THE BUDDHA'S TEACHING ON

DEPENDENT ORIGINATION CESSATION

CATASTROPHE APOSTROPHE

AJAHN AMARO

THE BUDDHA'S TEACHING ON
DEPENDENT ORIGINATION & CESSATION

CATASTROPHE APOSTROPHE

AJAHN AMARO

CATASTROPHE / APOSTROPHE

THE BUDDHA'S TEACHING ON DEPENDENT ORIGINATION/CESSATION

AJAHN AMARO

AMARAVATI
PUBLICATIONS

This book is dedicated with great respect and gratitude to Ajahn Buddhadāsa, Somdet Buddhaghosajahn (Phra Payutto) and Ajahn Sumedho, who have presented the teachings on dependent origination/cessation to the Western world in such comprehensive, remarkable and practical ways.

Catastrophe: [a. Gr. καταστροφή overturning, ... f. κατα-στρέφειν to overturn, etc., f. κατά down + στρέφειν to turn.]

'A final event; a conclusion generally unhappy' (J.); a disastrous end, finish-up, conclusion, upshot; overthrow, ruin, calamitous fate.

OXFORD ENGLISH DICTIONARY

E.M.: It reads: 'And death shall be no more, *comma*, Death, thou shalt die.'
(As she recites this line, she makes a little gesture at the comma.)
Nothing but a breath—a comma—separates life from life everlasting.
It is very simple really. With the original punctuation restored,
death is no longer something to act out on a stage. It's a comma, a pause.
This way, the *uncompromising* way, one learns something from the poem,
wouldn't you say? Life, death. Soul, God. Past, present. Not insuperable
barriers, not semicolons, just a comma.

VIVIAN: Life, death...I see. *(Standing)* It's a metaphysical conceit.
It's wit! I'll go back to the library and rewrite the paper—

E.M.: *(Standing emphatically)* It is *not wit*, Miss Bearing. It is truth.
(Walking around the desk to her) The paper's not the point.

VIVIAN: It isn't?

E.M.: *(Tenderly)* Vivian. You're a bright young woman. Use your intelligence.
Don't go back to the library. Go out. Enjoy yourself with your friends. Hmm?

MARGARET EDSON, ***W;T***

CONTENTS

SPECIFIC CONDITIONALITY

Iti imasmiṃ sati idaṃ hoti,
imassuppādā idaṃ uppajjati.
Imasmiṃ asati idaṃ na hoti,
imassa nirodhā idaṃ nirujjhati.

(M 115.11, S 12.41, A 10.92)

When this exists, that comes to be;
with the arising of this, that arises.
When this does not exist,
that does not come to be;
with the cessation of this, that ceases.

DEPENDENT ORIGINATION – ANULOMA

Avijjā paccayā saṅkhārā.
Saṅkhārā paccayā viññāṇaṃ.
Viññāṇa paccayā nāma-rūpaṃ.
Nāma-rūpa paccayā saḷāyatanaṃ.
Saḷāyatana paccayā phasso.
Phassa paccayā vedanā.
Vedanā paccayā taṇhā.
Taṇhā paccayā upādānaṃ.
Upādāna paccayā bhavo.
Bhava paccayā jāti.
Jāti paccayā jarā maraṇaṃ soka parideva dukkha domanass'upāyāsā sambhavanti.
Evametassa kevalassa dukkhakkhandhassa samudayo hoti.

With ignorance as condition formations come to be. With formations as condition consciousness comes to be.
With consciousness as condition mentality-materiality comes to be.
With mentality-materiality as condition the six sense-spheres come to be. With the six sense-spheres as condition contact comes to be.
With contact as condition feeling comes to be. With feeling as condition craving comes to be. With craving as condition clinging comes to be. With clinging as condition becoming comes to be. With becoming as condition birth comes to be.
With birth as condition, then old age and death, sorrow, lamentation, pain, grief and despair all come into being. Such is the origination of this entire mass of suffering.

DEPENDENT CESSATION – PAṬILOMA

Avijjāya tveva asesa virāga nirodhā,
saṅkhārā nirodho. Saṅkhārā nirodhā,
viññāṇa nirodho. Viññāṇa nirodhā,
nāma-rūpa nirodho. Nāma-rūpa nirodhā,
saḷāyatana nirodho. Saḷāyatana nirodhā,
phassa nirodho. Phassa nirodhā,
vedanā nirodho. Vedanā nirodhā,
taṇhā nirodho. Taṇhā nirodhā,
upādāna nirodho. Upādāna nirodhā,
bhava nirodho. Bhava nirodhā,
jati nirodho. Jati nirodhā,
jarā maraṇaṃ soka parideva dukkha
domanass'upāyāsā nirujjhanti.
Evametassa kevalassa
dukkhakkhandhassa nirodho hoti.

(M 115.11, S 12.41, A 10.92)

Now, with the remainderless fading, cessation or absence of that very ignorance comes the cessation of formations.
With the cessation of formations comes the cessation of consciousness.
With the cessation of consciousness comes the cessation of mentality-materiality.
With the cessation of mentality-materiality comes the cessation of the six sense-spheres. With the cessation of the six sense-spheres comes the cessation of contact.
With the cessation of contact comes the cessation of feeling. With the cessation of feeling comes the cessation of craving.
With the cessation of craving comes the cessation of clinging. With the cessation of clinging comes the cessation of becoming.
With the cessation of becoming comes the cessation of birth.
With the cessation of birth, then old age and death, sorrow, lamentation, pain, grief and despair all cease.
Such is the cessation of this entire mass of suffering.

PREFACE

Over the last few years I have led residential retreats specifically on the theme of dependent origination on at least five occasions – at Amaravati in the U.K., in Mae Rim, Thailand, and with Le Refuge, at Monastère de Ségriès, in the south of France. Various aspects of this rich, essential theme of Buddhist teaching have been focused upon in these different situations, according to the interests and needs of the various communities. The booklet entitled *'Just One More...' – Appreciative Joy: Jealousy, Selfish Desire and the Buddha's Teaching on the Cycles of Addiction* was based on the material from one of these events, a ten-day retreat held at Amaravati in July 2013. Most of the material gathered in this present book was presented at a retreat in Provence, in April 2018; the remainder is from the Mae Rim retreats of 2016-18.

The subject of dependent origination is intrinsically rich and varied, subtle and multi-dimensional, as the Buddha expressed in this notable exchange with his disciple and attendant Ven. Ānanda:

> Thus have I heard. On one occasion the Blessed One was living among the Kurus, near a town of theirs named Kammāsadhamma. There Ven. Ānanda approached the Blessed One and, on arrival, having bowed down to the Blessed One, sat to one side. As he was sitting there he said to the Blessed One: 'It's wonderful, venerable sir, it's marvellous, how

> profound this dependent origination is, and how profound its appearance, and yet to me it appears as clear as clear can be.'
>
> 'Do not say that, Ānanda! Do not say that! This dependent origination is profound and it appears profound. It is through not understanding and not penetrating this Dhamma that this generation has become like a tangled ball of string, matted like a bird's nest, tangled like coarse grass and is unable to pass beyond the cycles of rebirth, beyond the planes of deprivation, woe and bad destinations.'
>
> **(D 15.1)**

There have already been many erudite and wise explorations of the subject published in English, such as *Dependent Origination – The Buddha's Law of Conditionality* by Ven. P.A. Payutto; the collection of five chapters on the theme in Ajahn Sumedho's book *The Way It Is;* Ajahn Buddhadāsa's book *Under the Bodhi Tree: Buddha's Original Vision of Dependent Co-arising,* as well as many others. The intention of this present volume, whilst acknowledging the already great storehouse of perspectives available, is to focus upon practical means of understanding and applying the principles of dependent origination in order to support the freeing of the heart from addictive and destructive cycles of attitude and behaviour. In particular the emphasis will be on the exit points from this 'Wheel of Becoming' *(bhavacakka)* this cyclical process where the mind feels itself to be imprisoned in a habitual round of promise, gratification and disappointment.

The choice of title for the book was influenced by the fact of presenting the material at a retreat centre in France and the presence in the local mythology of Asterix and Obelix (Astérisque and Obélisque in French). In some respects the two are perfectly matched, as friends and companions in many adventures, but in others there is radical contrast between them. Their names share a rhyming ending, yet in meaning they are utterly different – an asterisk being a small star-shaped punctuation mark *, whilst an obelisk is a pointed, monumental stone column, similar to the menhirs regularly carried around by the eponymous hero. Accordingly 'catastrophe' and 'apostrophe' might appear to have nothing to do with each other but, in other ways, they can be seen as a perfectly matched pair.

A final note on word use is that, technically, the process which is the theme of this book should be described as 'dependent origination and dependent cessation'. The 'cessation' part being particularly significant as it is referring to the ending of *dukkha,* (dissatisfaction, suffering), which is the main purpose of the teaching in the first place. For the sake of brevity and convenience I will mostly use the term 'dependent origination' as a shorthand for the fuller expression 'dependent origination and dependent cessation' so, dear reader, please bear that in mind as you make your way through these pages.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This book has had many parents and forebears, material for its composition having come from retreats in England, Thailand and France, over the last eight years.

As is the case with many Dhamma teachings, it takes a lot of faith and energy, and the diligent focus of many people, first to create the occasions for the spreading of the Dhamma, and then to participate in the editorial process, to bring even a small book such as this into being.

First of all I would like to express my appreciation to Khun Ying Chamnongsri, on whose invitation, and at whose residence in Mae Rim, Chiang Mai, Thailand, I led three week-long retreats on the theme of dependent origination (in 2016, '17 & '18). Much of the material of this book was developed there, and the recordings that were the source for some of these chapters came from those rich and memorable sessions. Tong Chumsaeng managed these retreats and was immeasurably helpful in creatively producing teaching materials for the retreatants both before and during these sessions.

I would also like to express my appreciation for Le Refuge, a Buddhist group established in 1974 by the late Betty Pichelou, in the South of France, in the Marseille/Provençe area. The majority of the recorded material used as the basis of this book came from a retreat they invited me to teach on this theme

in April 2018. In this regard, I would particularly like to mention Bernard Gauthier, the retreat manager, and Geneviève Hamelet, the main translator (who had to work very hard!) and our hosts at the Monastère de Ségriès, Dhruv and Anne Marie Bhandari-Desmet.

The transcription of the talks was organized, as usual, under the efficient and energetic auspices of the Lotus Volunteer Group. The swiftness of their response to tasks such as this, and the flexibility with which they work, is always greatly valued.

Adam Long, who has edited and helped with numerous publications for our community, kindly undertook the task of taking the verbatim transcripts in hand and rendering it all into a coherent form. Once again I would like to express my gratitude for his contribution to this work.

Various people read through the manuscript and offered essential feedback and corrections, I would particularly like to mention Ajahn Dhammanando. His unique skill in flagging unsubstantiated statements in the text, suggesting preferable modes of expression, as well as spotting typos and missing commas, is greatly appreciated. I would also like to express my gratitude to Eleonora Monti, whose discerning eye and well-informed suggestions benefitted the manuscript immensely.

Lastly, I must mention Nicholas Halliday, the designer, typesetter, production manager and publisher for Amaravati Publications. His extraordinary

typographical and design skills, coupled with his good humour and great patience, is the principal means whereby this community is enabled to bring so many Dhamma teachings into print.

May all those who have been part of the genesis of this small volume be blessed with great peace and a freedom from all compulsions, the freedom that comes to the heart that is no longer creating and grasping the Wheel.

AJAHN AMARO
AMARAVATI
SPRING 2021

BEFORE WE BEGIN... ONE

The theme for this book is dependent origination. We can call this 'the wheel of birth and death' or 'the wheel of becoming' in classical language, or 'cycles of addiction' in modern language. My intention is not for this to be an academic presentation; I will try to describe and explain these teachings so that they will be of immediate benefit to all of our lives, specifically addressing methods whereby the wheel can be let go of or even broken. The subject can be very complicated but I will endeavour to keep it practical and direct.

Those of you who have read about the Buddha's teachings on dependent origination may have thought that the subject was byzantine and impenetrable. The twelve links, or twelve sections, of dependent origination can seem confusing or strange. That is a common experience. But at the heart of the teaching is a very simple principle that I will aim to focus on. Hopefully, during the course of this book, we will be able to explore and investigate this teaching, see how the different pieces fit together and how they explain experiences that we are all familiar with.

A THEORETICAL MAP – *IDAPACCAYATĀ*

It is significant that the Buddha was engaged in the deep exploration and analysis of specific conditionality and dependent origination immediately after his enlightenment:

Thus I heard. On one occasion, when the Blessed One was newly enlightened, he was living at Uruvelā by the banks of the River Nerañjarā at the root of the Bodhi Tree, the Tree of Enlightenment. Then the Blessed One sat at the root of the Bodhi Tree for seven days in one session, feeling the bliss of deliverance.

At the end of the seven days he emerged from that concentration, and in the first watch of the night his mind was occupied with dependent arising in forward order thus: 'That comes to be when there is this; that arises with the arising of this; that is to say: It is with ignorance as condition that formations come to be; with formations as condition, consciousness; with consciousness as condition, name-and-form; with name-and-form as condition, the sixfold base; with the sixfold base as condition, contact; with contact as condition, feeling; with feeling as condition, craving; with craving as condition, clinging; with clinging as condition, being; with being as condition, birth; with birth as condition ageing and death come to be, and also sorrow and lamentation, pain, grief and despair; that is how there is an origin to this whole aggregate mass of suffering.'

Knowing the meaning of this, the Blessed One uttered this exclamation:

When things are fully manifest
To the ardent meditating brahman,
His doubts all vanish, for he knows
That each thing has to have its cause.

In the second watch of the night his mind was occupied with dependent arising in reverse order thus: 'That does not come to be when there is not this; that ceases with the cessation of this; that is to say: With cessation of ignorance there is cessation of formations; with cessation of formations, cessation of consciousness … name-and-form … the sixfold base … contact … feeling … craving … clinging … being … birth, ageing and death cease, and also sorrow and lamentation, pain, grief and despair; that is how there is a cessation to this whole aggregate mass of suffering.'

Knowing the meaning of this, the Blessed One uttered this exclamation:

When things are fully manifest
To the ardent meditating brahman,
His doubts all end, for he perceives
How the conditions come to end.

In the third watch of the night his mind was occupied with dependent arising in forward and reverse order thus: 'That comes to be when there is this; that arises with the arising of this. That does not come to be when there is not this; that ceases with the cessation of this; that is to say; It is with ignorance as condition that formations come to be; with formations as condition, consciousness ... with birth as condition ageing and death come to be, and also sorrow and lamentation, pain, grief and despair; that is how there is an origin to this whole aggregate mass of suffering. With cessation of ignorance there is cessation of formations; with cessation of formations, cessation of consciousness ... with cessation of birth, ageing and death cease, and also sorrow and lamentation, pain,

> grief and despair; that is how there is a cessation to this whole aggregate mass of suffering.'
>
> Knowing the meaning of this, the Blessed One then uttered this exclamation:
>
> When things are fully manifest
> To the ardent meditating brahman,
> There, like the sun who lights the sky,
> He stands repelling Mara's hosts.
> **(UD 1.1-3; CF. MV 1.1; BHIKKHU ÑĀṆAMOLI TRANS.)**

The very core, the source code of the process of dependent origination is the law of specific conditionality – *idapaccayatā* in Pali – as is described in the quotation above. The Pali word *ida* means 'in this' or 'here'; *paccaya* means 'conditioned or affected by'; the suffix *-tā* means 'the quality of' or '-ness'; *idappaccayatā* thus means the quality of 'having its foundation in this', 'being causally connected like this', 'being by way of cause' or 'conditioned-by-this-ness'. In essence it is the process whereby one thing affects another. In the above passage from the scriptures it can be summarized as:

> When this exists, that comes to be;
> with the arising of this, that arises.
> When this does not exist, that does not come to be;
> with the cessation of this, that ceases.

The twelve links of the classical recension of dependent origination are cast in the form of one thing conditioning the next – they affect each other – but the exact way in which each of the twelve links affects the others can vary.

One of the most important distinctions in that way of affecting or conditioning is that it can be either sequentially in time or synchronically i.e. concurrently, simultaneously. An example of sequential conditionality would be that of an acorn – having been planted it conditions, later in time, the arising of an oak tree. If there was no acorn it would be impossible for an oak tree to arise.

An example of synchronic conditionality would be when sunlight shines through the window onto my desk; if I hold my hand above the desk the shadow of my hand forms on the surface. There is a conditional relationship between the shadow of my hand and the light on the desk which is completely synchronic – the sunlight pervades the area that the shadow leaves and the shadow pervades the area that the sunlight leaves. They affect each other simultaneously.

Without going into too much detail, suffice it to say that there are many different ways that such 'affecting' can take place. Classically there are said to be twenty-four modes of such conditioning but to list them all would probably cause more confusion than clarity, (for those who are interested they are gathered in the book of the Abhidhamma called *Conditional Relations*, the *Paṭṭhāna*). It is helpful simply to understand that, with respect to the connections between the twelve links, that it is not a matter of a uniform linear chain of: 'A directly

causes B, B directly causes C, C directly causes D etc.'. Rather it should be understood that the *paccaya* aspect means: 'A affects B in some way, B affects C in some way...' and so forth, with these conditional relations being sometimes synchronic, sometimes sequential, sometimes partial, sometimes conascent... in one of those twenty-four modes. Thus dependent origination is not a simple linear mechanistic process but rather one that is complex, nuanced, non-linear and responsive.

TWO LEVELS OF SCALE

The teaching on dependent origination can be described as being on the basis of a momentary experience or it can be presented as being on the basis of three lifetimes – those three being: the immediate past, the present, and the immediate future. Both of these formats are found in the Pali Canon, the original teachings of the Buddha, (such as at D 15.2-9 and M 140.31), and in the commentarial literature (books such as the *Sammohavinodanī,* a Commentary to the Abhidhamma, and the *Visuddhimagga, The Path of Purification*, a compendium written by Ācariya Buddhaghosa) that arose in the centuries after the Buddha's time.

The 'momentary' interpretation describes the entirety of the twelve linked factors happening in rapid succession, effectively showing how the mind is 'born' into experiences moment by moment. It happens as fast, as Ajahn Chah would put it, as falling out of a tree. He further pointed out that trying to track

every nuance of the process would be like trying count the branches that you are falling past during your accelerating descent. It's too quick to catch every detail but you know without doubt that, THUD! when you hit the ground, it hurts. This 'momentary' interpretation is espoused as a key teaching not just by masters of the Thai forest tradition like Ajahn Chah but also, for example, by Western scholars such as Dr. Paul Dahlke.

The 'three-lifetimes' interpretation breaks the twelve links into three groups:

1. PREVIOUS LIFE 'ignorance conditions formations; formations condition consciousness', this 'consciousness' being seen as a 'relinking consciousness' from one life to the next.

2. PRESENT LIFE 'consciousness conditions mentality-materiality (mind and body of the new life); mentality-materiality conditions the six sense-spheres; the six sense-spheres condition contact; contact conditions feeling; feeling conditions craving; craving conditions clinging; clinging conditions becoming', this 'becoming' being seen as the gestation of another birth.

3. NEXT LIFE 'becoming conditions birth; birth conditions old age and death, sorrow, lamentation, pain, grief and despair.'

In his book *Dependent Origination: The Buddhist Law of Conditionality, (Appendix 1)*, Ven. P.A. Payutto, who is an extremely thorough scholar, describes how he went through the whole Pali Canon and found that approximately one third of the teachings on dependent origination referred to the 'three-lifetimes'

interpretation, while two thirds described the 'momentary' representation. He also analysed the Commentaries and found it was the opposite; two thirds of the references in the Commentaries described the 'three-lifetimes' interpretation and one third referred to the 'momentary' interpretation. So, over the centuries, during the evolution of the Commentaries, there was a drift towards the three-lifetimes interpretation as the dominant meaning.

Throughout the twentieth century, Ajahn Buddhadāsa, one of the most significant voices of the Southern School of Buddhism, made it a personal mission to point people to the Suttas rather than to the Commentaries. He felt they were far more reliable and liberating to take as a basis of the Buddha's teaching, and thus the wisest source of guidance. The majority of the Suttas show the teaching on dependent origination to be something vitally relevant to our current lives, rather than a road map to events in regions well beyond our reach – to wit, a life that has gone by or a life that is yet to come. In his teaching Ajahn Buddhadāsa would strongly emphasize that the idea of past lives and future lives is not helpful, even to the point of being wrong because it could lead to superstition. He was trying to get the Buddhism of Thailand back on to the Middle Way and away from the unconscious creation of self-view and superstition, a drift that is very common in the ageing process of religions.

In 1988 I had a chance to meet Ajahn Buddhadāsa; a Western monk who was travelling with me was very concerned about Ajahn Buddhadāsa's rigorous

emphasis on the 'momentary' interpretation and dismissal of the 'three lives' one, because that Western monk had strong perceptions about past lives and future lives. These seemed extremely real and common sense to him, as well as being mentioned very regularly in the canonical teachings. It was upsetting and confusing to him that Ajahn Buddhadāsa, in his writings and his talks, seemed to be saying that the idea of past lives and future lives was wrong or bad.

When this monk asked him about this very point I was quite touched by Ajahn Buddhadāsa's response. He could discern the sincerity of this enquirer and he was thus very sensitive and respectful towards him. He said, 'Yes, of course those references are in the Suttas, and I don't deny that they are valid, but in Thailand blind belief and superstition, self-view around past and future lives, is so strong that I have felt it my duty to emphasize things in the way that I have, because the current is so powerful in the other direction.'

That said, I would stress that there is no one single correct way to understand dependent origination and to apply its principles. It is a map of a natural, organic process which can be seen to apply on many different levels: at the sub-atomic scale (see the Appendix for more perspectives on this); at the level of momentary human experience; over a span of several lifetimes; and even on a population-wide scale, if one considers the effects of ignorance in societies, producing greater greed, hatred and delusion and thereby suffering – the process of dependent origination obeys the laws of scale invariance. That is to say, just as the dendrite of a nerve ending, a tree and a river delta all

have the same silhouette at different scales, dependent origination takes shape according to the same template at many different levels of our lives.

For the purpose of this current exploration – in the spirit of Ajahn Buddhadāsa and also Ajahn Chah, who valued Ajahn Buddhadāsa's wisdom very highly – attention will be focused on the 'momentary experience' aspects of the pattern as this is what can be said to lead most directly to liberation, to the ending of *dukkha*, and that is what the Buddha repeatedly reminded us was the entire purpose of his teaching.

LANGUAGE AND CONVENTION

Lastly, by way of laying the ground for this book, it might be helpful to look briefly at the use of language in this area – for example in the apparent dichotomy between the teachings on rebirth and those on *anattā,* 'not-self'.

In the Buddha's time people would ask him (as they still do today) things like, 'You say that all things are not-self but you also talk about this or that person passing away, and being reborn in this realm or that realm (e.g. at D 18.1 or M 68.8-24). If all things are not-self, who or what are these people that you are talking about?' You can almost hear the Buddha sigh. The Buddha would respond in the vein of, 'It is a fact that I frequently say that all Dhammas are not-self. But I refer to "this person" or "that person" because it is the common usage of speech. Those words are employed without any delusion and without any creation of the belief in permanent individual self.'

For example:

> ‘If a bhikkhu is an Arahant …
> That monk might still use words like “I speak,”
> And he might say, “They speak to me.”
> Skilful, knowing the world’s parlance,
> He uses such terms as mere expressions in common use.’
> **(S 1.25)**

> ‘For, Citta, these are merely names, expressions, turns of speech, designations in common use in the world which the Tathāgata uses without misapprehension, uses to conform to common custom without clinging to them.’
> **(D 9.53)**

One might say, ‘Today is Saturday’ but it is not *really*, on an ultimate level, Saturday. That designation is just a human convention, based on the English language and the seven-day week, referring to a particular experience in a particular geographical location. When we think of something as being ‘right’ or ‘wrong’, the rightness or wrongness is often highly relative. Similarly, the Buddha warned against being attached to specific verbal usages. For example, using a single household item as an instance of this, he said:

> ‘Don’t cling to vernacular usage or override convention. And how does one cling to vernacular usage or override convention? By dogmatically maintaining, for example, that a certain object – which is called a

> "dish" (*pāti*) in one part of the country, or a "bowl" (*patta*) in another, or a "vessel" (*vittha*) in another, or again a "saucer" (*serāva*), or a "pan" (*dhāropa*), or a "pot" (*poṇa*), or a "cup" (*hana*), or a "basin" (*pisīla*) in yet another – must invariably be called by a single name: either a "dish", or a "bowl", or a "vessel", or a "saucer", or a "pan", or a "pot", or a "cup", or a "basin". Then insisting, in each and every locality, "This word alone is the proper usage; all the rest are mistaken." That would be an extreme case of local prejudice.
>
> 'But if one varies the terminology as one travels through different regions, continually bearing in mind how these various terms are applied to the same household object, then all divisive bias will be avoided.'
> **(M 139.12)**

This flexibility around language is of great importance when looking into a complex process like dependent origination, especially as it is defined at its source in foreign terms. As one looks into the anatomy and mechanics of dependent origination it is the case that, after working with it for some time, most people find their own ways of articulating and getting a feel for each of the links, and the connections between them. This approach, and even the crafting of one's own language to name each of the links, I feel is to be encouraged.

THE WHEEL OF BIRTH AND DEATH
TWO

CYCLES OF ADDICTION – THE CATASTROPHE

We keep making the same mistakes, finding ourselves following the same destructive habits. As David Bowie put it, we are 'always crashing in the same car'. The teaching on dependent origination offers us a way out. For myself, this is a very impactful teaching; it is one of the main reasons I've been living in monasteries as a Buddhist monk for forty years. What is important and transformative is not just the specific words of the teachings on dependent origination but the principle which they embody – how to free the heart from destructive cycles.

As the Buddhist scholar and poet Martin Verhoeven (Bhikshu Heng Chau) put it:

> Life is truly a dream,
> all of its troubles I alone create.
> When I stop creating,
> the trouble stops.

When we use language like 'liberation from the wheel of birth and death', the teaching can seem very dramatic and remote. Many readers have probably seen paintings from the various Buddhist traditions (Tibetan, Thai, Sri Lankan, Burmese, Chinese, Japanese) that depict a circular wheel in the grip of a demonic-looking mythical creature. The outer rim of the circle is divided

into twelve sections, representing the links of dependent origination. Many pages could be filled by describing each of these traditional images in turn but it will be more practical and useful to look at these twelve in terms of their psychological qualities, and how to work with them to conduce to liberation.

Inside that rim of the twelve images are five (or sometimes six) sections describing the different realms of existence. Inside this is another ring, coloured half light and half dark, representing the effects of wholesome and unwholesome actions. Lastly, at the very centre are three animals – a cockerel (representing greed), a snake (representing hatred) and a pig (representing delusion) – each of these with its jaws clamped onto the tail of the one in front of it. These are the three *akusalamūla*, the unwholesome roots, that form the very hub of the Wheel of Becoming, the cycle of addiction. As long as greed, hatred and delusion are in place then the wheel will keep spinning.

These images can be very colourful, very interesting, very frightening, very mysterious and perhaps annoying: 'What on earth is that all about? So many figures, so many things going on. What does it all mean?' But the symbolic value of this representation of the wheel of birth and death is very great; it is highly beneficial in helping us to understand our own life. According to some scriptures, the Buddha declared that this picture should be installed over the gate of every monastery in order to represent the central teaching. It is a symbol that everybody who walks into a Buddhist monastery could relate to and be informed by.

The circular shape represents the wheel-like nature of the process but, equally significantly, it represents a mirror. When you look at that picture you are looking at what you are, at what factors comprise your life. The being holding the mirror is Mahākāla, whose name means 'great time'. Thus it is time holding the mirror that reflects what we are. The main part of the image is divided into five or six sections representing what are called *bhūmi*, the 'realms of existence': heaven, hell, the realm of the hungry ghosts, the human realm, the realm of animals and, if a sixth one is included, this will be the Asura Realm, that of the jealous gods or titans. Sometimes the *asuras* are included within the Deva Realm and are not given their own segment of the diagram.

If you have no faith or interest in the idea of such realms as distinct dimensions of existence, parallel worlds, these can also be seen as descriptions of psychological states. You don't have to believe in hell to understand what it's like to be angry. You don't have to believe in heaven to be enraptured by the sound of your favourite music. In this respect heaven and hell are not things that are far away.

THE HUMAN REALM is defined as the realm of those who live according to the Precepts. So you can have a human body but not be living in the human realm. In Buddhist psychology a 'human' is defined as a being who lives by at least the Five Precepts.

THE *DEVA* REALM represents and embodies refined sensory pleasure like delight in beautiful music, fragrances, refined tastes or visual images. It also represents sublime states of bliss arising from concentration and meditative absorption.

THE *ASURA* REALM is the domain of the 'jealous gods', the titans, beings who are powerful, intelligent and love pleasure in the same way as the *devas*, but because of jealousy they are generally not as beautiful nor do they have as much power as the *devas*. The realm of the jealous gods is like the political sphere, where there is hunger for power and the forces of the world are always in competition. This is the realm of the *asura*.

THE ANIMAL REALM represents the states of mind dominated by food, sex, territory and animal instincts. Often, we like to think of ourselves as living a very refined life, but I would suggest that a lot of human life actually revolves around the animal instincts: 'Can I eat it? Is it gonna eat me? Can I mate with it? Does it want to mate with me? Does it want to come into my territory? Can I get into its territory?' If you look through the news, a lot of it is about the animal realm.

THE HUNGRY GHOST REALM is the arena of all-consuming addictions – hungers that cannot be satiated by consumption. Addiction to alcohol or to nicotine or to addictive drugs are clearly visible realms of endless hunger. This is the mind absorbed into the destructive cycle of consuming a desired substance and being unable to escape from that. The Hungry Ghost has a very small mouth but is always hungry; no matter how much the body or mind consumes of its

drug of choice, it never gets enough and is always hungering for more. That is the Hungry Ghost realm. There can be other kinds of addiction, more refined than drugs and alcohol, which will be explored in due course.

THE HELL REALM comes last. This is all about pain and heat and conflict. This describes the mind in the state of anger, oppression and hatred. There is an intense focus on pain and the aversion that arises as a consequence of that. When we are angry with someone and are absorbed in that conflict, to the point where we want to destroy something or someone, this is the experience of the hell realm. In the hell realm, it becomes more important to escape from pain, or to destroy or to harm or to hurt than anything else in the world.

The twelve links of dependent origination around the rim depict the pattern by which the wheel turns and that completes the picture, the mirror into which we are looking. Again, it might all sound very complicated, but this is a visual way of conveying the teachings on how we create trouble for ourselves and how the heart can be freed from that trouble. We free ourselves by understanding the mechanism of how that trouble gets created. Understanding enables us to no longer create it.

THE USER'S MANUAL – THE FOUR NOBLE TRUTHS

The Buddha outlines the spiritual malaise – suffering, *dukkha* – as the First Noble Truth. He says that this *dukkha* 'is to be recognized', to be apprehended, to be understood.

The Second Noble Truth, the cause of that spiritual illness, is outlined as self-centred craving or desire *(taṇhā)*. The Buddha encourages us to work with this Second Noble Truth by abandoning that cause, it 'is to be let go of'.

The Third Noble Truth is the prognosis that this malaise of *dukkha* can be cured. There is the possibility to be free of *dukkha* and that cure, that freedom from *dukkha* 'is to be realized'.

The Fourth Noble Truth is the treatment. The Noble Eightfold Path is the medicine that will bring about the cure from the malaise of *dukkha*. The Buddha's advice is that this Eightfold Path 'should be developed'.

In a sense, the teaching of dependent origination spells out in fine detail how to get from Noble Truth Two to Noble Truth Three, from the cause of suffering to the end of suffering. I often compare the teachings to a car's manual. The manual may be a hundred pages, but you can also have a one-page summary in the front that tells you what you need to know to get your car to start and to drive it. That one-page summary is the Four Noble Truths. The other ninety-nine pages in the manual are the teachings of dependent origination. They're like the detailed instructions in the car's manual about how to control the heater, how to adjust the air conditioning or the settings on the lights and the indicators and the automatic doors; it explains all the fine detail of the system so that the driver will know how to adjust everything, in order to make full and effective use of the vehicle.

When we look at the dependent origination teachings, particularly considering it as describing cycles of addiction, there is a specific question to investigate: 'Why do I keep making the same mistakes?'

Why do we keep repeating activities when we know they bring suffering? Why do we keep indulging in certain obsessions?

When I talk about addiction, I don't just mean addiction to alcohol or cocaine or nicotine. There can be addiction to meditation. There can be addiction to your iPhone, addiction to relationships, addiction to fame, addiction to self-criticism. It can be subtle or gross; it can be visible or invisible. When I speak about addiction it can refer to many different dimensions of experience. Each one of us can usefully look at our lives and see the areas where we get stuck.

In order to assist this investigation, I'll briefly describe the process of dependent origination and how it relates to addictive habits. Once again, some teachings about dependent origination speak of it as referring to a period of three lifetimes; past life, present life and future life. Other representations refer to present moment experience. When I describe dependent origination here, I'm taking the second approach. I am simply referring to this present moment experience that we have here and now.

DEPENDENT ORIGINATION: LINKS ONE TO FOUR – *AVIJJĀ, SAṄKHĀRĀ, VIÑÑĀṆA, NĀMA-RŪPA*

To begin with, when considering the 'momentary' approach, it's important to talk about the fundamental nature of mind, Original Mind. To describe this one

uses terms like 'Suchness', *tathatā*, but there are other descriptions also: this is from a Tibetan teacher, Khenpo Tsultrim Gyamtso Rinpoche:

> [T]he luminous, self-aware non-conceptual mind that is experienced in meditation, when the mind is completely free of concepts, is Absolute Reality and not a vijnana [Pali = *viññāṇa,* partial, fragmented knowing]; … When the luminous, self aware, non-conceptual mind that is the Wisdom Mind is realized … there is no seeing and seen aspect, no realizing and realized aspect to the realization. … It is none other than the non-conceptual Wisdom Mind (Jnana) itself. It is also called the non-dual Wisdom Mind (Jnana), the Clear Light (prabhasvara) Nature of Mind [Pali = *pabhassara*] … the Dharmata and the Tathagatagarbha.
>
> (KHENPO TSULTRIM GYAMTSO RINPOCHE, SHENPEN HOOKHAM TRANS., *PROGRESSIVE STAGES OF MEDITATION ON EMPTINESS*, PP 77-8)

Tathāgatagarbha means 'the womb of the Tathāgatas', which means the origin of the mind, the origin of awareness.

When we talk about ignorance, therefore – even though it is situated at the beginning of the classical twelve links – we are not talking about it as the basic nature of reality, but rather that ignorance is something which arises from Original Mind, which is the mother and father of everything, as Ajahn Chah's teacher Ajahn Mun liked to put it. Ignorance, and all perceptions of everything, arise in contrast to that basic ground. Dependent origination is thus talking about the arising of illusion out of reality. This principle will be explored in

more detail later on in this book (in Chapter 6), when the 'third exit point from the cycle' is described.

Dependent origination is thus a way of looking at what happens when the natural awareness of mind is clouded. When there is ignorance the mind doesn't see clearly – ignorance being represented by a blind person, or by the blind leading the blind, in the first image on the rim of the *bhavacakka*. When we lose our mindfulness this gives rise to *saṅkhārā*. *Saṅkhārā* means 'divided', 'particular' or that which is compounded; it means the arising of self and other, any kind of polarity, duality. So that, out of this mind which recognizes Suchness, we start to drift off to the sense of self and other. *Saṅkhārā* also means 'thing-ness', the 'world of things' – thus the illusion of solid independent entities starts to arise. What we then have before us is a process of crystallization or complexification, so that fundamental sense of division into 'this' and 'that' becomes strengthened and conditions *viññāṇa*, which means 'discriminative consciousness'. The mind is not only just dividing 'this from that' and 'self from other', but is starting to be able to conceive a whole variety of different elements, different things within the sphere of attention.

The first four of the twelve links are *avijjā, saṅkhārā, viññāṇa, nāma-rūpa* (ignorance, formations, consciousness, and mind and body). These four links refer to the establishment of the subject/object relationship. When there is ignorance, when the mind does not see things clearly, then the mind drifts

into the sense of a 'me here' and a 'world out there' initially in a rudimentary way, as formations *(saṅkhārā),* then strengthening into consciousness and mind and body *(viññāṇa* and *nāma-rūpa)* in relationship to each other, leaning on each other 'like two bundles of reeds' (S 12.67). Thus, at this stage, the division between subject and object, a knower and a known, seems quite real and natural.

Viññāṇa leans on *nāma-rūpa,* and vice versa, in a reciprocal relationship. It's an intensification – helpfully referred to as 'the *viññāṇa*/*nāma-rūpa* vortex' by Ven. Ñāṇananda – the mind is drifting into a sense of separateness of the experiencer and the experienced.

There are many ways that this process can be understood, using the terminology of dependent origination; one useful framework is to take the *viññāṇa* 'bundle of reeds' to be embodying the formation of a 'subject', whereas the *nāma-rūpa* 'bundle of reeds' embodies the formation of an 'object'.

If one is already somewhat familiar with Buddhist teachings this might seem a bit confusing since *viññāṇa* is also part of the group of mental qualities that make up *nāma,* in the other bundle of reeds: How can *viññāṇa* be both part of the subject side as well as the object side of the process?

To help make sense of this, I would suggest that the '*viññāṇa*' that is the third link in the chain of dependent origination refers more to the subjective faculty of cognizing, knowing; whereas the '*viññāṇa*' that is the last of the factors

comprising *nāma-rūpa*, the fourth link in the chain of dependent origination, refers to the finest grained units of experience that make up any sensory event.

Just as in a picture taken by a digital camera, at high magnification, it can be seen that the picture is composed of pixels, tiny individual coloured units, so too the *'viññāṇa'* that is one of the five *khandhas* (which means the same as *nāma-rūpa*) refers to the 'pixels' or building blocks of experience that comprise every sense-object.

Thus we have a single word having two related but variant meanings; this is not uncommon in Pali – the word *saṅkhārā* is another example – so the reader and practitioner needs to be wary of making assumptions that they know what a specific word means.

Mindfulness of the context and a lot of reflective consideration will always be helpful!

DEPENDENT ORIGINATION: LINKS FIVE TO SEVEN – *SAḶĀYATANA, PHASSA, VEDANĀ*

The next three links refer to the establishment of the perceptual process, the process of the six sense-spheres *(saḷāyatana)* being reified and activated.

This means the mind gives more reality to the field of perceptions. The world of sight and sound and flavour and smell and touch comes alive, becomes far more tangible. From the activation of the senses, sense-contact *(phassa),* feeling

or more accurately 'sensation' *(vedanā)* arises, along with the impression that there is an 'I' who is doing the feeling.

Having established the subject/object relationship, when there is an impact through one of the senses – when the mind perceives an object or hears a sound – that contact very quickly gives rise to a feeling, a sensation that is pleasant, painful or neutral that a separate 'I' seems to be experiencing.

This process happens extremely quickly from the moment of there being ignorance, not seeing clearly, to the moment of a feeling and a feeler arising. When feeling has arisen, this is where the trouble can begin in a substantial way, because if there is ignorance then the mind attaches to those feelings (liking or disliking or neutral). That attachment then very quickly feeds the next three links of the process.

So the process is growing from a simple root, like a tree slowly rising, branching, branching and branching, getting more and more diversified and multifarious, spread out and involved. A verse in the *Tao Te Ching* says:

> The Way gives rise to the One,
> The One gives rise to the Two,
> Two gives rise to Three,
> From the Three arise all 10,000 things.
> (***TAO TE CHING***, **VERSE 42**)

Out of the Way, out of Suchness, there arises oneness then twoness then threeness, and once you've got three then you have got the ten thousand things.

As the mind absorbs into perception of a form then life appears more and more complex. Once we have a belief in the reality of the sense world, then all the feelings of pleasure and pain, like and dislike start to arise and become stronger, more interesting and compelling.

DEPENDENT ORIGINATION: LINKS EIGHT TO TEN – *TAṆHĀ, UPĀDĀNA, BHAVA*

The next three links are *taṇhā, upādāna* and *bhava*. *Taṇhā* is 'craving', *upādāna* is 'clinging' and *bhava* is 'becoming'. That is a description of the outflowing intensity of the mind. There is a feeling of liking that grows into 'Ooooh, that's really great!' and then 'I'll have more of that!' This happens very quickly. This is a description of the mind latching onto a particular sensation and then absorbing into it. It's like climbing onto a train and setting off from the station.

This is where the experience of suffering really gets launched. In the Second Noble Truth, the Buddha said that craving *(taṇhā)* is 'to be let go of'; that connection between feeling and craving is, accordingly, seen as the key point, the weakest link in the chain.

That is the link to keep attention upon because once the momentum of obsession builds toward the desired object it gets harder and harder to recognize what's going on and thus harder to let go.

The pattern of dependent origination thus describes how a feeling, a sensation turns into a desire, some kind of self-centred craving; then how that desire around one particular sight or sound or sense-object leads onto grasping; if an interest arises, the mind latches onto it, we see something, that produces a feeling of 'That's beautiful', then the eye is attracted towards it and it says, 'I wouldn't mind having one of those.' Then the absorption goes further, to grasping, 'Well, I *really* would like to have that, it's a truly beautiful thing.' Then there is the decision to act upon that, 'Well, no one is looking; here it is, a nice little fruit just hanging off the tree. After all, it's only going to drop to the ground and go to waste.' This is *upādāna*: grasping means going after something, taking hold of it.

Bhava comes next: this is translated as 'becoming.' It is a word that befuddled me for years and years – 'Becoming, becoming, becoming *what*? What is becoming? What is this talking about?' It took me a long time to realize that 'becoming' means the thrill of getting what you want – there will be more on this later.

DEPENDENT ORIGINATION: LINKS ELEVEN AND TWELVE – *JĀTI, JARĀ-MARAṆA, SOKA PARIDEVA DUKKHA DOMANASS'UPĀYĀSĀ*

The last two links are birth (*jāti*), and ageing and death (*jarā-maraṇa*) – which includes sorrow, lamentation, pain, grief and despair *(soka parideva dukkha domanass'upāyāsā)*. In this system of symbolism, birth is the point of no return; you have committed to the path of some particular action and there is no

turning back. Once the baby is born, life is there and the baby will need to be looked after. Prior to birth there's still the possibility of turning back. Birth symbolizes the point of no return. After that, life has to be followed through to its completion.

A simple example is eating. You enjoyed your food and the thought then arises, 'That was delicious.' The recognition that you are already full is put to one side and the mind focuses on the pleasant feeling *(vedanā)* of deliciousness. That leads to craving *(taṇhā)*: 'I wonder if there's any left over.' This leads to *upādāna*, clinging, buying into the impulse to act on the craving. The next thing you know, you're helping yourself to another portion.

We are now well into 'becoming' territory. The world has shrunk down to the food on your plate. There is a 'me', plus a desired object, and the promise of pleasure that will come from getting that object. The whole universe has got very small and simple. You help yourself to more food and you sit down and the only thing that matters is the 'good thing' that you are about to taste. This is the essence of *bhava*, becoming.

You eat your extra food and the mind is enjoying it; even as you're finishing it, the mind starts to think that it didn't really need that food and why are you eating it and you're overweight already and you said you weren't going to do this and here you are doing it again! You sat down to eat a meal and then, having got lost in the craving for more pleasure, there was the birth moment;

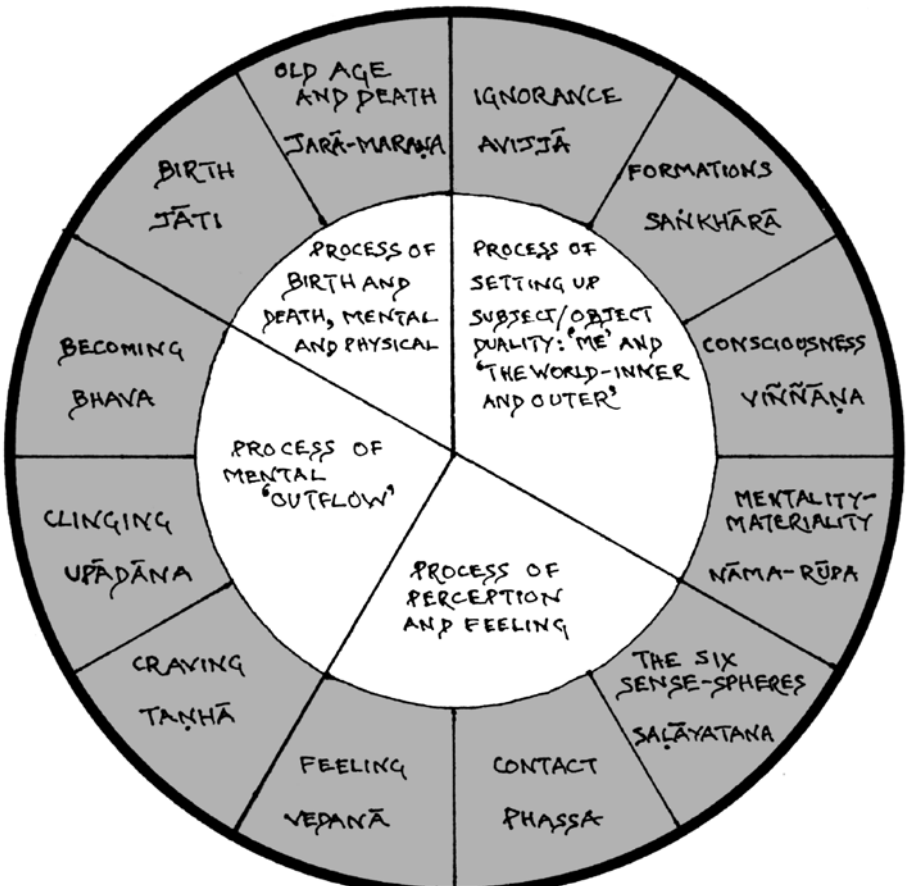
no turning back, you can't un-chew a meal – sorrow, lamentation, pain, grief and despair. This is the 'catastrophe' of this book's title.

Becoming almost invariably leads to *jāti*, 'birth'; to suddenly realizing, in this example, 'Oh dear, one of them tasted good but I've just finished my fourteenth, I can feel indigestion coming on.' 'Birth' is not talking about physical birth in this instance, but rather a psychological birth, the point of no return where we have created karma and there is no going back. Just as once a child is born there is no turning back. Once that situation has been born we have to live through the whole life-span of its legacy, whatever that entails. And any condition that has been invested in invariably, inexorably goes towards *soka parideva dukkha domanass'upāyāsā* – sorrow, lamentation, pain, grief and despair – ego-death in other words.

FAMILIAR TERRITORY

Having overeaten, you try to meditate. The heart is heavy and the body feels tired. 'Oh! Why did I do this to myself? This is so uncomfortable. I feel so embarrassed.' This is the *dukkha* experience. If there is ignorance then we won't learn from the experience; we just get lost in regret, self-hatred or self-justification. If we buy into that *dukkha* experience we create the conditions to repeat the same thing. We end up feeling insecure, lonely, alienated, frazzled, inconsolable.

DEPENDENT ORIGINATION



What happens then? Weirdly, ironically and sadly, and unconsciously, the mind recalls the last time it felt good, which was when the world shrank and there was the guarantee that we were going to get that 'good thing'. So even though we thought we'd learned our lesson and would never do that again, the seeds were sown for the next round. The next time we have that kind of *dukkha* feeling we'll follow the same pattern because what we want is that *bhava* experience. That is the drug of choice; whether it's another snack or another relationship or signing up for another meditation retreat.

It is not a rational process. The driving force is ignorance – *avijjā*. Because we're not seeing clearly, the process keeps repeating. The rational mind says, 'This is really uncomfortable. I'm never going to do this again. This is silly.' But when the heart is lost in that *dukkha* state, feeling insecure and fragile and incomplete, then the rational mind doesn't have a vote.

So this is the practice: we understand the process of *dukkha*; we learn to bring awareness to the feeling of *dukkha*; we learn to know *dukkha* but not get lost in it. When we feel fragile or desolate, if we have developed awareness, mindfulness and wisdom, we then recognize that feeling for what it is. 'Oh! I know this – better be careful!' This describes one of the 'exit points' from the cycle. The Buddha said that:

> 'Suffering *(dukkha)* ripens in one of two ways; it either ripens in confusion (i.e. more *dukkha)* or it ripens in search.'
> **(A 6.63)**

The word 'search', as it is used in the Sutta, means: 'There must be some alternative to this. I don't have to follow this. Now what's the way out?'

This is a very important area of Dhamma practice to explore and to develop. No matter how deeply we might be addicted, no matter how strong our habits, the heart can always be free. Even if those habits have been there for a lifetime, that recognition of 'there must be a way' represents the faith that the heart can be free of this dependency, it can be free of this addiction. That is the possibility. I feel this is very valuable for us all to contemplate.

DESIRE, SATISFACTION, DISSATISFACTION AND FREEDOM

Perhaps a good way to illustrate this last point is to recount my own experience. When I was twenty-one years old I was already regularly filled with despair. I'd become an alcoholic by the time I was twenty and I was getting to the point where I was beginning to think that freedom was really impossible, happiness was impossible. I was thinking that maybe life was just a case of surviving 'ordinary human unhappiness' for as long as we can, eventually we die and that's all there is. I was beginning to have that kind of feeling. It seemed that it was impossible to be genuinely free because there were always limitations. You could never fulfil all your desires. Either you didn't have enough money or there were too many laws, too many obstacles, so freedom was impossible.

I went travelling in South-East Asia and, along the way, I was shown to a monastery in Thailand; I asked to stay there simply because I needed a cheap

place. I didn't have very much money. At the time, as a type of hippie anarchist, I objected philosophically to organized religion and to rules of any kind. I thought I would stay at the monastery for two or three days.

I knew nothing about Buddhism at that time as I had never even read a Buddhist book. I thought that the Buddha was Chinese. The monks kindly let me stay at the monastery for a few days, telling me I'd need to shave my head if I was going to be there for more than a week.

On the first evening I asked one of the novices about meditation and he gave me some instruction. I remember him saying, 'Desire is a liar. When you desire something, it's not telling you the truth and if we let go of our desire then it just passes away.'

When I heard that I thought, 'That's pretty stupid. That doesn't help me at all, I still won't get what I want and I will be in a state of lack, just as usual.' But I also thought that since I was staying in the place I should give it a try. All guests were on the Eight Precepts which, I was surprised to learn, meant there was no supper.

That evening, a few minutes into the group meditation, I thought, 'I'm hungry. I fancy some pineapple.'

Then I thought, 'OK, I'm hungry, that's a desire, but the novice said "Let go of desire and things will be fine"; so, OK, I'm aware I'm feeling hungry... hmmm, it's not making it go away. So what did that "letting go" bit mean?'

A moment later: 'I'm still hungry. Buddhism is stupid.'

But after five or ten minutes, my mind having been distracted by something else, I noticed that, when I brought my attention back to the present, the hungry feeling had gone. A few minutes earlier I was hungry and I was apparently incomplete without some pineapple. Ten minutes later I hadn't got the pineapple but nothing was missing.

'Ohhh!!! I didn't get the pineapple but nothing is missing!'

That was the big moment. It was like a curtain opening on the way forward to liberation. I could suddenly see what the novice had meant when he said, 'Desire is a liar.' Desire had been telling me that if I didn't get the pineapple I would not be complete. If we believe that, we end up endlessly chasing the desired object, hoping for some kind of fulfilment. The moment came where I didn't get the pineapple and nothing was missing. It was as if a pathway had opened up in front of me and I could see what I had to do.

Of course, that was the start of a long journey rather than the end of one.

That happened more than 40 years ago and it is one of the reasons why I still follow this teaching today. It is highly valuable because it speaks to the insight, the intuition that freedom is possible. Even if the addictions are still there in the system, the heart knows deep down that freedom is possible.

A BUDDHA IN EVERY REALM

THREE

In the Buddhist tradition the Triple Gem – the Buddha, the Dhamma and the Sangha – forms the centre-piece of our faith and practice. We reflect upon the qualities of these Three Jewels daily, for example in the morning and the evening chanting at our monasteries. We recite the attributes of each of them in a formal way but we also reflect that the elements of the Triple Gem have both an internal and an external aspect to them.

INNER AND OUTER QUALITIES OF THE TRIPLE GEM

When we chant our praises, our respect and reverence of the Buddha, this refers in the external sense to Gotama Buddha – our teacher, the founder of this religious tradition, the great master who established this amazing array of teachings and who realized full and complete enlightenment, and who has been a great example and mentor of so many generations of us that have followed after. This is an important aspect of the Triple Gem.

Ajahn Chah and other forest ajahns would emphasize that, on a psychological level, the Buddha Refuge is not so much the external, historical Buddha who passed away 2,563 years ago, but rather the internal quality of 'Buddha'. That is the true refuge. That is the safe place here and now. A genuine refuge has to be a sanctuary, here and now. A memory or an idea of a historical figure, a statue

or a shrine, is not a safe place. It is an image. It can inspire, but it is not where genuine psychological, spiritual security can be found.

The word 'Buddha' literally means 'the one who is awake' – essentially, the quality of wakefulness. To 'take refuge in Buddha' is to choose to be awake. It is the choice to embody that very awareness, that knowing, that is the essence of true wisdom. It is an attribute of this heart: your heart, my heart, here and now. So, on the internal level, taking refuge in the Buddha is to be aware, to be awake, to employ that quality of awareness, to know the flow of experience here and now.

When we think of the Jewel of the Dhamma, we often think this refers solely to the Buddha's wisdom, the words of the scriptures and the many wonderful descriptions and skilful means that are given in the verbal teachings of the Buddha, or in the words of great teachers over the centuries. The word 'Dhamma', however, literally means 'that which upholds' or 'that which supports', 'that which integrates'. The word 'Dhamma' also means 'nature' or the 'natural order'. The Pali word '*Dhammajāti*' ('born of the Dhamma') is the word used in the Thai language to refer to nature *(tammachaht)*, the natural order of things.

On an external level, taking refuge in Dhamma means that we are guided by the Buddha's teachings, taking those teachings to be a reliable source of knowledge. On the internal level, taking refuge in Dhamma is choosing to be in

harmony with the way things are, to be in harmony with nature. Essentially, it means to choose to live in a way centred on nature rather than centred on our ego, our personality. Taking refuge in Dhamma means that the heart attunes itself to and is in harmony with its own nature, which is also the nature of all things. As Ajahn Chah said:

> Everything is Dhamma … Dhamma is nature … If we realize the Dhamma, then we will likewise be the Buddha.
> (*THE COLLECTED TEACHINGS OF AJAHN CHAH,* P 485)

The taking of refuge in the Sangha also has inner and outer aspects. Externally this is choosing to be guided by, and to take as an example, those beings who have awakened to the Truth, to Dhamma, and who are the enlightened disciples of the Buddha. In our daily recollections we refer to 'the four pairs, the eight kinds of noble beings', this means those who have awakened to the different levels of realization.

The internal aspect of Sangha is about how we practise, how that noble heart manifests in the world. 'Refuge in Sangha' internally can mean a variety of things but since the description of the Sangha Refuge lists the qualities of goodness – respecting and loving the good, loving to act in a straightforward way, loving to act in a well-integrated way, how to be accomplished in goodness – I feel that the most accurate and helpful way of understanding it is

to take 'Refuge in Sangha' as 'choosing to listen to the voice in the heart that loves the good'.

This is the inner aspect of the Sangha Refuge, the Sangha Jewel.

AWARENESS OF EVERY REALM

In the visual depiction of the six realms, in that mirror held by Mahākāla (above, p 31), if one looks closely there is a Buddha to be found in every one of the realms. There is a Buddha present, even in the Animal Realm, the Hungry Ghost Realm, that of the *asuras* and the Hells. This feature of the iconography symbolizes the fact that in each and every mind state, whether it be heavenly, blissful and wholesome, or unwholesome and painful such as anger, fear or compulsion, the quality of wisdom or awareness is available. The Buddha is able to visit that realm. There is no realm that the Buddha can't visit.

For example, if the mind is lost in a train of thought, say a feeling of righteous indignation about something, at a certain moment there is the recognition that the mind has got lost and has been carried away. That recognition is symbolically represented by a Buddha being present in that realm – in this instance it would be the Asura Realm – it characterizes the quality of wisdom arising, awareness being brought to bear to apprehend and fully know that mind state.

We consciously take refuge in the Buddha, Dhamma and Sangha to strengthen that quality of awareness, to make knowing more accessible – to invite the Buddha more effectively into every one of the Six Realms. In taking refuge, awareness and wisdom can be brought more easily to meet and receive those distractions or emotions or compulsions, be they unwholesome, wholesome, painful, pleasant or neutral. In this light it is significant that, in the classical imagery, the Buddha in each realm holds an instrument or object that is particularly relevant for the beings in each realm. He is using the medium that each category of beings can relate to:

In the Human Realm he holds the alms-bowl of a monk.
In the Deva Realm he holds a musical instrument, a *vīṇa*.
In the Asura Realm he holds a flaming sword.
In the Animal Realm he holds a book.
In the Hell Realm he holds a flame.
In the Hungry Ghost Realm he holds a bottle of nectar.

These different media represent the skilful means through which wisdom needs to operate in order to have an effective impact in each realm, upon each psychological state.

LOVING-KINDNESS – EXPRESSIVE AND RECEPTIVE

Another aspect of the symbolism is that the Buddha is always a loving presence, even if he is carrying a sword or a flame. Buddha-wisdom is the embodiment

of profound loving-kindness, that radical acceptance which facilitates the process of liberation and frees beings from the wheel of becoming.

Many years ago, when Ajahn Sumedho first began teaching in the UK and Europe, he would use the classical phrases for teaching loving-kindness, *mettā* meditation: 'May I be happy, may I be well; may all beings be happy, may they all be well.' Most English people would think, 'Ugh! This is so sentimental! It's really annoying! You're trying to teach loving-kindness but it makes me really irritated. It's too sweet, sentimental, like "thinking pink".'

I remember one person on a retreat saying, 'I was doing fine, I was very happy until you started teaching *mettā*. Then I got really angry.'

Ajahn Sumedho is a very creative and adaptable teacher. He thus employed some skilful means and changed the language that he used to describe *mettā*. He defined it instead as 'not dwelling in aversion'. In a similar vein the phrase that I like to use for *mettā*, 'radical acceptance', follows on from Ajahn Sumedho's lead. It describes a principle of acceptance, or not dwelling in aversion. We can have *mettā* for that which is not likeable.

And this, in a way, is the central principle. It applies directly to dependent origination.

If we confuse *mettā* for meaning that we're supposed to *like* all beings and all mind-states, it can easily be irritating because there are many things about our own minds and other people that are not likeable – those Hell Realms of

anger and conflict are still hot and painful – but they are the way they are. The Buddha carries a flame to those realms but he is not averse or impatient. He is as calm and benevolent as he is everywhere.

If you have chronic pain, or you've had a headache for three days, you can't like it, but you can accept it. Here it is. If you have a difficult family member who is causing you a lot of stress, you can't like that, but you can accept it. This is a practical and realistic way of understanding *mettā* – it is a quality of acceptance and open-heartedness, of clearly seeing 'this is the way things are', rather than trying to feel like we have to force ourselves to like everything. If we have an angry mind state, or we feel a wave of jealousy, fear or craving, we're not trying to pretend that we like that: 'Oh, hooray! I'm really angry. My anger is so beautiful.' We're not trying to create that kind of attitude, but rather we acknowledge when an angry feeling arises: 'This is anger. It feels this way. It's part of nature. It's like this.'

When we establish a foundation of loving-kindness, this means establishing a readiness to accept what we like, what we dislike and what is neutral, with an open heart. We're not being biased. We are not judging. We are recognizing in this moment that the mind's experience is exactly *this* way. This is what the Buddha being present in each realm is intended to mean in the iconography of the wheel of birth and death.

When we understand and learn to use this attitude of radical acceptance, it doesn't mean that we are being passive. Accepting doesn't mean going numb. Our hearts don't freeze. Acceptance doesn't mean that we refuse to act or respond to an experience. It's simply a recognition: 'Here we are; it's like this.' If you are driving to Paris, enjoying chatting to a friend, and then you see a road sign that tells you you're just entering Nice, you might wish that you had not gone fifty kilometres in the wrong direction, but that's where you are. So, rather than criticizing yourself for taking a wrong turn, you accept what's happened: 'Oh, I'm here. It's not where I expected to be. Now, how do I get back on the right road?' You accept where you are and that acceptance informs how you act in order to head in a better direction.

In a way, this quality of *mettā* is the route we follow in making skilful choices. This is directly related to dependent origination in that it is about learning how to make choices based on wisdom and mindfulness rather than reactivity. If 'acceptance' meant taking no action then, once you had taken that wrong turn and found yourself in Nice by mistake, when you had some commitment in Paris, you would then think: 'Oh well, I guess I just have to stay in Nice.' This is called stupidity.

If we can establish this basis of radical acceptance, then when we are observing the activities of our mind, whether in terms of feeling, sense experience, liking and disliking, we know these activities for what they are. If something

is ordinary, you know this as the feeling of something being ordinary. If we experience dislike, then we know this is the experience of disliking. The mind is able to appreciate those qualities of experience just as they are. We learn more and more about liking and disliking, we see them clearly, and this is a major means whereby we can free the heart from its addictions.

If we experience dislike for something and are able to know that feeling clearly, then the mind will not grab hold of that dislike and turn it into hatred or deep aversion. If we are unmindful then pain becomes a problem, it becomes the 'enemy', it becomes something that has to be brought to an end by any means possible. When the mind grasps pain it is born into the feelings of hatred and aversion. But if there is wisdom and mindfulness, the feeling, the sensation can be known simply as it is: 'This is unpleasant. I can't make it pleasant. It's just this. It's just a painful feeling. That's all.' Dislike doesn't have to lead to hate.

In exactly the same way, when we like something – we taste some delicious food or we see some beautiful countryside – we experience a feeling of liking. We can experience that liking and know it just as it is, as a feeling of delight, of pleasure. If we are wise, we recognize that we don't have to add anything to that. We can just let that delight, that pleasure, be what it is: 'It is this way.' But if we're unmindful, if we're unwise, then the mind grasps hold of that. We try to get more of it, or keep it, or create the same experience in the future. We get so excited in grasping that taste, we get so busy in the mind, that we end up missing the taste in the moment.

A friend of the monastery once told me that she took her family to a resort on an island in the Mediterranean: 'We found this beautiful village on a little island. It was the perfect hotel. It was the perfect beach. The kids were so happy. I spent the whole holiday trying to figure out how I could book the place for the next year, so I didn't enjoy it this year at all.'

Many years ago I was on a retreat with Ajahn Sucitto. One day, after the meal, he had this glow in his face and I said, 'You look very happy, Ajahn. What happened?' And he said, 'I ate a potato.' It looked like it had been a profound religious experience. 'Yes, it was amazing. I ate a potato and I wasn't doing anything else.' There was the experience of being hungry and having a taste of potato. Just being present for that experience was extraordinarily delightful.

So this area of Dhamma practice, this dimension of meditation, is very rich for exploration. If we can bring our attention to present moment experience and fully attend to what's here and now then we can find that quality of satisfaction and fulfilment that most of us are seeking in life. We wish to be content, we wish to be fulfilled, we wish to be at peace and complete. But if the mind is always looking for the next and the next and the next thing, we are tied to the wheel of becoming, we're tied to that cycle of addiction; the heart, even though it longs for rest and completion, never experiences any rest, peace or completion.

To put it simply, we can establish this insight: I can 'like' but I don't have to 'want'; I can 'dislike' and I don't have to 'hate'.

On considering all of this, it can be seen that the practice of loving-kindness has both a receptive and an expressive aspect. The expressive quality of *mettā* manifests in the conscious radiating of benevolent feelings towards others and to oneself, well-wishing, spreading kindness, sending goodwill out to every being. It is like the outbreath.

The receptive aspect of *mettā* is like the in-breath, taking everything in and opening our hearts to each other and to the way things are. This is the radical acceptance, the not dwelling in aversion, the attunement to the reality of the way things are, that is also the life-source of wisdom.

Accordingly, just as it is the inbreath that gathers the oxygen that our bodies need to stay alive and it is the outbreath that expels the unneeded carbon dioxide, so too (I would say) it is the receptive, acceptance aspect of *mettā* that is its essence, and the expressive aspect which is a natural and helpful result of that.

ATTENDING TO THE PRESENT – CONCENTRATION

In order to free the heart from its addictions to afflictive habits it is most helpful to continually bring attention to the experience of this present reality. How is this moment felt? How is it received? This body, this mind, in this moment –

how is it? Then, on that basis of appreciation and acceptance of the material we're working with, we can set a direction.

If we notice that we are tense or excited, we can lean towards calming and being peaceful. If we notice that we are sleepy and heavy, then we realize that we need to set the direction toward energizing, a way of enlivening the meditation practice.

In a period of meditation, having brought awareness to the current state of mind and physical feelings, where we are starting from, we strengthen the attention on the body, establishing the posture, forming a balance of energy and relaxation.

Having found that quality of balance between the body being energized but also relaxed, then we bring attention to the rhythm of breathing. The body breathes on its own. It is not something that we have to 'do'. Just as the heart beats on its own, our lungs breathe on their own. So in mindfulness of breathing, we bring attention to the breath as we let the body breathe according to its own pace, its own natural rhythm. We let that natural rhythm be at the centre of our attention. The breathing is not a thing that you have to 'do'; the mind is simply paying attention to a natural process.

We focus the attention on the rhythm of the breathing. Whenever the mind is distracted – there might be a sound in the room, or memories that are triggered by something in the body, a vehicle passing in the street – we take note of that. Notice that the mind has been caught, that there is distraction, and then

consciously let go. Notice the feeling of grasping; and then notice the feeling of *not* grasping. Then bring the attention back to the sensations of the breath. We work with an attitude of loving-kindness, radical acceptance. This means that, as we work with the body and mind, we are doing it with an attitude of friendliness and collaboration. The mind, with its habits of wandering thoughts, is not the opponent or the enemy; we are not working *against* the mind but rather we are working *with* it.

If we are a parent, a mother, a father, or a teacher in a kindergarten, and we have to teach a small child how to write the alphabet, the child may be restless. We patiently and carefully sit the child down, put the crayon in their hand, put the piece of paper in front of them and gently, holding their hand, we make the letter 'A': 'One leg here and one leg there, and then a bar across the middle – A.' We patiently work with that restless, confused or chaotic energy. We work with kindness and a sense of cooperation; taking that energy and guiding it, not opposing it, not fearing it.

If we wish to realize peace and freedom we need to work with our minds and bodies employing the same kind of patience and compassion, but also with strength, giving direction. We are giving a form, but we are giving that direction from a heart of loving-kindness, of friendliness. If we establish this attitude in our way of working with the mind and body – kindness and compassion linked with giving direction – then the means whereby we are training the system

are peaceful, as well as awake and aware. According to the Buddha's teachings cause and effect are always united. If we use a peaceful and well-organized, harmonious cause it will result in a peaceful and harmonious effect. In contrast, if we use a contentious, forceful means – trying to compel the mind and body to obey by sheer will – the results will necessarily be stress-filled and afflicted.

When we meditate, using a method such as bringing the attention to focus on the breath, I encourage this attitude of working with loving-kindness and the quality of acceptance, and then looking at the results. We are aided in our efforts by paying attention to the effect that that has.

It doesn't matter how many times the attention drifts away from the present. It is not a competition. Nobody is keeping score. This is an exercise in how to work with the mind's natural tendency towards distraction. Whenever we notice the mind is drifting – caught up in memory of the past, plans for the future, drifting into sleepiness – as soon as we notice that sense of grasping and entanglement, we let go. There is a releasing of the grip and an end to the grasping. We bring the attention back to the feeling of the breath and notice the quality of the mind free of grasping. How is that? In this way, we become very familiar with the process of distraction, then awakening, then letting go and re-establishing the attention in the reality of the present.

When we consider the teaching of dependent origination, its very essence is this experience of getting distracted and grasping and caught up; and the

mind's ability to notice and to let go. Having let go, there is the experience of clarity and peacefulness. This comes when the mind is free of grasping.

Just this.

Just this simple process that we can all witness, this is the essence of the teachings on dependent origination and cessation.

THE THREE CHARACTERISTICS

The Buddha gave us the tool of the Three Characteristics of Existence to help us investigate the nature of experience and, in turn, to strengthen that clarity and stability of awareness and wisdom – this is strengthening the presence of Buddha-wisdom in each of those Six Realms. These Three Characteristics are impermanence (*anicca*), unsatisfactoriness (*dukkha*) and not-self (*anattā*). All patterns of experience are understood to possess these three qualities. By using these three as tools to explore our attitudes, presumptions, attachments and conditioning, we can discover where the mind habitually looks (in vain) for permanence, certainty, happiness and 'the real me'. Insight meditation, *vipassanā*, is the process of that revelation and the freedom of heart that results from it.

ANICCA

This means the quality of change, transitoriness, in the objective domain, and the quality of uncertainty on the subjective side of things – when the heart

experiences change in the field of perception it does not know what that object will change into, thus it feels uncertainty.

When meditation is well-developed the attention becomes more steady and is able to rest easily in the present moment. From this point of rest we can use those Three Characteristics as reflections to examine the very nature of experience, to see how the mind works.

In order to develop this perspective, during meditation, we let the breath, the feelings of the body, the sounds we hear around us, the sensations in our feet as we walk... let them be part of a continuous flow of experience. Let them merely be patterns of perception that arise and pass away and sustain the quality of open awareness, being attentive to patterns of change, the perceptions as they arise and pass away in each moment. There is a conscious letting go of interest in the *content* of experience in order to fully appreciate the *process* of experiencing.

In this way of developing the practice of meditation the heart is embodying that quality of wakeful awareness. Essentially, it is being 'Buddha', being awake. And what that wakeful awareness knows is the Dhamma, that is to say the patterns of nature as they arise and pass away. When the Buddha sees the Dhamma, what arises is the Sangha. When the awake mind sees the way things are, what arises is harmonious action, the inclination of the heart towards what is noble and wholesome.

If the mind is quite focused, quite aware and pays attention easily to the present moment, then we can use this reflection on *anicca* to help facilitate that quality of open awareness, open attention. For example, if we are making an effort to be aware of the flow of experience and then the attention is caught by a pain in our leg or the sound of a bird, we can reflect, 'The sound of the bird is changing' or 'the feeling in my leg is changing'. That is *anicca*. That is letting go of the object, letting go of the *content* of the experience and looking at the *process* of the experience instead. Then the mind is able to let go of the object that it is attached to and simply be aware of the flow of experience once again.

DUKKHA

Dukkha means 'unsatisfactoriness', the fact that no experience can permanently fulfil us. We look at experience, at perception. If it is changing, can it be something permanently satisfying? No. Even if it is truly, deeply pleasant, that pleasure has to come to an end eventually. Therefore it is *dukkha*.

Some people, when they hear that the Buddha taught that everything is unsatisfactory *('Sabbe saṅkhārā dukkhā')*, they think he's being very negative. But the word *dukkha* is very subtle. '*Du-*' means 'wrong' or 'out of balance'. '*Akkha*' is the centre of a wheel where the axle goes through. So the image of *dukkha* is that of a wheel that is not spinning truly; it is out of kilter. Even things that are blissful are subject to change and, because they change, they cannot be completely, permanently satisfying. That's not to say that some experiences are

not delightful or beautiful, delicious or wholesome, like a blissful meditation state or a piece of music by Bach. But the point is that pleasant experience is unsustainable, therefore it is *dukkha*.

ANATTĀ

Anattā is the principle that no thing that is experienced can be truly said to be who and what we are; no thing can truly be owned. If it is changing and unsatisfying, can it truly be said to be who and what I am? Does it really have an owner? No...

This is the most challenging characteristic to understand because the translations into European languages have often misrepresented it. *Anattā* is often translated in such a way that it sounds like the Buddha was saying we don't exist, or we have no self or no soul. However, there is no place in the Pali Canon where the Buddha says 'there is no self'. The teaching of *anattā* is about letting go of what we habitually think of as ourselves without creating an idea of what a real self might be and hanging onto that instead. It is a way of looking at how we identify with the body, with our personality, with our personal story, with our memories, our possessions, our reputation, all those things we think of as ourselves: our age, our gender, nationality, everything.

There can be the feeling that 'I' am hearing, 'I' am meditating; there is the sense of 'I' as the doer and the experiencer. The Buddha's teaching on *anattā* is a way to challenge that. Yes, there is hearing. Yes, there is thinking. Yes, there

is remembering. But what is it that knows those memories? What is it that knows that sound? Is there anything which is an owner of these moods and feelings and thoughts?

When that is looked at and explored, no 'thing' can be found which is precisely the 'doer', the agent of experience and action. So, the reflection on not-self is a means of letting go rather than taking a philosophical position.

We might practise *vipassanā* meditation and come to think, 'I am pure awareness, that's what I am! I am the Dhamma, that's the real me!' But the thought 'I am the Dhamma' is just a thought. The thought 'I am awareness' is just a thought. The method of *vipassanā* meditation is to keep letting go of any kind of identifying, to let go of grasping thoughts or images or concepts and to simply embody that knowing awake quality. One of the most useful teachings that the Buddha gave on this area is the statement:

> 'Whatever you conceive it to be, the truth is always other than that.'
> **(M 113.21, UD 3.10)**

'THERE IS THE UNBORN, THE UNORIGINATED, THE UNCREATED, THE UNFORMED'

We use these reflections to let go of the content of experience, to be open to the process of experiencing. The Buddha introduced the contemplations on *anicca, dukkha, anattā* at the very beginning of his teaching career when

he spoke to his five companions just after his enlightenment. He used these Three Characteristics as a way of exploring experience. They are tools for investigation rather than a philosophical position. So the Buddha is not saying that you should believe everything is 'not-self'; he's inviting us to take this principle and use it to explore our habits of thinking, our attitudes.

After his enlightenment, the Buddha was travelling to the Deer Park in Varanasi, to reconnect with his five former companions. He met a wanderer named Upaka along the road. Upaka thought to himself, 'Wow – this monk looks really radiant and peaceful.' Upaka said to the Buddha, 'You look like you've just had some kind of great awakening or some powerful experience.' The Buddha said, 'Yes, I'm fully enlightened and I'm the only enlightened being in the whole world.' Upaka was a bit shocked. (I think we've all met people who speak like this on the street. I met one in Rome not long ago). Upaka said, 'It sounds like you claim to have realized the Deathless; if that's the case, who is your teacher? How did you awaken to this?' The Buddha said, 'Yes, that is correct, I have realized the Deathless but I have no teacher. I realized this completely by myself.' Upaka said, 'Good for you, friend,' (rather as I did with the fellow in Rome). And then, shaking his head, Upaka left by a different road.

In this account Upaka spoke to the Buddha about 'the Deathless'. This term might be unfamiliar to some although it is common within the Buddha's teachings; it is one of the qualities of Dhamma in its transcendent aspect.

One of the most significant teachings, and one of Ajahn Sumedho's favourite passages from the scriptures, is where the Buddha says:

> 'There is the Unborn, the Unoriginated, the Uncreated, the Unformed and if there was not the Unborn, the Unoriginated, the Uncreated, the Unformed then escape from the born, the originated, the created and the formed would not be possible. But because there is the Unborn, the Unoriginated, the Uncreated, the Unformed, therefore escape from the born, the originated, the created and the formed is possible.'
> **(UD 8.3)**

This teaching points to the transcendent dimension of reality, beyond time and space and identity. The main aspect of awakening is the embodiment of the realization of that transcendent quality. That's why it is called liberation from birth and death.

One of the most significant things we recite, when recollecting the attributes of the Triple Gem, are the qualities of the Dhamma: 'Apparent here and now, timeless, encouraging investigation...'. To speak of the timeless, the Unborn, the Deathless, might sound a bit spacey and remote, a bit airy-fairy, however it is not referring to some super-cosmic realm somewhere else; rather it is the fabric of our own heart. The aim of Buddhist practice is to discover this liberated quality of our own being that we've had with us all the time. It is the very foundation of what we are but we have not noticed it, having been

preoccupied with worldly concerns. To borrow a phrase from Christian tradition, 'It is closer to us than we are to ourselves.'

To continue the story... The Buddha was a very quick learner. He realized that a straightforward declaration like that was not helpful. So, when he met with his five friends, he adopted a method of analysis instead. Rather than telling them, 'This is the Ultimate Reality...', he used a way of reflecting on *anicca, dukkha* and *anattā* to help his friends arrive at that realization for themselves.

They started off with *anicca* and with the body. He asked, 'Is the body changing? Is the body in a state of change?' They answered, 'Yes.' Then he asked, 'If something is changing is it subject to affliction or not subject to affliction?' Then they answered, 'It is subject to affliction. The body can be sick, it can break apart.'

The Buddha then asked, 'If something is changing, if it is subject to affliction, then is it something that can be permanently satisfactory?'

They answered, 'It can't be permanently satisfactory if it is subject to affliction and is in a state of change. It is necessarily *dukkha*, unsatisfactory.'

Then the Buddha asked, 'So, if the body is in a state of change, subject to affliction and is unsatisfactory, is it appropriate to say of it, 'This is mine, this is what I am, this is my true self'?'

They replied, 'No, it is not appropriate to say that' (S 22.59).

At the Buddha's time, as with Vedic philosophy today, there was the idea of

the *atman*, the 'self'. *Atman* was thought of as being permanent and blissful and truly who and what we are – its qualities comprising *sat-chit-ānanda*, 'being-consciousness-bliss'. So, in a sense, the Buddha is aiming right at those beliefs of his time. If the characteristics of *atman* are meant to include permanence and bliss, the body cannot be *atman* (Skt.), it cannot be *attā* (Pali).

In the teaching to the group of his companions the Buddha goes through each of the five *khandhas*. The first is *rūpa*, material form, as just described. The second is feeling, *vedanā.* The third is *saññā*, perception. The fourth is *saṅkhārā*, mental formations. The fifth is *viññāṇa*, consciousness based on the senses. It is very systematic. First there is the exploration of the physical realm *(rūpa)*. The other four are aspects of mind *(nāma)*. The Buddha says that each of those *khandhas* is in a state of change, is subject to affliction and not permanently satisfying. He says that these *khandhas* are impersonal, they cannot be said to be a 'true self', who we really are or our fundamental nature:

> *'Netaṃ mama, nesoham'asmi, na me so attā ti'* –
> 'This is not mine, this is not what I am, this is not my self.'
> **(S 22.59)**

When we focus upon the characteristics of *anicca, dukkha* and *anattā,* keeping these in mind as an ongoing reflection, and we look at the result of that reflection, how does it change our heart? In that moment of non-grasping – what is the quality of experience?

This has to be known, realized by each individual for themselves, but the Buddha pointed out that it is when the grasping stops that the Deathless is realized:

> 'This is the Deathless, namely, the liberation of the mind
> through not clinging.'
> **(M 106.13)**

THE FIRST EXIT POINT FROM THE CYCLE

FOUR

'This, bhikkhus, is the Noble Truth of *dukkha:*
Birth is *dukkha*, ageing is *dukkha*, death is *dukkha*, sorrow, lamentation, pain,
grief and despair are *dukkha*, association with the disliked is *dukkha*,
separation from the liked is *dukkha*, not to get what one wants is *dukkha*.
In brief, clinging to the five *khandhas* is *dukkha*.'

'This is the Noble Truth of *dukkha*,
and this *dukkha* is to be apprehended.'
(S 56.11)

Through the course of a day we can observe how the mind relates to the flow of experience, irrespective of where we might be: on a bus, at home, in an office, in hospital, in a forest, on a retreat. We can notice when the mind is lost in feelings of *dukkha* (dissatisfaction). Maybe we've been remembering some past conflict and have recreated an argument with somebody. Maybe we are lost in a fantasy about someone that we are attracted to, or someone that we used to be in love with but it broke apart, or we are caught up in the idea of being with some completely imaginary person. Perhaps we find the mind lost in worry about our health. Perhaps we are arguing with someone at work or in the family... Whether based on attraction, aversion, fear or whatever, we

can notice these experiences of the mind being caught in a tangle of *dukkha*. Sorrow, lamentation, pain, grief, despair – we each experience these feelings in our own way. But the Buddha offers us tools in order to understand and work with these feelings.

TWO POSSIBLE RESULTS OF *DUKKHA*

The Buddha said that the feeling of *dukkha* can ripen in two ways. One way it ripens is to create more *dukkha*; we create an even bigger, tighter tangle of suffering. The other way that same experience can ripen is in 'search' (A 6.63, as mentioned above, p 47). This is to say the intuition arises that there must be an alternative to the *dukkha.* This is, in effect, the arising of faith, faith that there is a way out of the tangle (S 12.23).

When the Buddha spoke about the First Noble Truth, the truth of *dukkha*, he spoke of a way it should be worked with, as he did with each of the Four Noble Truths. He said: *'Dukkha* is to be understood', *(idaṃ dukkhaṃ ariyasaccaṃ pariññeyyan'ti)* – it should be received. It should be apprehended, recognized. This is in his very first discourse, the *Dhammacakkappavatana Sutta* (S 56.11).

When our hearts are lost in feelings of regret or heartbreak, anger, confusion, aversion, fear, jealousy or desire, we tend to think of it as the result of something external.

We focus on an argument or the behaviour of another person. We think that the issue is something personal. The mind grasps that feeling, takes it personally

and gets born into it. If the influence of ignorance dominates, the cycle will be repeated – more *dukkha* is created.

However, the Buddha encourages us to place attention on the *dukkha* itself instead, remember: *'Dukkha* is to be apprehended'; it is to be received, to be understood. 'This is being associated with what we dislike; this is the experience of being separated from what we like, therefore it is painful', and so forth. It is this understanding, the apprehending that enables the *dukkha* to ripen as faith rather than as further *dukkha.*

EXITING THE CYCLE

We make the shift from the mind being entangled and absorbed in what we desire or fear or what we're irritated by, we let go of the content of the *object* and turn attention back to the attitude of the *subject* and thus to the recognition of *dukkha*. This is the first exit point from the cycle of addiction, the wheel of birth and death. This first exit point is thus directly related to the First Noble Truth.

If you have a sensation of lack, this is a kind of *dukkha*. If you then reach into the fridge to take some ice cream, the craving has arisen conditioned by that *dukkha*. It is the wheel turning, the cycle of addiction and compulsion continuing – this is exactly it. When you have a feeling that you are incomplete, unsettled, unhappy, frazzled, lonely, that is the mind affected by *soka parideva dukkha domanass'upāyāsā*. That feeling of lack is felt as genuine to the degree

that there is ignorance, *avijjā*. If the ignorance goes unchallenged then we believe: 'I am lacking something. I need something.' That belief is being fed because of ignorance. It is taken as real: 'I *do* need something. I *am* lacking.' As long as ignorance is strong, the whole cycle starts again.

But if the *dukkha* is recognized, apprehended: 'This is the feeling of being incomplete, this is the feeling of lack; this is the feeling of really wanting something even though I don't know what I want' – if that feeling is recognized, then it doesn't have to be believed in. The heart can respond mindfully to it, rather than to blindly react. That is the exit point.

When we recognize *dukkha*, there is also the recognition that *dukkha* has a cause. This is the Second Noble Truth. When we acknowledge the feeling of *dukkha*, this leads to the arising of faith *(saddhā)* because there is intuitive wisdom telling us that this can't be the whole story, there has to be a way beyond this. If that faith is acted upon then the doors to the Deathless are opened.

In one particular teaching, called 'The Proximate Cause' (S 12.23), the Buddha describes how that faith then gives rise to gladness *(pāmujja)*, a kind of delight in the heart: 'Hooray, there's a way out!' That delight leads to rapture *(pīti)*, tranquillity *(passaddhi),* and then to happiness a settling of the mind, a deep contentment (*sukha*). When there's relaxation of body and mind and the quality of calmness and contentment, that creates the basis for concentration *(samādhi)*.

It is easy to concentrate the mind when you are content with how things are. For example, if you are content with being where you are right now, your mind is not creating the idea of being somewhere else. There are not any restless feelings that need to be quelled. Then, when the mind is concentrated, when it pays attention to the present moment, it is easy and natural for the quality of insight and wisdom to arise *(yathābhūtañāṇadassana)*. When insight arises, there is a direct understanding of the way things are. There is a natural arising of coolness of heart *(nibbidā)*. The heart lets go of its habits of attachment *(virāga)* which leads to liberation *(vimutti)*, culminating in full enlightenment, also known as the stopping of the outflows *(āsavākhaya)* – this is the consummation of the development of wisdom and contemplation.

CONTEMPLATION

When we talk about 'contemplation', we are talking about having enough calm to sustain attention in the present moment, not being caught up by particular objects. Ajahn Chah used to point out that contemplation doesn't have to involve words or conceptual thought at all. There are several Pali terms that refer to contemplation. One is *yoniso manasikāra,* translated as 'paying attention to the origin of things', another, *dhammavicāya*, is translated as 'investigation of reality'. Both of these terms are very close in meaning and represent an application of the mind's ability to investigate and recognize patterns. So contemplation is an active exploration of how things are related to each

other. It might involve conceptual thought and it might not. It is more to do with looking and exploring, intuiting how things fit together than with calculating or defining conceptually.

The Latin word *contemplari* means 'within the temple'. In Greek and Roman times, religious experts would mark out an area, either in a building or on the ground outdoors with stones, or an area of the sky, and they would observe what was happening within the *templum* – what birds might come and go, and suchlike. It is a very good word because it represents defining an area that you are examining and seeing what is happening within that defined space, within the area of interest that you are looking at.

During the course of each day, we can observe how the mind works. We can notice where it gets entangled in things that we like, things that we dislike, things we want, things we're afraid of, things we have opinions about – we can contemplate how it works.

Whenever we notice that kind of tensing, stressing in the heart, we can make the effort to let go of the content of the experience and to simply recognize – 'this is *dukkha*'. In this way that experience of *dukkha* will open the door; through the receiving, knowing, understanding of *dukkha* the body and mind relax, the calm mind then can concentrate, and the concentrated mind is able to see with insight – and through the arising of insight the heart will be liberated.

Many years ago, when I was monastery secretary at Amaravati, I was working

alongside a monk who I didn't get along with easily in that work environment. I really struggled with various issues about him. I thought he was out of order, doing things the wrong way. My mind was fixated on this: 'He shouldn't be this way!' Of course, I was trying not to be negative towards him; we had to work together every day. It was a real tangle. After six weeks, I suddenly realized, 'Oh! It's just as we recite in our daily chanting: "Association with the disliked is *dukkha*"!' It was as if a light suddenly came on. Amazing! 'This is simply association with something disliked, and therefore *dukkha*. This is the cause; this is the effect. That is all. It's not a personal thing.' The *dukkha* of that situation was apprehended, understood. That made it a lot easier to not make more of a tangle but rather to bring about a relaxation, a letting go. Surprisingly, I was able to find the quality of harmony with it and it was much easier to work with him after that.

If we are wise it shouldn't take us six weeks but these things are unpredictable.

THE DEVELOPMENT OF INSIGHT

We have to know for ourselves what is the appropriate practice at any one time.

If the mind is very agitated and busy, if attention is scattered and running here and there, that is the sign that we need to develop a quality of focus,

a more calm and centred quality of attention. If that is the case, then in sitting meditation we focus on the breath, and particularly pay attention to the out-breath, to the exhalation. This is the natural way of calming and settling the mind.

If the mind is drifting because it is sleepy and lacking in energy, again we can benefit from developing steadiness of attention on the present but we need to develop the energizing side. In that case, it is helpful to pay particular attention to the inhalation, the in-breath, which is the natural way of brightening and energizing the mind.

If the mind is quite awake and attention is easily fixed in the present reality, then there is no need to fix the attention on the breath or a special object. If the attention rests easily in the present, then we make effort to sustain that quality of unentangled openness through reflections on *anicca, dukkha, anattā*. These are the tools we use to help the mind avoid clinging, to let go of objects of the senses.

With respect to developing this first exit point it is useful to get to know the experience of *dukkha*, to notice when the mind is tensing around anything – coarse or fine. If we hear the sound of a bird, if we think the sound is beautiful, we might reflect that hearing the same sound for ten hours would not be satisfying; this would be *dukkha* made manifest. However it's helpful to reflect that it was *dukkha* all along – the very relishing of that beauty – we just didn't realize it until we followed through with the reflection on it.

On an even more subtle level we can reflect on the fact that we are not the owner of that birdsong; we think we are the person who is doing the hearing, but we can investigate using the tool of *anattā*. Who is receiving the sound? Does there have to be a 'me' who is the hearer? If there is a 'me', what does that 'me' look like? Tall or short? Female or male? Young? Old?

This is not to create a kind of philosophical puzzle but rather to eliminate the assumptions that are made about perception and experience. The reflection on *anattā* is to help the mind recognize that there is hearing but you can't really say that there is a 'me' who is hearing. Notice how any kind of I-making and mine-making around any perception or thought is inherently *dukkha* – even with just the 'me' who hears the beautiful sound... there's a tensing in the heart. As the Buddha said:

> 'I am' is a conceiving; 'I am this' is a conceiving; 'I shall be' is a conceiving; 'I shall not be' is a conceiving … Conceiving is a disease, conceiving is a tumour, conceiving is a barb. By overcoming all conceivings, bhikkhu, one is called a sage at peace. And the sage at peace is not born, does not age, does not die; they are not shaken and are not agitated. For there is nothing present in them by which they might be born. Not being born, how could they age? Not ageing, how could they die? Not dying, how could they be shaken? Not being shaken, why should they be agitated?
>
> **(M 140.31)**

When we apply these reflections on *anicca*, *dukkha* and *anattā* in a skilful way, this brings about a change of heart. This sort of reflection, contemplation, changes the way the heart knows and receives the flow of experience. There is a shift from the usual, familiar 'me and my' experience to 'here is the quality of awareness knowing the flow of the way things are'. As Ajahn Sumedho would often put it, it is the change of view, the paradigm shift from seeing in terms of 'me and my problems' to 'here is the Buddha seeing the Dhamma'. This is the awake mind knowing the way things are. We can also see this as a shift from an ego-centred view to a nature-centred view.

When we talk about the development of insight meditation, we speak of the active employment of reflections on *anicca*, *dukkha* and *anattā*. But it is important to understand that the most important aspect of *vipassanā* is this change of heart that comes about as a result of applying this set of reflections, this method. We can sit for many hours reflecting on *anicca*, *dukkha*, *anattā* over and over. But the point is the change of heart that comes when there is the recognition: 'Oh. This is not really *me*. The mind doesn't have to be tied to, be limited by this feeling, this thought, this desire, this fear. Oh!' In that 'Oh' there is great freedom. That is the point of the practice.

Just as the point of preparing and cooking a meal is to eat it and be nourished. If we only focus on the cooking but do not eat what we have cooked, we might

have done a good job with the cooking but it is not serving the purpose for which it is intended. It is not fulfilling its potential.

To use another analogy: if you have an illness, you go to the doctor. The doctor prescribes medicine. You collect the medicine. You take the medicine. That's all 'applying the method'. Then there is the state of health that arises when the medicine begins to work, curing you of the disease. The 'state of health' is the point of going to the doctor and taking the medicine. It is important not just to apply the method of *vipassanā*, but also to consciously experience the results.

One final point to make on the development of insight is that it might be that we *think* we are making the effort to practice *vipassanā*, contemplating the nature of experience with open, unbiased awareness, but the actuality might be something different. Is the mind genuinely attentive to the flow of experience, or is it getting lost in moods and thoughts and memories? What is happening? Just because it says *'Vipassanā'* on the label, is that what is actually inside the tin, as it were?

If we are merely calling what is happening '*vipassanā'* but in truth the attention is caught in the flow of thought and getting lost – be aware of that. Use the posture of the body, use the rhythm of the breath to refocus on the present. Or, if you are applying this process in your active life, when walking or running use the footsteps, if you are on a chair in a business meeting or in a family

discussion, consciously feel the weight of your body as an anchor for awareness – the body is always here irrespective of how intense the situation might be.

Take some time to re-establish the quality of attention. Once that steadiness of attention has been re-established and there is the quality of focus in the present, then open the sphere of attention once again. We take responsibility for our own practice; we observe and adjust it as we need to.

THE SECOND EXIT POINT FROM THE CYCLE

FIVE

'This, bhikkhus, is the Noble Truth of the cause of *dukkha:*
The craving which causes rebirth and is bound up with pleasure and lust,
ever seeking fresh delight, now here, now there; namely, craving for sense
pleasure, craving for existence and craving for annihilation.'

'This is the Noble Truth of the cause of *dukkha*,
and this cause of *dukkha* is to be abandoned.'
(S 56.11)

Continuing with the theme of ways to liberate the heart from the cycles of addiction, I would like to look at a second escape point. This second exit point is related to the Second Noble Truth: the cause of suffering, *dukkha-samudaya*. The cause of suffering is defined by the Buddha as the quality of craving (*taṇhā*), literally 'thirst'. Just as with the First Noble Truth, the Buddha gave a description of how this Truth should be worked with. He named the task involved with the Second Noble Truth as: 'The cause of *dukkha* needs to be abandoned, relinquished, let go of', *(idaṃ dukkha-samudayo ariyasaccaṃ pahātabban'ti)*.

The cause of *dukkha* is craving. That the cause 'should be abandoned, let go of' is probably the most common theme of Buddhist meditation – letting go. The

importance of this teaching is based on the Buddha's advice on how to relate to craving and to end suffering. Furthermore, to highlight this as the centre-piece of his Dhamma instruction, he repeatedly stated:

> What I describe, now as formerly, is *dukkha* and the ending of *dukkha*.
> **(S 22.86, S 44.2)**

When Ajahn Sumedho was a novice in Thailand more than fifty years ago he studied and contemplated the Four Noble Truths very deeply, as he has done ever since. At that time he was particularly helped by Ven. Nyanatiloka's book *The Word of the Buddha.* It became clear to the young Novice Sumedho that 'letting go' was the central task of Dhamma practice so he made a great emphasis on this over the subsequent years of his training. As Ajahn Sumedho has a natural ability to visualize he would sometimes write these words in his imagination: 'Let go. Let go. Let go.' Big green letters with red flashing lights around them.

The Buddha underscored the importance of letting go in 'The Shorter Discourse on the Destruction of Craving':

> 'Venerable Sir, how in brief is a bhikkhu liberated through the ending of craving, one who has reached the ultimate end, the ultimate security

> from bondage, the ultimate holy life, the ultimate goal, and is foremost among gods and humans?'
>
> 'Here, ruler of gods, it's when a bhikkhu has heard: "Nothing is worth holding on to" *(sabbe dhammā nālaṃ abhinivesāyā)*. When a bhikkhu has heard that nothing is worth holding on to, they directly know all things. Directly knowing all things, they completely understand all things. Having completely understood all things, when they experience any kind of feeling – pleasant, unpleasant or neutral – they abide contemplating impermanence, dispassion, cessation and letting go in those feelings. Contemplating thus, they don't grasp at anything in the world. Not grasping, they're not agitated. Not being agitated, they personally realize Nibbāna. They understand: "Rebirth is ended, the spiritual journey has been completed, what had to be done has been done, there is no more coming into any state of existence."'
>
> **(M 37.3)**

FEELING CONDITIONS CRAVING – EXILE FROM THE GARDEN

When we look at the links of dependent origination, the first four of these (ignorance, formations, consciousness, mind and body) can be seen to set up the subject/object duality; the feeling of 'me' and 'the world'. The next three (the six sense-spheres, sense-contact and feeling) describe the arising of a particular sense-event: seeing, hearing, tasting, smelling, touching or thinking something in particular. This brings us to the realm of 'feeling' (*vedanā* or

'sensation'). When things have reached this stage, it can still be very simple; the mind can still be clear and peaceful while there is contact and feeling going on. Consider enlightened beings, like the Buddha: they see, they hear, they smell, they taste, they touch, they feel – that realm of perception and feeling can be completely free of suffering and difficulty.

When I first began to look closely into *paṭicca samuppāda* I was confounded by a number of its mysteries; I could not work out what the whole pattern was referring to. With a vague memory in mind, and intrigued by how ignorance (or innocence), desire and suffering seemed to be themes in common, I searched out a copy of the Bible and found, in the first chapter of Genesis, a mythical Judaic version of the *paṭicca samuppāda*.

One can reflect that this process, described so thoroughly in the Pali Canon, is related to that primal theme of the Bible. The realm of 'feeling' is like life in the Garden of Eden: it can be very pleasant and very simple. The trouble begins when *taṇhā* shows up.

That's the serpent.

What dependent origination describes is the emergence of suffering out of perfection, the emergence of pain and difficulty out of that which is pure and whole. The way the King James version of the Bible begins is: 'In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth' but I feel that what is meant is more along the lines of, 'It is out of God, out of perfect unity, that division emerges.'

I should explain a little how I have arrived at this. I found that this phrase, 'In the beginning...', in reflective experience, suggested to me: 'When a pattern appears, when the experience of a *thing* begins, there emerges self and other, subject and object, this and that.' 'Heaven', in this respect, represents that which is elsewhere, 'earth' that which is here. That division between here and there, subject and object, occurs when some thing begins and is known, when a world comes into being.

After the heavens and the earth are created there are a series of images, beginning with, 'And the Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters.' We can look at this part of the process as the arrival of 'consciousness'; this consciousness is established in relationship to the world just as *viññāṇa* and *nāma-rūpa* lean upon each other and form a reciprocal relationship – that *viññāṇa*/*nāma-rūpa* vortex mentioned earlier.

In this world the land and the waters are created, as well as all of the animals and creatures. This we can see as signifying the development of 'materiality' and 'mentality', bodies and minds, this leading on to *saḷāyatana*, the 'six sense-spheres' and their functions, the different ways of perceiving the world and of living life, different ways of being – this is comparable to 'sense-contact' *(phassa)*.

Then there is the arising of humanity, Adam and Eve, man and woman, and their life together in the Garden. This takes us up to the point of 'sensation'

or 'feeling', which is unselfconscious. Now, it is at this turn that the serpent comes along and it represents, understandably enough, temptation or 'desire'. Desire comes along and says, 'Here's the Tree of Knowledge, standing right in the middle of the Garden; you could help yourself. There is more to life than just being in the Garden like this, you know.'

The snake has its charms and soon 'desire' turns into 'clinging' as Eve and Adam eat the fruit of the tree. From this follows 'becoming' as knowledge and self-consciousness arise, and then comes 'rebirth': suddenly Adam and Eve realize they are naked. There is the shock of birth as the Master appears on the scene: 'Adam, where are you?'

The natural consequence of the moment of birth – when Adam and Eve are discovered – is represented as God's judgement and the punishment he puts upon them. So they find themselves driven out of Eden, exiled from the Garden – sensitive, open, separated and subject to all types of suffering; they are born into the world feeling heat and cold, hunger, 'ageing and death, sorrow, lamentation, pain, grief and despair.' Or, to paraphrase Genesis, Chapter 3: 'All the days of your lives you will toil with sweat and bring forth children in pain.'

In the realm of feeling there can be a lot of clarity and wisdom; there is the body and the life of the senses, and then the experience of feeling: pleasant, painful or neutral feeling. That on its own doesn't cause any difficulty at all. It is very simple, and the heart can be completely awake and at peace with

it. But the stronger the influence of ignorance – not seeing clearly, the lack of wisdom, the lack of mindfulness – the more the mind will believe in those feelings of liking, disliking and neutral feeling, and will tend to be intoxicated by them. If there is a lack of mindfulness and wisdom then, when there is a feeling of dislike, it turns easily into, 'I hate it. I can't stand it. I've got to get away from this.' Similarly, if it is an experience of liking, and if there is a lack of mindfulness and wisdom, then the liking turns into, 'Oh, this is great. I want this. I've got to have this.' And the mind chases after that desire object.

Once the mind crosses that bridge between feeling and craving, between *vedanā* and *taṇhā,* then it becomes more and more difficult to turn back. Maybe a better image is getting onto a train. While you're standing on the platform at the station, you can still decide where you want to go, which train you want to board. To Paris or Milan? Or maybe we're happy just staying here on the platform. But once we get on that train and it starts to move, we've followed that desire and there is an engagement with that object. While the train is still going slowly, maybe you could force the door open and jump out (although you would get some bumps and bruises). But once the train is up to full speed you can't jump off. That is *jāti*, birth. So the easiest thing to do is to be mindful while you are still standing on the platform: do I want to get on this train or do I not? If we develop mindfulness of feeling – being aware of the experience of liking, disliking and of neutral feeling – then this can make life much simpler. We recognize that we can like something without wanting it,

or we can dislike something without hating it, or we can have neutral feelings towards something without nursing any opinion at all about it. In that way, we give ourselves a great deal of freedom in life. Once we have plucked that fruit from the tree it cannot be put back on the branch so we become limited by the results of that act. Our freedom is lost.

This principle goes against a lot of our current cultural conditioning. In the West we put a lot of effort and money and energy into getting lost in what we like and what we love and what we hate. We pay good money to get carried away by that train. I'm speaking from my own experience. There can be a certain thrill, an excitement that comes from being carried away, from that type of absorption, biting the apple, but some of us are tired of experiencing the bit that comes after – the sorrow, lamentation, pain, grief and despair.

In terms of working with the mind, the most common teaching of the forest ajahns is the aiming of attention at the connection between feeling and craving, *vedanā* and *taṇhā*. This was a common teaching for Ajahn Sao, Ajahn Mun and Ajahn Chah, and it was a common teaching in classical times as well. This connection between feeling and craving is described as the weakest link of the cycle. This is where we can have the most effect with the least complications and painful side effects.

The emphasis is on learning how to be restrained with respect to pleasant feelings, how to be patient with painful, uncomfortable feelings, and alert

to neutral feelings. This kind of learning to work with the realm of feeling is the centre-piece of our forest tradition training. On a practical level this is carried out through learning how to find contentment with having very few possessions or desire objects.

That said, we don't aim to torture ourselves but the forest monastic life is a very direct training, aiming right at our attachments and habits, our preferences. Most of us don't realize the degree to which the mind is addicted to chasing things that are pleasant and resisting things that are painful. If we become aware of the degree of addiction and learn how to not get lost in feeling, at that moment where feeling changes to craving, we free the heart in a very radical way.

With respect to dependent origination, Ajahn Chah pointed out (as mentioned earlier) that this process happens very fast. It is like falling from a tree and trying to count the branches on the way down. Generally, all you know is that when you hit the ground it hurts. In terms of neurophysiology, *phassa* (sense-contact) is the electrical impulse going from the sense organ through the nerves to the brain. In the case of vision, light is registered, captured by the eye, an impulse travels through the optic nerve to the brain and triggers the region of the brain that relates to vision. That is *phassa*; the electrical sense-contact.

Vedanā is probably best translated as 'sensation' rather than 'feeling', because the word 'feeling' tends to carry the sense of emotion. *Vedanā* is almost always

defined as simply pleasant, painful or neutral sensation. It is not complicated. We inherit this from our most remote ancestors, little monocellular plankton, of billions of years ago. Even an entity as simple as that can perceive: 'Does it hurt? Does it not hurt? Is it pleasant? Can I ignore it? Can I consume it? Will it consume me?' V*edanā* is a very basic experience.

The question can arise: what is it that knows *vedanā*? The simplest answer is that it is the awareness of the mind. Awareness is the medium of knowing, it is the means whereby anything and everything is known. On this point I would suggest to keep it simple rather than to try to conceptualize the nature of that awareness. All that needs to be known is: 'Here is pleasant feeling, painful feeling, neutral feeling.' This means being aware rather than thinking about awareness – in this way the habit of 'crossing the bridge' can be observed and understood. We can learn how the mind shifts from experiencing a pleasant feeling to: 'Ooh! I want to have that!'

EXPERIENCING PAIN AND DISCOMFORT

When sitting in meditation for long periods of time it is very natural to have pain in our legs, back and different parts of the body. When pain arises in the body this is an ideal opportunity to look at the process of feeling and, while looking at it, learn how not to add anything to it. We feel pain; we feel dislike for that sensation – but we can train the mind to simply know that as it is. We

can train the mind not to create suffering out of that painful feeling. This is described in the teachings in a Sutta called simply 'The Arrow'.

The Buddha used the image of a soldier being shot on a battlefield. The first arrow that hits the soldier represents the feeling of physical pain. If you have a body and mind, this first arrow is inescapable. The second arrow that is fired at the soldier is everything the mind adds to that: fearing the pain, resenting it, negotiating with it, waiting for it to be over, all of that fretting, worrying, stressing around the feeling of pain. That is the second arrow. The Buddha said that the second arrow can be avoided if we are aware, if we are mindful (S 36.6).

In the teaching of the Four Noble Truths the Buddha talks about the complete ending of suffering; that 'ending of suffering' is not about never experiencing physical pain, rather it is all about that second arrow, what the mind adds onto things.

Even if you are a fully enlightened Buddha, nobody can evade the first arrow of physical pain. When he was an old man the Buddha had chronic back pain. He felt physical pain all the time. He said that only if he absorbed his mind into complete emptiness would he not be aware of painful feeling in the body. If he was aware of the body, he was aware of painful feeling (D 16.2.25). Although the Buddha experienced physical pain, he knew how not to suffer from it. So, when we sit in meditation for long periods of time, that is a good opportunity to learn how to avoid the second arrow. We can experience physical pain, but

the heart can be completely at peace with it. With the right attitude pain might be present but it is known as absolutely not a problem.

The advice Ajahn Chah would give about physical pain in meditation was to make the effort to work with it. If we move our body as soon as we feel discomfort we never learn how to get beyond suffering. We never learn how to avoid that second arrow.

If we are trying to pay attention to our breath and we start to experience pain in the knee or thigh or back, we may think, 'Ah! If only that pain wasn't there I could concentrate properly. It really hurts. I wish it would go away.' We unconsciously create resistance, negativity, aversion, fear around the painful feeling. When we notice that the mind is reacting to the pain in that way, the most helpful response is to turn the attention to where the painful feeling is. Don't think of it as an unwanted intruder but instead make it the centre of attention. In other words, invite it, welcome it in.

When we bring attention to physical pain we notice there are two aspects to it, a physical aspect and a mental aspect. On the physical side there is usually resistance; the body tenses up against it, the muscles become tight and rigid in the area of that pain. So, firstly, we place the attention on that area and consciously invite those muscles to relax. Let those muscles be free of tension, free of stress and tightness.

When working with the tension that comes from the mental aspect, consciously bring to mind the quality of patience: 'It's a painful feeling but it can be tolerated for another couple of minutes. No permanent physical damage will happen within the next little while. Let's see if I can be fully patient, fully accepting of the sensation. Here it is right now. It's just a painful feeling.' Bring these kinds of thoughts to mind. Be accepting.

Acknowledge this painful feeling as part of the natural physical process.

In this manner we relax the body and we relax the attitude. When we work with physical pain in this way we are increasing the quality of mindfulness and awareness so that, in this moment, there is a more complete attunement, more complete harmony with the body's limits. If we are patient with that painful feeling, if we open the heart to it and bring forth the quality of acceptance then, after a few minutes, it is easier to recognize when it is right to move. 'Okay, now it's enough. It is time. The body is now under strain so this is the time to move it.' In this way the choice to change the posture is based on kindness towards the body rather than upon aversion to pain.

If we move too quickly that is not helpful because we never learn to deal with the second arrow. But if we don't move at all, that could mean a trip to the osteopath or to the hospital. The Middle Way is based on the attunement of the heart to the reality of the way things are; part of this reality is the body so that attunement to it is what guides our actions. When we develop this attitude of

acceptance of painful feeling it doesn't mean that we become numb or foolish. It doesn't mean we take no action. Rather, there is a quality of wise attunement and mindfulness. Then we can make wise choices. Then we can make decisions based on the reality of the way things are, rather than on emotional reactivity, hatred or desire.

We don't deliberately create pain in order to make trouble for ourselves, but when it arises we can work with it in this way and discover whether these principles are valid or not. It is important for everyone to find out for themselves whether things work in this way or whether they don't. Is this true or is it not? How do you find it to be?

'PATIENCE IS THE CLEANSING FLAME'

There is a story that Ajahn Sumedho has often told that illustrates this principle well. Every two weeks in the monastery, on the full and new moon days, we have a recitation of our Monastic Rule, the *Pāṭimokkha*. That's about 13,000 words of Pali and it usually takes about forty-five minutes for a chanter to recite it. After the recitation is complete, usually the senior member of the community would give some instruction, some encouraging advice to the group. In Thailand this recitation would usually be in the early part of the evening, about six or seven o'clock. Then all the monastics would go and join with the lay community and have an all-night meditation. Usually during the evening Ajahn Chah would give a Dhamma talk to the whole assembly as well.

On one particular evening, an old monk friend of Ajahn Chah's came to visit Wat Pah Pong. After the recitation of the Rule, instead of Ajahn Chah giving an encouraging talk he started chatting with his friend. According to the system everybody present has to stay. You can't just say, 'Excuse me Ajahn, I'm not really interested in your conversation so I'm going to go and sit by myself.' That would be totally unthinkable.

So Ajahn Chah continues chatting with his friend and time goes past – one hour, two hours, three hours. They're swapping stories about their trips, their wanderings through the countryside together, talking about which old monk has just died, what the mangoes are like in a particular province... All this time, the young Bhikkhu Sumedho, who wasn't used to sitting on the floor, is getting more and more impatient, then angry, then enraged. He's thinking to himself, 'Doesn't he know he's keeping us here pointlessly?! The lay people are waiting, they're expecting a Dhamma talk! Is he doing this on purpose?' By one in the morning, his anger had turned into a dull resignation, misery mixed together with self-pity and pain. By two-thirty in the morning he had got to the point where he realized, 'I give up. We can just sit here forever. If the talk goes until dawn or even longer, it's up to them. If they want to talk about ducks and chickens and mangoes for the rest of the night and day, that's OK, I can bear it.' And as soon as had that thought, Ajahn Chah said, 'Oh, look at the time! It's nearly three in the morning. The Sangha must be tired.'

He then looked at Ajahn Sumedho and gave him a big grin. And his American disciple grinned back.

That was a good teaching. It wasn't that Ajahn Chah wanted young Bhikkhu Sumedho to suffer, but he wanted him to see what his mind was adding to the painful feeling. He wanted him to see through the 'reasonable' mind: 'Let's be sensible, you're not talking about anything useful. I could be practising meditation. I could be improving myself. Instead, I have to listen to all this nonsense that doesn't involve any of the rest of us.' That is the voice of reason.

Ajahn Chah was teaching him to go beyond that, to develop genuine patience. Quite often, when we use the word 'patience' there is a kind of resentment mingled with it. We want this painful thing to be over and we exert our strength to tolerate it. That sort of patience involves a large portion of negativity. The patience which is a *pāramitā,* a genuinely liberating quality, is the attitude of the heart that lets go of time. True patience is where there is a letting go of the idea of the future. It is not just gritting your teeth and tolerating, as you resent an uncomfortable feeling. It is a profound letting go. With true patience you are not waiting. This is the result of letting go of craving. We can learn to be with uncomfortable feeling and not be waiting for it to be over. We are not pretending to be glad. The uncomfortable, unpleasant feeling is still there but we are not resenting it. We are not creating negativity around it. This kind of patience is a wise surrender. It is a surrender of self-centred desire, *taṇhā.*

We acknowledge the impact of our senses. If something is painful, we don't pretend it's not painful. If something is delicious, we don't pretend it's not delicious. If something is likeable, we don't pretend it's not likeable. There is that impact. Ajahn Chah often said that practising Dhamma is not about getting rid of like and dislike. That is impossible. We are not rocks or tree stumps. We are going to experience like and dislike. The point is, what do we do with it?

The realization that we can dislike yet not hate, just as we can like yet not want, is profoundly liberating.

NO NEED TO CLIMB ABOARD THE TRAIN

Going back to the train analogy – we stand on a train platform, we see a train bound for Paris, Edinburgh, Exeter, Bangkok... perhaps we know people there or feel that it is a beautiful place, perhaps we have heard that there is something interesting or exciting happening there... but that doesn't mean we need to get on board the train. We can *like* but not *want* – there is a choice there.

The forest ajahns of many generations have spoken of 'mindfulness of feeling' as the most accessible exit-point from the cycle. That was true in the past and it can be seen to be true today. The story of the uncomfortable young Bhikkhu Sumedho was set in a forest in Thailand over fifty years ago but these principles relate to us equally here and now, in the materially developed West. That is why they are useful.

For each of us, the encouragement is to look at where the mind moves towards dislike, fear, liking or opinionating. Is the object of like or dislike coarse or subtle? Is the object of fear internal or external? Get to know where the mind becomes entangled with objects of fear, desire, aversion, ambition or opinion; where are they located?

When we get to know those objects we can consciously learn how to be aware of the feelings that arise in those areas. We have to know for ourselves where our points of grasping are: what we love, what we hate, what we're afraid of, what we have opinions about, what is familiar to us, what we are nostalgic for. It is useful to explore all these areas, to become familiar with them. Even tiny things like our attachment to the correct way of slicing a tomato or how we feel the knife should be held when bread is buttered, how people slouch so much or how English really *is* the best language...

What are the areas where we get upset? Excited? Afraid? Irritated? What are our cherished opinions? Our religion, our politics, our family – see what effects are triggered in the mind. Each one of us has unique areas of attachment and entanglement so it is up to each one of us to explore and see where we get lost. We see that, feel that, and then we apply this meditation on feeling; see if you can like but not want, dislike but not hate.

What's then the result of making that effort?

The reason the Buddha described the process of dependent origination was to help living beings stop suffering. The letting go of craving is said to be the

easiest and most accessible exit point from the wheel of birth and death. This is something which all of us can do. We can apply these teachings to our moment-to-moment experience, and the degree to which the teachings are thus applied is the degree to which they will be genuinely useful.

MAKING THE DARKNESS VISIBLE

The four kinds of grasping are:

grasping sense pleasure *(kāmupādāna)*
grasping views and opinions *(diṭṭhupādāna)*
grasping conventions *(sīlabbatupādāna)*
grasping views of yourself *(attavādupādāna)*

How do each of us work best with these various kinds of grasping?

We are all different in personality and experience, therefore each of us will probably have stronger tendencies in certain areas. It is up to each one of us to explore the habit-areas where our minds get most fully caught up. That said, there are effective ways that we can approach all the different kinds of grasping.

One approach is what I call 'conscious clinging' or 'making the darkness visible'. This is a method that Ajahn Sumedho has encouraged in the past and which I have found extremely helpful. When we notice a particular kind of grasping in the mind (something that we want, something that we hate), typically we think that we should let go of that unskilful feeling, and we may

think there is something wrong with us if we can't let it go. Most of us, as Buddhist practitioners, are trained to have this response to let go. But often, in the urge to immediately let go, we are actually empowering those unskilful attitudes by being afraid of them, averse to them. We make them more real by creating a reaction against them. We create a belief – 'I am an angry person' or 'I am better than that person' or 'I am a greedy person' – and we unconsciously strengthen that belief even as we are trying to let the unskilful habit go.

Ajahn Sumedho would recommend that, instead of pushing that belief away, we bring it front and centre instead. Get it to speak up. If we feel annoyed with someone, bring that annoyance to mind: 'I wish that person didn't exist! I wish he was dead!' What we are doing seems unthinkable; good Buddhists shouldn't be having a thought like this! But when we bring that thought front and centre, what happens almost immediately is that we start laughing. Once it's clearly conscious, the absurdity of the thought becomes apparent: 'If you were different, I would be happy!' We realize that it's a joke. Then, maybe, we find something else to be annoyed about but, again, we notice the judgements we are making and can train ourselves not to believe our own thoughts. We recognize that this is a judgement and not an absolute fact.

This practice is particularly helpful in regard to self-view (*attavādupādāna*). If we have a self-critical attitude, a negative self-view, we can catch the mind creating that self-critical thought. We bring it front and centre and ask it to

speak up. We recognize the judgement: 'I am a terrible person. I am the worst person in this family. I am polluting the atmosphere for everybody else with my selfish thoughts.' We tend to believe thoughts like this because they are internal, often unspoken, and yet so familiar; we think them and take them to be true without even realizing that they are an assumption. So, instead, we bring them forward in order to see them clearly.

When exploring attachment to conventions one easy example to use is that of money. In the UK the unit of currency is still pounds, but take an old blue five-pound note to a shop today and they won't accept it. Similarly if you try to spend francs in France, lira in Italy or deutschmarks in Germany... they won't buy you anything since the currency is now euros. That which was agreed to have value now has no value. When I was a young child my grandfather gave me a billion-mark banknote from the Weimar era in Germany – *Ein Milliarde* – I was impressed that it had only been worth pennies at the time.

When we reflect on this, what does it say about how we give things value? And how that value seems *so* real – yet a finger snap later the value has gone. It was just what our minds and human agreements had added to it. This is bearing in mind that 'just' is a big word! It takes a lot of mindfulness and wisdom to notice this kind of habitual conditioning. One way to investigate this is to ask yourself: 'Why is this important? What makes this so good? So bad?' Or even more simply, whenever the mind makes a judgement: 'Is that so?'

Our attachments to sensual pleasures, conventions or our views and opinions tend to be more visible. However, our views about ourselves, our self-judgment, tends to be invisible. Before I learned this practice from Ajahn Sumedho (back in the mid-1980s), I frequently used to think that I would be fine if only I could be someone else. I would regularly think in this self-critical way. The practice of bringing these critical voices to the centre of attention was very helpful and made a big difference. If I had that thought I would catch it and replay it: 'If-only-I-was-someone-else-I-would-be-fine.' It's a joke – how could that be taken seriously? It would then fall apart on its own.

I heartily recommend this practice, this kind of reflection to investigate the way the mind creates the world. We mindfully catch the thought and then consciously replay it internally. It is quite wonderful to see that thought's value, its meaning fall away. We don't have to say to ourselves: 'I shouldn't be thinking that foolish thought!' The thought falls apart on its own in the light of wisdom.

Notice the effect when those beliefs and that type of grasping falls away. What's the result? What happens to the heart when the grasping stops? For myself, there is always the feeling of relief, the quality of freedom.

We need mindfulness to name the quality and tone of experience. We notice the feeling and we name it in a clear and complete way. As an example, I used this when I was on a year-long pilgrimage to India. India is famous for the

arising of all kinds of emotional feelings, particularly feelings of irritation, discomfort and frustration. In my opinion, India is the most wonderful country in the world and I love it dearly, but while travelling in India, powerful feelings of irritation can arise. I adopted a really simple and direct practice for my trip, one that I could use in all circumstances so that I wouldn't get lost in aversion or frustration or grumbling or complaining and instead use the flow of feeling and the support of the Dhamma.

I determined that whatever feeling arose I would look at it without getting upset.

This kind of meditation on conscious feeling was then extraordinarily helpful. Every time a train was eighteen hours late, or we missed it because it was two hours earlier than scheduled, I would consciously look at the feeling that arose and spell it out: 'No train should ever be late because that makes things inconvenient for me.' As a result I had the most wonderful year travelling in India. When I was upset, I would notice the feeling of being upset. If I was worried, I would notice the feeling of being worried. That's all it would take, if I remembered to apply the practice.

We can use this meditation on conscious feeling in many dimensions of our daily lives; it doesn't have to be only when we are upset, or lost in fear or desire. If someone comes to us in tears and we don't know how to handle the situation, we might feel ourselves pulling away, contracting. We can notice

that feeling of tightening. In that moment, where instead of reacting blindly we consciously feel, there is a natural relaxation. We are still paying attention, but that sense of contraction or fear, that sense of 'what should I do?!' drops away. We make the mind consciously aware that this is the 'Oh-dear-this-person-is-very-upset-and-they-are-asking-me-to-do-something-about-it' feeling. That's what this feeling is. The mind that knows it as a feeling is, in that conscious knowing, freed from identification with that feeling, at least to some degree. It is known as a mental event, arising and passing in consciousness, rather than as a *real thing* that involves *me*.

In the heart there is a natural attunement to the situation and we find ourselves able to respond more effectively, either with a gesture or by words or by being quiet. The heart is able to respond with what is helpful, rather than reacting from an acquisitive, fearful or aversive place.

THE THIRD EXIT POINT FROM THE CYCLE

SIX

'This, bhikkhus, is the Noble Truth of the cessation of *dukkha:*
The complete cessation, giving up, abandonment of that craving,
complete release from that craving, and complete detachment from it.

'This is the Noble Truth of the cessation of *dukkha*,
and this cessation of *dukkha* is to be realized.'
(S 56.11)

EMBODYING PEACE

When we notice that the mind has been caught in some kind of entanglement, some kind of grasping – whether a thought or a feeling, something that we see or hear or taste or smell, something that is beautiful or ugly, blissful or painful – in that moment of mindfulness, when it is noticed that the mind is distracted and the attention is entangled, it is very helpful to be conscious of the sensations of grasping.

What is the feeling of grasping and entanglement? That tensing of the heart around a particular object, how does that feel? We take a moment to stay with that feeling of grasping before we let it go; if we take a moment and let that feeling be fully conscious we see what it's like. When we let that tension, that

grasping, that stressing of the heart be fully known, then the letting go comes from a natural and intuitive place. We allow ourselves to recognize that we're causing ourselves stress and pain. Why should we bother doing that? It's like holding our hand too close to the fire: 'Ow! That burns!' The hand is withdrawn in a natural and automatic way. Letting go happens because of wisdom – the heart recognizes that we are creating our own stress, our own burden, our own grasping, our own *dukkha* and why would we want to do that?

This recognition is very helpful because often we relate to spiritual advice or meditation guidance as following orders, or obeying a set of instructions. Rather, in this way, we are listening to our own wisdom. That has a different quality. When obeying orders, there is not that intuitive sense of the real reason why we let go.

So, when we find the attention is entangled, grasping a feeling or a thought or a perception, we take a moment to let that be fully felt, to fully know that state of grasping. We recognize what is being done, and how afflictive it is, and then the letting go comes from the heart. It is a natural falling away rather than a 'me doing something that I should be doing because that is what the rules say I should do'. It is a natural movement of the heart. It is as if we were out in the bright sunshine in the afternoon and the body is getting hot, so we incline towards the shade of a tree to give the body some relief. It is a natural and simple gesture – the result is coolness.

When that letting go has happened and the heart is free of grasping, free of entanglement, it is also very helpful to notice how *that* feels. When there is that quality of the heart free of grasping, how does it feel, what is its texture, its tone, its nature? In that moment, it is realized that there is simplicity, there is peace, there is clarity. There is a spaciousness and a brightness. And, if it is explored carefully and closely, it will be recognized that in that moment there is no sense of self. In that moment, before 'I' pick up the practice again or 'I' become distracted by another object, there is a recognition of simplicity – there is no person acting, doing, feeling. There is awareness that 'it is just how it is' but that awareness is not a person and does not belong to a person. The mind knows personal qualities arising and ceasing but, in its essence, the mind is not a person, it is Dhamma.

When we recognize this over and over again – purity, simplicity, brightness, no sense of self – what does that say about the basic nature of mind? If every time that the grasping and entanglement dissolve there is simplicity, purity, brightness, no sense of self, doesn't that suggest that that is the fundamental, primal nature of mind? It is only the clouds of grasping, entanglement and self-view that come along and obscure the bright sun, the pure heart.

ORIGINAL BLESSING

The Buddha said that the nature of the heart is bright, vast, radiant. Defilements simply come along as visitors (A 1.51, A 1.52). This is one of the

central teachings of the forest ajahns. Rather than the Christian doctrine of original sin, the Buddha's teaching points to original purity, original blessing. One doesn't have to believe this blindly or take it to be true merely on trust, rather we can test it and see for ourselves. If we have a direct look and explore we find that, when the heart is free of grasping, when the heart lets go of self-view, fear, desire and the streams of thinking, when the heart is awake to the present reality, how does it feel? We can look and explore for ourselves. We don't have to believe the words of a spiritual authority or a teacher. We can know from our own direct experience.

The Buddha talked about the quality of the mind free of grasping as a kind of transcendent consciousness. The Pali word *vijjā* refers to this awakened awareness, transcendent consciousness. Its opposite is *avijjā*, which translates as 'ignorance' or 'not seeing things clearly' 'nescience'. *Vijjā* is the natural awakened awareness of the heart. When we take refuge in the Buddha, it is exactly this quality of *vijjā*, 'knowing', 'awakened awareness' that is being embodied. When the clouds of attachment dissolve, this quality of wakefulness is the bright sun that appears. The awake, aware quality of the heart is the source of its essential radiance.

When we establish the practice in this way, we are really 'being Buddha', or being that awake mind. It is embodied in that quality of awake, open, alert, knowing. 'Being Buddha' is not some kind of giant ego-trip, although to use those words it might sound a bit like that; instead it is being that awareness

that knows ego-trips arising and passing away. It is also the awareness that knows sad or happy feelings, or irritated feelings, arising and passing away. It is the same quality that knows all of the states, perceptions and actions of this body and mind, that knows the image of that face in the mirror. It is aware of the entire flow of attitudes and perceptions that are called 'me' and 'the world'.

With regard to dependent origination, the third exit point from the cycle of addiction, the wheel of birth and death, is to not let the cycle start in the first place. When the heart is established in this quality of *vijjā* (awakened awareness) then *avijjā* doesn't arise. When we chant the words describing *paṭicca samuppāda* (dependent origination), the whole of the second half refers to the non-arising or cessation of the cycle: 'When *avijjā* ceases, when there is no ignorance, *saṅkhārā* does not arise...'.

The *paṭicca samuppāda* is a description of the process of experience when it is influenced by *avijjā* (ignorance). The first four links of the dependent origination process are *avijjā*, *saṅkhārā*, *viññāṇa*, *nāma-rūpa*. These are what I describe as 'the establishing of the subject/object relationship'.

When the mind doesn't see clearly, when there is *avijjā*, that gives rise to *saṅkhārā*. *Saṅkhārā* is the basic forming or dividing process of the mind. When the mind is not seeing clearly it creates the realm of things and the agent who is knowing those things. The mind drifts into the delusion of 'experiencer' and 'experienced', subject and object as separate and distinct realities. In the

traditional painting of the Six Realms and dependent origination, *saṅkhārā* is depicted as a potter forming, shaping a clay pot on a wheel.

The next two steps, *viññāṇa* and *nāma-rūpa*, as mentioned earlier, are described very clearly in a wonderful little book called *The Magic of the Mind* by Bhikkhu Ñāṇananda. He talks about *viññāṇa* and *nāma-rūpa* working together like a vortex, a whirlpool, getting stronger and stronger. They work together to strengthen this division of consciousness (*viññāna*) into 'the knower' and mental/physical factors (*nāma-rūpa*) into 'the known'. That initial process of subject/object is like a little disturbance in the stream that then escalates into a whirlpool; it gets stronger and stronger until there is the sense of 'me with this body and senses' and 'the world out there'. It happens extremely fast.

The next link is *saḷāyatana*, the six sense-spheres. This is the feeling 'I see, I hear, etc...'. At this point, the world of sense perception seems absolutely real.

In the Pali Canon, there are many different ways that dependent origination is described; the standard twelve links is just one representation. In the longest discourse about dependent origination (the *Mahānidāna Sutta*, 'The Great Discourse on Causation'), the Buddha starts with the experience of *dukkha* and then follows it backwards through the various links. He describes each link as conditioning *(paccayā)* the next but in that teaching he only describes the process as going back as far as *nāma-rūpa* and *viññāṇa*, then how those two factors are mutually conditioning of each other (D 15.3).

One more thing to remember, again as mentioned earlier: *'paccayā'* doesn't always mean 'A directly causes B'. It is more that one link *affects* another in some way shape or form. Sometimes the links arise together; sometimes one is a necessary condition for the other. There are many different ways that the relationship between these links can be understood. It is important to point out that dependent origination doesn't mean that ignorance is the creator of *saṅkhārā*; there is an effect from one link to the next and that effect can vary.

CESSATION AND NON-ARISING – THE APOSTROPHE

The word *nirodha* is often translated as 'cessation', implying a thing that has begun then comes to an end. But it also means 'the non-arising of something', or 'the restraining, limiting of something'. The word *nirodha* thus is a convention of language that indicates an absence. Just as an apostrophe (') is a mark that indicates some letters have been left out of an English phrase – as in would've (for 'would have') or isn't (for 'is not') or it's (for 'it is') – the word *nirodha* represents an absence of *dukkha*, an absence of greed, hatred and delusion. It is a something that indicates a nothing. It makes the reader conscious of a significant absence.

When there is *vijjā* there is awareness; *avijjā* doesn't arise. The whole cycle of birth and death, that division into subject and object, 'me and the world', is not given any fuel. This third exit point from the cycle is thus positioned before *avijjā* appears, or after it has been dispelled.

We might find this puzzling or strange or we might find our mind wanting to work out the logic of how it all fits together, but instead of trying to figure it all out, just watch how it works. When the heart is established in that quality of the selfless bright simplicity of knowing, notice how there is an absence of 'me' and 'the world'. There is seeing, hearing, feeling, remembering, but that flow of perception and feeling is not accompanied by the sense of 'I' or 'me' or 'mine', and there is the absence of the feeling of alienation that comes with that. There is a naturalness, a simplicity and a beauty to each moment. Even if what is being perceived is not pleasant or is very ordinary, the heart is still able to fully enjoy each moment because of the full attunement of the heart to its own nature.

There is no need to believe or disbelieve these words. Experiment. We can explore for ourselves. In our clearest moments, how is the experience of this being and the world? How is it? The inner world and the outer world, how does it feel?

This third exit point from the cycle is thus related to the Third Noble Truth: *dukkha-nirodha*, the cessation of suffering. Just as with the first two Noble Truths, the Buddha gave an instruction on how to work with this Third Noble Truth; he named the task as: 'It is to be realized, appreciated, fully taken to heart', *(idaṃ dukkha-nirodho ariyasaccaṃ sacchikātabban'ti)*. This means that the ending of *dukkha* is to be wholly appreciated, embodied, known as real,

otherwise how could the heart fully imbibe the delightful truth that there is no *dukkha*?

You might think that such an appreciation would go without saying but the conditioning of the perceptual process tends to work against this. Say, for example, we are sitting and we hear a continuous sound – the sound of traffic or the humming of the fridge – when that sound stops, there are a few seconds of 'Ahhh!' as we realize that the unpleasant sound has stopped. In the same way, we only notice *nirodha* (cessation of suffering) in contrast to the presence of some *dukkha* (suffering). After a few seconds the absence of the irritating sound has become ordinary and so the mind ignores that absence. Ignorance has, literally, been established once again.

EATING IS MORE INTERESTING THAN PEACE

The challenge of the Third Noble Truth is to *sustain* that awareness of no *dukkha*. This is challenging because peace is not interesting. Silence is not interesting. Space is not interesting. It doesn't catch our attention because our senses are geared towards noticing what you can eat, what is going to eat you, what you need to protect and provide for, what to compete with and what is going to be valuable. The senses are for things that are going to be pleasant or painful. So we have to train our senses to notice peace, to notice space, to notice silence and to stay with it. This is what *sacchikātabban'ti,* the realization of *dukkha-nirodha* means.

The instruction in the Sutta is: '*Dukkha-nirodha* should be realized'. Those of you who have been students of Ajahn Sumedho, listened to his Dhamma talks or read his books, will know that he puts a lot of attention onto this theme. He will often use a catchy phrase like: 'Peace is really boring.' This is because silence, space, stillness and peace are not exciting according to our normal habits of perception. But when we let go of those habitual ways of perceiving and open the heart to silence, space, peacefulness, stillness, the ending of *dukkha*, that initial impression of being uninteresting or boring falls away. There is a kind of blossoming.

For example, let's say you are looking for someone. You look in the living room and it is empty. There's nobody there. 'Nothing interesting here.' So you take off and search some other rooms. What if, instead, as you come into the empty space of the living room, you stop and attune to the space, stillness and silence?

The heart opens to the presence of the moment. There is the recognition that the Dhamma is here and now – how could it not be? In that moment, if there is a real openness of heart, if there is a realization of the quality of stillness, silence, spaciousness, there is a profound richness and beauty in that absence.

In the Thai language, the word for 'ordinary', *tammadah,* is derived from the Pali word meaning 'the nature of ultimate reality', *Dhammatā*. Hidden in the ordinary is the ultimate. If you open up the packet, you find great treasure inside. This is *dukkha-nirodha*, which is recognized by the awakened awareness of the heart.

Again, we don't need to believe this or take it on trust, we can experiment for ourselves. When there is a peaceful moment, everything is clear and simple, selfless, beautiful; how long can the attention stay with that spaciousness, simplicity, silence? How long is it before the mind seeks another thing to have an opinion about? Similarly, when we do bring attention to that quality of inner silence, spaciousness, simplicity, notice what happens. When the heart opens to peace and simplicity, when the heart goes from being a blank space that hasn't got any interesting thing in it to the richness of the presence of Dhamma itself, notice that. Test it out, then we can see for ourselves how it is.

In contrast notice how food, even for the most non-sensual, is interesting, exciting when we're hungry or when the food is of just the sort we like. Eating is a very primal activity. It's closely tied to the qualities of *taṇhā-upādāna-bhava*, the movement from craving to clinging to becoming. An exercise we can use to explore this is eating just one mouthful at a time. We might think we do that already, but most of us don't. While we have food in our mouth, our eye is scanning the plate and the hand is already making preparations to get the next mouthful lined up like an aeroplane in a holding pattern – while one plane is landing, the next is circling. In addition, the eye is preparing for the next descent of the utensil to select the next mouthful after that one. We can have three things on the go without realizing it. And we don't need to work to sustain attention on eating for the most part; it attracts attention naturally.

To counteract this unconscious habit, when we take a mouthful of food, put the food in the mouth and then put the utensil down. We are simply paying attention to the act of eating what we are eating – what a radical concept! When that mouthful is finished and the food has been swallowed, then we pick up the utensils again for the next mouthful.

I make no predictions, but often the experience is, 'Wow, this food is really something special!' Even a mouthful of plain lettuce can taste extraordinary: 'Why did no one ever tell me that lettuce tasted like this?! I never realized.'

This is a very helpful way of recognizing *taṇhā-upādāna-bhava*, craving-clinging-becoming, that outflowing process. By putting down the utensil, we are helping ourselves to witness that urge; instead of following it, we simply keep the mind with the experience of feeling and perceptions.

In the moments when the mind is clear, the sense of 'me' and the 'world' is not solid. When *vijjā* is established then *saṅkhārā* does not arise; it is held in check. So too all the other ten links of the chain. If you start off with *vijjā* the result is no *dukkha* – this is *paṭicca-nirodha*, dependent cessation. As the attention drifts, as the mind becomes unmindful, the subject/object division seems to take on a reality and the *paṭicca samuppāda* process kicks into action once again.

It is most important to get a sense of how that works on our own experiential level.

The dependent origination teaching is like a precise map; the most important thing is embodying and understanding the experience.

So the third exit point from the *bhavacakka*, the wheel of becoming, is the establishment of *vijjā*, the awake, unobstructed heart. If that quality of awakened awareness is strong enough, the cycle is not allowed to begin at all. If that attribute is well established, ignorance can't take root and the whole cycle of addiction can't get activated. If the heart is fully awakened and aware, then *dukkha* is not allowed to arise and there is the realization that there is no *dukkha*.

It's like the image of the Buddha's enlightenment under the Bodhi Tree, when Māra's army was attacking him – all of their spears turn into beams of light and their arrows transform into flowers, raining to the ground. In this way, that image of the Buddha's enlightenment is symbolic of all of us, when the mind is fully awake and aware. The pains in our body, or the struggles in our family, or the tangles of our world are still there and we are sensitive to them, but the mind does not create suffering around them. It doesn't complicate or create 'conceptual proliferation' – *papañca*.

THE FUEL FOR PROLIFERATION

The Buddha spoke of three qualities that feed, are fuel for the process of *papañca*, conceptual proliferation. And it's also the case that *papañca* feeds these three qualities.

They're like a bad behaviour club. These three qualities are craving, conceit and opinions and views *(taṇhā, māna* and *diṭṭhi)*. They are also qualities that relate to self-view.

The first quality (craving/*taṇhā*) is related to the possessive self, the self that seems to do the owning of anything. It is related to the attitude described by the Buddha in 'The Discourse on Not-Self', when analysing the mind's creations of self-view: *'Etaṃ mama'* – 'This is mine'.

The second quality (conceit/*māna*) is the 'I' feeling. You can call it the being-self or the ego-self, the agent-self. This refers to the attitude that '*I* do' '*I* feel' '*I* remember' '*I* am' etc. It is related to the attitude described in the same discourse of: *'Esoham'asmi'* – 'I am this.'

And the third (opinions/*diṭṭhi*) is about our narrative, our views about who and what we are – when someone asks us, 'Who are you?' it's what we say about ourselves: 'I'm a monk, a mother, a schoolteacher, I'm retired; I'm British, French, American, Thai; I'm 64, 17, 95...' and so forth. It is related to the attitude in the same discourse of: *'Eso me attā'* – 'This is my self.'

These three *papañca-dhammas* work together to feed conceptual proliferation; and conceptual proliferation feeds these three kinds of self-view. It is likely we've all experienced this in our lives, and in our practice as we've watched our minds drifting off in different areas of imagination and self-creation over the years.

This reminds me of a story I once heard about Ajahn Lee. Ajahn Lee was the teacher of Ajahn Ṭhānissaro's teacher Ajahn Fuang. Once, when Ajahn Lee had been a monk for about four years, he was sitting in his *kuṭī* listening to the rain

falling on the roof. This thought came to his mind, 'How much longer will the rainy season last? It must be about another month.' Then he thought, 'When this rainy season comes to an end, this will be my fifth Rains. That means I'm an officially trained monk. So, if I finish my apprenticeship, what do I want to do with myself? I could go wandering or maybe I could go back and visit my home village. Actually, come to think of it, if I've finished five years, that is the end of my monastic commitment. If I wanted to, I could go back to lay life, and it would be no disgrace at all. I wonder why I have not thought about that before. That is quite an interesting idea come to think of it. I could go back to my village and see my friend Som... and there's that younger sister of his. She told me that I might be marriageable once I'd been a monk for a few years. I thought she was just teasing me, but maybe she was giving me a message.'

Soon, Ajahn Lee had created a detailed life-story that involved marriage, children and a job at a match factory. And then he imagined the match factory going up in flames, his livelihood gone and his wife and children leaving him; his life descending into utter ruin. If only he had stayed a monk! But then he realized that he *was* still a monk and he was mightily relieved. All that was triggered by the sound of the rain on the roof.

There is a sense organ (the ear). There is sound. Ear-consciousness arises on the basis of the sound hitting the ear. This is sense-contact, *phassa*. Sense-contact gives rise to feeling (*vedanā*: pleasant, unpleasant or neutral

sensation). That feeling conditions perception, *saññā,* the mental formation of the actual sense-object. 'The sound of rain.' The brain registers that as a particular sound. The nerve impulse goes down the auditory nerve and hits the auditory centre in the brain; the brain lights up with that particular sense impression. This triggers conceptual thought, *vitakka*, which conditions conceptual proliferation, *papañca*.

Conceptual proliferation brings forth the many and various mental creations that arise on the basis of *papañca* and create the feeling of alienation and oppression, *papañca-saññā-saṅkhā*. There is the feeling of 'me' in a state of tension with a very distinct 'world'. That could be 'me' wanting something I haven't got, 'me' protecting something I have got, or 'me' being attacked by something I'm afraid of. It could be contention, arguing against something I don't like, having lots of opinions about everything. Those same qualities that lead to conceptual proliferation (craving, conceit, opinions) create more fuel to continue the *papañca* process.

One of the most helpful and skilful ways of working with this is to follow the train of thought back to its origin – from the match factory and the ruined life back to the raw sound of the rain on the roof: 'Oh. It just began with hearing. That's all.' As you get closer and closer to the root, there is less of a feeling of 'I' and 'mine'. There is simply hearing or seeing or thinking or remembering. There is no strong sense of 'I, me, mine' involved.

In this way, the realm of feeling and perception can be seen to be, in their essence, as extremely simple. It is uncomplicated. And the Ven. Sāriputta

gave a helpful two-word teaching which sums this up: '*appapancaṃ papañceti*' literally, 'One is complicating that which is not to be complicated' (A 4.173). More simply put: Don't complicate the uncomplicated!

Our minds love to create complexity, complication, but if we want to find peace and freedom, then the less complicated the better. One of the attributes of the Buddha was *nipapañca*, 'One who is free of complication'. Even though he had an amazing intelligence and imagination, his mind – as a direct experience – was supremely uncomplicated.

MINDFULNESS OF AWKWARD FEELING

Another of the ways of working with emotion and cessation is with respect to feeling socially uncomfortable. I call this 'mindfulness of awkward feeling'; this can be a very profound practice. This is the 'Oh-dear-this-is-exactly-what-I-didn't-want-to-happen-and-it's-just-happened' feeling. The 'here's-this-person-they're-really-upset-with-me-and-I don't-know-what-to-say-in-order-to-make-them-feel-okay' feeling.

Even though anxiety and worry have not been a big issue for me for a long time, I still often have that sense of 'Oh dear, what am I going to do with this?' or 'Hmmm, this is really a puzzle' and I find that the mind is hunting for a way to solve the issue, to come up with an answer, to figure out what's the 'right' thing to do. In this process the mind is always trying to get away from that awkward feeling.

In exactly the same way as when there's an emotional reaction of greed, or fear, or anger, and you catch it and spell it out; 'mindfulness of awkward feeling' is the ability to catch what the mind is adding on to that moment. Say, this is the 'Here's-this-person-they're-really-upset-with-me-and-I-don't-know-what-to-say-in-order-to-make-them-feel-okay' feeling. Rather than getting drawn into the content of the dialogue, you're looking at how you're experiencing it. So once again, it's not being drawn into the situation, but turning the attention back onto what the feeling is.

It is particularly interesting that, even though there might be a demand for you to make a response very quickly – even as the person is talking or even as *you're* talking – you can divide your attention and steer some of it back and reflect, 'This is an awkward feeling. This is the "Oh-dear-what-on-earth-do-I-do-about-this-one?" feeling.'

I use this practice virtually on a daily basis, often several times a day. I find it extraordinarily helpful because it doesn't mean you're switching off or ignoring the other person or the situation, rather you're simply not being drawn into your own self-centred reactivity, trying to get away from that uncomfortable feeling, but instead you're recognizing that it's a mildly achy emotional feeling, no more than a physical ache would be.

I feel whole books could helpfully be written about mindfulness of awkward feeling. It could save us a lot of money, a lot of time, a lot of effort, because

we put a huge amount of energy in our lives to get away from the discomfort of 'Oh-dear-what-am-I-supposed-to-do-with-this?' We find all kinds of ways of covering that up, getting away from it and smoothing it over, and we don't have to. Instead we can say to ourselves, 'This is the "This-is-exactly-what-I-didn't-want-to-happen-and-it's-just-happened" feeling. Uh huh. That's what this is.' And, in a mysterious way when you recognize that tensing in the system and relax with that, then there's an untangling, a decluttering of the mind.

Sometimes what pops into your mind is: 'Well I'm hearing what you're saying, but I'm really not understanding it. Could you try that again?' And you realize that's a totally valid thing to say. Or you might say, 'I usually have an answer for most people's problems but in this case I haven't got a clue! And so, to be honest, your guess about how to handle the situation is as good as mine. So let's look at it together.' And you find that that tense, difficult thing that you were trying to get away from, you didn't need to be intimidated by it or feel threatened, instead you can turn it around and work with it.

BEING MISUNDERSTOOD AND/OR MISREPRESENTED

Another aspect of working with uncomfortable emotions is related to an extremely challenging area – this is how to be misunderstood and misrepresented. When people are saying things about you that are not true and you think, 'But, but, but, it's not that way! Let me explain. How dare you!

That's not fair.' Or people tell others what your attitude is and they have got their facts wrong – this is what it means to be misunderstood and misrepresented.

If you're in a position of responsibility and you have to be guiding people (which I have to do a fair amount of these days as abbot of Amaravati) this provides many opportunities to be misunderstood and misrepresented. When you're in a position of responsibility – in your family, running a hospital, or your business, or in a university, or whatever it might be – then you're doing a lot of the decision-making and guiding, so there are many opportunities for people to judge your actions and your character. And it's not always praise.

People are not always happy about the things that you do and they don't always understand your motivation. They might be resentful, they might be angry, they may just not have all the information, but it's very common for us to be misunderstood and misrepresented. Of course, even if you're not in a position of leadership, you can still easily be misunderstood, misrepresented.

My tendency is to want to jump in and try to explain: 'Oh no, it's not like that. Let me tell you' – it's spiritually demanding to practise restraint and not to justify yourself like this. You want to jump in and set everything straight because then (you assume) everything will be alright.

I was told a little while ago that the Queen of England has two policies: never complain, never explain. If you're the Queen you can get away with it. But it's a worthy principle to reflect upon, I feel, even if you're not a queen.

Don't complain, don't explain – because, when there's that urge to jump in and make people understand, we can overdo it, we can overcompensate as a result of self-defensiveness: 'I don't want you to see me like that. I want you to see me the way I like to be seen. So let me get in there and make you see things differently.' The very energy, the attitude that we bring to it is filled with self-view, and the conceits of 'I' and 'me' and 'mine'.

It's not that we should switch off or be disengaged from situations. Rather it's to not go along with that compulsive pull, to be driven by self-view, but instead to freely allow people to see you the way they want to see you. I can't control how you see me. I can talk in certain ways and I can hope that you see me in ways I would like to be seen but I can't control what you experience. It's not within my power. Not even the Buddha or any of the Arahants over the ages could please and inspire everyone. You do your best but what people make of that is completely up to them.

I find a skilful way of working with a sense of being misunderstood or misrepresented is that you take note of what people are saying or how people are talking, and you're patient; you recognize 'Well, that's not exactly true' or 'They didn't really understand that', so perhaps there'll be a moment where an alternative view can be expressed, or perhaps there won't. Or maybe there might be an opportunity to talk about it with someone else and they can pass the message back to the misunderstanding person. All that said, sometimes it's

best just to leave things alone, particularly if there's a very strong reactivity in the heart. To allow yourself to be misunderstood – sometimes for years – can be very valuable.

I have reflected many times on the quotation, by Alan Watts (reportedly from 'The Analects of Confucius'): 'Those who justify themselves do not convince.' It points directly at that relaxing and opening of attitude that is so helpful. Mysteriously, or perhaps not so mysteriously, it is often the body language of openness and ease that is the best response.

By not giving the signals of self-justification and indignation, one can radically change the dynamic of an exchange or an encounter, thus diminishing stress and suffering for everyone.

PEACE DOES NOT MEAN PASSIVITY

Earlier in this book I quoted a poem

> Life is truly a dream,
> All of its troubles I alone create.
> When I stop creating,
> the trouble stops.

That doesn't mean that all of our debts are magically paid off or that our illnesses suddenly disappear; what it means is that the mind no longer creates a struggle, no longer creates 'trouble' out of those experiences.

That also does not mean that we are passive. We still go to the doctor if we are ill. We still do things to work with difficult issues. However, along the way, the mind does not create suffering out of any of those concerns. The arrows turn into flowers, perfume and beams of light. Even if you are lying in bed in the hospice and it is the last minutes of your life, you're fine. This is what we mean by *dukkha-nirodha*. Even when there is great pain, we can experience that pain but not create suffering out of it. This is how the Buddha encourages us to be. Pain is inevitable but suffering is optional.

SENSORY EXPERIENCE LEADING TO NIBBĀNA

Dependent origination is only one way of describing the process, the development of an experience. It represents the process of experience affected by ignorance, when the mind is not awake and not seeing clearly. However, there is also the possibility of experiencing things through a fully awake mind. In the Aṅguttara Nikāya, 'The Numerical Discourses', the Buddha gives a description of the process of experience which is free from ignorance. It begins with 'interest': 'All things are rooted in interest.'

With interest *(chanda)* as the root, then all things are born of attention *(manasikāra)*. Then there is contact (*phassa*). There is the paying of attention. This is paying attention to the present. The mind turns toward that sense-contact and, from that contact, feeling *(vedanā)* arises. That feeling can be pleasant, painful or neutral. The Buddha uses the phrase, 'Diverging into

feelings' or 'converging on feelings' *(vedanā samosaraṇa)*. You can use the image of a tree to picture this process. Interest is at the root. Attention is where the roots come together and the trunk arises from the ground. Contact (*phassa*) is like the trunk. When the branches spread out, that is the spreading of feelings, diverging into feelings.

Then significantly, in contrast to dependent origination, instead of feeling leading to craving and clinging and so on, in this case the mind has a very different relationship to feeling.

You can envision the next three steps in the sequence as the big branches turning into smaller branches and then into twigs. The next three links are 'headed by concentration' *(samādhi)*, then 'dominated by mindfulness' *(sati)* and 'surmounted by wisdom' *(paññā)*.

Concentration, mindfulness and wisdom – concentration focuses the attention, mindfulness brings awareness of how the feeling is changing and the context of the feeling, and wisdom recognizes that the nature of all feelings is *anicca-dukkha-anattā*: impermanent, unsatisfactory, impersonal. The mind is fully awake and aware. All varieties of feeling are attended to and the mind is in tune with them. The mind is not drawn into grasping the pleasant or opposing the painful. The mind sees feelings in their true light and holds them in an environment of mindfulness and wisdom. The mind is attuned to their nature.

'All things yield deliverance as their essence.' You can imagine the fruit that grows on our beautiful tree. It is covered in the fruits of deliverance, *vimutti*, liberation. Every feeling that has been known and understood, whether pleasant or unpleasant or neutral, bears the fruit of liberation.

The next link is 'merging in the Deathless' *(amatogadhā)*; 'all things merge in the Deathless.' Following the image of our beautiful tree, the tree covered in the fruits of liberation, then 'merging in the Deathless' is represented by all of the branches and twigs and leaves and fruit being surrounded by and merged with the atmosphere, the air.

Finally: 'All things terminate in Nibbāna.'

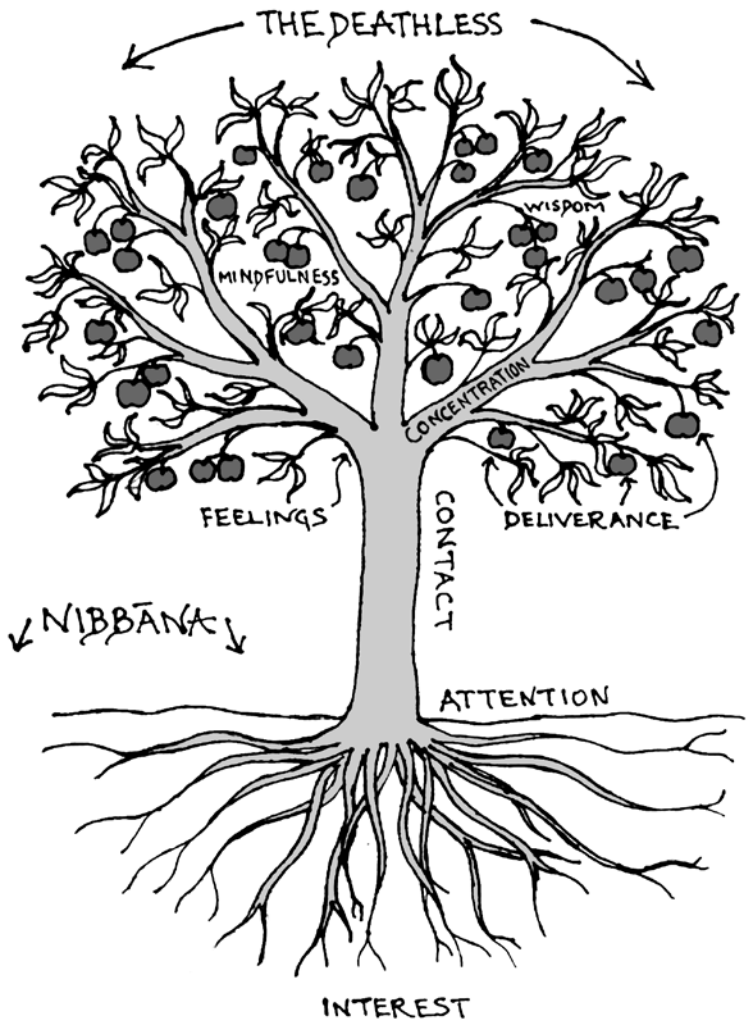
The Buddha described all of this in order to help us to develop a skilful way of recognizing our experience and seeing how things work, in the light of wisdom. What is the process of experiencing when the mind is awake?

This guidance is a way of informing our meditation, informing our practice. When we use words like 'merging in the Deathless' there is an easy way to understand that; we recognize that what we took to be a 'thing' was only given solidity by our attitude. We gave it reality by the way we attended to it. 'Merging in the Deathless' is recognizing that that apparent solidity (the perception of 'thingness') was imparted to the flow of experience by a mistaken attitude. There was no absolute thing that was born and there is no thing that dies.

Ajahn Chah put it in this way, 'All the things of this world are merely conventions of our own creation. Having established them, we get lost in them, giving rise to all kinds of trouble and confusion.' So if we take a principle like 'merging in the Deathless', it is really just seeing the empty nature of all things. It is simply seeing the dependent and conditioned nature of all things. Ajahn Chah also said that we 'determine' things into existence.

The last link is 'terminating in Nibbāna'. Reflecting on the image of the tree, if the air represents the Deathless, we can wonder: what is the symbol of Nibbāna? Then it came to mind that since Nibbāna has no form at all, perhaps the 'terminating in Nibbāna' is the peace-filled awareness of this mind knowing the image. This is where it terminates, in this very heart; this where the image arises and passes away, where these words and forms are being contemplated. If that ending is clearly seen, if the empty nature of all things is clearly seen, the result of that seeing is great peacefulness. And that is the primary nature of Nibbāna: peace.

We can be staying in a place that looks like paradise, such as Provence in the spring, or a tropical garden in Chiang Mai, surrounded by beautiful countryside and noble friends. Probably all of us have noticed, at certain times, that even when surrounded by wholesome, beautiful, noble and inspiring things, the mind still can create suffering. When we look at the cycle of dependent origination, we see that things can end painfully or,


THE DEATHLESS
MINDFULNESS
WISDOM
CONCENTRATION
FEELINGS
CONTACT
DELIVERANCE
NIBBĀNA
ATTENTION
INTEREST

with a skilful attitude, they can end very beautifully. Ajahn Sumedho summed this up in a very clear way: if you start with ignorance, you end up with *dukkha*; if you start with awareness, you end with Nibbāna. Or, even more briefly: 'Ignorance complicates everything.'

That is the simple version.

The work and practice of Dhamma is then to arouse and sustain the quality of awakened awareness. The more the heart is able to sustain this quality of awakened awareness and wisdom, the more the heart can be completely in tune with the reality of the present experience. This attunement conditions the realization of Nibbāna, peacefulness. We bring attention to and sustain it on the present reality. This is the work that we all need to do if we wish to free the heart and realize peacefulness:

1. Rooted in interest are all things,
2. Born of attention are all things,
3. Arising from contact are all things,
4. Diverging into (converging onto) feelings are all things,
5. Headed by concentration are all things,
6. Dominated by mindfulness are all things,
7. Surmounted by wisdom are all things,
8. Yielding deliverance as their essence are all things,
9. Merging in the Deathless are all things,
10. Terminating in Nibbāna are all things.

(A 10.58)

THE FOURTH EXIT POINT FROM THE CYCLE

SEVEN

‘This, bhikkhus, is the Noble Truth of the way leading to the cessation of *dukkha:*
Only this Noble Eightfold Path; namely, Right View,
Right Intention, Right Speech, Right Action, Right Livelihood,
Right Effort, Right Mindfulness and Right Concentration.’

‘This is the Noble Truth of the way leading to the cessation of *dukkha,*
and this way leading to the cessation of *dukkha* is to be developed.’
(S 56.11)

The first three exit points that have been addressed so far each relate to a different portion of the cycle of dependent origination, the wheel of birth and death. The first exit point is at *‘dukkha’*, this being link #12; the second exit point is the bridge between ‘feeling’ and ‘craving’, these being links #7 and #8; the third exit point relates to the establishment of *vijjā*, ‘awakened awareness’, and the non-arising of *avijjā*, ‘ignorance, unawareness’, it is thus associated with link #1.

It has been noted along the way how these three exit points relate to the First, Second and Third Noble Truths. Also the reader might have noticed that each of these is operating at an earlier point in the sequence of the cycle. It can thus be considered: ‘Is there then a fourth exit point associated with the Fourth

Noble Truth? If so, where would that be on the cycle? If it is a pattern that each one happens earlier in the process, how could you go back before link #1?' This chapter will explore this area and this possibility.

Having said that, please note, gentle reader, that just as with the other exit points from the cycle described here, this is not presented as a definitive way of interpreting the process of dependent origination and cessation, rather it is just one pattern of reflective enquiry, investigated and teased out, in order to help actualize the cessation of *dukkha* that is the purpose of the entire teaching of the Buddha.

GOOD FRIENDS ON THE PATH

It is natural to consider how to maintain the skills and insights derived from the contemplation of, and insight into, dependent origination in every kind of environment. How do we sustain Dhamma practice in an active, engaging and colourful world?

A central feature of solitude or being in a retreat situation is that we refrain from conversation, therefore we're able to be more aware of our inner world and of the flow of experiences, thoughts, moods and perceptions. When we are in an environment where we have to talk to other people, have to perform as a human, where we have an active personality, a life, a name, an occupation, when we are engaging with other people and taking up responsibility and decision-making, receiving the expectations and the needs of the world – that

is to say 99% of most of our waking lives – the mind is very easily and naturally drawn into those activities. The world requires us to create the past and the future, to remember our commitments and make sensible plans, and to have all kinds of opinions in the present moment. So how do we sustain attention on the reality of the present? How do we not get lost in those creations of the remembered past or the imagined future? How do we avoid being drawn into created abstractions about the present that the mind is so easily pulled into?

There are many different things that affect our lives – one of them is relationships, who we choose to spend our time with, because that has an effect. If we have chosen to spend a week together with people who like to meditate, who are not concerned about looking attractive all the time, people who don't need to be entertained or charmed by us, people who can deal with discomfort without complaining – that will likely have a relaxing effect on the mind. If we have chosen to spend a week together with people who like to go to boxing matches, on pub crawls, to royal receptions or to glamorous film festivals, there will be a different kind of effect – we will have been caught up in the excitement of the fights, wondering where we lost our phone, or worrying about which earrings to wear and whether we wore the same suit as last time. I'm not saying that sports and pubs, royal events and film festivals are all intrinsically bad things, but how we choose to spend our time, and who we spend it with, has an effect on our mind, on our heart.

There is a teaching of the Buddha's called 'The Highest Blessings', the *Maṅgala Sutta* (SN 2.4). In the Buddha's time the word *maṅgala* meant 'a lucky charm', or 'a protective spell', 'a blessing' or 'an auspicious sign' so such things were not just seen as a spiritual blessing but also as a means of personal protection. In this discourse, it starts with a *deva* coming to meet the Buddha. She asks the Buddha, 'What are the highest blessings, the best sources of protection?' The Buddha gives a list of thirty-eight things. Every single one of them is about what you do. There is nothing whatsoever about amulets or magical tattoos or sacred objects. It is all about the choices that we make.

Number one on the list of the sources of blessing is:

> 'Not to associate with fools,
> but to associate with the wise …
> this is the highest blessing.'

That said, you might think 'Well I'd love to not associate with fools, but that's my job, Ajahn'; or, 'You haven't met my family...'.

So far, in the effort to focus on practical applications of dependent origination, there has been an emphasis on the exit points from the cycles of addiction and rebirth. It has been described how three exit points relate to the First, Second and Third Noble Truths; I would suggest that there is indeed an exit point relating to the Fourth Noble Truth. This Fourth Truth is the Noble Eightfold Path. This is the medicine that brings about the cure for the spiritual malaise

of *dukkha*. As you might expect, the Buddha gave instruction on how to work with this Noble Truth too; he named the task for the Fourth Noble Truth, 'The Path that leads to the cessation of *dukkha'*, as: 'It is to be developed, cultivated, brought to fruition', *(idaṃ dukkha-nirodha-gāminī paṭipadā ariyasaccaṃ bhāvetabban'ti).* He also defined that Path, in the same discourse, simply as the Middle Way, *(majjhima paṭipadā).*

How then does that Fourth Noble Truth, and the means to work with it, relate to exit points from the cycles of addiction and birth and death? The Noble Eightfold Path is all about our intentions and our choices. It is about how we work and act, internally and externally, the attitude of our mind, what we say and do, and who we choose to be with. If we intend to not allow ignorance to arise (as per the third exit point), then we need to see what gives ignorance its strength and to work to deprive it of that fuel – a fire will go out if there is nothing left to burn. Thus the fourth exit point is talking about depriving ignorance of its fuel – not giving ignorance, unmindfulness any support. It's a question of removing the fuel from the vehicles of ignorance; not providing that army with nutriment and the means to operate.

There is a teaching in the Numerical Discourses, Book of the Tens (A 10.61), where the Buddha talks about the causes of ignorance. He starts off by reflecting: 'What is the nutriment, what is the supportive condition for ignorance?' He then names the Five Hindrances *(nīvaraṇā)* as the nutriment,

the support for ignorance, the fuel for ignorance. The Five Hindrances are sense desire, ill-will, dullness/sleepiness, restlessness and sceptical doubt. The Buddha then reflects on what is the immediate nutriment of the Five Hindrances. He defines the fuel for the Five Hindrances as 'the three kinds of misconduct', that is misconduct in body, speech or mind. The Buddha then reflects on the nutriment for these three kinds of misconduct.

He says that the fuel for these three kinds of misconduct is 'a lack of sense restraint' *(indriya-saṃvara)*. This means being careless and indulgent in sense activity, in what we look at, listen to, taste, smell and touch – being reactive rather than responsive.

Then what is the nutriment, what is the fuel for being unrestrained in the senses?

That is named as a 'lack of mindfulness and clear comprehension' *(sati-sampajañña)*.

What, in turn, is the nutriment, what is the fuel for the lack of mindfulness and clear comprehension?

It's 'unwise attention', not using wise reflection *(yoniso-manasikāra)*, attending to things unwisely.

What is the nutriment, what is the fuel for unwise attention or putting the mind onto unhelpful or confusing things?

This is defined as being 'the lack of faith' *(saddhā)*. What is the fuel, what then is the nutriment for lack of faith?

It is 'not hearing the good Dhamma'. And what is the cause, what is the fuel for not hearing the good Dhamma?

This, most significantly, is named as 'not associating with good people' *(sappurisa-saṃseva),* choosing to hang out with foolish people instead.

So that is the root. The origin of this whole causal chain is related to who you choose to spend your time with.

The Buddha (being an extremely thorough and scrupulous teacher) then takes us back through the chain in the other direction and, at the conclusion, shows what the beneficial result are of making better choices.

If you choose to spend time with good people they will encourage you and support you in listening to good Dhamma which gives rise to faith, which supports wise reflection, which supports mindfulness and clear comprehension and intuitive awareness, which supports restraint of the senses, which means living responsively, rather than reactively and compulsively. This removes the fuel for unwholesomeness in actions of body, speech and mind, which removes the fuel, takes away the support for the Five Hindrances, which in turn removes the fuel for ignorance. In addition, he points out how wholesomeness in actions of body, speech and mind supports the development of the Four Foundations of Mindfulness; these lead in turn to the fulfilment of the Seven Factors of Enlightenment, as he also describes in the *Satipaṭṭhāna*

Sutta (D 22, M 10) and the *Ānāpānasati Sutta* (M 118), and, eventually, to 'true knowledge and liberation'.

That is all rather a long way of saying: 'Be careful of who you choose to spend your time with.' Where we have a choice, who do we draw close to? What do we choose to do together? There are so many choices in the modern world. Who do we communicate with? What company do we choose to work for? Whose Twitter and Instagram accounts do we choose to follow? What television programmes do we choose to watch? Which friends do we choose to spend time with? What sites do we visit on the internet?

If we are attentive, we see that during the course of a day there are hundreds if not thousands of choices that we make. How do we spend our time? What information do we take in? Who do we choose to be with? All of that has its effect. I'm not encouraging us to be anxious and uptight, but to be discerning.

If we choose to spend time with good people *(sapurisa-saṃseva)*, that sets the conditions in place to support the effort to be awake and to not let ignorance arise. In the absence of ignorance then *vedanā,* feeling, will not condition *taṇhā*, craving, but rather, via concentration, mindfulness and wisdom, lead to Nibbāna instead of to *dukkha.* This is what I would define as the fourth exit point from the cycle – noble company.

To make an easier reference, here are those sequences laid out as they are in the Sutta:

1. What is the nutriment, what is the supportive condition for ignorance?
The Five Hindrances.
2. What is the nutriment … for the Five Hindrances?
The three kinds of misconduct.
3. What is the nutriment … for the three kinds of misconduct?
Lack of sense restraint.
4. What is the nutriment … for the lack of sense restraint?
A lack of mindfulness and full awareness.
5. What is the nutriment … for lack of mindfulness and full awareness?
Unwise attention.
6. What is the nutriment … for unwise attention? The lack of faith.
7. What is the nutriment for lack of faith? Not hearing good Dhamma.
8. What is the nutriment for not hearing the good Dhamma?
Not associating with good people.

And, in contrast:

1. True knowledge and liberation have a nutriment… What is that?
The Seven Factors of Enlightenment.
2. What is the nutriment … for the Seven Factors of Enlightenment?
The Four Foundations of Mindfulness.
3. What is the nutriment … for the Four Foundations of Mindfulness?
The three kinds of good conduct.
4. What is the nutriment … for the three kinds of good conduct?
Sense restraint.
5. What is the nutriment … for sense restraint?
Mindfulness and full awareness.

6. What is the nutriment … for mindfulness and full awareness?
Wise attention.
7. What is the nutriment … for wise attention? Faith.
8. What is the nutriment … for faith? Hearing good Dhamma.
9. What is the nutriment … for hearing good Dhamma?
10. Associating with good people.
(A 10.61)

MINDFULNESS OF THE BODY AND THE SELF-ADJUSTING UNIVERSE

The most reliable means of sustaining mindfulness in our daily lives is to use the feelings of the body. Mindfulness of the body is our guaranteed anchor for the present reality. No matter how much our mind has to think about – past or future, plans or problems, abstractions about the present – the body is always here. The body is like our most reliable friend. It is always here to come back to. No matter how far away the mind goes, the body is always here. That is one hundred percent reliable. So, to sustain the quality of mindfulness and awareness in daily activity – travelling, being with people, working, living, interacting with family and so on – if we develop an ongoing mindfulness of the body, that is a guaranteed way to key the attention into the present moment experience.

The body is also a gauge for our emotional state. This is another benefit of mindfulness of the body. If you bring attention to the body and you realize

you are racing along at speed, this can help us reflect: 'Where am I running to? Where's the fire? Slow down.'

Or maybe we notice that our belly is tightened into a knot. That tells us that we're feeling worried or anxious. OK... breathe out, lighten up. Each of us will find that emotions appear in different ways in our bodies, in different forms. The act of attention is the balancing agent. It's not as though there needs to be an inner commander-in-chief who says, 'You're going too fast, slow down'; or, 'Your belly is tight, you need to relax'. Rather there is the simple act of attention that brings the quality of awareness to the lack of balance – this imbalance is noticed and the awareness has its own effect. It is a self-adjusting universe.

Let's say for example you're sitting at your computer desk and you realize that you're tight and hunched over. Try saying to yourself: 'I'm all slumped over. I am not going to do anything, but I will just let the quality of awareness have its effect on my posture.' See what happens. We discover: 'I' don't have to 'do' any 'thing' – the universe adjusts itself as the natural effect of attuned awareness.

COMPASSIONATE ACTION AND THE ATTITUDES OF A WELL-ROUNDED PERSON

We do what is possible to bring our practice to our working life, our family, our relationships. As we engage with other people, we might notice that, if we pay attention to ourselves, we automatically adjust to the group and the group

adjusts to us. Human life is a relational experience. Even when we are not talking, we respect each other's presence, we care about each other, we make space for each other, we are existing in a relational state. We carry into our lives that spirit of natural care and attention and harmonization with others.

This is what I would call living according to the Middle Way. It means the development of the Eightfold Path in order to cultivate life as a well-rounded person, a *sappurisa* – we too can be that very kind of 'good person' that it's useful to associate with, which is a compassionate offering to others as well as being beneficial for ourselves.

According to the Buddha's teaching (at A 7.68) a well-rounded person, one who can be counted on as a truly valuable member of society and who is able to encourage their community and society towards greater peace and well-being, possesses seven specific qualities:

1. ***DHAMMAÑÑUTĀ:*** this means knowing principles, knowing the origins and causes of things and where they come from. If we know the underlying principles governing the things with which we must deal then we will be much more in tune with situations as we carry out our daily tasks. At the highest level, *dhammaññutā* means fully knowing, appreciating and harmonizing with the laws of nature so that one can deal with life and the world with a mind that is free, not resentful of or confined by those laws of nature.

2. ***ATTHAÑÑUTĀ:*** this means knowing objectives, knowing what direction things are heading, having an appreciation of likely results. If we know the reasons behind the task we are doing and the objectives it has, we are likely to be able to steer things in a direction that will be beneficial for all. To develop *atthaññutā* means to know what may be expected in the future from the actions we are doing in the present. At the highest level, *atthaññutā* means understanding the implications of the way nature works, coupled with an intrinsic intention to guide our actions and speech to be of the highest benefit, supporting the well-being of all to the best of our ability.

3. ***ATTAÑÑUTĀ:*** this word is spelled similarly to the previous quality but it has a very different meaning. This is, essentially, the necessity of knowing yourself. We need to appreciate the characteristics of our own conditioning, our personality, our age, language, nationality, education and so forth. Are we an artistic type or scientific? Are we an extrovert or an introvert? Female or male? What was our family background? Rich or poor? What are we good at? Not good at? Primarily we need to learn that we can't do everything and that it will help tremendously to be acquainted with the various strengths and weaknesses, and cultural biases that pertain for the attitudes of this being. If we can fully acknowledge the array of conditioning variables of our make-up we can then act accordingly. We do what is needed to be done to act skilfully, meanwhile making effort to learn skills or abandon bad habits so as to evolve to greater maturity.

4. ***MATTAÑÑUTĀ:*** this means knowing 'the right amount', to cultivate a sense of moderation. If we know 'the right amount' in such areas as spending money, eating food, holidaying and the consumption of global resources we can live in a very well-balanced way; we can look after the needs of our own life and those we are responsible for without over-taxing resources or harming ourselves or others through the choices we make. To know moderation in speech, work and action, in rest and in the pastimes we adopt, it helps if we do all things with an eye on what the point of it is and what genuine benefits might result. The spirit of moderation guides us to act not merely for our own gratification, or to accomplish our own ends, but rather to take into account the needs and preferences of all.

5. ***KĀLAÑÑUTĀ:*** this means knowing the time and place, and situation; knowing what the occasion is. If we consider carefully where we are and what's going on, and the proper time to speak up or be quiet, with respect to our actions, duties and engagements with other people, then we will regularly be a force for harmony and benefit. *Kālaññutā* encourages a sensitivity to when to arrive and depart, when to begin or end a conversation. It also means developing punctuality, regularity, being in good time to meet responsibilities, staying with family or friends for the right amount of time and at the right time. As Benjamin Franklin once noted: 'Fish and visitors stink after three days.' *Kālaññutā* includes knowing how to plan our time and organize it effectively.

6. ***PARISAÑÑUTĀ:*** this means knowing the group of people that we are currently relating to, the company we are keeping and the context within which we are meeting each other. Are we with our parents? Are we visiting a school? Are we in our own country or a place where we don't know the language? Are we in the role of teaching a group of students? Are we one patient on a hospital ward? Are we putting our children to bed? Who are we with and what is the relationship between us all?

Parisaññutā is knowing the locale, the people and the language to use to communicate skilfully. Just as the Buddha described in the passage quoted back in Chapter 1: 'If one varies the terminology as one travels through different regions, continually bearing in mind how these various terms are applied to the same household object, then all divisive bias will be avoided' (M 139.12).

7. ***PUGGALAÑÑUTĀ:*** this means knowing the character and role of individual people; it is something of a subset of the previous group. When we consider distinctive differences between others and take those into account, when we contemplate someone's temperament, abilities and shortcomings, when we recollect our past experiences of communicating with that person, all this is to have developed *puggalaññutā*. This skill also guides us to assess whether someone might be reliable as a friend or as a business partner, how they might fare in the monastic life, how they might handle a leadership role and how it would be best to relate to them. Lastly it can reliably guide us to communicate

skilfully with another person – whether to praise them or to criticize, whether to advise them or ask them questions.

These seven kinds of knowledge are known as the *sappurisa-dhammā*, the qualities of a well-rounded person. I find these qualities are very valuable in many situations: family get-togethers, on the London Underground, in the monastery, everywhere.

All of these are the result of developing mindfulness and full awareness, and wise reflection. If we nurture these seven *sappurisa-dhammā* they actively deprive ignorance, *avijjā,* of its fuel, they support the development of the Noble Eightfold Path, and thereby open up that fourth exit point from the destructive, addictive cycle well before it has begun.

There is an old Alcoholics Anonymous saying that if you sit in a barber's chair long enough you will eventually get your hair cut. This means that if you go to visit pubs and bars often enough, sooner or later you will end up having a drink – so, don't go near the pub. If you don't want a haircut, get out of the barber's chair.

If we don't put ourselves in the position of temptation we will not slip up and tumble tail over tea-kettle, make that 'sudden turn', 'The Fall', and undergo the catastrophe of dependent origination, ending up in the crumpled heap of *soka parideva dukkha domanass'upāyāsā*, 'sorrow, lamentation, pain, grief and despair'. This fourth exit point is about good friends and skilful living, the not 'climbing into the barber's chair', so that there is no fuel to power the turning of the wheel of becoming. This is how it operates before link #1 and provides a wholesome and beneficial basis for our life.

We bring our attention to the experience of the present reality. We open the heart to this day. A day can feel like a really long time. Even five seconds can seem like a really long time. Our perceptions of time are subjective. Whether something feels like a long time or a short time is up to the attitude of this mind.

BHAVA, THE DRUG OF CHOICE

The more the heart is entangled in the feeling of becoming, the less time there seems to be. So the word *bhava* or 'becoming' is important to understand. The more the heart is entangled with becoming, the more our life is an experience of continual pressure. It might be an exciting pressure but it is a stressful feature nonetheless. It forms around an attitude of 'me' trying to get somewhere else, a feeling that 'I' am on my way to this 'other thing'. It might be something that we are attracted to, something that we want, something that we are afraid of, something that we feel a duty to engage with, something that is irritating.

Any of these can be an object of becoming.

Attraction, aversion, fear, duty – all of these make the heart very crowded, yet most of us are comprehensively addicted to the sense of being and identity that we get from all of that. The pleasant, the painful, the comic and the tragic,

it doesn't matter as long as it brings a sense of defined being – 'me being *something*'. Investigate this feeling. As we feel ourselves being pulled or pushed toward the next thing, we ask ourselves: 'Where am I going? Who is trying to get there?' We might discover that even while walking in a park there is the feeling 'I am getting somewhere' regardless of the fact that it's just around a lake, in order to walk back again to where we began.

Notice that sensation of 'me getting somewhere'.

We can even observe the quality of becoming while sitting still – in our own home as well as on a train or a plane, in a car as well as in a meditation hall – whether it's trying to get to a physical destination like Chiang Mai, London or Paris, or to get concentrated, the process and the energy is the same. We can watch the thoughts creating possibilities of future activities, places, experiences. We can observe this quality of becoming through the mind attaching to any changing condition.

If we bring attention to this, we find that there is a leaning into the imagined next moment – *quid nunc?* 'What now?' is the ancient Latin way of expressing this feeling.

In the Suttas it says, 'Nibbāna is the cessation of becoming', *bhava-nirodho nibbānaṃ* (A 10.7). This is a very short but very powerful statement. If we interpret that as meaning that Nibbāna is only realized when all conditions of the world and the mind have stopped, evaporated, life is going to be very

difficult. If it meant the stopping of all action, we would have to stop breathing, walking, talking. That is obviously not a realistic interpretation. By saying, 'Nibbāna is the cessation of becoming' it doesn't mean we freeze in our tracks or that we stop the breath from entering and leaving the body or even that we stop the flow of thought in order to realize Nibbāna.

Rather, it is a change of attitude towards those transient conditions, the arising and passing of experience. It is the quality of non-entanglement with the experience of changing conditions, seeing their ownerless and insubstantial nature. It is the restfulness that comes from not grasping, not clinging, not identifying with what is being experienced.

WATCHING A WORLD ARISE

As we look about us in life we can discover, 'Oh, the woman in the next seat, who I thought was a primary school teacher, is actually a famous film director.' Or 'That fellow who I met in the park, who I was sure was a scientist, it turns out he is a sculptor.' We can watch how our version of the world comes into being. It is not good, it is not bad, it is *just this*. Every day there is a great opportunity to see a world being born – seeing how we judge our own life, our personality, judge the lives of others – we can watch those patterns, those perceptions, springing up and taking shape, and dissolving.

The senses, contact and feelings arise. If we are able to recognize that the world is actually 'my version of the world' then we are able to be much more sensitive

and spacious in the way we relate to others. In one very significant teaching the Buddha said:

> 'That whereby one is a perceiver of the world, a conceiver of the world, that is called "the world" in this Dhamma and discipline. And what is the means whereby one is a perceiver of the world and a conceiver of the world? It is the eye, the ear, the nose, the tongue, the body and the mind.' (S 35.116)

We can see how those perceptions arise and how the mind can give them value.

How do we feel about other people? The perception of 'scientist' has one feeling, 'sculptor' has another feeling. We create each other. We produce different judgements and perceptions out of habit, out of our conditioning, out of our social situation.

We tend to believe our perceptions as absolutely true. But we can be aware that this is a creation or a naming that the mind has put upon perceptions of the present – as Ajahn Chah put it, 'We determine things into existence.' This awareness gives a great freedom to our own heart and it gives great freedom to others as well. The kindest thing you can do for other people is not to create them. Just as the kindest thing we can do for ourselves is not to create this person that we think we are either. This might sound a bit strange but, on reflection, perhaps it makes some sense.

It is a great relief not to be created into a particular role. There is a friend of the Sangha in California who is quadraplegic, in a wheelchair. He once told me how

one of the great happinesses in his life was when people would talk to him and 'Not talk to the chair.' So, as we receive the world into our hearts and we watch it come into being, each moment, a useful exercise in developing compassion, kindness and harmonious relationships is to not create people.

This doesn't mean that when your grandchildren come running through the door saying they're happy to see you, you tell them they don't exist. If a child is five years old and Granny tells her that she is not real, that child will probably think that Buddhism is bad for Granny. The practice being spoken of here is not the picking up of some philosophical idea and then brandishing it as a concept to identify with, an achievement or a self-protection, rather it is expanding the view. It is relaxing expectations and projections and opening the heart to the fullness of the present reality.

If we make the effort not to create each other we can see what the effect of that is. Be attentive, attune to the present reality. We then let our words and actions and feelings be guided by that attunement. I encourage us all to look into our hearts to see how this feels: the freedom of non-creation, the freedom of not judging others as being *this* or *that*, the freedom of not having to be someone special.

I would like to tell the story about one particular friend of the Sangha who used to visit Chithurst Monastery back in the early 1980s. In those days the old Victorian house was a building site. The floors had only scraps of leftover carpet to cover them. Most of the tea mugs didn't have handles or had chips in

the sides. It was a pretty rough environment. This friend of the Sangha was a local woman who used to come and visit regularly. She had been married to the British Ambassador to Japan. When she came to visit she would sit down quite delicately on the scraps of carpet, sip her tea daintily from the chipped mug. She was obviously a very refined lady.

One day she said, 'The reason I love to come to Chithurst is because here I can be a potato.' And she really meant it. She didn't have to be 'the Ambassador's wife' or the gracious lady. She could just enjoy the company of good friends and sip her tea, and not care that the cup was chipped or the place was covered in paint and plaster dust. What a delight not to have to be this *thing*, this role, this identity; how joyful to be able to let that go. Unborn, Unoriginated, Uncreated, Unformed.

HERE, JUST AN APOSTROPHE

When there is a powerful urge in the mind to be getting to the next place or planning the next event – worrying about whether or not we will make it there, or if we will become ill or we won't get what we want or if we will have difficulties along the way – whenever we see the mind getting caught in those types of worries and plans, we can reflect that really there's nobody going anywhere. These are just the conditions of the mind that are changing. It is always the case that the experience of the world only happens in our

mind. There might be a perception that this body is going from one place to another, but all those perceptions happen in our mind and heart. The heart is the centre of the world – the heart of the universe is your heart – this is where the world is experienced. It begins and ends here. Exactly *here*. None of us really go anywhere.

Throughout our lives, since we were small babies until the present, everywhere that we've ever been was always exactly *here*. When we reflect in this way, we see that the world arises and passes in this mind. We are always *here*. That realization brings a profound quality of ease and rest.

Even as there is the perception of the road rolling away under our wheels, or the sea and land beneath the plane's wings, the feet walking and the world moving, the heart can be fully relaxed and at ease with the present experience. You are always precisely *here*. When the heart recognizes that the world arises, exists and passes away here in this sphere of awareness, then there is peace, spaciousness. This is one very accessible aspect of the ending of becoming.

Changes are happening, choices are being made, but the heart is not limited by them, the heart is not identified with them. We can get things done, we can make plans to go for walks, settle family arguments, run an office and catch planes. We can go to the shops or watch the body pacing from one end of the path to the other, but all the time there's nobody going anywhere, nobody doing any thing. This is really peaceful.

That 'nobody' is, in essence, only an apostrophe – a mark that designates an absence – it is the insignia of *nirodha.* If *dukkha* has ended, that actuality doesn't need to be named but for the sake of communication the convention of such signs can be a valid *upāya* – a skilful means. That is as long as it is recollected that: 'These are merely names, expressions, turns of speech, designations in common use in the world which the Tathāgata uses without misapprehension, uses to conform to common custom without clinging to them' (D 9.53).

GRATITUDE

As this book reaches its final pages, this is a good time to reflect upon the quality of gratitude; I feel the first person to cultivate gratitude for is the Buddha.

Over 2500 years ago this one human being woke up to the way things are. That awakening arose through incredible commitment, love of reality, patience, wisdom and effort. The Buddha then undertook to establish the teaching and traditions of Dhamma practice, and spent the next 45 years doing so. More than 2500 years later we are the beneficiaries of his commitment, his effort, his love and his great genius as a teacher. At the time the Buddha was teaching, in Southern Europe it was the era of the Greeks, the armies of city states and the islands of the Mediterranean fighting against each other, warring over territories. In what is now the U.K. it was still the pre-historic era, the middle of the Iron Age, when the Buddha was teaching in India.

From all those centuries ago until our own time these teachings have sustained themselves. How miraculous and wonderful that they are available to help to change our lives, hearts and minds today.

We can also send forth feelings of gratitude for those who have helped to bring our lives into being. We can send forth our gratitude, cultivate and radiate a quality of gratefulness and appreciation for all of those hearts and hands that have contributed to creating this opportunity for us – our teachers, our parents, our mentors and all who have nurtured and nourished us along the way.

Life is a relational process. We live in relationship with each other. Our lives are formed from all of the actions, the work, and the bodies and minds of those who have come before us and with whom we interact today. We might feel very independent but the source of our life is the countless generations of other people, other beings who have gone before and that live along with us now. This life exists in relationship to the planet, the land, the air, the plants, the animals and all other living and breathing things. We reflect upon this relational state and, accordingly, express gratitude for all those beings and forces that have supported this life and that continue to help to provide these opportunities.

When we cultivate gratitude it is not just an idea in the mind, or a long list of names. We look into the heart; we feel and find that quality of genuine humility

and appreciation, joyfulness that there is this connection, this relatedness with others. Along with that gratitude for the blessings that come from others, we can find a joy that we are also able to be of assistance, that we can be a source of blessings and benefit to others ourselves. How wonderful that our words and our actions and our work can be a source of benefit to other beings.

Sādhu! Sādhu! Sādhu!

APPENDIX

IMAGES OF CAUSATION

THE FOLLOWING IS TAKEN FROM A TALK GIVEN TO THE SANGHA AT AMARAVATI DURING THE WINTER RETREAT OF 1987.

This evening I have been asked to offer some reflections on the *paṭicca samuppāda*, to pass on a few of the different images I have used in the past which have helped illuminate its meaning for me.

First of all, it occurred to me how much similarity there was in the way in which the *paṭicca samuppāda* ran, and the way that one can look at the arising of the human being from the raw matter of existence. The *paṭicca samuppāda* is a pattern that is trying to describe the way in which persons and their suffering arise. In the Buddhist world it is often stated that these stem primarily from ignorance. However, as the Thai meditation master Venerable Ajahn Mun pointed out in his discourse Muttodaya: 'The primordial heart is the mother and father of ignorance.' That is to say, these arisings depend on ignorance, but ultimately it is out of Suchness, the Unconditioned, that persons and their problems appear.

Now, when you consider the nature of matter, you can reflect that it is from this same Suchness that it too emanates. When you begin to look down at

molecules and then atoms and then sub-atomic particles, you find that there is a limit which the ability to measure, and the conceptual mind, cannot reach beyond. At this quantum limit the most minute and primordial particles that are known and talked about have all kinds of weird qualities which don't correlate with the physical world as we know it at the unassisted sensory level, for which they coin terms like 'wavicle', 'strangeness' and 'charm', and beyond them there is nothing that can be described. Past this limit space and form, energy and matter appear to merge, to become unified and indistinguishable – they use terms like 'the plenum' and 'quantum foam', (virtual particles existing briefly as fleeting fluctuations in the fabric of spacetime), to describe this primordial level of physical reality. This is the Suchness of physical existence and its nature is beyond the measure of the thinking mind. As soon as there is ignorance, however – that is as our focus relaxes and we are not totally with that sense of Suchness – at that moment 'formations' arise. Out of this all-pervasive, seamless web of Suchness there emerges that which can be labelled and divided – waves and particles, quarks and muons and gluons, hot and cold, this and that. So 'formations' or 'compounded conditions' are that which is formed, that which has got a pattern.

Although the Western scientific world might not recognize it, within most esoteric traditions, native religions and within the intuitions of many, it is understood that matter possesses consciousness; and that any type of thing which is formed has some kind of consciousness associated with it. For a

Native American, for example, to break up a rock without asking permission first, or expressing gratitude for the usefulness which it is offering, would be like performing surgery on your mother without an anaesthetic. Reflection along these lines has helped me to clarify the mysterious link between the arising of 'formations' and then 'consciousness'. In this way you may see that as soon as that which is unformed becomes formed then there is some kind of consciousness associated with that pattern.

If you then reflect upon the biological basis of life – you find that it is built, first of all, from simple molecules and then complex molecules, then amino acids and proteins. Very simple forms of life, such as prokaryotes, can be made by natural occurrences out of these basic chemicals. Now it doesn't take very much for a thing to become sentient. Some of the most simple viruses are nothing more than a few strands of DNA molecules, but they can reproduce and they possess the one factor that all living, all sentient things have in common, which is irritability. So these molecular patterns, wherein there is some kind of consciousness, eventually refine and complexify and from them arises sentiency. This strengthens the apparent division between physical structure and the mental energy that exists associated with that form; this is described as the arising of 'mentality' and 'materiality'.

The more that the form develops and life complexifies, the more there grows up a whole system of ways in which the living being can pick up information

about the environment around it. 'What is there around that is beneficial? What is there that is dangerous?' This is the sensory world, and it is in this way that all the cells of our body become sensitive to other cells and to other activities around them. First of all this sensitivity is quite coarse: just 'Dangerous – get away' and 'Good – grab it'; even tiny little cells and simple structures react in this way. But what happens with evolution and the refining of structures within our bodies is that these become developed into the sensory organs, very distinct ways of picking up precise information about the environment in which we live. This is how the sense organs arise from the basis of mind and body, 'mentality-materiality', and particularly the six sense organs of the human. Because there are the sense organs, there is the picking up of information about the environment. There follows 'contact' with the outside world, then 'feeling' and all the ensuing qualities of the experience of existence. This part of the *paṭicca samuppāda* I will go into shortly as it is only this first part that these more scientific reflections are concerned with.

* * *

The other image I would like to talk about concerns the process of what happens in the moment of moving from that sense of perfection and Suchness into rebirth and suffering. What is the pattern that occurs? The way that you might envisage this is to imagine yourself as an eye high above the world, far above the clear waters of the ocean. All that can be seen from where you are

is just a pure expanse of blue. The mind is resting in the sense of stillness and being. There is peace of mind, alertness, clarity. Then, because of careless tendencies, the attention slips from resting in stillness of being and the eye begins to look closer at the blue beneath it. You begin to be able to discern that there is some kind of pattern, there are some kinds of shapes on the surface. This is the arising of awareness of 'formations', of separateness, of pattern, of 'this' and 'that'. Then a process of absorption follows; there is a drawing in of the attention so that the eye is attracted down, telescoping towards the waves on the surface of the ocean. It draws closer and closer in upon the pattern. Firstly, from above, you can just perceive that there is some shape there, and then, as you get closer, you can see the way the patterns relate to each other, the shapes they make and the relationships they form. This corresponds to the arising of 'consciousness' – the forces that act between things.

The absorption carries on and the distinction between the physical qualities ('formations') and the formless qualities ('consciousness') becomes more definite. This can be seen as a closer observation of particular waves and the way that they move and act upon each other. This corresponds to the differentiation of experience into 'materiality' and 'mentality'. The process then develops as you become closer and closer to some particular wave until there is complete absorption. You pass through the development of 'the six senses' and 'contact' as the proximity increases and then 'feeling' as you connect with that wave. You are floating at ease, being

carried with the wave, but then suddenly the mind is no longer free. There is no longer just the sensation of being with the sea. The wave begins to rise and roll and the mind is caught, caught on the crest.

This then is 'desire' and 'clinging'. The mind is caught by the wave and there arises the thrill of being carried along as it swells. This develops into 'the process of becoming' as you are swept along by its momentum like a surfer riding a big roller. There is a sense of beautiful abandonment and perfection as you speed along. There is a sense of excitement and absorption. You're completely caught with that wave, caught up in that rushing exhilaration. All sense of reflection has vanished and there is maximum excitement. 'Becoming' is the big 'hit' of the mortal realm. But then what happens after 'becoming'?

The wave encounters the reef and suddenly from that glorious exhilaration – WHAM! – your surfboard is turned upside-down, you're flying through the air, smashed on the rocks. 'Birth' has happened and here comes life in the raw: 'ageing and death, sorrow, lamentation, pain, grief and despair'! So there you are struggling – can't work out which is up or down. You have lost your surfboard. You wonder which way the land is, and yet you find yourself looking to climb on another great wave; you find yourself looking for another rebirth.

* * *

These patterns which have been mentioned here are just a few ways of seeing, but to really use this teaching you must investigate and know it for yourself.

We have to inquire of ourselves, 'What is the source of our experience of existence? What is this pattern describing?' What is that feeling of perfection? What is it like just to be clear and open, totally at peace? How does that get lost? And how does that losing happen?' If you inquire like this you will see how these patterns can be traced in your own life, and consequently be more able to free yourself.

* * *

> *In the ignorance that implies impression that knits knowledge that finds the nameform that whets the wits that convey contacts that sweeten sensation that drives desire that adheres to attachment that dogs death that bitches birth that entails the ensuance of existentiality.*
>
> **(JAMES JOYCE,** *FINNEGANS WAKE)*

GLOSSARY

Ajahn (THAI) — Teacher; from the Pali *ācariya*: in the Amaravati community, a bhikkhu or sīladharā who has completed ten rains retreats (*vassa*).

akkha — The central spindle or axle that sits at the centre of a wheel.

akusalamūla — The roots of unwholesomeness, to wit, greed, hatred and delusion.

amatogadhā — Literally, 'merging with the Deathless'.

anattā — Literally, *'not-self'*, i.e. impersonal, without individual essence; neither a person nor belonging to a person. One of the three characteristics of conditioned phenomena.

anicca — Transient, impermanent, unstable, having the nature to arise and pass away. One of the three characteristics of conditioned phenomena.

anuloma — Literally, 'with the grain of the hair'; here referring to the arising of *dukkha* aspect of the dependent origination process.

Arahant — Literally, 'worthy one' – a term applied to all enlightened beings.

asura — A celestial being of the category of 'Jealous Gods'. This is a titanic form of being that is less refined than most devas and regularly at war with them.

attā (PALI)
atman (SKT.) — The feeling of selfhood. In the Pali this is recognized as a delusory impression; in the Skt. it is taken as the absolute reality, the fundamental nature of a being.

attaññutā — Knowing yourself, i.e. your own character and disposition.

attavādupādāna — Literally, 'clinging to ideas of self'.

atthaññutā	Knowing objectives, the direction things are likely to go.
avijjā	Literally, 'not knowing', ignorance, nescience, unawareness. In Buddhist usage it is distinguished from the usual English meaning of 'not having the facts'; the first of the links in the process of dependent origination.
bhava	Becoming, existence; the tenth of the links in the process of dependent origination.
bhavacakka	Literally, 'the wheel of becoming', also known as 'the wheel of birth and death'; the cycles of subjective captivity that the mind, when dominated by ignorance, is trapped in. It is a synonym for *saṃsāra*.
bhūmi	A plane of existence, an 'abode of beings'; in classical Buddhist cosmology there are understood to be 31 of these. The 31 are grouped into three main areas where rebirth takes place: *kāmāvacarabhūmi*: the sensuous plane; *rūpāvacara-bhūmi*: form-plane; *arūpāvacarabhūmi*: formless plane.
Bodhi Tree	The tree, in Bodh Gaya, India, under which the Buddha was sitting when he realized enlightenment; a *ficus religiosa*. Also other trees of the same species, planted in different places.
chanda	Interest, zeal, enthusiasm, desire.
deva	A heavenly being, an angel; a being that abides in any one of the seven lower heavens in classical Buddhist cosmology.
Dhamma (PALI) **Dharma** (SKT.)	The Teaching of the Buddha as contained in the scriptures; not dogmatic in character, but more like a raft or vehicle to convey the disciple to deliverance. Also, the Truth towards which that Teaching points; that which is beyond words, concepts or intellectual understanding. When written as *'dhamma'* this refers to an 'item' or 'thing'.

dhammajāti (PALI) ***tammachaht*** (THAI)	Literally, 'born of the Dhamma'; nature, originating from, and structured and functioning according to nature.
dhammaññutā	Knowing causes, the origins of things.
dhammatā (PALI) ***tammadah*** (THAI)	Natural, of the nature of Dhamma. In the Thai usage it usually has the connotation of 'ordinary', 'unremarkable' or 'normal'.
dhammavicāya	Literally, 'investigation of reality'; the second of the Seven Factors of Enlightenment. The others are 1) mindfulness, 3) effort, 4) rapture, 5) tranquility, 6) concentration, 7) equanimity.
diṭṭhi	View or opinion.
diṭṭhupādāna	Clinging to views and opinions.
domanassa	A painful mental state.
dukkha	Literally, 'hard to bear' – dis-ease, restlessness of mind, anguish, conflict, unsatisfactoriness, discontent, suffering. One of the three characteristics of conditioned phenomena.
Four Noble Truths	The core teaching of the Buddha. The Truth of Unsatisfactoriness; the Truth of the Origin of Unsatisfactoriness; the Truth of the Cessation of Unsatisfactoriness; the Truth of the Path Leading to the Cessation of Unsatisfactoriness.
idapaccayatā	Literally, 'conditioned by this'; the principle of specific conditionality whereby one facet of the natural order affects another.
indriya-saṃvara	Literally, 'restraint of the sense faculties'; an attitude of modesty, composure, collectedness and responsivity that was praised by the Buddha.
jarā-maraṇa	Ageing and death; the twelfth of the links in the process of dependent origination.

Jnana (SKT.) Knowledge, understanding; Pali '*ñāṇa*'.

jāti Birth in any mode of being, both physical and psychological; the eleventh of the links in the process of dependent origination.

kālaññutā Knowing the right time and the right amount of time for things; also punctuality.

kāmupādāna Clinging to sense pleasure.

khandha Literally: 'group', 'aggregate', 'heap' or 'lump' – the term the Buddha used to refer to each of the five components of psycho-physical existence: *rūpa* 'form', *vedanā*, 'feelings', *saññā*, 'perceptions', *saṅkhārā*, 'mental formations', *viññāṇa* 'consciousness. The five together are equivalent in meaning to '*nāma-rūpa*'.

kuṭī A hut; a secluded and simple dwelling for a monk or a nun.

Mahākāla A Buddhist deity, representing the nature of time, also associated with King Yama, the god of death.

māna Conceit; in contrast to the English usage of the word, which means the overestimation of one's own qualities, personal vanity or pride, in the Buddhist sense 'conceit' involves any fixed judgement of one's own qualities, regardless of whether that is positive, negative or neutral.

manasikāra Attention.

maṅgala A blessing, protection; either through one's own wise and wholesome actions, or through some kind of charm, mantra or suchlike.

Māra Personification of evil forces. During the Buddha's struggle for enlightenment, Māra manifested frightening and enticing forms to try to turn him back from his goal.

mattaññutā	Moderation, knowing the right amount.
mettā	Loving-kindness, radical acceptance; one of the four Sublime Abidings.
nāma-rūpa	Mind and body, mentality-materiality; the fourth of the links in the process of dependent origination. Equivalent in meaning to 'the five *khandhas*'.
Nibbāna (PALI) **Nirvāṇa** (SKT.)	Literally, 'coolness' – the state of liberation from all suffering and defilements, the goal of the Buddhist path.
nīvaraṇā	The Hindrances, obstacles to concentration; these are listed in the scriptures as five in number: *kāmacchanda* (sense-desire), *vyāpāda* (ill-will), *thīna-middha* (sloth and torpor, dullness), *uddhacca-kukkucca* (restlessness) and *vicikicchā* (skeptical doubt).
pabhassara (PALI) ***prabhasvara*** (SKT.)	Radiant, light-filled.
paññā	Wisdom.
papañca	Conceptual proliferation, mental prolixity or complication.
papañca-dhammas	Literally, 'the mind-states conducive to conceptual proliferation'; these are listed as: *taṇhā* 'craving', *māna* 'conceit' and *diṭṭhi* 'views'.
papañca-saññā saṅkhā	Literally, 'perceptions and notions tinged by mental proliferation that beset the heart and mind; the feeling of separation between a 'me' and 'the world' coupled with the tension between the two, based on wanting, fearing, hating, owning or opinionating.
pāramī/ pāramitā	Literally, 'means of going across', perfection. The ten perfections in Theravāda Buddhism for realizing Buddhahood are giving, morality, renunciation, wisdom, energy, patience, truthfulness, determination, loving-kindness, and equanimity.

parideva	Lamention, tearful sadness.
parisaññutā	Knowing the company one is keeping, the group one is addressing.
paṭiloma	Literally, 'against the grain of the hair'; here referring to the cessation or restraining of *dukkha* aspect of the dependent origination process.
phassa	Sense-contact, this is comprised of the confluence of 1) the sense organ, 2) the sensory stimulus and 3) the sense-consciousness that arises stimulated by that; the sixth of the links in the process of dependent origination.
Precepts	The guidelines for skilful behaviour described and encouraged by the Buddha. These are codified into various numbers and types of Precepts according to an individual's spiritual commitment or formal adoption of monastic training.
The Five Precepts are:	1. I undertake the precept to refrain from taking the life of any living creature. 2. I undertake the precept to refrain from taking that which is not given. 3. I undertake the precept to refrain from sexual misconduct. 4. I undertake the precept to refrain from lying. 5. I undertake the precept to refrain from consuming intoxicating drink and drugs which lead to carelessness.
The Eight Precepts are:	1. I undertake the precept to refrain from taking the life of any living creature. 2. I undertake the precept to refrain from taking that which is not given. 3. I undertake the precept to refrain from any intentional sexual activity. 4. I undertake the precept to refrain from lying.

	5. I undertake the precept to refrain from consuming intoxicating drink and drugs which lead to carelessness. 6. I undertake the precept to refrain from eating at inappropriate times. 7. I undertake the precept to refrain from entertainment, beautification and adornment. 8. I undertake the precept to refrain from lying on a high or luxurious sleeping place.
puggalaññutā	Knowing who one is addressing, taking into account another person's character.
Rains	The formal Rainy Season retreat of the Southern Buddhist calendar that runs between the full moon of July and the full moon of October every year. Monastic 'age' for nuns and monks is measured in how many Rains one has been in robes.
saḷāyatana	The six senses; the fifth of the links in the process of dependent origination.
samādhi	Concentration, mental collectedness.
samosaraṇa	Coming together, meeting, union, junction; this can imply either converging on or diverging from a point.
saṅkhārā	Formations, usually meaning 'mental formations', especially volitional impulses; all mental states such as thoughts, emotions, memories, fantasies, desires, aversions and fears, as well as states of concentration; the second of the links in the process of dependent origination.
saññā	Perception, the mental function of recognition.
sappurisa-dhamma	The qualities of an admirable, well-rounded person.

sappurisa-saṃseva	Drawing close to admirable, well-rounded people.
sat-chit-ānanda (SKT.)	Literally, 'being-consciousness-bliss'; qualities understood to be inherent attributes of the *atman* in Vedic and Upaniṣadic philosophy.
sati	Mindfulness.
sati-sampajañña	Mindfulness conjoined with clear comrehension, an intuitive awareness; this signifies the full awareness of an object of experience along with appreciation of the context within which it is apprehended (i.e. the time, the place and the situation).
sīlabbatupādāna	Clinging to conventions, rites and rituals, or agreed value systems.
soka	Sorrow.
Sutta (PALI) ***sūtra*** (SKT.)	Literally, 'a thread'; a discourse given by the Buddha or one of his disciples.
taṇhā	Craving, self-centred desire; the eighth of the links in the process of dependent origination.
Tathāgata	'Thus gone' or 'thus come' – one who has gone beyond suffering and mortality; one who experiences things as they are, without delusion. The epithet that the Buddha applied to himself.
tathāgatagarbha	Literally, 'womb of the *tathāgata*'; this means 'having the *tathāgata* or the *buddha* quality within'; it refers to the awakened awareness that can be accessed and embodied via skilful Dhamma practice; sometimes referred to as 'Buddha-nature'.
tathatā	Suchness.
upādāna	Clinging; the ninth of the links in the process of dependent origination.

upāya	A skilful, expedient means to achieve some goal; a method of practice or instruction.
upāyāsa	Despair.
vedanā	Feeling, sensation; physical and mental feelings that may be either pleasant, unpleasant or neutral; the seventh of the links in the process of dependent origination.
vimutti	Liberation, freedom.
vīṇā	A classical Indian stringed musical instrument.
viññāṇa	Usually means 'sense-consciousness' or 'discriminative consciousness', the process whereby there is seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting, touching and thinking; rare uses of the word, contrastingly, have it mean 'transcendent, awakened awareness'.
vipassanā	Insight; this can refer to either the type of meditation that leads to the development of wisdom or the quality wisdom that arises from it.
vitakka	Conceptual thought, discursive thinking.
yoniso-manasikāra	Wise reflection, careful consideration.

ABBREVIATIONS

D: Dīgha Nikāya	The Long Discourses of the Buddha
M: Majjhima Nikāya	The Middle Length Discourses of the Buddha
S: Saṃyutta Nikāya	The Discourses of the Buddha Related by Subject
A: Aṅguttara Nikāya	The Discourses of the Buddha Related by Number
SN: Sutta Nipāta	A collection of the Buddha's teachings, in verse form
Ud: Udāna	The Inspired Utterances of the Buddha
MV: Mahāvagga	One of the books of The Vinaya, the Buddhist Monastic Rule

BORN IN ENGLAND IN 1956, **AJAHN AMARO** RECEIVED A BSC. IN PSYCHOLOGY AND PHYSIOLOGY FROM THE UNIVERSITY OF LONDON. SPIRITUAL SEARCHING LED HIM TO THAILAND, WHERE HE WENT TO WAT PAH NANACHAT, A FOREST TRADITION MONASTERY ESTABLISHED FOR WESTERN DISCIPLES OF THAI MEDITATION MASTER AJAHN CHAH, WHO ORDAINED HIM AS A BHIKKHU IN 1979. SOON AFTERWARDS HE RETURNED TO ENGLAND AND JOINED AJAHN SUMEDHO AT THE NEWLY ESTABLISHED CHITHURST MONASTERY. HE RESIDED FOR MANY YEARS AT AMARAVATI BUDDHIST MONASTERY, MAKING TRIPS TO CALIFORNIA EVERY YEAR DURING THE EARLY NINETIES.

IN JUNE 1996 HE ESTABLISHED ABHAYAGIRI MONASTERY IN REDWOOD VALLEY, CALIFORNIA, WHERE HE WAS CO-ABBOT WITH AJAHN PASANNO UNTIL 2010. HE THEN RETURNED TO AMARAVATI TO BECOME ABBOT OF THIS LARGE MONASTIC COMMUNITY.

AJAHN AMARO HAS WRITTEN A NUMBER OF BOOKS, INCLUDING AN ACCOUNT OF AN 830-MILE TREK FROM CHITHURST TO HARNHAM VIHARA CALLED *TUDONG – THE LONG ROAD NORTH*, REPUBLISHED IN THE EXPANDED BOOK *SILENT RAIN*. HIS OTHER PUBLICATIONS INCLUDE *SMALL BOAT, GREAT MOUNTAIN* (2003), *RAIN ON THE NILE* (2009) AND *THE ISLAND – AN ANTHOLOGY OF THE BUDDHA'S TEACHINGS ON NIBBĀNA* (2009) CO-WRITTEN WITH AJAHN PASANNO, A GUIDE TO MEDITATION CALLED *FINDING THE MISSING PEACE* AND OTHER WORKS DEALING WITH VARIOUS ASPECTS OF BUDDHISM.

CATASTROPHE/APOSTROPHE

THE BUDDHA'S TEACHING ON DEPENDENT ORIGINATION/CESSATION

BY AJAHN AMARO

AMARAVATI BUDDHIST MONASTERY
ST MARGARETS
GREAT GADDESDEN
HEMEL HEMPSTEAD
HERTFORDSHIRE HP1 3BZ

ISBN 978-1-78432-179-6

COVER AND TEXT DESIGN AND FORMATTING: NICHOLAS HALLIDAY · HALLIDAYBOOKS.COM


AMARAVATI
PUBLICATIONS
FOR FREE DISTRIBUTION
Also available as a free eBook