

# treasure trove

By

Venerable Ācariya Thoon Khippapañño

Translated by

Neecha Thian-Ngern

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*Original Sermon by*

Venerable Ācariya Thoon Khippapañño

*Translated by*

Neecha Thian-Ngern

*Illustrated by*

Rungkamol Gunjaekpong

*Layout Design by*

Sirinun Wechasetanon

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For information, address:

309 Northwood Drive,  
South San Francisco, CA 94080  
or email: [neecha.thiangern@gmail.com](mailto:neecha.thiangern@gmail.com)

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## Preface

Venerable Ācariya Thoon Khippapañño gave these sermons at Yarnna Rangsee Buddhist Monastery in Sterling, Virginia between May 29 and June 6, 1998. During this very first of Luang Por Thoon's American Dhamma retreats, Yuvadee Manochaiyakorn recorded seventeen cassette tapes worth of material. Years later, she presented the collection to Saranya Thian-Ngern (Mae Chee Yo).

Upon reviewing the content, Mae Yo realized that many golden principles, such as “two-sides,” “self and self-belongings,” and “compel your mind to truly feel the concept,” could be found in these priceless sermons. These wisdom-based techniques and guidelines have already illuminated the path for many fruitful Dhamma practitioners at KPY USA, San Fran Dhammaram Temple, and around the globe. Thus, the decision was made to print this collection of discourses.

This treasure trove contains the inspiring story of Luang Por Thoon's life and his Dhamma path, jewels from rare question and answer sessions, and invaluable Dhamma shortcuts that may be applied in one's practice.

Luang Por Thoon said that on his brief annual visits, his USA-based students would refrigerate his teachings in order to consume them throughout the year. This Dhamma stash is more than enough to sustain a practitioner for one year. In fact, it may guide a practitioner's entire journey. May the reader benefit from the glorious teachings left to us by our masterful, enlightened teacher, Luang Por Thoon Khippapañño.

## Translator's Note

The Sanskrit version of words like karma and dharma are prevalent in Buddhism's English narrative today. However, this translation incorporates Pāli terms, so those familiar Sanskrit words will take on a slightly different spelling – such as kamma and dhamma. There are differences in meaning when dhamma is capitalized as well. In its uppercase form, Dhamma represents the Buddha's teachings, while its lowercase form refers to the laws of nature, the truth about the way things are, or mental objects.

As is common in interpreting any language, certain Pāli words can take on different meanings depending on the context. For example, paññā mainly translates to wisdom, but can also denote examination, analysis, thought, reasoning, or intuitive insight. Bhava, which is frequently translated as becoming, can also mean existence, life, realm, or birth.

Then there are cultural differences in meaning to contend with. The widespread practice of silent, sitting meditation that is the face of Buddhism today is commonly referred to as samādhi. However, the original Pāli term doesn't only come in the tranquil version. Samādhi translates to concentration or unification of the mind. Serene meditation is only one of many incarnations of concentration. In this text, "meditation" will be used to refer to the contemporary connotation of samādhi (sitting or tranquil meditation) and not the denotation of the word (contemplation or deep reflection).

Navigating naming conventions can be confusing, as there are many ways of referring to a single individual. When Thoon Nonruecha ordained, he was given a dhamma name reflecting his lightning fast wisdom: Khippapañño (or Khippapanyo). Venerable Ācariya Thoon Khippapañño is his full formal monk name, while Luang Por Thoon or simply Luang Por is the familiar name his students call him. Ācariya is the Pāli word for teacher (Ajarn, Ajahn, or Ajaan are the common Thai versions), that is typically used for monks who have been ordained for at least ten rains retreats. Kru Ba is a Thai term for teacher that is used to address junior monks in the north and northeastern regions of Thailand. In Thai, Luang means honorable or venerable, Pee means elder sibling, Por means father, and Pu and Ta mean paternal grandfather and maternal grandfather, respectively.

In the conversation sections, “LPT” represents Luang Por Thoon, while “P” denotes a practitioner asking the question or conversing with Luang Por. “P” does not always indicate the same individual.

A glossary is included at the end of the text.







**May 29, 1998**

If you've never practiced thinking, you won't know how to think, and your practice will stall. Establishing wisdom (paññā) at the forefront of your Dhamma practice is most critical. Wisdom blazes the trail and leads the way, just as light guides us through darkness. When someone travels through a dark or obscured area, they need some kind of light – whether it is a flashlight or a lamp – to illuminate the trail. Likewise, you must train your wisdom to be your mind's vanguard. As it stands, you have never trained or developed your wisdom, so it is incapable of directing your mind. All you know how to do is think in circles. It is crucial that you train your thoughts and foster your wisdom, because your mind conforms to your thoughts. Wherever you direct your thoughts, your mind will follow. Many people do not understand that training in wisdom is imperative and instead believe that meditation (samādhi) will birth wisdom. This is hogwash. How can people advocate this?

I have read the Buddhist Pāli Canon (Tipiṭaka) and thoroughly researched the histories of the holy individuals (ariyapuggalas) during the Buddha's time. How did the various monks, nuns (bhikkhunī), novices (sāmaṇera), and laypeople who attained any level of enlightenment – whether it be ultimate enlightenment (arahant), non-returning (anāgāmi), once-returning (sakadāgāmi), or stream-entry (sotāpanna) – practice? How did each of them start their practice such that it concluded in fruitful attainment? There must be actual examples and rational evidence to support your Dhamma practice ideology.

These days, the books in circulation contradict these accounts, but people are oblivious to that fact. The truth still exists, yet people fail to expose it or talk about it. Throughout the entire Tipiṭaka, the discourses (sutta) speak of the truth, yet people do not bring these truths to light. They do not speak of the Buddha's true method of practice. Instead, they exalt the ascetic way. It's not enough they glorify the practice of meditation, but they go a step further and proclaim that wisdom will emerge from meditation. Perhaps those who advocate this notion have neglected to read the entire Tipiṭaka. Where can you find wisdom arising from meditation? When did the Buddha ever teach this concept to anyone? People don't even consider this.

The Tipiṭaka screams, *Wisdom! Wisdom!* but no one reads or listens. And because they don't read the discourses, they don't know that it's always wisdom at the forefront of practice. Nevertheless, people continue to author books on meditation and usher confusion and chaos into the community. Lay devotees are confused enough about how to practice, then they read these pro-meditation manuals and buy into the hype. I feel bad for the practitioners who have failed to



do their homework and the teachers pushing illogical claims. Why are they teaching these silly notions? The true teachings exist. Why aren't they teaching what is valuable and beneficial? It's not easy though, because meditation books are so widely disseminated. Even if you hear the truth, you can't follow it. There simply aren't enough people promoting the truth. I'm the only one in Thailand.

Everywhere you go, you hear people advocating for meditation practice. It won't be easy for me, but I will do everything within my power to get the truth out there. Sometimes, I hear senior monks plugging the wisdom arising from meditation theory and I wonder if they've bothered to study actual noble individual (*ariyapuggala*) accounts. They've obviously read the *Tipiṭaka* – evidenced by their completion of secondary or advanced level Buddhist studies – but perhaps their reading was merely perfunctory and that's why they so vigorously promote meditation. As if meditation is our salvation. The ascetics (*tāpasa*) practiced it and what good did it do them?

When you look into the accounts of the ariyapuggalas, you must study until you truly understand what you're reading. It's not difficult. In fact, it's blatantly clear. Every discourse exemplifies wisdom. Start with the earliest disciples. What were the first five monks (Pañcavaggiya) taught such that they were able to become ariyapuggalas? They were taught wisdom. They were not taught meditation. Yasakulaputta and his company of fifty were also taught wisdom and they became ariyapuggalas. They were not taught to compete for higher meditative absorptions (jhāna). The group of thirty people who were chasing after a prostitute were taught in the forest. They lacked any familiarity with meditation whatsoever, yet they were still able to attain enlightenment. Why don't people consider this? They were not instructed to start practicing by delving into meditative absorptions. They were taught the truth so that they would gain wisdom. They innately possessed wisdom and they achieved arahantship. The three Jaṭila ascetics and their entourage of one thousand were also taught wisdom. Every single holy individual was taught wisdom. Yet, this is precisely what people can't seem to grasp.

I will not preach at a place where they are intensely pro-meditation because my presence will only incite conflict. I wouldn't know how to teach what they preach. I would feel embarrassed of myself preaching something that isn't true. Why is it that people persist in teaching these falsehoods?

So how, precisely, did regular laypeople become ariyapuggalas? They all did it with wisdom. They were not made to sit down and compete to see who would delve deeper into serene meditation. No, it wasn't like that at all when the Buddha was alive. Apparently, things are

different now. How on Earth do contemporary manuals justify their claims? The idea sounds good, but there aren't any individuals who can substantiate this theory. If the claim were actually true, there must be an example of someone during the Buddha's time who can validate it.

I have posed this question to meditators before. What did they think about meditation siring wisdom? All of the one hundred people questioned responded in the same way, that once one practiced tranquil meditation to a certain point, wisdom would burst out and attack one's various defilements (kilesas). Once all the impurities were eradicated, one would automatically become an ariyapuggala. This is what meditation practitioners believe. What about you all? What do you think about this? It is how I've described?

P: Yes, that's what we've heard, too. But it doesn't actually work.

LPT: It only works hypothetically in their minds. It is a shame that the Buddha's teachings are forsaken for that of the ascetic sages and seers. Everyone has read about when the Buddha first embarked on his journey as an ascetic. He studied with the two sages. And what happened? He sat in meditation for five whole years. Once his mind entered a serene meditative state, it was as if nothing was happening. All was calm. His mind was immersed in the equanimity (upekkhā) of the meditative absorptions (jhāna) where everything vanished. Yasodharā, Rāhula, his parents, and the city of Kapilavattu faded away, leaving peaceful bliss in their place. But when he withdrew from that meditative state, the bliss faded with it. He began to long for Yasodharā, Rāhula, his parents, and Kapilavattu again. So, he dove back into the meditative state, only to emerge and be greeted by the same thoughts that had been waiting for him.



The Buddha had cultivated a wisdom-prominent personality (paññādhika), so his wisdom was whole and consummate. That being so, why didn't his wisdom burst out when he was deeply immersed in a tranquil meditative state? Consider the evidence and you will see that meditation is not the true path. You must find a new path. All of you are carrying on blindly, and it's not getting you anywhere. Just like a blind man paddling a boat in a pool, you can paddle your heart out just to circle the same spot.

When water is placed in a freezer, it will solidify. Once that ice is removed from the freezer and left out, it will melt and become water again. Put it in the freezer and it will solidify. Take it out of the freezer and it'll liquify. These actions do not have any inherent meaning. The practice of meditation mirrors this scenario. When you meditate, you're happy. Once you stop, the happiness melts away within the hour. You meditate again, and you're back to being happy. Nothing really happens. People carry on this way without any growth or forward progress.

These days, there is heavy marketing for meditation. Why is there only a muted buzz for the true path of wisdom? Can you cure the wrong understanding that meditation begets wisdom? If you subscribe to that ubiquitous notion, are you wrong (*micchā*) or right (*sammā*)?

Many people who come to see me in Thailand understand this. But those who don't come to see me believe what they are told by other masters. They criticize me, claiming that what I preach is at odds with the manuals. It makes me want to get on a platform and open up the *Tipiṭaka*. Show me where I'm wrong. I will show you solid evidence of how wisdom arises. Starting with the *Pañcavaggiya* and ending with the last disciple, *Subhadda*, it was always wisdom.

The only point of contention may be *Cūlapanthaka*, to whom the Buddha gave a white cloth to hold and use as a meditative object. But even that was alert and focused concentration, not silent meditation. Concentration must be separated into two classes, but people these days won't make the distinction. Once they start to meditate, they will only practice tranquility. The most important part of concentration is being alert and focused. Being tranquil is not as important. While *Cūlapanthaka* held and rubbed the white cloth, was that meditation? Yes. It was alert and focused meditation, not serene meditation. You have to make this distinction. He was alert and focused because he had a task at hand. He was concentrating on rubbing the cloth in his hand. Thus, he was not still or serene. If his mind was already in a tranquil meditative absorption (*jhāna*), he would be unable to hold the cloth. Full meditative concentration (*appanā samādhi*) or meditative attainments (*jhāna samāpatti*) are vacant states in which nothing registers; the mind is in a deep slumber. You would be completely oblivious to feces under your

nose, a ghost, or even a tiger in your presence. You're essentially sound asleep. But people don't understand this.

Alert and focused concentration is like when you are in bed but unable to fall asleep. In an alert and focused state, you can still think and hear various sounds. This is because you are not asleep. Your eyes are shut, but your mind is not.

All that is being taught these days is tranquil meditation. I pity those instructors because they did not read the Buddha's manual, but instead opted to read the ascetic's manual. They use ascetic principles for their lessons and claim them to be the teachings of the Buddha. Are these doctrines actually a part of the Buddha's teachings? These principles are an offshoot of a minor vein, but definitely not a major artery to the heart of Buddhism. Meditation only supports wisdom; it doesn't lead it. It is like how the act of resting or sleeping will recharge us so that we can continue to work. Rest only serves as a support for work. The rest gained through meditation furnishes us with the energy to develop our wisdom. If you think about this rationally, you'll understand.

For any type of work that we are to do, we must first research and understand its nature. People are wrong (*micchā*) because they buy into the concept that once the mind is in a tranquil state, wisdom will charge forward, strike down all defilements and desires, and you will easily join the ranks of those who have attained the fruit of liberation (*ariyapuggalas*). This is beyond foolish. You haven't even tried to address this glaring blind spot. How on Earth do you suppose you'll become an *ariyapuggala*? The *ariyapuggalas* are not fools. They are wise and comprehensively intelligent. The notion of "wisdom arising" is completely misinterpreted. The way books



describe the emergence of wisdom cannot be corroborated by reality. What actually arises is an understanding of reality as it exists. It doesn't arise like a sudden explosion of a geyser. It's a gradual understanding that arises, reality progressively coming into sharper focus. This is what arising means. People misinterpret this concept of arising. Now, what questions do you have for me?

P: I'd like to ask about something I read in one of your books. While walking behind Venerable Sāriputta on an alms round, a sāmaṇera saw a man fine-tuning his arrow so that it would be straight. The novice then returned to the temple and contemplated this. I would like to know how he contemplated so that he became an ariyapuggala.

LPT: Once the sāmaṇera saw the man tuning his arrow, he asked Venerable Sāriputta what the man was doing, why he was doing it, and for what aim? Venerable Sāriputta told the novice that the fletcher was straightening the arrow. With a straight arrow, a hunter would be able to shoot his desired target. With a warped arrow, his arrow could take a curved course and miss its intended target. The novice realized this as a metaphor for himself. If he had an understanding that was aligned straight, everything else would fall into its proper place.

The sāmaṇera then saw farmers carrying water into the fields. Soil encircled the water. Again, the novice asked his teacher what the people were doing. Venerable Sāriputta told him that they were channeling water to the fields. The novice realized that the water doesn't have consciousness, as it isn't alive, yet it can still flow into the fields. And what was the purpose of corralling this water? Water normally flows to lower ground, but once the water was contained

in this manner, it could be made to flow to higher ground. The novice internalized this and realized that our minds also tend to flow to lower ground. The things we like and desire are all low and base. Mindfulness and wisdom are like encircling or containing the mind, preventing it from flowing to lower ground.

As the novice asked his questions, he thoughtfully considered the answers. He wasn't in a serene state of meditation. His wisdom was beginning to arise as he started to grasp the rational explanations his teacher had provided. Once his wisdom began to sprout, the novice abandoned his alms round and returned to the temple. He realized that he needed to think. While Venerable Sāriputta continued on the alms round, the novice returned to his hut to contemplate. He reflected over his mind, the arrow, and the water. He was driving the Dhamma lessons home to his heart. He considered how the arrow being straight or curved was just like the mind which is curved and continues to circle the wheel of rebirth (saṃsāra). Sometimes we travel to the heavenly abodes, to the celestial heavens, or to the hell realms. We don't take the straight path. Our curved path prevents us from hitting the target. And the water was likened to our minds which have the tendency to flow to lower ground and need to be corralled in order to flow to higher ground. The novice contemplated on the topic of his own mind. Everything he contemplated was related to the Three Common Characteristics (Tilakkhaṇa), change, and uncertainty – as was typical while the Buddha was alive. While the novice was contemplating these things, he did not enter tranquil meditation because he was actively thinking. He used wisdom as he contemplated.

Now, at that point, the sāmaṇera had not yet attained ultimate emancipation as an arahant. As Venerable Sāriputta was on his way

back to the temple, the Buddha had the supernatural insight to know that Venerable Sāriputta would bring food to the novice. The Buddha also knew that the novice was just hitting his stride in his continuous stream of contemplations. The Buddha did not want Venerable Sāriputta to disturb the novice or interrupt his thought flow because Venerable Sāriputta was unaware of what his pupil was up to. Thus, the Buddha conjured up a vision of himself in order to block the way, and he invited Venerable Sāriputta to chat until the novice entered arahantship. Once the novice was fully liberated from the chains of rebirth, the Buddha allowed Venerable Sāriputta to return to the temple. This is the story of the paṇḍita sāmaṇera, or wise novice.

These days, there are so many people determined to practice. It's a shame that their practice doesn't align with the Buddha's teachings. Their confusion undermines their determination.

P: Did the Buddha Sikhī arise before our Buddha?

LPT: Yes. The order goes Buddha Sikhī, Vessabhū, Kakusandha, Koṇāgamana, Kassapa, and then our Buddha – Buddha Gotama.

P: That's so many years. How was the Buddha able to see so far back?

LPT: He knew everything. And why wouldn't he? If you aren't sleeping, you can contemplate (bhāvanā) and know things for yourself. Everything comes from contemplation.

P: Does bhāvanā mean meditative mantras or wisdom?

LPT: Wisdom. Look, you'd have to know how to meditate. What you're asking about is attained through meditation.

After contemplating on the topic with wisdom, you look inward. *What pāramī have I cultivated in the past that has landed me where I am in the present?* You focus your mind on this self-examination, and you may discover the answer.

P: So, the body is extinguished but the mind (citta) is not extinguished, right?

LPT: Yes, that's right. Our minds never age and don't know how to die. Aging is a physical issue, not a mental one.

P: What about consciousness (viññāṇa)?

LPT: Viññāṇa is only a symptom of the mind. It comes from the mind but is not the mind itself. It merely senses on behalf of the mind. Consciousness means sensing and acknowledging all the stimuli that come into contact with us through our eyes, ears, nose, tongue, body, and heart – sensing and acknowledging physical forms, sounds, scents, flavors, all of it. It can recognize cold or hot. However, the act of sensing and acknowledging is not a defilement. It is only a job or duty. What is the duty of the five aggregates (khandas)? Are tangible form (rūpa), feeling (vedanā), memory (saññā), mental formations or imagination (saṅkhāra), and consciousness (viññāṇa) defilements? No, these aggregates are also not defilements. But they do provide lodging for defilements. You must be able to vanquish the five aggregates. These five houses are abodes in which infamous thieves have once resided. The house itself is not a thief, though it can provide thieves with lodging. After the thieves are put away, the house will still remain a house. When you contemplate on the five aggregates, it's not contemplating on defilements. You must use your wisdom to understand this distinction and keep the issues separate. Defilements are another

matter. Desires, needs, and lust are concealed in our minds, and we must use wisdom to evict them. It is wisdom that vanquishes them, not meditation.

P: If you shed the five aggregates (khandas), will your mind-soul (citta) be extinguished?

LPT: No. How is the citta supposed to be extinguished?

P: Will it be not-self (anattā)?

LPT: The citta is not anattā. The khandas are anattā. It's unrelated.

P: Once someone has made it to nibbāna where will the citta be?

LPT: There is no becoming (bhava), no life existence. Once you have arrived at that point, it's not referred to as "citta," but rather as the purity of dhamma. For the most part, it is simply referred to as the purity of the soul. However, that is not accurate because it is really just purity.

P: Another monk said nibbāna means an empty soul – the emptiness of the universe.

LPT: That is one way to look at it. But how well does that actually describe nibbāna? The truth is that it doesn't. There is no "empty" or "not empty," because the term "empty" is merely a convention (sammuti) used for the sake of comparison and to facilitate ease in understanding. Though he may be an ariyapuggala, our interpretations can take different paths. The words we use to construct concepts are different, and some monks may lack theoretical knowledge. We do not label the emptiness you're referring to as "empty" or "not empty," nor do we say where or how the citta exists. There is no becoming, no place in which to exist,

travel to, or come from, and there is no up or down. To interpret it as extinct or cessation of existence (anattā) is not accurate, either.

P: That's confusing.

LPT: Don't waste time being confused with this terminology. Let it happen to you first, then you will know.

P: How did Venerable Ācariya Mun Bhuridatta appear to teach you even though he had already entered nibbāna? Was it his citta that came to you?

LPT: It was his virtue, not Ācariya Mun himself. It was the virtue resulting from our having been associated with one another in the past. Suppose your parents committed meritorious deeds and entered a heavenly abode upon their deaths. You dream of them doing various things, in various settings. They haven't actually come to you, but you see them in your dream. What is it that you see? It is your parents' virtue that is imprinted on you and seared in your mind. The virtue displays itself before you, that's all. It's a figment of your imagination (saṅkhāra).

P: So, when he comes to teach you various Dhamma lessons, it's his virtue reminding you of something? His virtue teaches you a topic even though you haven't even considered that topic?

LPT: His virtue appeared in order to present a Dhamma metaphor.

P: But you weren't asleep? It was in meditation?

LPT: I wasn't asleep. It was his virtue. To illustrate, Venerable Mahā Kassapa has already entered nibbāna, but his body has not

been cremated. His body is currently buried in a mountain with three peaks. The fire used to burn his body has not been extinguished – it cannot be extinguished – and it will continue to burn brightly into the era of Buddha Metteyya. The reason that the fire cannot be extinguished is because of the association Venerable Mahā Kassapa still has with Buddha Metteyya. When Buddha Metteyya becomes enlightened, he will personally cremate Venerable Mahā Kassapa. He will place Venerable Mahā Kassapa in his left palm and use his supernormal meditative powers to burn his body.

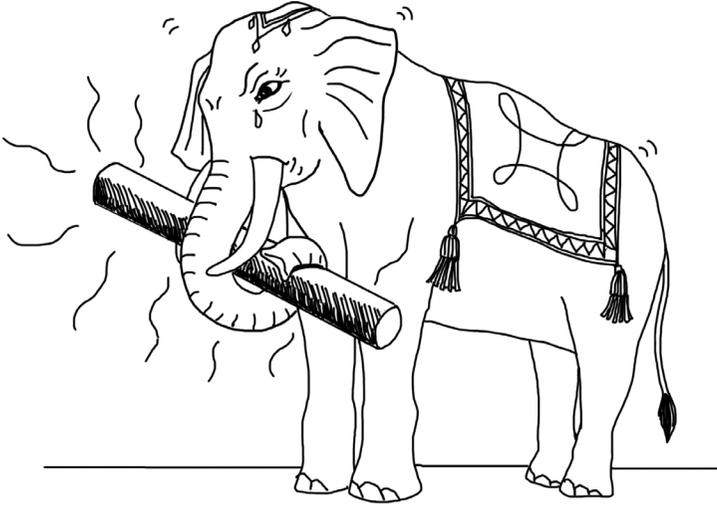
P: Where is the fire?

LPT: It's burning beside his body. It's a devotional fire, a magical fire. It cannot be extinguished.

P: Where is this mountain?

LPT: The books call it Kukkutasampāta Mountain, although they don't specify the exact location. I don't know if it is even in our country. It's a deep cave that's completely closed up. No one can see it. Only the celestial beings (devatās) can go and pay their respects.

So, what is this association Venerable Mahā Kassapa and Buddha Metteyya have with one another? A long, long time ago, Buddha Gotama was a great king and Buddha Metteyya was a mahout, or an elephant trainer. Venerable Mahā Kassapa was a royal bull-elephant who was well-trained and easy to look after. One day, the king made a trip into the forest. As the royal bull-elephant caught the scent of a female elephant, he was overcome by lust. The mahout stood by utterly helpless. The king was thrown from the elephant, and was enraged. How could such a well-trained elephant become like this?



Regardless of how well-trained anything is, if it is overcome with lust, that training will disintegrate. Sensual pleasures are a major issue. Nothing, neither humans nor animals, surpasses sensual pleasures (kāmagaṇa). They say hermits and monks endowed with special meditative powers may be able to fly and walk on air, but they will plummet straight to the ground once they encounter the forces of sensual pleasures. It's interesting and it makes sense. The reasoning is there.

Afterwards, they tested the elephant to see whether its high competence in being trained in other matters could translate to the matter of lust. The mahout stuck a metal bar into the blazing fire and made the elephant wrap its trunk around the searing hot bar. Buddha Metteyya was the mahout who forced the elephant, who would become Venerable Mahā Kassapa, to hold the scorching red bar until it died from it. This is the kamma they committed towards one another, and it is why Buddha Metteyya must be the one to personally cremate Venerable Mahā Kassapa.



P: Why did Venerable Mahā Kassapa have to be born during the era of Buddha Gotama?

LPT: They were associated in many other matters.

P: They were connected in other lifetimes?

LPT: Yes, in other lives as well. They ran in the same circles. Through cultivating meritorious acts and perfections of character (pāramī) together, they came to be reborn together again. Their pāramī isn't cultivated with only one group of associates, but many groups. Their group was the Buddha's disciples (sāvaka) – meaning elder disciples. Ordinary arahants are not included here. It was the elder disciples who came as a group because of their past associations. We don't have a group. We are not the Buddha's sāvaka. We are like transients or nomads, so we don't have a group and we don't warrant any prophecies.

When the Buddha was to be born, he had to survey the era to see whether or not everything was ready. He had to consider the five omens (nimitta):

1. The life expectancy of humans in that era. If the average human life span was below one hundred years, the Buddha would not be able to come into existence. He would only be able to be born in an era with a life span above one hundred years.
2. Whether or not the Buddha's father and mother had already been born.
3. Whether or not the Buddha's right-hand and left-hand disciples (Venerable Sāriputta and Venerable Mahā Moggallāna) had already been born.

4. Whether or not the Buddha's attendants, like Ānanda, had already been born.
5. Whether or not the elder disciples (sāvaka) who had cultivated virtues together had already been born.

If all five omens had occurred, the Buddha would come to be born. This is what it was like during the Buddha's time. All of us are just ordinary, inconsequential disciples [laughs]. Once we have eradicated our defilements and desires, we are instantly out of here. We could do it under any Buddha. It doesn't matter, so long as we make it out. Listening to this Buddha is like listening to the next Buddha. Every Buddha's teachings are the same: right view (sammādiṭṭhi) and right thought (sammāsankappa) are the bedrock of practice, meditation is not at the forefront of practice, and it is always wisdom that leads the way. It is like this in every Buddha era. The next Buddha era will follow this pattern as well. The Noble Eightfold Path is the only way to become a holy individual. What other questions do you have?

P: In your book, "Entering the Stream of Dhamma," you wrote that insight that all mental intoxications would be eliminated (āsavakhayaṇāṇa) arose, then consciousness (viññāṇa) was extinguished. Was that a temporary extinguishment? Just during the time that the insight (ñāṇa) arose, right? Because when you say that the mind-soul (citta) doesn't get extinguished, isn't viññāṇa a part of the citta? That's what has me wondering. And then after that, vedanā is extinguished.

LPT: It happens all at once, simultaneously; in a fleeting instant.

P: Due to the power of the insight?

LPT: The citta enters bhavaṅga in that quick instant.

P: And then after that –

LPT: Why are you even asking this?

P: I'm curious because you said the citta doesn't get extinguished –

LPT: I only wrote that to make a record of it. When we say “extinguished” – viññāṇa extinguished and citta extinguished – viññāṇa is not the citta, but a mere symptom of the citta.

P: Does it only get extinguished temporarily, during the time that the insight arises?

LPT: I don't even know why you're asking this. It's pointless.

P: I don't understand.

LPT: It's a natural process. Everyone who attains arahantship will experience it.

P: But after that happens, the citta does not get extinguished?

LPT: It doesn't know how to get extinguished.

P: The citta doesn't get extinguished. So, the citta expires from defilements?

LPT: The defilements are extinguished, not the citta.

P: I'm curious. So, the citta is not anattā.

LPT: Anattā is unrelated.

P: Anattā is not related to the intangible aggregates (nāma)?

LPT: It's unrelated.

P: Anattā is related to tangible form (rūpa), then.

LPT: Once you get to that point, anattā is unrelated. It's a separate matter. But some monks do write about anattā, because they don't know the truth.

P: Someone said that anattā isn't just form-based.

LPT: It's intangible-based (nāma), but it does not concern the purity of the citta. In all the manuals, you'll find anattā linked to the mental components – vedanā-anattā, saññā-anattā – these are all intangible aggregates. But the symptoms of the citta are well beyond that point. It's beyond the five aggregates (khandas). The extinguishing is related to something else.

P: So, I'll have to go back and start over. Luang Por, is it necessary for us to read?

LPT: Yes, so that you can allay any doubts you may have about the veracity of my teachings. Read the histories of the noble individuals.

P: Modern-day ariyapuggalas?

LPT: Those of long ago, during the Buddha's era. Reading it will allow you to immediately decide whether or not it's true that meditation births wisdom. The evidence you uncover will help you be certain of what is true. It'll help alleviate your qualms and misgivings about what is correct or incorrect. People say that wisdom arises from tranquil meditation. Is this true? Read the scriptures so that you can stop wondering. Otherwise we'll just keep arguing like this. *This monk said this* – you'll keep questioning and hesitating. Once you've read up, when any monk teaches you that

meditation begets wisdom, you'll be able to instantly reject the teaching. It just simply isn't supported by the scriptures – not the Buddha's scriptures. I've read through so much and nowhere in the scriptures is there proof for that theory. Why wouldn't you be filled with apprehension if you haven't done your reading and research? If someone teaches you that wisdom is produced by meditation, toss it out. It's not the Buddha's teaching. If you have misgivings about what is true, read the scriptures and you'll know for yourself. There's no model for that paradigm, not a single person to support it.

P: Does the god of death (Yama) really exist? In the discourses, there doesn't seem to be any mention of one.

LPT: You'll know when you die. You just didn't complete your reading of the discourses, because they do mention a god of death. Anywhere they talk about hell, there's mention of him. You can't just read one page; you have to read the entire book – many books. If you read a book that doesn't mention a god of death, of course you won't find any mention of him. He's definitely mentioned.

Have you ever read about Revatī and Nandiya? Go read up on the discourse. Revatī was Nandiya's wife. Although her husband was a faithful devotee, Revatī was not. Nandiya invited the Buddha to partake in a meal at their house and extended an invitation to have five hundred monks take a meal at their house daily. One day, Nandiya was not available to serve the monks, so he asked his wife to perform his responsibilities. But Revatī was not a faithful believer. She was stingy and afraid that her provisions would be depleted. Once her husband was out of sight, Revatī began to concoct a plan to prevent the monks from being invited to her house. Once the monks finished their meal and left the house, Revatī had people



scatter rice bits on the ground. Then, she called the townspeople to come and witness the disrespectful and sloppy behavior of the monks who had come to eat at her house. Revatī proclaimed that the monks' conduct during the meal was unbecoming, and as a result she would no longer invite them to eat at her house.

Once Nandiya returned many months later, Revatī informed her husband of what had allegedly transpired. She told him that the monks were not composed during the meal, and thus she had no faith in them. That's why she hadn't invited them to take meals at their house. But, Nandiya did not buy her story. He knew what the monks were like. He knew the nature of the arahants. So, he invited the monks to take their meal at his house as usual. As a faithful devotee, Nandiya also built a house and several small huts for the monks. Nandiya's merit bore fruit as a marvelous palace in the Tāvatiṃsā heaven. Soon thereafter, Revatī's deeds caught up with her. A god of death assumed the form of a demon (yakkha) and

captured Revatī. He exposed her evils to the townsfolk and proclaimed her a slanderous destroyer of the Buddhist religion. He then proceeded to take her to the Tāvātimsā heaven where he showed her Nandiya's magnificent castle. Revatī announced that she was not going any further. She wanted to live in her husband's castle. The demon told her that she would not be staying there. She was then taken to the hell realm and punished. Revatī begged to be taken home, but the god of death took hold of her legs, held her upside down and slowly submerged her into a boiling pot just like a frog dipped into a pot of boiling water. To this day, Revatī still has not emerged from hell. There are examples, if only you finish reading all of them. Many examples, in fact.

P: This story is in the Tipiṭaka?

LPT: Yes.

P: What about Xuanzang? Where is he now? Has he been reborn yet?

LPT: I don't know. I've never read the story of Xuanzang.

P: The last piece of news told of his being in the Tusita heaven.

LPT: I only read the Buddhist historical accounts – Theravāda only, not Mahāyāna. We follow the Theravāda tradition, so that's what you should read. Xuanzang belongs to the Chinese Mahāyāna tradition.

P: Your book states that Venerable Ācariya Khao Anālayo said a deer entered the woods but could not be found. Is it because the deer was merely a figment of his imagination?

LPT: Luang Pu Khao only supposed there was a deer. He supposed

that hundreds of thousands of people encircled the woods and marched forward, side by side, overturning every leaf and blade of grass. Yet, the deer could not be found. It's only an analogy. You don't see the lust (rāga) in your mind, but does it exist? People will search their minds and presume that it doesn't. Again, you haven't read the entire text [laughs].

P: When it comes to contemplating, I don't understand what Dhamma topics we should normally be thinking about.

LPT: Impermanence (anicca) works, or suffering (dukkha), or not-self (anattā). Contemplating on impermanence means thinking about things that change and are inconstant. Each of the Three Common Characteristics – anicca, dukkha, and anattā – govern the whole universe. They encompass the entire Three Realms of Existence. There's impermanence right here where we are sitting. For instance, is the shirt you're wearing impermanent? There are no gaps in impermanence. Stick the tip of a needle anywhere in this world and there is impermanence. Only, we don't see this. There is nothing within the Three Realms that is permanent. With wisdom, you will be able to contemplate on this on an expansive scale. You lack wisdom.

P: How can we make wisdom arise?

LPT: The generation of wisdom, or wisdom arising, refers to the emergence of understanding – understanding that is aligned with the truth.

P: When I contemplate, it's not every time that wisdom arises. Sometimes it's unclear and I get confused.



LPT: That's because your contemplation lacks thoroughness. It's not comprehensive and it's not clear. That's why you have misgivings. With constant contemplation, you will form comprehensive understandings and eradicate all doubts and suspicions.

P: Sometimes I think that I understand some of it, or enough of it anyway.

LPT: You understand but cannot put it to use. In contemplating any issue, you must train yourself to truly feel what you are thinking about. For example, if you are on the topic of impermanence, you must truly understand precisely how ephemeral things are. This way, you feel the emotions and comprehend the disillusioned reality of the situation. The disenchanting truth in your mind must truly come to life. It is as if you are acting in a drama. When the script calls for it, your tears must fall as you act out all of the corresponding emotions and gestures. If you are sad, the tears must fall. The feelings must be genuine. You must train your mind to personify what you know in your mind.

If you haven't yet trained your wisdom, it will be an uphill climb. Just like how I can't speak English. If an American comes up to me, I'm running into the woods. If someone has never practiced speaking English, they will not be able to. Likewise, you need to train your wisdom so that it corresponds to the Three Common Characteristics (Tilakkhaṇa). You must first learn how to think. Try thinking for an entire month. Thinking momentarily isn't enough, you have to think continuously. Just like with plants. It is impossible for a plant to blossom beautifully after only one watering. Similarly, you can't teach your kids just once and have it last for their whole entire lives.

Even when your kids are grown, or pregnant with their own kids, you must still teach them. If you teach them often, your message will slowly permeate. When a child is born, you teach it right away. The newborn is oblivious, yet you teach it. The more often you teach the child, the more the teachings become ingrained. If you take an American child and have Thais raise it, will its personality change? Or if you take a Thai child and have Americans raise it, it'll take on American traits. Teaching is a big issue. You have to teach yourself with wisdom and teach yourself often. Mostly, people don't teach themselves. They read the manuals, believe they understand, and leave it at that.

P: And then they forget. But if you contemplate and truly understand, then you won't forget, right?

LPT: You can't forget, because it is entrenched in your mind. The principles of how to teach your mind with wisdom exist. There are many principles, in fact. However, people are uninterested and unable to follow these guidelines. When a forest monkey is captured, it cannot climb a coconut tree. You have to train it first. Can a forest parrot squawk "Buddho, Dhammo, Sangho"? You have to train it first. Everything requires training. If you don't have wisdom, you have to practice thinking. Eventually, you will become accustomed to contemplating. You must observe the things that you come into contact with. Don't just let your observations go. Rather, you should use them to contemplate on the situation.

Impermanence is everywhere, and if you practice thinking about it for a while, you will find your way. You have been in the dark because you have never trained yourself to think in this way. Zeal or the will to do (*chanda*) hasn't yet arisen, but after you practice

contemplating, it will. It is like dancing. Once you are able to learn one move, the other moves will follow with ease. The same goes for singing. After learning how to sing your first song, the second song will come with ease. Through more practice, you'll develop your own rhythm.

In training your wisdom, do not emulate what you have learned from the scriptures or elsewhere. Those concepts are the wisdom belonging to other people. You should read them as examples, but don't claim them as your own. You must use your own wisdom. Start over. It's alright to make mistakes in thinking, so long as you think. After you become skilled at thinking, you will develop techniques and strategies. It is impossible to expect that you will get everything right. To err is normal.

A contractor who builds houses doesn't get it right the first time. From clumsy beginnings, as time advances, the contractor will be able to progress and build more beautiful structures. Every kind of skill must start from being rough and imprecise, only to evolve into being more detailed and precise with experience. So, how can you improve? Well, everyone here had trouble with English and was anxious when they first started out. But now, you all can speak as well as the natives. You all improved with constant practice. What other questions do you have?

P: When we contemplate, should we contemplate while in alert and focused meditation, which is momentary mindfulness (*khaṇika samādhi*)? What about access mindfulness (*upacāra samādhi*)?

LPT: They are similar.

P: Is absorption mindfulness (*appanā-samādhi*) too serene?

LPT: Yes. Look, the different states of meditation do not announce, “I am khaṇika!” They’ve simply been given labels based on their characteristics.

P: The reason I ask is because when I work, I simultaneously contemplate. That concentration is alert and focused, and my eyes are open.

LPT: That alert focus is innate to all of us. Anyone can do it, in any activity, regardless of religious beliefs. Anyone who does what you’ve described is applying alert and focused concentration.

P: Because we have mindfulness (sati)?

LPT: Mindfulness is a given. There’s no need to speak of it. Alert and focused concentration is not mindfulness. Don’t mix them up. It’s like someone is sleeping and you ask them, “Are you sleeping or dead?” Why would you ask? Obviously, they’re sleeping.

P: Well, I just thought that if I’m focused, then I’m being mindful.

LPT: They come together.



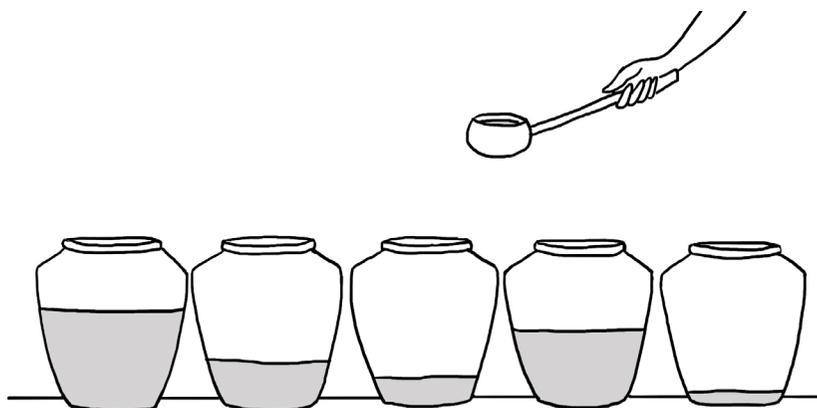
**May 30, 1998**

*First Sermon*

It is not difficult to seek out the truth (dhamma) to understand. There is plenty of dhamma all around us. However, in order to develop a comprehensive understanding, you must refer to the manuals. Listening to me explain things will not provide you with a blanket understanding of all the topics. What I am speaking about is only a couple squares in the entire quilt. As laypeople, it is really difficult to develop a true understanding by reading manuals. This is because worldly affairs have consumed all of your time, leaving no time for dedicated learning and Dhamma research. Teachers must find time to study and practice Dhamma, then relate that information to their pupils. The teachers, themselves, cannot teach everything because they can't possibly know every single Dhamma topic. They can only teach what they know. They read manuals describing Dhamma practice starting from the basics and ending with nibbāna. Come morning, they must comb their minds for a topic suitable for their audience.

For laypeople, practice is of a rudimentary level. To lay down the basics all the way up to nibbāna in one sitting is impossible. Thus, I will speak of the initial steps on the path to nibbāna – the Dhamma for stream entry attainment (sotāpanna). You should be able to reach that level in this lifetime. Simply put, it is an easy task when everything comes together at the right time. It will be difficult to find your way if things don't fall into place or you are on the wrong path. Dhamma works like a lock and key. Sometimes your key fits into the lock but cannot turn it. Likewise, you can practice Dhamma, but if what you are practicing does not fit into your style or personality, you will not see results.

Anyone can swallow a pill prescribed by a doctor, but is that medication well-suited to the actual ailment? If not, the remedy will achieve nothing except allergic reactions or undesired side effects, like indigestion. The same can be said for a Dhamma teacher prescribing an antidote for a sick pupil. The greatest doctor we know of is the Buddha. He was a living X-ray machine, able to see through all people. The Buddha could see what kind of personality each person carried with them through countless rebirths. He could also see precisely what virtues (pāramī) and merit (puñña) they cultivated, as well as the circumstances in which they did so. The Buddha knew all of this. He carefully selected each topic of Dhamma to complement the personalities and virtues his pupils had cultivated. That is why during the Buddha's lifetime, people found Dhamma practice to be simple and straightforward. Accordingly, they easily attained the fruits on the path to nibbāna. Because the examples of dhamma that the Buddha taught his pupils were aligned with the course of virtues they had cultivated in the past, they could follow his teachings without breaking a stride. Or even if they had strayed



off that course, the establishment of the link between the past and present was all that was needed to get back on course.

It is like pouring water into buckets. Suppose one day, you pour some water into one bucket, and then you forget about it. The next day, you pour water into a different bucket. But this bucket also does not get filled. As you wonder why the new bucket is not full, you also cannot seem to locate the old bucket. Each day, you continue to pour water into a brand-new bucket, all the while never topping off the old ones. You pour water into buckets for years and years, without ever topping off any of them. Dhamma practice is the same way. If you had cultivated a particular kind of virtue in the past, but in this lifetime, you create new virtue that does not complement your old virtue, nothing will come of it. Even if you wager your life in the quest to attain a stage of holiness, it will be futile if you cannot link your past efforts to your present.

During the Buddha's time, he would be able to tell you exactly what kind of meritorious acts or virtues (*pāramī*) you had cultivated, and

you would draw the connection to the present within an instant. It is the same way with the water bucket. In the past, none of the buckets would fill up. If, today, you continue to pour water into a bucket that you had already started to fill, the water will soon reach the brim. This method of filling up a bucket is a lot easier. Day to day, we cultivate virtues without being able to distinguish whether they are brand new or linked to our past. If someone says it is good, we do it. We never link our present actions to our virtues cultivated in the past. Not every Dhamma pitch harmonizes with our past virtues.

Just as with prescribing medicine, there is no universal remedy that heals everyone. Each ailment or patient requires a particular cure. And even if a treatment has worked in the past, it may not be effective when applied to other patients. This also rings true for Dhamma. Back when the Buddha was alive, he used a particular model of the truth to teach a group of disciples and they successfully attained various levels of holiness. Yet, that same model would not prove effective on a different group, because of its incongruence with the virtues they had cultivated. I have conducted a lot of research on how to select Dhamma topics to teach to laypeople. Ultimately my hands are tied, as I lack the supernormal insight to know the fate or cultivated virtues of each person. Even those who had attained arahantship in the Buddha's time did not possess this perceptive faculty, as this insight is unique to the Buddha. He is the only one who will know the personality, fate, and cultivated virtues of others. No one else can know these things, and that is what makes present circumstances exceedingly difficult.

When monks give discourses to their followers, it is as if they are just throwing random topics out there, preaching their best guess.



Those who manage to catch a teaching that can be applied to them are lucky, while those who cannot have just wasted their time. It is the same situation as the lottery, where everyone tries their luck. In Las Vegas, people asked me for winning numbers. It's all a gamble. How many losers are there for every winner? Would one hundred losers suffice? Not likely. It's a gamble. Dhamma practice is also a gamble. If someone has luck on their side, they can put a coin in the slot and hit the jackpot. It is as if it were so easy to do; winning seems so effortless. But then there are those who sit in front of the blinking slots all day without ever collecting. See, the key doesn't fit into the lock.

Practicing Dhamma is the same way. We can all train in the same topic of contemplation, but the results will vary. The Buddha selected certain topics to teach specific followers. If a particular group of people shared the same cultivated virtues and personality type, the Buddha would use the same model of Dhamma to teach them all at once and be done with it. They would all attain a level of holiness together, as a group, because they shared the same characteristics. This is likened to administering identical dosages of Tylenol to patients in a hospital suffering from the same condition. Because they all have headaches, this medication will do the trick. However, those whose headaches stem from a tumor will not be cured. They all came in with headaches, but the latter will not be cured with this remedy.

Some people in Thailand contend that my teachings are incorrect. But in reality, they are not. In fact, it is the reverse that is true – my teachings are correct. My teachings are inaccurate only in the sense that they deviate from what others teach, and that is also precisely why they are accurate. In Thailand, America, and across the world,

meditation is primarily taught. Practitioners are instructed to repeat a meditative phrase and strive for tranquility. What's more, they claim serenity will spontaneously give rise to wisdom. While the Buddha was alive, when did he ever teach this? He didn't. Then why do people tout this concept in contemporary times? Now whose teachings are incorrect? Why do people teach meditation before wisdom? Where did this concept come from? It was non-existent when the Buddha was alive, because the Buddha taught wisdom before meditation. Things are reversed now.

The Buddha taught wisdom by teaching people how to think. And what is thinking? It is using our brains for contemplation; it is each person's individual and innate wisdom. Although we already possess wisdom in its entirety, we have never trained ourselves to think in the correct manner or in terms of the truth. We glide along gracefully when it comes to worldly thoughts, but we fall flat on our faces when we attempt to think about Dhamma. We all have powerful wisdom, but because we don't know how to apply it in terms of Dhamma, it is all consumed in the worldly sphere.

Back in the Buddha's era, he taught people who already possessed wisdom. Why would he waste time with those who didn't? The truth that the Buddha brought to light could be easily understood by those who already had wisdom as a foundation. They would readily comprehend what was right or wrong and evil or good. These people already inherently possessed wisdom, only they had never had anyone stimulate it. The truth exists in this world, but people don't recognize it because no one has ever pointed it out to them.

Just as with overturned jars, people must be told to turn the jars upright in order to be able to collect rainwater. If the container is

face down, it can rain for a million eternities and the jar will never fill up. The technique for flipping the jar over must be pointed out, so that the jar can begin to collect rainwater. It's not that the jar isn't there; it is just lying face down. Likewise, people inherently possess wisdom, but it is customarily applied in worldly affairs. By simply rotating the angle in which you view an issue, you can harness this wisdom in terms of Dhamma. You need to train the wisdom that you innately possess in contemplating the Dhamma. Some claim that the truth doesn't exist. The truth exists, but people don't know how to think about it because they've never practiced. They've been sitting on top of the truth for a long time. In each rebirth and each existence, the truth has been inherent to us. It is everywhere. Stick a tiny needlepoint anywhere in the world, and there the truth exists. You just haven't understood this. The truth exists in every millimeter of the world, but you're blind to it because you don't possess wisdom. Your truth-oriented wisdom has never been trained, so although the truth exists you can't harness it. You must train your mind and wisdom to turn in the direction of the truth.

The term "arise" refers to the generation of understanding that is aligned with the truth. It is when perception, understanding, and the truth are all identical. The terms "see" or "arise" do not refer to a spontaneous burst or explosion. Rather, the terms "see" or "arise" both refer to the same thing. It is an understanding, an illuminating realization consistent with the truth of how things are. In the past, this understanding of what exactly arises was absent and there was no illumination of anything. Everything was taken to be mundane or normal. For example, birth is considered to be normal. Aging is normal. Sickness is normal. Death is normal. Yet, simply knowing that these conditions are normal does not effectively disenchant our

minds. It does not make us fear anything that happens. We simply know that is it normal, and that's all. Practitioners must take normal matters and contemplate on them on a deeper level.

Now, how does birth come about? Find the cause of birth and contemplate such that you understand it. This is how we take “normal” and give it another round of thought. The concept of birth being normal is only a result. We must find the cause, so we know where it comes from. We must search out what it is that births an existence (bhava). It is the chain that connects us sometimes back to the past and sometimes forward to the future. There is truth in the present. This truth can move. It can link back to the past and connect to the future. Where it goes is dependent on how each person chooses to relate it. Commonly used texts often refer to the present in terms of *paccuppannañ ca yo dhammaṃ, tattha tattha vipassati*, or being mindful of only the truth occurring in the present. Consequently, the concept of the present is only applied in terms of meditation – *stay in the present as you meditate. Don't think about anything. Don't think about the past or future. Only stay with the present, don't do anything else.* That's as far as the meditative approach goes in its application of the present.

So, what about the wisdom approach to the present? In the past, nobody but I taught the wisdom version of the present and how to contemplate on our current birth. What is used as the basis for contemplating the present in terms of the wisdom approach? The present life. We use the present as a central pivot between the past behind us and the future ahead of us. Once we have the present as a foundation, we can glance backward into the portrait of our past and peer forward into the vision of our future, all while maintaining our stance in the present.

There are two approaches to the present: the serene meditative approach and the wisdom approach. In contemporary times, people only understand one application of the present – meditation. This does not thoroughly cover the concept of the present. It is an understanding that is incomplete. The meditative approach to the present should be saved for last, because everyone already knows how to meditate and there are many instructors for it. I am going to teach you about something that you have never heard before – the present in terms of mindfulness, wisdom, and insight development (*vipassanā*). From the present life, we can bend backwards to the past. How? By contemplating how the present life came about and contemplating the cause behind this particular birth. What was the cause that compelled your present life? Before being able to take formation as a new life, there would first have to be an existence, or process of becoming (*bhava*).

What is an existence? An existence is when your mind is attached to something, whether it is a house, significant other, or anything else. The object of one's attachment is what defines an existence. When we are at home, we are concerned about our home, but we are overly concerned. Our concern for our children and grandchildren is also in excess. The same goes for just about anything else we are concerned about. Our soul is tied up with concerns and worries, and the soul that is to assume a life-form or birth goes straight to the thing it cares most about. The same goes for this present lifetime. There must be something on this Earth that we are concerned about. It is this concern and attachment to many things on this Earth that has compelled this present birth. This is how we look behind us and contemplate the past.



Where does an existence (bhava) come from? Desire (taṇhā) – desire for sensual pleasures (kāma-taṇhā), desire for existence (bhava-taṇhā), and desire for non-existence (vibhava-taṇhā). The term taṇhā indicates desire or wanting. It is the mind that desires. Defilements (kilesas) are the things that lead us to desire. Desires towards more virtuous things don't often occur. Instead, most desires are worthless or degenerate like those for tangible forms, sounds, scents, tastes, and delicate sensations. The way you understand it, all these things – whatever they may be – belong to you. You want them to remain with you for all of time. Upon owning a house, you want the house to stay with you forever. You don't ever want to have to leave it. You have children, grandchildren, nieces, nephews, money, and all kinds of other assets that you want to remain with you for evermore. This is desire. You desire for your belongings to remain with you forever. You also desire to remain with your belongings forever. There are many layers of desire that come together here.

Desire is where you need to fix things. In dealing with desire, you must employ wisdom as you analyze and contemplate. When you contemplate, you must realize and understand the suffering, harmful outcomes, and perils that arise from desire. Desire itself is a cause. What are its consequences? In cause and effect analysis, desire is variable in that it can also be a result. Desire is the cause. What is the result? Existence is the result. Now, suppose existence is the cause. What is its result? Birth is the result. Now, if birth is the cause, what is the result? Death is a result. Aging, pain, and sickness are also results. This is only an abbreviated analysis.

By arranging and classifying each cause and effect in stages, realization and understanding according to the truth will arise. This can be used to teach and further illuminate the truth for yourself. Once you see the suffering, harmful consequences, and dangers that are generated from all these things, you will be able to let go of them. If understanding of the truth is present, while realization of the harmful consequences inherent in the things you love and hold dear is absent, you will not let go. The attachment will persist. This technique of retracing the past up to the present illustrates how the present birth is used as a foundation for compiling and arranging our lives.

Now, the present can also be used to form comparisons to the future. The defilements, desires, and ignorance (avijjā) festering in our minds will serve as the cause for existence or rebirth. If desire existing in the present life hasn't been addressed or fixed, it will serve as the cause that propels an existence or next life into being. This cycle repeats with each and every rebirth. No matter how many hundred, thousand, million, or countless rebirths, those lives will be just like your present life.

Beforehand, the present was only viewed through the lens of silent meditation. This silent meditation approach isn't very important. Rather, it is viewing the present through the wisdom approach that is extremely important. So why haven't you ever practiced it?

Contemplation through wisdom is the foundation. You should look into the future and analyze what kind of happiness you would likely possess, and whether it would be like that which you already have in your present life. Of course, it would be just like it is in your present life. However, we don't often think about this. Mostly, people like to say that future reincarnations will be unlike the present. Our heads are in the clouds, dreaming that the future will hold happiness that surpasses that which we know now. However, the reality is that it will be the same. It is never better. We bring to each of our countless rebirths dreams that in the next life we will be richer or have another chance to rectify things. And then we are reborn and unable to realize those dreams. So, again, we aspire for a superior life in the next round. We have done this for hundreds and thousands of aeons. Is anything really better? Not at all. It's the same.

Take a look at your current situation. In a past life, you aspired for a better future life. So, is this life satisfactory? It's the same as it was then. Now, again you steer your dreams towards a next life that will be better than this life. How confident are you about your next rebirth?

We're fooling ourselves. These defilements are fooling us. We aren't sharp enough to keep up with the game defilements is playing. It's just a game. Now, there are worldly and political types of games. But we're talking about the game of defilements versus wisdom. Who is going to win? Who will have superior reflexes and better adaptability? If wisdom is superior, you will win the game.



If defilements play a better game, you will continue to lose. It is a game of agility, a test of reflexes. There's a constant disagreement, a struggle to stay above the opponent. Between wisdom and defilements, who will be cleverer?

It is as if you are on stage, debating the topic of what in this world of ours is actually good. Between wisdom and defilements, who will have better arguments and explanations? When defilements take the stage, everything will be good and desirable. Nothing will be considered bad. When corporal form is a topic, defilements will never mention the terms stinky or filthy. The human body will always be fragrant and aromatic. Team Defilements will assert that things continue to exist in the same state they had once been in during a moment in the past. If the body was once fragrant, it continues to be fragrant. Defilements will argue that the human body is adorable, attractive, kissable, and huggable. Whether it is actually fragrant or not, defilements will surely state that it is. These are the types of arguments used by defilements.

Once defilements step down from the podium, wisdom must step up and present its argument. Using the same topic of corporal form, the debate will experience an about-face. The human body is filthy, rotting, and decaying. It is not adorable, attractive, kissable, and huggable as defilements once stated. In fact, it is the complete opposite. Wisdom will begin its argument with human conception. Our bodies are formed from the combination of our mother and father's dirty reproductive fluids. From sperm and an egg, a clump of blood – a zygote – takes shape. Soon, a head, two arms, and two legs sprout. Eventually we assume the full form of a human. Are our parents' reproductive fluids from which we are created filthy? Very much so. Team Wisdom will take the stance that from the very

beginning of our bodies taking shape, even the fluids from which we were derived were dirty.

In order to survive to childhood, we had to feed our bodies unclean things, like rice. We relied on the elements of other things to sustain our own elements. We must be able to clarify to ourselves from what “dirty” is derived. What part of our human bodies is fragrant? Not a single part. They are all unclean. From skin to bones to muscles, every single part of our bodies are filthy. Would you hug each one of these parts? If we took our skin and flipped it inside-out, would it be embraceable? No, because it’s disgusting. Wisdom would make assertions along the lines that every single body part is filthy.

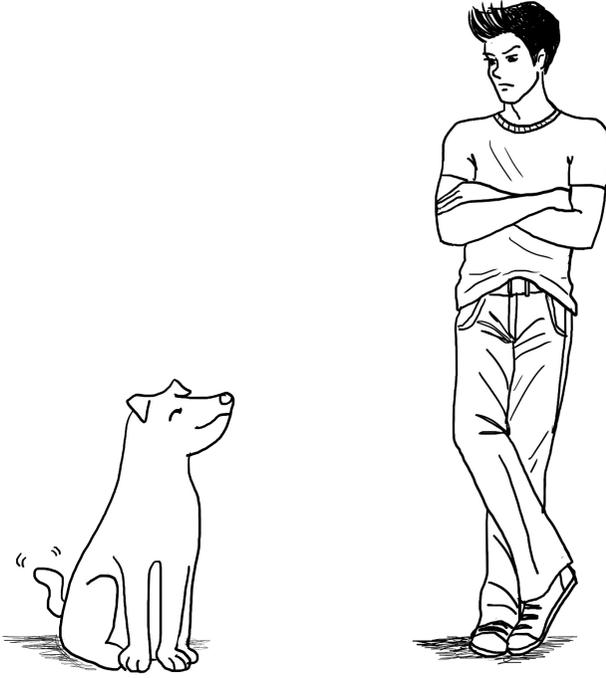
As for food as a contemplation topic, once we have ingested something, it will be burned by the fire element in our bodies and digested. The portions that benefit us will be used to sustain our bodies, while the remnants will become waste. The fire element within us will burn these scraps into big pieces and small pieces. The bigger pieces will exit through the bowel. Come morning, you sit on the toilet and purge the food you called delicious. Does it smell foul? What is it like when you eat the food? What is it like when you excrete it? What is it like while it is still in your body? It is foul during all of these times. Some types of food are expelled through pores on other parts of our bodies. Waste is emitted through our eyes, ears, nose, armpits, and other channels. All of these bodily wastes are filthy. Wisdom would bring up these points that drastically clash with defilements’ argument.

You must train your wisdom so that it can have a chance in this debate. Who will be more convincing? Whose argument will be more consistent with the truth? Between imagination (via

defilements) and wisdom, in the game of dexterity in thought, who will reveal a more accurate grasp of the truth? Are defilements' claims of seeing and understanding the truth accurate? No. It is all an illusion. Wisdom always speaks the truth because every single thing is filthy. Take hair for example. If you didn't shampoo your hair for four or five days, what would happen? It would become disgusting and filthy. What if you didn't wash your body for two or three months? A colony of flies would swarm around you. If you were to walk past a dog, it would stare at you in bewilderment. We really are that filthy. We shower daily in order to cover up our stench. Our waste oozes out and accumulates with each and every day. It's repulsive. This is the approach wisdom takes.

Wisdom's stance is the complete opposite of defilements'. We have to develop realizations and understandings to justify our claims in the debate. Who will have a better argument? And who is the judge? Your mind-soul (citta). As wisdom and defilements debate, if your mind is a truly fair judge, the side with the strongest argument will be awarded the win. At this point, your wisdom is lacking. So, when defilements tell you that the human form is adorable, you are quick to agree. No one speaks up, nor does anyone know what to argue. A silent wisdom never gets to engage in the debate. Wisdom's implicit surrender leads us to swallow defilement's claims. Despite having the best case, not being able to convey it renders the good arguments useless.

This can be compared to a chef who purchases premium raw materials to prepare a meal, while lacking the ability to cook or season the food. The high-quality food is ruined and wasted. Sometimes the food is salty, bland, or lacks flavor. Even with premium ingredients, a bad cook produces poor results.



Dhamma is the same way. Even with good Dhamma, poor wisdom can lose out to defilements. If someone is skilled in speech, even something that isn't good can become so.

As an example, let's consider the debate over whether humans are better than dogs. Let's see who will have the more persuasive argument. Those who believe dogs are better will argue from that stance. Those who believe humans are superior will argue accordingly. The judges will base their decision on the rationality, truthfulness, and quality of the arguments. Who will capture the heart of the audience with their argument?

How are dogs better than humans? There are many reasons why they are superior:

1. Dogs do not need shoes in order to run in the woods. Humans can't say the same. Humans have to wear shoes for fear of stepping on thorns. This also demands that humans own many belongings. Dogs are superior in that they can pick up and go a lot quicker than humans and are not afraid of stepping on thorns while running.
2. Dogs do not need a pillow in order to sleep. Is that better than humans? Even when it is cold, a dog can sleep without a blanket.
3. When something happens in the middle of the night, dogs can run into the darkness without being afraid of ghosts. [laughs] Despite clinging tightly to one another, humans are still afraid of ghosts. Thus, dogs are better than humans.
4. When it comes to eating, dogs don't have to drink water along with their food. Dogs don't need plates or bowls. Food placed in front of dogs can be consumed as is. Dogs are better than humans, who have to use plates and all kinds of utensils. Dogs don't even need spoons [laughs].
5. Dogs are better than humans in that they don't have to brush their teeth or wash their butts. Dogs don't need a bathroom to do their business.
6. Dogs can eat human feces, but can humans eat dog feces? No. Humans aren't as good as dogs.

There are many reasons why dogs are better than humans. Once you assume that stance, you'll begin to see things accordingly. You will find rational and truthful reasons to support it. So, for those who argue that humans are better, are their reasons convincing enough? They'd lose.





**May 30, 1998**

*Second Sermon*

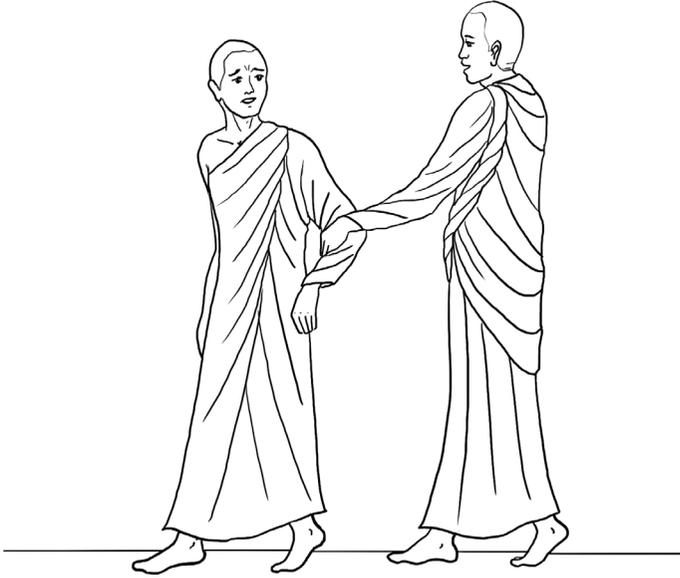
Defilements will finish us. Things that are not real can appear to be and may become the object of our delusion. Just like being repeatedly reborn. Who is it that leads us into rebirth? Defilements. They're skilled. Defilements can trick people into being dumb and gullible, so that they are reborn into this world over and over again. We've been oblivious this entire time, up to the present. One of those people is me, Luang Por Thoon. I was also pulled into being born. Thus, it must be that we are deluded because we lack wisdom. However, now we must retrain ourselves. As defilements triumph, we have always gotten the short end of the stick, making it imperative that we recoup. We have the Buddha as our teacher and master. He is the one who can provide us with Dhamma and other facts. We are fortunate to be born in an era where Buddhism exists. In applying a mode of practice, we must carefully evaluate whether it aligns with the Buddha's methods. Research and practice according to how the

Buddha did. Of the nearly seven billion people in the world, how many understand the principles of the Buddha's practice? Hardly any. Of the sixty million people in Thailand, are there even a million who truly understand the Buddhist religion? There may be up to ninety percent of people in Thailand who subscribe to the religion, but are there at least ten percent who recognize and understand according to the Buddha's teachings? Probably not.

A while ago, when I was already a monk, I felt extreme bliss and contentment. I wanted people to see the truth. This feeling arose without my questioning how it came to be. I felt extreme sympathy for people and wanted to bless them with a sermon. They didn't know about the Dhamma or morality, and I wanted to teach them. It was around January or February of 1962, so I had only been ordained five or six months at the time. I don't know what it was, but when my mind entered a serene meditative state, it was as if there was a sewing machine churning out meter after meter of fabric. No one was around, just a continuous flow of fabric falling into a pile. I watched the situation. As I exited the meditative state, I could feel my mind trembling. It was nearly dawn. I suddenly felt like I wanted to contemplate on all the Dhamma from my past, from when I was a *sāmaṇera* and my early monk years. All of that knowledge was being revived in my mind. It was like nothing could stop the deluge of Dhamma. I couldn't gulp it all up in time. The Dhamma I had studied in previous lifetimes surged forth and joined the tide of Dhamma already gushing out of me.

I was desperate to speak the Dhamma to someone, to anyone. I yearned for someone to ask me a question. I wanted to answer their questions so badly, because I knew too much. I went to a monk friend in a neighboring hut. "Come on, ask me a question,"





I encouraged him. I wanted him to ask a Dhamma question so that I could answer it. “It could be a question about anything in this entire universe. Just ask me.” I wished to speak and I wished to answer. The excitement was palpable. I found myself quivering in giddy anticipation of his question.

Anyone could’ve asked me anything during that period. The flow of knowledge was completely unobstructed. I saw the past clearly. I could answer any worldly question and any Dhamma question. I knew it all. After pestering my friends for questions every single day, they grew increasingly annoyed. Because of their limited education, they didn’t know what questions to ask. Every day after mealtime, I would make a beeline to my monk colleague’s hut. Eventually, he grew weary of these visits and began avoiding me. I kept finding his hut curiously empty. He absconded into the forest, where he’d find respite from my uncontained enthusiasm.

During that period, Mr. Boonyun made daily offerings of sugar cane juice at the temple. His habit was to make his offering and go home. One day, he arrived just as I was bursting with the desire to relay the Dhamma. But he wasn't interested in the Dhamma, only in offering the juice. When he made his offering, I told him not to get up and go quite yet. "Why, Kru Ba?" he asked. I told him, "Sit and listen to what I have to say," and the Dhamma poured out. I began preaching at 5 p.m. and by 7 p.m. Mr. Boonyun still hadn't left. He couldn't leave! I forced him to stay because the Dhamma hadn't finished flowing. It was late, and Mr. Boonyun had a water buffalo tied up in the fields. I wasn't even done when he interrupted, "Kru Ba! It's late. I'm going to bring my buffalo back into its stall." But I told him, "Okay, go on." In the days that followed, I didn't receive a drop of sugar cane juice. He never came again. He was too afraid to risk it! Preaching too much Dhamma is not good – you miss out on sugar cane juice.

So, I walked all over the temple and beckoned people closer, prompting them to ask me a question. I couldn't fall asleep during that period, as I was busy giving sermons in my mind. Without someone to ask me questions, I'd ask myself questions and answer them. I kept this internal dialogue going non-stop. It was funny, really. Once the uposatha holy day came around, the men and women at the temple said, "Kru Ba, we want to hear the Dhamma! We haven't heard a sermon in a long time." There were around twenty people. A monk friend who had ordained at the same time as me exclaimed, "I have only been ordained for a short time. I can't preach!"

I thought, *Hey! If you don't know how to preach, why don't you tell me to do it?* I wanted to yell at him. Later, when it was just the two

of us, I asked him, “Why didn’t you give a sermon when the devotees requested it?” He said, “I don’t know how to give sermons.” I told him, “If you don’t know how to preach, why don’t you let me do it?” He said, “Oh, I forgot! It’s okay though. Next week. Next week.” I counted the days and nights. It seemed like forever until the next week. My mind was locked onto the next week. When it finally came around, it was like the Dhamma was restless and ready to burst. It was constantly flowing.

While I was doing walking meditation (*caṅkama*), it didn’t feel like I was walking. I shined a flashlight on the path. My footprints proved that I had been pacing back and forth, but I didn’t know how. Why hadn’t I walked straight into the forest? How did I turn around at the end of the path? It was apparent that I was capable of turning when I reached the end of the path, but I hadn’t done it consciously.

The next uposatha, after the laypeople had finished eating, my monk friend asked them, “Do you still want to listen to a sermon?” “Of course, we do.” “Well, then Kru Ba Thoon will preach to you all.” I was delighted because I wanted to speak the Dhamma. I began with the chant to take refuge in the Buddha, the Dhamma, and the Sangha. But as I was still a new monk, I was not familiar with the rest of the adages that traditionally preclude a discourse. So, I simply started with, “*Kusala dhamma, akusala dhamma...ti*” and opened the dam and let the Dhamma surge forth. There was no clock and I completely lost track of time. It was like I was crazy, drunk on words. Once I realized that I was actually exhausted, I wrapped up the discourse. A few old men crawled closer to me and rubbed my feet on their heads and faces. They said that since they had been born, they had never heard Dhamma like this. Older monks had preached to them,

but they had never before felt this kind of bliss and excitement. “Teacher Thoon! And this is after being ordained for only one rains retreat! Imagine after ten rains retreats!” But I just felt neutral about it.

The holy day passed but the torrent of Dhamma did not. I was growing weary and exhausted from all of the thought and contemplation. During that period, I was unable to do any sitting meditation. One day, I went to the bathroom, which was just a deep hole in the ground. As I was doing my business, I noticed that worms of all sizes were eating my feces. I wondered what it was that was fooling the worms into believing that feces were a premium and quality food. Were they thinking of their lives? I internalized this as a parallel for myself. The worms were like my mind that was infatuated with Dhamma. I was infatuated with myself. As I squat over the pit, I was startled out of the Dhamma trance. And just like that, all of the things that had happened and all of the Dhamma disappeared within a blink of the eye! I tried to think back on some of the Dhamma, but I couldn’t recall any of it. It was gone. This is how I used the model of worms and feces as a parallel for Dhamma, to teach myself and to cure myself.

If something happens and you don’t contemplate on it well enough, you can really lose yourself in it. You can’t make it happen; it happened naturally and nothing could contain it. You could attribute it to my tendency to contemplate, or my personality, or the things I had contemplated on in the past. Once I analyzed the Dhamma, new Dhamma sprouted. It was detailed in nature and shot out in rapid succession. This is wisdom. This is the product of training in contemplation.

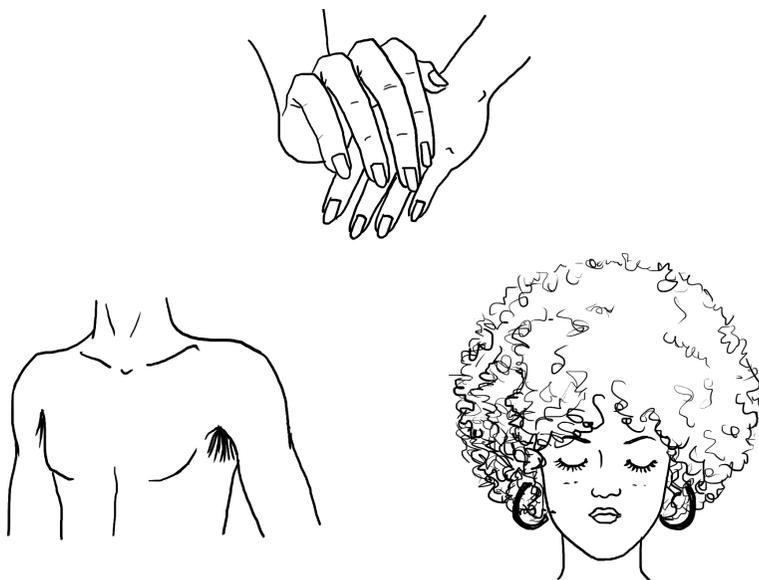
It was natural for me to think. I had been a thinker since a young age or even since past lives. Once I began to practice Dhamma, the old qualities fused with the new. Since childhood, the way I thought was often different from others, as I was innately able to analyze a situation and make a resolute decision. Each person is individual in this sense. Some don't have to have a thinker-type personality in order to practice. A person can become an ariyapuggala even with only a little bit of wisdom. Not all ariyapuggalas are talented at preaching. In fact, some do a poor job of it or don't know the first thing about giving sermons. They are skilled at thinking and skilled at Dhamma practice. Everyone thinks and possesses wisdom. Only, they may not know how to give those thoughts a voice. None of that matters, though. What matters is that you become skilled at thinking. Being an expert thinker is more important than being an expert speaker.

During the Buddha's time, he clearly delineated the path of practice. I have done a lot of research and have found that for the most part, wisdom is at the foundation. What did the Buddha begin with the first time that he preached? Wisdom. The first time that the Buddha preached, he gave a discourse to the five monks (Pañcavaggiya), who had cultivated wisdom in the past. The Buddha helped to develop and refine the wisdom that the monks already possessed. When they attained emancipation, it was not through seasoned meditation, tranquility, or meditative absorptions, but through wisdom. The meditation used in the short period of listening to the Buddha's sermon did not involve meditative phrases, but rather, alert and focused concentration used to simultaneously ingest and digest the teachings. Shortly thereafter, one of the five monks, Añña-Kondañña, penetrated the truth and won stream-entry (sotāpanna) – through

the use of wisdom. The Buddha always started his teachings with the same topics: how to think properly and how to develop right views that correspond to the truth of reality.

Wisdom is at the foundation of the Pāli Canon (Tipiṭaka). There are tons of books at the temple, but people read them and don't understand that what they are reading about is wisdom. I have read through all of the scriptures, and all of them are based on wisdom. Yet people overlook this and don't apply these examples in their own practice. If you read the translations of the chanting verses, the Setting in Motion the Wheel of Truth Discourse (Dhammacakkappavattana Sutta), Not-Self Characteristic Discourse (Anattalakkhaṇa Sutta), or the Fire Discourse (Ādittapariyāya Sutta), it is evident that they are all saturated with wisdom. Read the Setting in Motion the Wheel of Truth Discourse translation. Does it correspond to wisdom? The Fire Discourse is all about how lust is like fire. That's all wisdom. The Not-Self Characteristic Discourse is also entirely soaked through with wisdom.

The morning chanting verse, *Buddho susuddho karuṇā mahañṇavo* concerns form, feeling, memory, volitional thought, and consciousness. *Rūpaṃ aniccaṃ (form is impermanent)*, *vedanā anicca (feeling is impermanent)*, *saññā anicca (memory is impermanent)* is entirely concerned with wisdom, yet we often glance past it when we chant it. It is literally right there in our hands. The verse says these aggregates are impermanent. Use wisdom to consider the verses. How are they impermanent? How are they not-self, or anattā? These can all be adopted as topics for reflection of the truth. The Reflection on the Thirty-Two Parts – *kesā (hair of the head)*, *lomā (hair of the body)*, *nakhā (nails)* – can be used to contemplate filth and uncleanness.



One must know how to think. Not knowing how to think properly yields problems in one's Dhamma practice. Even with prime ingredients, an unskilled cook will produce food that is of no value. Construction work that lacks skill is no different. If you contemplate on Dhamma and don't understand it, it's basically wasted. You read and chant the Dhamma all throughout the day, yet you are unable to apply any of it to actual practice. No task can be accomplished well without proficiency in that field.

Practicing indicates adapting ourselves to the Dhamma that we study and improving our behavior, speech, and minds. As in the chanting verse, *appagabbho kulesu ananugiddho*, we must be one who is not impulsive in action, speech, and thought. We must be mindful to behave in a manner that is within normal boundaries. If you cannot accomplish this, you cannot be considered a Dhamma practitioner. Some appear to be knowledgeable in countless Dhamma topics, including the path to nibbāna, but their actions and speech betray

them. They criticize, disparage, gossip, and fight with each other. This is not the behavior of a true practitioner. These people have merely committed Dhamma to memory. They know the Dhamma but do not realize the Dhamma. The knowledge they've sponged up from books is useless because they do not really taste or understand true Dhamma. They are unable to fix anything.

The cure lies in truly seeing yourself. This is the dhamma. You must see yourself in the person you're criticizing. You must think often and teach yourself regularly. Being alone is the best as you contemplate the truth of reality. Gradually mull it over, weigh the rationale of different perspectives, and relate cause and effect. This first step involves contemplating until you understand according to the truth of reality. This is basic and prevalent. The second step is actually becoming and conforming to what you have come to understand. This is what's really critical.

In Dhamma practice, experiencing according to the truth of reality is the beginning. It forms the foundation. Knowledge can't affect anything. Feeling the truth of the situation is what can really make a difference. But people don't make their minds conform to the knowledge. They merely stop at knowing. A person can be right on target when speaking about Dhamma but be completely unable to eradicate their wrong view. This is because true realization does not exist within them. It's not like once you're well-versed on the Dhamma, it's all smiles and sunshine. The Buddha's words aren't magic. It's not like you say them and *whoosh* everything is set right. You have to do it yourself. You actually have to practice.

Start from today. Whatever provokes thought, contemplate on that. It doesn't matter that our time here is limited. Give it your all. Take



what I've said here and contemplate on it further. If you contemplate on my teachings when you're at home, is it like contemplating here? Yes. It's dhamma. There's dhamma at your home, next to you, all around you. Take the principles I've given you and train yourself to think. Figuring out how to think about a topic must be done gradually and on your own. You must continuously relate cause and effect, little by little and step-by-step.

Thought and analysis make up the bedrock of wisdom. Don't be too lazy to think. Although unfocused, imaginative thoughts are dangerous for tranquil meditation, they can complement and augment wisdom. The more you fantasize, the more you think. Just be careful not to let your imagination (saṅkhāra) whisk away those thoughts. Unfocused thoughts aren't good, but you can make them good. You can use those thoughts towards your benefit in the same way a snake's venom can be used to make its own antidote. Use like to cure like. While unideal, distracted thoughts can be used to complement wisdom development. Just be careful. Without sufficiently anchoring your wisdom to reality, your imagination may steal the reins and steer you towards more endless rebirths (saṃsāra). Try to find as many examples or models of Dhamma you can to contemplate on in terms of the truth of reality in order to boost your wisdom.

When referring to texts and manuals, there may be topics of Dhamma that are too sophisticated to be used in actual practice quite yet. You ought to hold off on those and instead select topics that are necessary or most relevant to you. Just like with the medicine you keep in your home. There are many medications to choose from, but you do not take the medication until it is necessary. When you have a headache, you take the corresponding pain medication.



When you have diarrhea, you take anti-diarrheal medicine. Dhamma practice is the same way. You do not simply pick up any arbitrary topic to practice. To do that jumbles you up so that you are unable to discern right from wrong. If you pour too many ingredients into a single pot, you'll be unable to discern what you're eating. In practicing Dhamma, you must select a specific, pertinent topic befitting your relative level. Sometimes, selected topics are suitable for the final level of enlightenment, yet people with a toad's tail of wisdom attempt to practice them. You must begin with the basics, at the bottom rung of the ladder. Now, who has questions for me?

P: When selecting a proper Dhamma topic, if I don't have supernormal insight to see what kind of Dhamma I've cultivated in the past, but my current practice makes me happy and I feel like I understand, will it merge with my old practice?

LPT: You just have to start by practicing. In contemplating Dhamma, you first have to take one of each pill in the medicine cabinet in order to see which pill cures your ailment. If you get better, you continue to take that pill. It is a risk. Guess correctly you'll be cured, guess incorrectly and you'll be screwed. To prevent guessing, use the truth as your basis. The Three Common Characteristics – suffering, impermanence, not-self – apply to all things. The merit and virtues that we have cultivated in past lives still correspond to the Three Common Characteristics. Use these three tenets as your foundation and branch off later. The key to practice is wisdom, and the Three Common Characteristics are an excellent way to train that wisdom.

However, don't expect that you will immediately be able to detach from belongings and gain instant clarity. You must build up your virtue and enhance the boldness of your wisdom. When you plant a mango tree and add fertilizer, you cannot expect it to immediately bear fruit. All you can do is water the tree and protect it from harmful insects. In four or five years, you might see it bear fruit. You should not cut down the tree simply because it does not produce instantaneous results. To do so would be to cut down your opportunities. The tree needs time to grow. As for people, our cultivated virtues and perfections of character (*pāramī*) are different. Some people possess a nearly full bucket of virtue and lack only a small amount. If their new virtue is poured into the nearly full bucket, then that bucket of virtue can finally become full. But if the new virtue is poured into the wrong bucket, the nearly full bucket will not become full and they will be wasting time. It is a risk.

If a Buddha existed in the present day, many people would attain a level of emancipation on the path to nibbāna. There are plenty of people, both in Thailand and abroad, who are interested in and focused on practicing Dhamma. However, because they are unable to find a method of practice appropriate to them, they simply chant, *Buddho Buddho*, like parakeets. The Buddha possessed rare insight of the Dhamma lessons best suited to each individual. Neither his disciples nor any teachers from contemporary times possess it. Even Venerable Mahā Moggallāna and Venerable Sāriputta did not possess this insight. Consequently, lessons are left to chance.

Therefore, you must apply the Three Common Characteristics to your practice as much as possible. You must train your mind to reject things like your belongings and other attachments. Even if your mind is not fully ready to refuse them, you must train yourself to feel it. When the time comes, you will know for yourself whether or not you have truly rejected these belongings. You will not be attached or obligated to them. Deep down, you disclaim the belongings. This disownment serves as a strong foundation for you to build upon. On the outside, you still behave normally. You will still work and acquire possessions for your own benefit or for that of others. On the inside, you reject these possessions, as there is no part of them that truly belongs to you. Once you understand that you have no sense of ownership over these possessions, you will be ashamed to even think that you do because you know better. But who will practice like this? People only want to acquire more. And you can, on the outside. You can have heaps of money, but not cling to it or believe that it is yours.



**May 30, 1998**

*Third Sermon*

Contemplate so that you really understand how people practice in order to gain a rebirth in the fine-material world (rūpa-loka). They meditate every day until they attain form-based higher meditative absorptions (rūpa-jhāna). Upon dying from their human lives, they are reborn in the fine-material sphere (rūpa-brahma). After the intensity of the rūpa-brahma wanes, they are reborn in the human realm once more, as there's nowhere else for them to go. Beyond rūpa-brahma lies the fine immaterial sphere (arūpa-brahma), which is attained through even more intense meditative absorptions (jhāna). The ultimate, finest jhāna to be achieved is arūpa-jhāna – an immaterial, formless meditative absorption. Those who practice arūpa-jhāna die and are reborn in arūpa-brahma, which stretches out beyond eternity. They remain there even after countless Buddhas have come and gone in the world. Once the power of that jhāna is exhausted, they are reborn in the human world again. They simply

can't go anywhere else. Meditation is merely wholesomeness of the sensual plane (*kāmavacara-kusala*). It hasn't entered the level of mental training (*yogāvacara-kusala*) required to transcend the world.

You have to study in order to figure out how people achieved enlightenment. Were expert meditators able to meditate their way to *nibbāna*? No one in the history of Buddhism or in the history of the world has ever been able to attain *nibbāna* through meditation, nor will they be able to do so in the future. Tranquil meditation only keeps you happy day to day. After you die, you'll be destined for a rebirth in the Brahma world followed by one in the human world. Thus, meditation is for the *kāmavacara* – those who desire to be continually reborn in this world for an incalculable period of time. Meditation exists in every era. The Buddha allowed his pupils to practice meditation, but he taught his students not to be fooled by it.

During that era, the Buddha had two groups of students: those with a wisdom-oriented personality (*paññāvimutti*) and those with a concentration-oriented personality (*cetovimutti*). Which group had more members? There were many *paññāvimutti* and few *cetovimutti* during the Buddha's lifetime. The methods used to teach these two groups differed. The *paññāvimutti* were taught to develop mindfulness and wisdom as their foundation. They were not taught to enter deep meditative states because they would only get lost there. They were allowed to use concentration, but it was alert and focused concentration – not *jhāna*. The Buddha taught the *paññāvimutti* to think rationally in terms of cause and effect and to develop realizations and understandings aligned with the truth of reality. He taught this right out of the gate. He didn't encourage them to remain in *jhāna*. These people were able to become holy individuals (*ariyapuggalas*) because they were *paññāvimutti*. Once

they penetrated the truth, they instantly became ariyapuggalas. There were many holy individuals back in those days. The Pañcavaggiya are a prime example. They were all paññāvimutti, unskilled in jhāna. There are so many examples of ariyapuggalas in the scriptures. Monks, sāmaṇera, bhikkhunī, female devotees, male devotees – they're all in there. Read up on them. You'll find that the majority of discourses pertain to those who attained liberation through wisdom. People skip over this part of the scriptures.

The teachings that are ubiquitous today concern the other personality type – the cetovimutti. There were very few of the cetovimutti personality type back in the Buddha's time. In teaching this group, it was not possible to immediately apply wisdom, as they were still consumed with and attached to deep meditative attainments. The cetovimutti were to start with a serene mind, then enter jhāna. After dwelling in the meditative absorption for a bit, the Buddha would instruct them. He would teach them how to untether themselves from their attachment to meditative absorptions. He would preach the adverse consequences of being consumed with deep meditative states and the pros and cons of serene meditation. Once they died, they would be reborn in either the form-material (rūpa-brahma) or formless-immaterial (arūpa-brahma) realm. And when their meditative state waned, they would be reborn as a human once more. They would traverse this cycle with no end.

The expert meditators listened, but only after they had already exited jhāna. While in the deep meditative absorption, they would have been essentially unconscious. As there is only happiness and bliss in jhāna, the Buddha would preach to the cetovimutti at the point when the meditative state began to fade. The Buddha would ask them if

they desired the Brahma world or nibbāna. If they desired nibbāna, they must first realize the harmful consequences of meditation. Instead of being attached to meditation, they should learn to develop wisdom. As they realized the negative effects of meditation, they would follow the Buddha's instructions and enter the serene meditative absorptions less frequently. Instead, they would practice alert and focused concentration and train their wisdom. They had to see the harm in jhāna first, then they would train their wisdom. That is how they achieved a level of enlightenment on the path to nibbāna. They saw the harm in jhāna and became wise about jhāna. As ariyapuggalas, they were called the cetovimutti – those who possessed little wisdom but ample concentration. During the Buddha's time, there were few people with this personality type.

If people in contemporary times were to practice serene meditation and jhāna, who would teach them that it is not the right path? These expert meditators would not believe anyone who would warn them. The Buddha is the only one who can help them, because these people are deeply enchanted by their meditative absorptions. If they were to develop supernormal insights (abhiññā) such as the divine eye, divine ear, or penetration of the minds of others, that enchantment would deepen and their pride and conceit (diṭṭi-māna) would swell.

In our era, there are many with the wisdom personality type (paññāvimutti) and few with the concentration personality type (cetovimutti). Yet instead of applying the wisdom methods to Dhamma practice, the concentration methods are applied. This is likened to pouring water into buckets. The paññāvimutti bucket is about to be full, so why are they wasting their time pouring water into the cetovimutti bucket instead of topping off the paññāvimutti



bucket? Instead of practicing focused concentration, people waste time training in serene meditation.

You don't become an ariyapuggala by serene meditation. You do need meditation, but it is the alert and focused concentration type that collaborates with wisdom and serves as its partner. The willful lack of training in focused concentration precludes any potential for its use. People go well beyond alert focus, plunging deep into serene meditative absorptions. Because they've never trained their focused concentration, it's unable to propel them forward. Consequently, their wisdom remains the hollow echo of the scriptures they've studied. Focused concentration is a powerful tool that supports the work we do. But this tool does not actually shed defilements. Rather, it fuses with your wisdom, enabling you to work more efficiently and productively.

Meditation functions the same as sleep in that it recharges your energy so that you can work. If you meditate without a task at hand, the stored-up energy will be wasted and the tranquility will fade. This is akin to how an unused ice cube that is left out will melt and cease to be cold. You turn that plain water back into an ice cube again, but then you just leave it out to melt once more. Again and again you build up tranquil meditation without applying the harnessed energy in any way. What's more, you must constantly meditate in order to refresh the bliss that naturally wanes when your eyes are open. What a waste of time. That is why the Buddha taught his students to start their training with wisdom. Once they had developed wisdom, then they were to follow with concentration to support that existing wisdom. With a task at hand, one who wakes up can immediately resume working.

You have to understand the different modes of practice. Your job is to think and contemplate. Don't be afraid of unfocused, whimsical thoughts, for they happen every once in a while to those who lack wisdom. Wayward, imaginative thoughts will only pop up during serene meditation and will only be dangerous for meditators. For those with wisdom, these thoughts are used constructively. Just like how two foolish thieves surrounded by thousands of wise men cannot inflict harm on anyone, a few imaginative thoughts cannot put a dent in broad and comprehensive wisdom. If anything, the wayward thoughts will support that wisdom. Unfocused, fanciful thoughts carry on continuously and have no boundaries or bases to stem from. Due to sparse insight, these thoughts cannot be concluded in any way, and as a result the mind is aggravated and irritable. Those who are wise do not have these unfocused, fanciful thoughts because their thoughts are all used beneficially.

Unfocused thoughts drift along with your imagination (*saṅkhāra*) as you shape them to your desire. Just as with food, we tend to season and spice up our thoughts to our liking. Imagination is used to fashion and embellish our every wish. What is short becomes long, what is ugly becomes beautiful, and what is bad becomes good. We are constantly seasoning our thoughts, and as a result we have become completely enchanted and deceived by our imagination. Whenever these imaginative thoughts take off, it is always to a destination we are fond of. We never visit the destinations we dislike.

What is it that you like to think about every day? For some, it is money that is constantly on the mind. Sometimes people desire wealth, so they dream up ways to acquire huge sums of money. They imagine their way to Las Vegas, where they win tens of thousands

of dollars. And they imagine that they return to Las Vegas again, but this time to win twice as much. In closing their eyes and visualizing their profits from gambling, there are never any thoughts of losing. We only imagine that which is advantageous. We never lose. We always get equal returns or profits on our investments. And so, we sit, beaming and pleased as we imagine these scenarios, while greed unknowingly creeps into our hearts. In order to imagine, we must suppose and pretend. Without pretending, there is no material or basis out of which we can construct these fantasies.

We survive day to day because of pretending. It furnishes us with hopes and expectations. We only suppose that pleasant things will happen to us, as no one desires the unpleasant. Men dream of having a good wife and women dream of having a good husband. After getting married and having kids, parents envision their kids being well-behaved, attractive, and respectful. We never dream that our kids will be naughty or ugly. We always imagine in a way that is pleasing, and we feed on these dreams. These thoughts create the hopes and expectations that trick us into willingly enduring this world day after day. We believe that we will accomplish all that we desire. When we are not successful, we suppose that we will redeem ourselves the next time around or during our next lifetime. We live and breathe off of these dreams. We have been reborn for countless lifetimes in the never-ending quest to quench the thirst for our desires. But have we gotten all that we wanted?

We should seriously consider this. What is seducing us into being reborn? Who is seducing us into being reborn? Our minds do not possess the powers they should, as they have fallen under the influence of defilements and desire. Our minds cannot travel freely. Defilements and desires lead us in the direction of that which is

worthless or degenerate – the five sensual pleasures found in form, sound, scent, taste, and touch. We come to expect that everything is truly ours, when in reality nothing is actually eternally ours. The truth is that we merely rely on these things temporarily. But defilements and desire assert that these things are truly ours. It is backwards. As defilements and desire would have it, our ownership would apply to our husbands, wives, children, money, and all of our worldly belongings. We imagine that owning these possessions will only bring us happiness. The thought that suffering comes with ownership never arises.

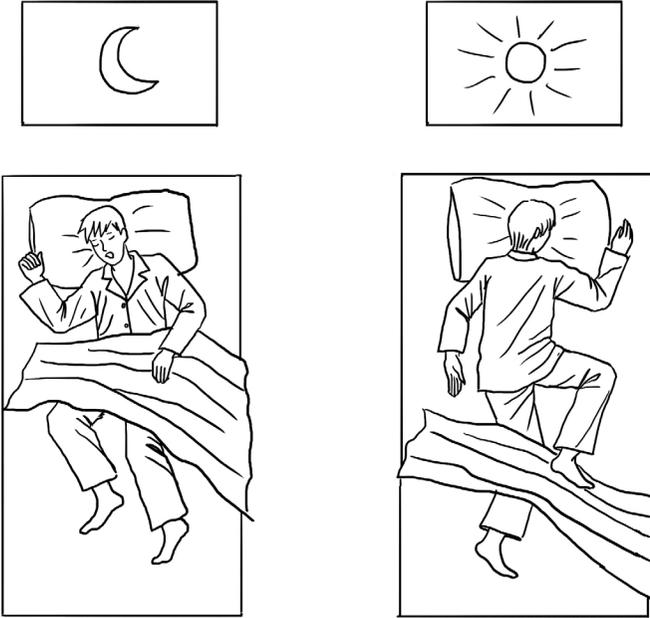
This is how desire puts us under its spell. How do you get a bird or any other animal to stay with you? You have to find a way for it to need you. Feed it well and it'll remain with you. Desires and defilements man the cockpit of our minds. We have been fooled because we do not recognize the tricks that they have played on us. They have led our imagination into painting a world in which possessions are truly ours. We must use our wisdom to snap out of this delusion. How has this world been used to fool us? We must think often and form correct understandings. Namely, ones that adhere to the Three Common Characteristics (suffering, impermanence, not-self). Thus, one day we will be able to truly perceive and understand according to reality.

I have studied the discourses in the Buddhist Pāli Canon, and all of the ariyapuggalas possessed wisdom. The discourses speak of wisdom and perception. They teach that the first step is to develop a right view aligned with the truth (*sammādiṭṭhi*). Our minds are deeply rooted in wrong views (*micchādiṭṭhi*), and as a result we are unaware of our intense attachment to this world. The Buddha taught his students to discern right perceptions from wrong perceptions.

Without first changing wrong views into right views, practice will be thorny. Once you've settled into a serene meditative state, the boost from that serenity will only augment the existing wrong views. Consequently, the meditation practice will become wrong concentration. There is a misconception that tranquil concentration is entirely good, but there are both good aspects and bad aspects. In reality, people possess wrong concentration but believe it to be right concentration. They don't realize it is wrong concentration. They need someone with superior knowledge to point it out to them. Their contentment has obscured their view of the truth.

During the Buddha's time, it was always wisdom that was applied in Dhamma practice. It was wisdom that led to holy attainment. However, it was not that people contemplated nonstop. When they grew exhausted from their contemplations they would rest. Only, the rest was achieved through focused and alert concentration, not serene meditation. This is because while the wisdom-orientated individuals (*paññāvimutti*) know how to focus, they do not know how to be serene. They can only be serene for a few minutes, unlike those with the concentration or meditation-oriented personality (*cetovimutti*).

It is not difficult to discern whether you correspond to the wisdom or concentration personality type. When you sit and repeat a mantra, if you keep thinking about things, then you are one of the *paññāvimutti*. If that is the case, you would not need to focus on serene meditation. Instead, practice alert and focused concentration. On the other hand, if when you sit and repeat a mantra, you immediately converge into a deep meditative state, go ahead and enter that meditative absorption; you're one of the *cetovimutti*. Even as a *cetovimutti*, you'd still need to pull back from that deep



meditation into focused concentration (*khaṇika samādhi*) before you'd be able to access wisdom and start contemplating. But if you're one of the *paññāvimutti*, you don't need to be calm. You can start right off with alert and focused concentration and begin contemplating. It's much easier.

To further illustrate, suppose there are two people. The first person sleeps during the day, afternoon, and night. This person is accustomed to getting ample rest before being able to work and has been following these sleeping habits for a long time. The second person only sleeps at night for a brief period. This individual does not rest during the day and can work all day long. This has been their custom for ages. Wisdom-oriented people are like this second person. The *paññāvimutti* are unconcerned with serenity. They can be alert and focused all day. With only a little bit of focus they are ready to think. Whenever they have the energy to think, they will

continue to contemplate. They think often. Once wisdom has developed to a certain degree, it gives rise to a calm mind. Calm is something that results further along in practice. If your mind doesn't want to be calm, then you should think. Can you force a child who is enjoying himself playing to sleep? No. Once the child is exhausted from playing, he will rest on his own. You don't have to force anything. Likewise, while contemplating according to the world's truths, do not force yourself to concentrate on meditative phrases. Do not attempt to converge into a tranquil state when you actually want to contemplate.

Right now, our minds are dim. This is natural. We must train our wisdom so that it is bright enough to enlighten our minds. With defilements and desires mentoring and training our minds around the clock, there are few opportunities for wisdom to get a word in. Therefore, our wisdom must be powerful and commanding in order to retrain our minds. It must be formed from a superior perception and understanding of reality that is capable of overruling defilements and desires. We must strengthen our wisdom in order to overpower desire's control over our minds.

Thus far, defilements have boasted a perfect record against wisdom. The difference between winning and losing is practice. In a fight between two boxers with equal statistics, the fighter who is more practiced is the one who takes home the championship belt. Truths like this exist in every atom of the world, and television is one way to help us see them. We can use television, not for entertainment, but to gather information about the world. In sports, athletes must train to be proficient and skilled in order to compete. When a professional diver steps onto the edge of the board, does he need a long time to concentrate? No. He needs, at most, thirty seconds to

focus before jumping. How long does a weightlifter stand in front of weights before attempting to lift them? Maybe a minute, at most. Expending a minute in concentration would be excessive for someone so well-trained. Once focused concentration is established, one can immediately start the task at hand. Alert and focused concentration is easy to achieve but we believe it to be difficult simply because we have never practiced it.

People practice meditation so much that their concentration bypasses the alert stage and plummets straight into the tranquil. That is why they are unable to contemplate anything. In the search for water, why would you drill through the dirt, past water, and straight into the Earth's crust? The water is right on top, at the surface. Wisdom also exists at the surface, right at alert and focused concentration. It is not that serene meditation is prohibited. Do it, if you are similar in character to the ascetics and hermits. I don't forbid it. Do it. But if you do not have the personality of a meditator, do not bother wasting time on it. Many people have practiced meditation for a decade and still have not achieved tranquility. Even after a hundred years, they'll achieve nothing. What a waste of time. The advancement of Dhamma practice lies entirely in the hands of wisdom, not tranquility. A product is created by working on it, not from resting.

For example, people do not attend seminars to merely sit. Keynote speakers share their thoughts and provide helpful tips to be applied at work. This information is taken in and digested by listeners. This part of the day represents work. People cannot think all day, so there must be a recess for people to eat and wait to return for the remainder of speeches. This part of the day represents rest. Look in the world and you'll find parallels to any concept you are contemplating.





It's the same principles everywhere. It's all the same. From this example, work is likened to wisdom contemplation while rest is likened to tranquil meditation. They go hand in hand. Take care not to rest for too long, for you will not get anything done.

Suppose it takes five hours to drive to a certain destination. Why would you give the car a ten-hour break? You will never arrive at your destination. The car is still in good shape, the engine is new and hasn't overheated, and the driver isn't sleepy and wants to keep driving. Why would you impose a break at a time like this? Keep driving! As for the actual driving, the driver must know how to handle the car. The driver must know how to move forward, reverse, turn left, and turn right. Someone who has never driven a car before won't get far in one. A new driver must first practice and become skilled at the task. Some people who do not know how to drive will start the car and immediately hit the accelerator while their other foot is firmly planted on the brake pad. They will never get anywhere!

In Dhamma practice, people begin with their foot on the brake, by conducting tranquil meditation. They prohibit thought because they are afraid that whimsical thoughts will arise. As a result, their practice never progresses. People need to think and need wisdom, but they do not know how to generate it, so they consult manuals that teach incorrect principles. In Thailand, serene meditation is rampant. Monks and laypeople alike will get together to repeat meditative mantras. Tranquil meditation is misaligned with hopes for nibbāna. It is not the way of Buddhism. Ascetics and sages practiced it to no avail. Their defilements didn't budge. They were at the same level before and after meditation. Even if incredibly deep levels of meditation are attained, defilements still cannot be eliminated.

I have read every word of the Pāli Canon and can report that it is filled with ample models of wisdom. Throughout the many discourses, the people who attained nibbāna did so through wisdom, not tranquil meditation. People read, but they don't think about what they read. As practitioners, you must be able to discern right from wrong.

Training your wisdom is an important issue. Who will train you? You. You must train yourself. You start by having a teacher instruct you. That's the first step, learning the principles. Thereafter, you must train yourself and cultivate your own wisdom. It's every man for himself. You only get what you put into it. Think often and contemplate often. It's preferable to allowing your thoughts to be guided by the world and rebirth.

I've explained a lot of Dhamma. Does anyone have a question for me? You should discuss what I've said and decide whether or not

what I'm telling you is steeped in reason. I've done my research. I've read the scriptures. There are books dedicated to teaching the cetovimutti. There are discourses on meditation, but there aren't many of them. Meditation is fine for the cetovimutti. The paññāvimutti, on the other hand, can practice all they want but they won't achieve serenity. They can die trying but they'll never be calm. It isn't in their nature. Now, if you can't be calm, then forget about wanting to be calm. Instead, be alert and focused. Think, and gain wisdom.

During the Buddha's time, there were many paññāvimutti who became ariyapuggalas. You must be able to distinguish what is right for each situation. You have to be able to tell the Dhamma apart from the world. You must be able to differentiate the aspects that coexist in a single issue. For instance, there are two angles from which you can view the human form. From one angle the body is filthy and repulsive. From another angle the human body is lovely and attractive. A difference in view can make you think something is either meaningless or normal by worldly standards.

We have never become jaded from traveling through countless rounds of rebirth because we have never realized the truth. We must realize and understand according to the truths of the world. The Buddha said, *natthi loke raho nāma: there are no secrets in this world*. You must uncover the truth about all things on this Earth that enchant you. Once you discover the truth, you will become weary of the pointless and repetitive process of being reborn in this world (nibbidā).

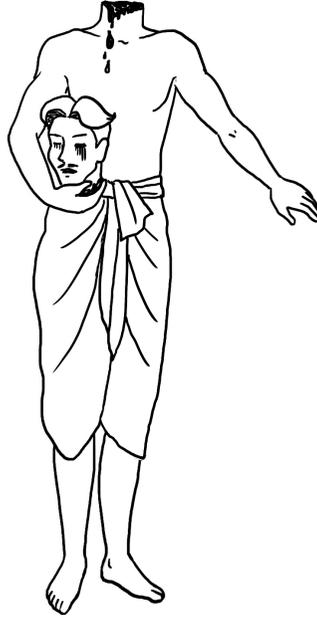
Now, both the person giving the sermon and his audience are getting tired, as speaking and listening are all part of work. We need to rest.

Next, we will meditate in order to recharge our energy. We will stop talking and thinking in order to do so. From this moment forward, let us focus on meditating.

Regardless of the instructor, meditation is based on the same principle of resting our minds. You all know about meditative mantras, so I need not say much about them. Do not think about the future or past. Do not think about your home, relatives, or anything else. Stay in the present, stay focused on yourself. You are sitting alone, your body has such and such characteristics, and your body is fixed in a particular position. You are comprised of two parts. Namely, your body and your mind. Your body does not know anything, but your mind can be aware and mindful. Let us focus on mindful breathing as a basis for meditation. Inhale and be aware of inhaling. Exhale and be aware of exhaling. Or if you prefer, inhale and think, *Bud*. Exhale and think, *dho*. Do not forcefully adapt the pace of your breaths to fit your mantra's tempo. Breathe in a normal rhythm.

If your mind starts to stray, you may rapidly repeat any phrase to prevent thoughts from slipping into your mind. Inhale and think *Buddho-Buddho-Buddho*, exhale and think *Buddho-Buddho-Buddho*. Don't allow any other thoughts to break the rapid, continuous stream of *Buddho* filling your mind. This is how you can effectively stop thinking. You can use any word in rapid succession, like *kesā-kesā-kesā-kesā*, to build a mental wall. Now, if you meditate and are not thinking about anything, then just breathe as you normally would.

You all have intently listened to Dhamma from me for many days, all with the goal of changing yourselves. Some have traveled far from their work and families in order to come here and listen to me.



You're all here seeking self-betterment. How much do you miss home right at this moment? Do not worry about that. Whatever is to happen will happen. Deal with it later. Your mind will be unable to focus if you dwell on those things. You will achieve serenity easily if you possess well-tuned wisdom. With untrained wisdom you will find it difficult to meditate and will need to force your mind to be calm. Alright, now you can continue to meditate on your own, for as long as you so desire.

P: Someone said that she practiced until she saw a decapitated ghost come to visit her. What can we make of that?

LPT: It is a merely a vision (nimitta) that arises from serene meditation. This type of vision can be conjured up, but what is important is how you think about it after it occurs. Does seeing a decapitated ghost make you realize how utterly tiresome the cycle

of rebirth is? If you had wisdom, you would be able to channel the visualized image (uggaha-nimitta) purposefully and contemplate until it becomes a conceptualized image (patibhāga-nimitta). Regardless of the vision or omen, always internalize and reflect on it (opanayiko). Even if the body in the vision obviously belongs to someone else, suppose that it is yours. Suppose that defilements are duping you into thinking it's someone else's head when in fact it is yours. Your wisdom will be stunted if, instead, you interpret the visions as representing someone else.

There was a monk who attempted to accelerate his practice by focusing on meditation. At one point, defilements played a nasty trick on this monk of little wisdom, and he was wholeheartedly fooled into believing that an illusion was reality. As he was sitting in silent meditation, he had a vision of a beautiful girl coming to visit him at his forest hut. Though he was pleased by her, he was more steadfast in the monk discipline that prohibited him from speaking to her. He guarded his eyes, ears, nose, tongue, body, and heart. During this first attempt by defilements, she prostrated before him beautifully and asked, "Venerable brother, are you going to disrobe or not? Don't you miss worldly things?" The monk refused to speak to her. So, she said, "Fine, if you aren't going to speak to me then I will go home," and she left.

The next evening the beautiful girl visited the monk again. "Venerable brother, I came to visit and venerate you again. Are you going to disrobe or not? If you wait too long, you're going to be too old to build a house and family." She continued to appeal to the monk. All the while, he remained composed and didn't say a single word. So, the girl left the hut and returned home.

Another evening, she came back to his hut and asked, “So what is it going to be? Are you going to disrobe? If you wait until you are old, it will be too difficult to build a family.” She proceeded to make her case to the monk, and this time he started to waver. He thought, *what she is saying is true. If I wait to disrobe when I am old, life as a layperson will be difficult for me. She’s right.* In that moment, the monk began to feel like this girl would truly love him. But he kept still and held his tongue. The girl appeared upset and said, “You never speak when I come to visit you. I’m never coming back again!” As she stormed out of the door, the monk’s heart quavered. He began to wonder why he didn’t speak to her and whether she would ever visit him again. Hoping to explain himself before it was too late, the monk grabbed a flashlight and ran out of his hut after the beautiful girl. He searched all over but could not find her. The vision was that real for him.

Venerable Ācariya So walked by at that moment and knew very well what had happened. Luang Por So asked, “How are you doing young man? Did you find that jackass?” Startled, the monk instantly felt ashamed in the presence of his teacher. In this circumstance, the young girl in the monk’s vision was no other than the monk himself. She was a personification of his defilements and desires. He didn’t know any better.

The same thing happened to a novice (sāmaṇera) named Phan. Every night, a young girl would come to play with him. Initially, he thought she was a ghost or a heavenly being (devatā). The sāmaṇera did not understand himself. He was pleased by the thought that once he achieved a tranquil meditative state, spirits would come to keep him company. The beautiful, playful young girl would put her face close to his, but the novice was careful. He told the girl to keep her

distance, as he was afraid of violating the monastic code. She continued to visit him often, causing him to wonder. The sāmaṇera relayed the events to his teacher, who asked him whether or not he enjoyed the visits. He replied to his teacher that although he enjoyed them, he didn't know how to prevent them from occurring. The teacher presented a simple solution. "Take this red betel paste with you. Whenever the girl comes near your face, dip your finger in it and dab it on her forehead. Once you touch her, come to see me right away."

The sāmaṇera took the red paste back to his hut and kept it by his side as he meditated. Once his mind converged into a calm state, the girl appeared. She jutted out her face as if she were keen to have her entire face painted red. The novice dipped his finger in the paste, touched the girl's forehead, and sprinted out of his hut to tell his teacher what had happened. The novice's teacher presented him with a mirror and said, "Take a look. Does the paste you used to mark her forehead look like this?" The sāmaṇera was baffled. He had actually dabbed his own face! For the most part, these visions (nimitta) are a personification of your own imagination; your thoughts donning a new outfit. Then there are other things, like ghosts, that really do exist outside of your imagination. As for the headless spirit that you asked about earlier, let's just assume that it falls in the imagination pile. There's no need to inquire further into it. What other questions do you have for me?

P: I read in a book that the Buddha would reside in an abode of emptiness (suññata-vihāra) when he would take a break from teaching or when he was alone. What does "suññata-vihāra" mean?

LPT: It is a state of non-existence that all arahants inhabit, including the Buddha. It is not a meditative void, but a different kind





of emptiness. It is a natural state of non-existence. The term emptiness (suññata) does not exist. It is only a word we have created to describe something. It is better to just say, “those who are empty.”

When Bhikkhu Siddhattha was about to become enlightened, he made the resolution, “I will sit here until I become a Buddha. I will not leave this place even if all my bones, skin, and muscles deteriorate.” Bhikkhu Siddhattha made the resolution after having the insight that all mental intoxications would be eliminated (āsavakhayañāṇa). A practitioner will become fully enlightened soon after this insight arises. Āsavakhayañāṇa is the same for all arahants, but it is unnecessary for the Buddha’s disciples to make the same resolution that he did. Alternatively, if someone who has not had āsavakhayañāṇa makes this resolution, they will die in their futile pursuit.

After becoming enlightened, there was a moment when the Buddha did not want to teach the dhamma to the world’s beings. Brahma

had to come to Earth and entreat the Buddha to preach the dhamma to the world. This feeling that the Buddha experienced is shared by all arahants, as the realizations and understandings they have experienced are too detailed and complex to be conveyed. However, none of the arahant verbalize this initial reluctance to teach. After no more than five minutes, the arahant will reflect that all beings have cultivated perfections of character (pāramī) and therefore have a chance at penetrating the truth and becoming ariyapuggalas. How did the arahant come to penetrate the world's undisputable truths? That's how others would come to realize the truth. The arahant would be able to help point out the path.

In imagining what it's like to be an arahant, understand that each arahant is new to arahantship; they have never been enlightened before. Before arriving at the finish line, the arahants also had to experience the world as commoners. After contemplating and attaining a level of enlightenment, who notifies or certifies them of the change in status? No one. The ariyapuggalas will instinctively know for themselves what they are. The steam-enterers realize they are now sotāpannas, the arahants will know that they are never again to traverse the cycle of rebirth. It's no different from the Buddha realizing his own attainment. It's individual (paccattaṃ). You realize it for yourself.

If you've been cycling through the world, riding the perpetual wave of delusion for innumerable rebirths, and now you're an arahant and will never be reborn again, how different is that sensation? The difference in feeling between that of an arahant and a commoner is unimaginable. The best thing to do is to become an arahant and you will know for yourself. Just as a group of people eating from the same bowl do not need to ask one another what the food tastes like

or how it feels to be full, arahants do not have to ask one another how it feels to be an arahant because the feeling is natural. It's paccattam.

Arahantship may be too lofty a goal to aim for. Set your sights on the elementary level of sotāpanna first, as this does not require as much effort. Once you have entered the stream as a sotāpanna, you will be encouraged to know that you have a one hundred percent chance of attaining nibbāna. As a stream-enterer, the doors to the hell realm are closed to you. You'll be certain that you have made it onshore, safely out of reach of the dangerous crocodile. Becoming a sotāpanna is feasible. Simply train your wisdom and contemplate often, such that you are no longer attached to worldly belongings and such that the four elements fully correspond to the Three Common Characteristics – impermanence, suffering, and not-self. This first level of enlightenment has not even touched on filthiness (asubha) or sexual lust (rāga), as those higher-level topics correspond to the non-returners (anāgāmis). The sotāpannas are incapable of conquering sexual desire. Thus, to achieve stream-entry, focus your contemplations on self-belongings. Don't simply understand the theory for the sake of understanding. Make your mind feel its reality. Feel how nothing truly belongs to you. It only takes a small understanding.

Attempting to understand the entirety of the Buddha's teachings is pointless. The knowledge gained from studying irrelevant topics is only used to show off to others. You may have studied arahant, anāgāmi, or sakadāgāmi-level Dhamma, but that information is useless in actual practice. Put that knowledge on the shelf and focus on the stream-entry topic of ownership and worldly belongings. It is all that you actually need. Be diligent about it and contemplate often.

The problem is most people don't think. They think they already know, so they don't need to think. As a result, their wisdom stalls.

If you have relevant knowledge but lack concrete realizations about a concept, you will merely graze over the topic and your contemplation will be shallow. Your collection of acquired information will shield you from experiencing the disillusioning awakening that comes from realizing the truth about the topic. Likewise, you will not get far with a depth of experiences while lacking knowledge. This is because realizations, wisdom, and knowledge are each distinct.

To illustrate, if you were to count all the money at a bank, you would not feel a sense of ownership because it belongs to someone else. On the other hand, if the money were yours, a mere one hundred dollars would hold immense value. In Dhamma practice, even if you possess little wisdom, at least it is your own. Plagiarizing the wisdom of others is pointless. The information is simply copied into the external knowledge database of your memory. The real challenge is to feel experiences that truly personify the knowledge in your mind.

In the Buddha's time, many people became ariyapuggalas because their knowledge was limited. With only one topic to contemplate on, they used their individual wisdom to become ariyapuggalas. Back then, there weren't any textbooks or manuals for them to emulate. In contemporary times, we are trapped by an avalanche of information. While we can use correct examples to form the skeleton of our practice, the flesh must be derived from personal experiences and details. If you are like Venerable Pōthila, who could recite the Buddha's teachings, wearing the wisdom of others as your own skin will only stymie your Dhamma practice. Wisdom must be your own in order to be genuine.

When you contemplate, you need not fear unfocused thoughts. Simply apply the Three Common Characteristics to your reflections. Over the course of Dhamma practice, while we will mostly need to reprimand ourselves (niggaha), we must also remember to console ourselves (paggaha) afterwards. When your scolding produces tears, you will know if you have hit the bull's-eye. If you wedge a snake into a space where there's a gecko, you'll hear an *ae!* sound. If there's no gecko, you'll only hear silence. Likewise, your defilements (kilesas) will startle at the precise moment your wisdom truly discovers them. However, as things stand now, with an inaccurate shot for wisdom, you will never hit your target. At most, you'll only come close.

P: Do stream-enterers still feel anger and resentment?

LPT: Yes, but the feeling doesn't persist for long. The reason being that the sotāpannas have only eradicated greed. They are still subject to anger and lust (rāga).

P: What is the insight (ñāṇa) that the arahants have?

LPT: Āsavakhayañāṇa is the knowledge that you will be free from all mental intoxicants (āsava), or the knowledge that all āsava will be extinguished in that very instant. All arahants will have experienced this insight. However, anagamis will not.

Aim to make it in this lifetime. Give it all that you've got. I once considered that if I died before attaining ultimate enlightenment in this lifetime, I would be risking my future. Where would I be reborn? I wasn't certain. If I were reborn in America, in a state I had never visited, who would be able to teach me? [laughs] If I were reborn where Buddhism didn't exist, I would be at a disadvantage. I would unwittingly cultivate bad kamma again. It is risky.

While the Buddha's teachings still clearly exist, we should put forth effort and do as much as we can. Don't throw in the towel. Aim to make it before you die. If you are going to be rich, become rich at a young age so that you can rule over your possessions for a long time. Your happiness will last long. If you become rich at an old age, that won't be any fun. Even with immeasurable wealth, it won't be convenient or easy to use your possessions when you're old. If you become rich in your teens, you can use your riches to the fullest extent possible. You will be able to derive much pleasure from them. Dhamma practice is the same way. If you attain full enlightenment or a level of enlightenment while you are young, your life will be incredibly good. But if you attain enlightenment and die immediately after, it isn't so worth it. You don't get to enjoy all the advantages. It is better to become rich when you're young.

You don't need to aim for much. For now, just set your sights on self belongings. Admonish yourself more often. Compel yourself to cast off attachments. It is like beating a snake that has a frog in its jaws. How must you hit the snake so that it will release the frog? You must beat the snake in a way that compels it to stop eating the frog. Only then will it spit out the frog. You can beat any part of the snake's body, so long as it releases the frog. You can strike it, scold it, or criticize it – whatever gets it to let go. If you speak to the snake kindly, imploring it to take pity on the frog, it will not release it. There's no way it would. You must take a stern approach, both scolding and beating it. This is an example that you should apply in your own Dhamma practice.

Every type of job requires excitement. For instance, singing requires various tones, low notes, and high notes. You don't just sing a single wordless note. That isn't how it works. You wouldn't know what

you were hearing. It wouldn't sound melodious, either. Singing should be melodious.

Many things I have told you here, I have never spoken of elsewhere. This is the first time I have ever divulged these personal details. I have survived my teens, family life, and many incidents and events. The more you abide by the precepts, the more you are tested by the dark side. Whether I was headed to the temple, the forest, or out in the middle of the night, there was always a woman asking to accompany me one on one. I was fixed in my determination to shield myself from them, and I successfully survived each instance. It's impossible to observe that caliber of resolution in today's men.

Tone of voice and tears are the most powerful weapons women possess. All other tools are secondary. I have observed and done much research on this particular topic. For instance, country women behave differently from their city counterparts. Women in the city are creatures of habit, while women in the countryside naturally adapt to changes and are easy to read. In jeans and a t-shirt, a country woman will carry on as normal. Once you put her in a snazzy dress, whip her hair into an intricate up-do, and apply make-up, her behavior will change. She will walk more graciously, smile more beautifully, and present herself as a completely different woman. Your choice of clothing can change your behavior. It can compel you to be more cautious. City women are unaffected by change because their behavior is routine.







**May 31, 1998**

*First Sermon*

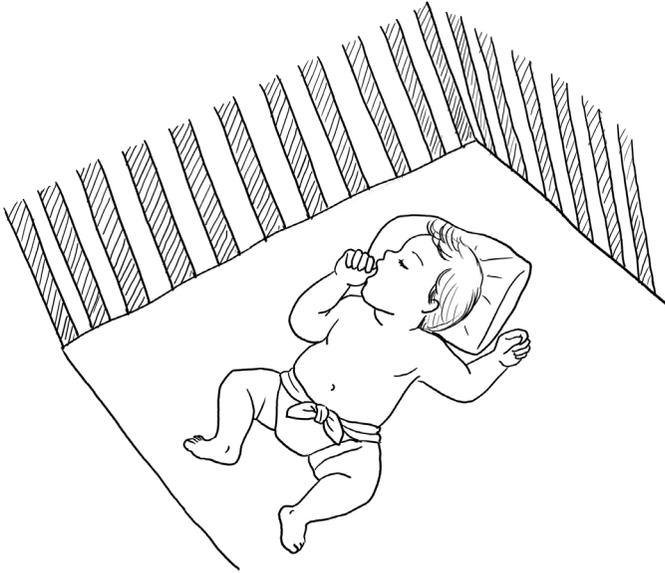
I must train myself to see that it is because I am slave to the female voice and the sight of their tears that I have been bound to this world for countless lifetimes. It has been too long that I have suffered this disadvantage. Today is the day to toughen up. Whatever happens, happens.

The opportunity to be born into the Buddhist religion is difficult to come by. Upon achieving it, we cruise through life, wasting our time on various pleasures. We age with each passing day, and as the days turn into months and years, we soon come to meet our deaths. Once you have departed the world, the opportunity to be reborn in it again is slim. Slimmer still are the chances of being born in the Buddhist religion and in Thailand. Even if you were to be reborn in Thailand, would the teachers at that juncture be as qualified as teachers in current times? If teachers in that era were incompetent, then you would have squandered your opportunity.

It is not easy to find someone who can provide models and examples of how to walk the path to nibbāna. In our current era, there are still teachers and holy individuals (ariyapuggalas) who are fully qualified to illuminate the path to nibbāna. Why don't you rush to follow them? There is nothing to lose. So long as you have not attained full enlightenment, you will still be able to return to partake in the pleasures that are invariably a part of this world. Meanwhile, the occurrence of Buddhism is incredibly rare; it only arises during certain periods and then quickly vanishes.

If a well brimming over with gold were to suddenly appear and you didn't hurry and jump into it, your opportunity to be immersed in brilliant, dazzling gold would quickly pass. Everything has its ephemeral life expectancy. If you don't take seriously your golden opportunity to practice Dhamma in this lifetime, you are taking a big risk in your next.

I thought back to the Buddha's life. How did he escape from his wife, Yasodharā? She was perfect in all aspects and their son, Rāhula, was still an infant. He ran away just a few months after his baby's birth. And look at me, I have legs just like the Buddha. Whatever will be, will be. The Buddha is my model. He didn't die from it and neither will I. But somehow, it was so difficult taking each step. My baby was sucking her thumb while lying in her freshly made crib, while her mother was downstairs and out of sight. In that instant, tears flooded my cheeks, most of them landing in the crib. I thought to myself, *from now on, you and I must part from one another. Just remember, if you have good kamma, your mom will take good care of you. If she remarries and your stepfather helps to raise you, you will turn out well if you have good kamma. From here on out, take good care of yourself. You and I must part ways. We must each die from one another.*



As I left these unspoken words with my baby, she just lay there sucking her thumb. This was the final farewell. With each heavy stride, I couldn't help but worry about my baby. If something happened, who would take care of her? But I had to make a decision. I had to man up and do what I said I would. I continued taking each excruciating step. Of course, I thought about her. There is nothing in this world that I would be more worried about than my child. That was my experience.

Once I arrived at the temple, I began the monastic ordination process. I practiced chanting the request to ordain with incredible focus. Many people doubted whether I would really be able to make it. Deep down, I felt like they were challenging me. But as I was one hundred percent focused and determined, I was unaffected by their words. After spending seven days as a candidate for monkhood (nāga), I became a monk. I ordained in Udon Thani, with Venerable Ācariya Dhammachedi (Joom Bandhulo) serving as my preceptor.

When ordaining, monks are to receive new robes. But all of the monks who had ordained before me took all the new ones. All that remained were old alms bowls resembling small pumpkins riddled with holes, and monk bags that were ugly and cluttered with designs. The traditional monk's outer robes (sanghāṭi) were patched, thick, and ugly, and the robes (cīvara) were also old. Nothing was in good condition. All available accessories were old: discarded razors, eye-less needles, and shabby thread. When a patron donated new robes to Photisomporn Temple, the monks just swapped out their old robes for the new. Once again, I was left with discarded robes. I didn't expect much more because I figured that this was as much as my fortune (vāsanā) was going to provide.

Once ordained, I concentrated on my Dhamma practice. I could see that freedom from suffering was almost within reach. I resolved to be liberated from all suffering within seven days of my being ordained. During walking meditation (caṅkama), my mind was energized and eager. When the villagers came to construct my walking meditation path, I told them to take special care to compact the dirt. They complained, saying that as I walked the path, it would become compressed anyway. But I thought it wouldn't be enough because one night of walking meditation already produced pits and large depressions in the dirt. The dirt path would have to be extra solid in order to endure prolonged, intensive usage. That's how motivated I was. The path shook and the dirt caved with my every stride. I was so focused. It didn't matter if I was standing, walking, sitting, or sleeping. All efforts funneled into my goal of enlightenment within seven days. I was that bold and determined.

Once we entered the rains retreat (vassa), I applied my wisdom to contemplations. The closer time crept to the seven-day mark, the

more I began to fret. Nonetheless, I was still determined and confident that I would be free from suffering within seven days. I poured everything I had into achieving my goal. Whatever would happen at the end of the seventh day would happen. I was willing to die on the final day if I had failed to achieve freedom from suffering. But in that case, my only wish was to be reborn again. I was going to sit in contemplation until I died from it. I was that audacious.

On the seventh day, I intensified my walking meditation and contemplations. My mind dipped into serenity for a brief moment and I suddenly realized, *if the fruit is not mature, you cannot force it to ripen*. I considered whether it was my defilements (kilesas) talking. It wasn't. It was the truth. I thought of the Buddha and how he spent years in painful meditation. Sakka, lord of divine beings, had appeared in front of the Buddha with a three-stringed sitar and plucked each string. Too loose wouldn't do, too taut and it would break, whilst the intermediate string was the most melodic. At that moment, I was in the taut category. I lacked flexibility. Sakka was an omen of the boldness of wisdom, which wasn't yet ripe at that time. The fruit wasn't ripe, so I had to wait for a while longer.

I recalibrated. This time, would three months be enough for my wisdom to ripen? If so, I would continue on living, but if not, all that remained would be to cremate me. And so, I made a new resolution. From then on, I accelerated my practice at the cost of my body's deterioration. I ate very little and slept very little. I became frail and exhausted. It seemed like my life would fade away and dissolve within a day or two. I was fatigued but I was willing to die because all I wanted was to attain dhamma.

One night, I had a meditative vision of a man dressed in white coming over to my hut. He was pleasant looking, and his skin was fresh and radiant. He looked familiar, but I couldn't place him. He climbed into my hut and did not bow. He simply sat there with his legs to one side, and his hands together in the lotus position. He said, "Your practice at this moment is too taut. Your body cannot be sustained. Once your body collapses, your determination to be liberated within this lifetime may be forfeited. Do not be too tense. Adjust and walk the middle path. Once you do that, your practice will be smooth and painless. That which you desire will attain fruition in this lifetime." Then he bowed and left my hut.

I thought that the vision was a trick my defilements and imagination were playing on me once again. Considering that with all of this effort I was still unable to solve the puzzle, there was no way I was going to take a break now. I pumped up my diligence, both in contemplations and meditation. However, because I lacked sleep, had reduced my food intake, and was living in the middle of the forest, I came down with malaria. I took Quinine malaria medication to combat the fever but became nauseous. I thought that if I were to die in the hut it would be a great dishonor to all forest monks. I didn't want my life to end in the hut. I decided it was better to die on the walking meditation path. That way, once my friends discovered my dead body, they would know that I had died in walking meditation. To die in the hut was an insult and I wasn't having it. Clutching the wall of the hut, I rose slowly. Now, the banana leaf walls were only held in place by four bamboo pillars, and the floor covering was constructed from bamboo sheets. There was netting made of cogon grass that provided light protection against the weather. And during the time that I came down with malaria fever, I had made a vow to fast for seven days. I suddenly fainted.

I had a friend who was staying in a hut twenty meters away from me. He had made an oath to refrain from speaking to anyone. Once he heard the loud thump coming from my hut, he wondered what had happened. He came over to see and found that I had died. He hurried and ran to the others who were practicing Dhamma elsewhere. He acted out “death” and “come and see.” He didn’t speak and nobody understood what he was miming. They brought him a pen and paper to write out what he was trying to communicate. He wrote, *Phra Thoon has died*, and then everybody rushed to see for themselves. They rang the temple bell, and everyone dashed over to try and revive me. My friends had come, but I had no idea.

At around 4 p.m., I regained consciousness. I wondered how I had regained consciousness and they told me about what had happened. I told them that I was about to die and had decided it would be best to do so while in walking meditation. The elder monk said, “I have been a monk for many years, and no one has ever done this. The body cannot endure this kind of treatment. If your body fails, you will be unable to attain nibbāna.” These words echoed those of the man in white. I took their words to heart and went about taking medicine and nursing myself back to health.

After recovering, I had to readjust. What was used to gauge the middle path (*majjhimā paṭipadā*)? I thought back to the Buddha and the period before he reached enlightenment. He had begun to eat and rest in order to nourish the physical and mental strength required to foster his wisdom. Thus, I resolved to eat enough to be full – but not overeat – and to continue practicing mindfulness and wisdom as before.



Soon afterwards, I had a vision of three different walking meditation paths. The first path was cluttered with overgrown grass, the second was a discernible and grassy course, and the third was barren and flat. It felt like I was walking on the third path when a voice said, “Walk the middle path,” and so I did. Within an instant, the pathway expanded into a road wide enough for cars to pass. There on the widened path stood a white stallion ready with its saddle. A voice said, “Ride this horse on the middle path and you will reach the end of suffering.” I immediately mounted the horse and it bolted off in a flash that would have left a zooming rocket in its dust.

Once the stallion approached the end of the pathway, it lifted its nose and soared into the sky, past clouds and into outer space. The voice said, “Ride this horse around the universe,” and the horse leapt off at an amazingly fast speed. The voice continued, “Once you are finished exploring outer space, come see the human world,” and the horse descended onto a forest of thick brush. The horse darted through trees that parted and rejoined as we passed. The stallion galloped through the entire world, leaving not a single spot



unexplored. The same voice said, “Once you are finished exploring the world, return the horse to solid ground,” and the horse touched down on the earth.

Thereafter, my mind withdrew from the meditative state, and I analyzed what I had seen. Of the three different walking meditation paths, the barren path represented my austere and nearly fatal practices. I hadn’t walked the middle path at all, and that was why there was grass growing there. The first path was also untraveled. I only knew strict perseverance and that was why I had to return to the middle path. The widened path was the middle path, free of obstacles. The stallion symbolized wisdom and the path it traveled corresponded to wisdom contemplations that employed reason consistent with the truth of reality. The horse’s journey upwards into outer space signified the knowledge that whether we go to heaven or any other place, there is no improvement over the suffering prevalent in this world. The return to the human world represented a comprehensive analysis of any possible desirables this world had left to offer.

I was confident that following sufficient rest and adequate nourishment, I would have ample energy, just like in my vision. Thereafter, my Dhamma practice advanced healthily. I accelerated my practice in anticipation of achieving enlightenment by my three-month target.

In the final month of the rains retreat, my relatives came to visit. They said they would permit me to ordain for only three months. My wife’s family also came. When I ordained, the elder monks advised me to go far away from home. They were afraid that I would be tormented by the sight of my wife’s face. But I stayed because I

wanted to know the yearning to disrobe typical of someone who has fled his family to ordain. I wanted to experience it. I wanted to stay there. I would take full responsibility for myself.

Once my wife's relatives arrived, they chronicled her suffering and sorrow in pointed detail. As they spoke through tears and indirect persuasion, feelings of guilt, affection, and compassion arose within me. All I could do was listen. They visited two to three times. After that, I felt like something changed within my mind. Something that I never thought would happen had happened. I had never missed a particular person before, but at that moment, I ached for my daughter. Imagination (saṅkhāra) was starting to make inroads. I began to wonder what would happen once she got older. *Who would find the money to finance her education? Who would take care of her once she got sick? Where would she find her father?* As a tsunami of concerns crashed on my mind's shores, I began to cry. At night, tears saturated my pillow. I couldn't eat or sleep, the meat on my bones withered, and I grew thinner with each passing day. Each bite of food I took lacked flavor. My heart was about to burst from how much I missed my daughter.

One day, Venerable Ācariya So noticed how emaciated I had become. The agonizing distress over my daughter had rendered my gait unsteady. Luang Por So called me in and asked me how my practice was coming along. He knew that I had intensified my Dhamma practice to the point where I lost consciousness and almost died, but he didn't know that I was about to die from how much I missed my daughter. I told him that I was fine.

Luang Por So asked, "How is your family doing? Do you miss them?"

I replied, "Sometimes." Although the truth was closer to "all of the time."

He said, “No matter, just focus on your practice and get past it.”

I said, “I will try my best. I am willing to die in the pursuit. I would like to promise that if one day I wake up and I can’t distinguish day from night, good from bad, men from women, and I am acting insane, then you can disrobe me. But so long as I wake up and can still distinguish day from night, good from bad, and men from women, I would like to remain in these saffron robes as a monk.”

After that, I accelerated my practice, but my tears prevented me from sleeping. I don’t know if all of you sitting here feel the same way when you miss your kids. The yearning to embrace my daughter was so heavy and tormenting. Thoughts of her had eclipsed my wisdom. During that period, I couldn’t get any rest. I had to catch shut-eye mid-step in walking meditation. While on the verge of my last breath, I contemplated the lives of all the Earth’s sentient beings, and I began to regain consciousness. I had been reborn again and again unto this world because of this very same feeling of being worried about someone. While I am still worried about a particular person, I will have to be reborn as that person’s child. I sped up my contemplations, but after two or three days I still couldn’t cure the heartache.

Then one day, while in the midst of walking meditation, the anxiety I felt for my daughter instantly vanished. Like a pile of gunpowder that vanishes the instant it is lit, my heart was liberated, light, and I could breathe easily. This is the heart of Dhamma practice – utilizing things around you for comparisons and contemplations. We are reborn into this world because of our attachment to someone or something. I had to accelerate my practice so that I could be free of worries and attachments. As a layperson, I fretted over my

belongings, but I had completely left all of them behind. At that moment, the one person I still agonized over and felt attached to was my daughter. She was my entire world. Once I had uprooted her from my heart, all the corresponding concerns and suffering withered and died.

A short time after, the annual robe ceremony (*kaṭhina*) came and went. I took leave of my elders on a journey to carry out the austere practices (*dhūtaṅga*) with Kru Ba Khambhun. He and I had been ordained during different months of the same vassa. The moment I stepped out of the temple grounds with my alms bowl and long-handled monk umbrella, I was soaring atop clouds of ecstasy. I was like one of the monks in the Buddha's time who ventured out to practice Dhamma. Blissful contentment coursed through my veins wherever I found myself. I wouldn't have been as elated squatting atop a pile of glistening riches and treasures as I was at that moment sitting atop a clump of sand.

I contemplated as I trekked onward. The term *dhūtaṅga* refers to the thirteen practices aimed at scrubbing away defilements until completely rid of them. Wherever I parked my umbrella tent, I felt like I was realizing my true worth. I was at my full potential while contemplating Dhamma. I faced no obstacles during meditation. Because I was a proficient meditator, it didn't take long for me to enter into a state of calm serenity. Thereafter, I would leave the serene state and immediately employ my wisdom in contemplations. Whenever more time in the serene state was warranted, I would allow it to dwell there. I could control it because I was capable. I used wisdom to control every state of meditation. Wisdom must be employed in order to corral the mind into a serene state. We must be resourceful when using our wisdom.

During a tranquil state of meditation one day, I experienced a vision (nimitta). I saw a massive horde of people, as if all the world's people had gathered in one place. When I watched them, it was as if I had an omniscient vantage point. Every angle was visible to me: front, back, and all around. I noticed that each person behaved differently. Some people resembled drunkards as they affectionately danced, swayed, and hugged one another. While others were violently hitting and killing people, the snow-haired elders were busy playing. The air was filled with discordant noises including that of gongs, violins, and flutes. So, this is what being drunk off the world was like.

While I sat there observing, a voice announced, "Whoever wishes to enter the doorway to nibbāna and the end of all suffering must exit that way. Once you go, you will not be reborn in this world again." My eyes scanned my surroundings and came to rest on a sign above a huge doorway that clearly read, "The Path to the End of Suffering." There were people walking towards it, too. However, after walking a short distance they glanced back, saw their friends dancing and enjoying themselves, and scurried back to join them. Once the announcement sounded again, they returned to the path. Then, after progressing about twenty meters they peered ahead and saw no one. They looked behind them and saw their friends reveling and thus dashed back to reunite with them once more. I thought, *why don't they just go? Why did they start on their way and then come back?* They were still preoccupied with worldly delights.

I heard the announcement and read the sign. I was motivated and determined to walk that path, but there was no way for me to cut through the throngs of people. I circumvented the gathering and made my way back towards the path. Now that I had located the path, I had to find a way to get up there. I looked around and saw a



small trail, wide enough for only one traveler. I saw footprints, so there were others who had traversed the path before. Then the voice said, “This is the path on which Luang Pu Mun brought a group of people. Scale this path.” I was excited because I had found the right path. I walked further and encountered dirt that was so soft it was like walking in mud. Like a car stuck in a mud hole, I couldn’t traverse it. I grabbed hold of bamboo stalks to brace myself, only for them to break in my hands. I used my feet to prop myself up against the bamboo stalks, and even the larger stalks still collapsed to the ground. I was alone, climbing and floundering about, thinking that I’d die if I had to. Wherever my feet landed, the dirt caved in. I was at the point of complete exhaustion. Still, I managed to gradually ascend, and I clambered on until I reached the main path.

When I glanced behind me, I saw a forest of fresh, old, and rotting bamboo stalks. The old masters had made their way just like I had. Those older stalks had been used to brace up the older generations,

while the fresher stalks had crumbled beneath me just now. Imagine how strong they had to have been, considering even the larger stalks had collapsed in their entirety. Then I looked back to the trail's opening and saw a large group of people holding their hands together at their chests, saying "Sādhu" in reverence [laughs]. I called to them, "Come on! Who wants to follow me?" They merely said, "Sādhu." I was about to walk forward, as I could see the end of suffering was only an arm's reach away. It was luminous and the path to nibbāna was clear. I would definitely arrive within an hour or so because it was a direct route, no forks or junctions lay ahead. If your Dhamma practice follows the Noble Eightfold Path, you are on the right course. There can be no wrong or ignorance on this path. It's already the middle path.

At that point, my mind withdrew from the meditative state and I evaluated what I had seen. The sea of people were the world's citizens who were consumed with life, death, and entertainment. I had been one of them. But alas, now I would no longer belong. There were people killing each other, and men and women embracing one another. When would those people snap out of it like I had? I walked around the mass of people, on the left side. Although that door was real, it was meant for the *kāma*vacara-kusala, or laypeople, to enter. It was a shortcut. The route for ordained individuals was different. The vision signified how I wouldn't take the layperson's direct route to nibbāna. I would take the circuitous route. I would attain enlightenment as a monk.

The various bamboo stalks lying scattered about represented the strength of my mindfulness and the strength of my wisdom. There was nothing that could pose an obstacle. I would just use my feet to push off of each stalk. Whichever stalk I clutched at broke in my

hands. Even a tractor was no match for me. The power of my devotion (saddhā), vigor (virīya), mindfulness (sati), concentration (samādhi), and wisdom (paññā) had all come together. The five strengths (Bala) had converged.

Upon examining my life, I was confident that I had been fully immersed in the ways of the middle path. I was a practitioner who did not have any burdens. There were no belongings, children, or anything else in this world that could anchor me. *Bhārā have pañcakkhandhā: the burden is indeed the five aggregates.* Although I still possess them, the aggregates (khandas) are a weight I can bear to carry. But I won't let others be a load on my shoulders. People like to carry burdens like their children, husband, house, belongings, and all sorts of other things. Our aggregates are already enough of a burden, yet people still pile on more layers of responsibility. While their mouths complain of suffering, their hands continue to grab at more to put into their baskets [laughs]. They should be lightening their load by picking things out of it instead. Yet the more they complain, the more they pile on. Is this crazy or sane?

The vision I had was a mere rendering of the truth. The real deal is garnered through realizing and understanding the truth as it actually exists. Stop eating and sleeping your days away and start hustling. You must realize that on the stage is one thing, while behind the stage is a completely different story. You must separate the external, worldly aspects from the internal Dhamma. You must know your role and the role of others. As a householder, wife, husband, or child you must perform as societal norms dictate, to your utmost ability. The belongings that you've earned are allowed. Just distinguish between the external and internal. Know that all belongings are merely for temporary use, for the period that you are alive and on



this earth. Once you've died, they will fall into the hands of your heirs. Your belongings are merely intended to be consumed from one day to the next. Don't expect more than that. You must convince your mind of this.

Your outward actions are just mannerisms that correspond to your role on stage. You play your part as a wife or mother to your utmost ability. Behind the stage is where you hold an ultimate secret that nobody knows. What you don't perform for others is immensely personal and private. You ought to keep action (*kiriya*) and non-action (*akiriya*) separate. Your husband needn't know, your children needn't know, and you really mustn't tell. You can't go around professing that your husband really isn't your husband or that your children really aren't your children. You can't just announce that all your wealth isn't really yours. It'll only invite trouble. People will come to collect it, seeing as it isn't yours anymore. That's why *akiriya* must be kept private and secret.

The truth is your loved ones are only yours in terms of worldly conventions (*sammuti*). You must train yourself to understand that so long as you are content with an object, you will return to be reborn with it. Here you are, in this life, as a consequence of an attachment to something in a previous life. Understanding truths like this through wisdom is the essence of Dhamma practice. It's how you coach and train your mind. You do not teach yourself by closing your eyes and repeating a meditative phrase. That is what you do to rest. All students need time to rest. When it's break time, use meditation to rest. When it's class time, channel your wisdom. You must alternate rest and work. You can't remain in one mode perpetually.





**May 31, 1998**

*Second Sermon*

Many people wonder why I appoint wisdom as the vanguard and meditation as the auxiliary. When people read the Dhamma manuals in circulation today, they neglect to read the texts in their entirety. As a result, their studies are incomplete. The numerous contradicting principles within a single book can tie your mind in knots. Yet each book alleges to be the Buddha's teachings. Did the Buddha teach these principles while he was alive?

When I am to teach someone, I don't just assume the scriptures are correct. I consider each case individually. Is the teaching supported by ample reasoning and logic? Is the cause and effect relationship sound? I am not credulous by nature. If it doesn't make sense, I'm not buying it.

During the Buddha's lifetime, what did he teach his pupils? People teach meditation today. Is that what the Buddha taught? What did he teach his very first students – the Pañcavaggiya? Did he advise

them to start with meditation? In the Noble Eightfold Path, what is at the heart of practice? *Sammādiṭṭhi* and *sammāsaṅkappa* are both wisdom-based; *sammāvācā*, *sammākammanta*, and *sammāājiva* are all morality-based; and *sammāviriya*, *sammāsati*, and *sammāsamādhī* are concentration-based. The Buddha's original teaching was wisdom followed by morality, followed by concentration.

Now, why would he teach wisdom first? Because wisdom is what does the work. What did he teach about wisdom? Where does wisdom come from? The Buddha spoke to the wisdom that innately exists in each and every one of us. The *Pañcavaggiya* already possessed wisdom. They didn't need to do anything to bring the wisdom into existence. People in every era – before and after the advent of Buddhism, ordained and non-ordained alike – are born with wisdom. This wisdom is congenital; it doesn't hatch from meditation. Regardless of your religion, or any religion to speak of, you have wisdom.

It is this fundamental, natural wisdom that the Buddha addressed. It is this existing wisdom that we are to train. In each and every era, we have been applying our wisdom in worldly, mundane matters. As a result, in this present era, our wisdom is the epitome of wrong view (*micchādiṭṭhi*). It's wisdom that has been habitually enraptured with the world. Now, we must train our wisdom to see the truth as it exists in reality. In other words, we must train ourselves to think. View and thought go hand in hand. Right view (*sammādiṭṭhi*) denotes views aligned with the truth. Right thought (*sammāsaṅkappa*) denotes thoughts that conform with the truth. We must train our wisdom to see the truth clearly and plainly – to know what is right and what is wrong, and what is proper and what is improper.

Establishing right view is fundamental to Dhamma practice. Once you have established right view, then you can use that wisdom to practice morality. This is what they did during the Buddha's lifetime. Morality (*sīla*) is guarding your outward demeanor – speech, action, livelihood – all of which are incorporated in the precepts. Wisdom is vital to the observance of precepts. Morality is a learned concept (*pariyatti*) that must be studied with the wisdom you innately possess. Only after you understand the precepts, can you honor them properly. How do you uphold the precepts *pāṇātipātā*, *adinnādānā*, *kāmesu micchācārā*, *musāvādā*, *surā-meraya-majja-pamādaṭṭhānā*? How can you use your wisdom to thoroughly understand each and every precept? How do your actions correspond to the precepts? How can your speech violate the precepts? What kind of livelihood conforms to the precepts? You must study it all. This is how you use wisdom to adhere to the precepts.

Once you have the right view on how to uphold the precepts, you can direct your wisdom toward concentration. How to practice concentration (*samādhi*) is also a learned concept (*pariyatti*). How do you carry out meditation? What are the characteristics of *khaṇika-samādhi*, *upacāra-samādhi*, and *appanā-samādhi*? What is *rūpa-jhāna*? What is *arūpa-jhāna*? What classifies as right concentration (*sammā-samādhi*)? What classifies as wrong concentration (*micchā-samādhi*)? You must study and understand all of these concentration principles prior to launching meditation practice. Otherwise, if you make a mistake, you may be unable to correct it.

Meditation isn't like other matters – it directly impacts the mind-soul (*citta*). If you wreck your *citta*, everything will be ruined. If you don't understand the principles of practice, just stay as you are. Don't

leap into anything quite yet. You must be certain that your practice will truly adhere to right concentration before you put it into practice. Look inward and assess whether your take on concentration corresponds to wrong view or right view. If you haven't corrected existing wrong views and proceed to meditate, once your mind becomes tranquil, that meditative energy will only amplify your wrong views. You'll end up unknowingly practicing wrong concentration. That's what they call the collapse of dhamma, or the defilements of insight (*vipassanūpakilesas*). Many monks and laypeople throughout Thailand are presently afflicted. That's because they dove into meditation without first studying how it should be practiced. It's what happens when your wisdom isn't sufficiently thorough.

You must be comprehensive in understanding the precepts to be undertaken. A monk must understand all of their two hundred and twenty-seven precepts, *sāmaṇera* must understand their ten precepts, nuns and devotees must understand their eight precepts, and others must understand their five precepts. If your understanding of the precepts is not thorough, you will unwittingly breach the precepts or be preoccupied by misgivings. It's identical to principles encountered in worldly affairs. Without a complete understanding of the task at hand, you're liable to make mistakes and incur damage. You must first understand the work you're to do before you can get it done right. When it comes to the work of precepts, you must develop an exhaustive understanding of how to uphold them, how they are broken, and how they are controversial.

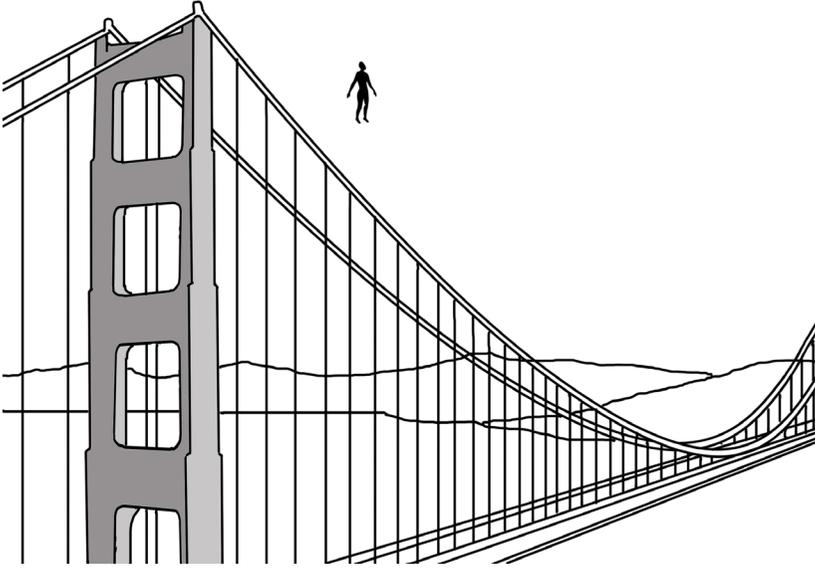
Do you know what qualifies as wrong concentration? If not, then how will you know when you've practiced wrong concentration? Who will correct it for you? It isn't easy. Once you've erred, it isn't

easy to rectify the situation, and you must do so on your own. Even if someone else has made the same mistake, they can't help you fix your problem. What are mistakes in meditation? The vipassanūpakilesas. When you experience illumination (obhāsa), what causes it? Meditation. Ñāṇa, pīti, passaddhi, sukha – all of these are explained in the first of my Sammā series books. Read up on it so that you can understand these meditative pitfalls.

Use the wisdom you already have to determine the anticipated results of your meditation practice. If meditation is the cause, what will be the result? Dhammaññū means knowing the cause, atthaññū means knowing the result. In this case, dhammaññū is understanding meditation's role as a cause. Knowing the result of that cause is atthaññū. Every action has a result. Is wisdom the result of meditation? That's what most people in Thailand and abroad believe. Why don't the instructors read the scriptures to determine whether the Buddha taught this? They don't stop to consider whether or not what they're reading in the scriptures is correct. They personify the Kālāma Sutta. What is this blind faith in the scriptures? They don't know what is right and what is wrong.

When did the Buddha ever teach this? Which of the hundreds of thousands of ariyapuggalas did he instruct in that way? Where is the proof? These contemporary teachings cannot be attributed to the Buddha; he never taught that way. It's monks who push it, and devotees who are confused by it. They continue to perpetuate these erroneous teachings. The authentic accounts exist in the texts, only these contemporary teachings view them through meditation-colored glasses.

Does meditation really birth wisdom? No. Meditation is counter to the generation of wisdom, although it can support it. So, what



actually results from meditation? Meditation births tranquility, meditative absorptions (jhāna) – like rūpa-jhāna and arūpa-jhāna – and supernormal insight (abhiññā). The path of meditation leads to supernormal insight like the divine eye (cakkhu-ñāṇa), divine ear (sota-ñāṇa), telepathy (ceto-pariya-ñāṇa), magical powers like flying and traveling through solid substances (iddhi-vidhā), and assuming another form (manomaya-iddhi) as Cūlapanthaka could. All of these supernormal insights are the result of meditation, yet today’s practitioners assert that wisdom is the result.

I’ve debated this with many people before. Take the discourses, any of them. Take the very first sermon, the Setting in Motion the Wheel of the Dhamma discourse (Dhammacakkappavattana Sutta). What does it all mean? Is it wisdom or isn’t it? Or the discourse given to Yasakulaputta. Was that entirely wisdom? Yes. There wasn’t an inkling of meditation in there. Analyze the translation of the



discourse presented to the three Jaṭiḷa ascetics. It was exclusively wisdom-based. People don't understand the discourses. They don't see how it was all wisdom back then, not meditation. The Buddha taught people to understand the truth, to be wise, and to be thorough in their contemplations.

Don't merely read the discourses, read the translations too. Where is the meditation in there? It's all wisdom, it's all sammādiṭṭhi. This is because we all inherently hold wrong views. As such, we must start by changing wrong views to right views. We all naturally possess wisdom. We don't need meditation to create it. The Buddha didn't teach meditation before wisdom, but people believe it regardless. They believe morality begets concentration, and concentration begets wisdom. Who will you believe? What do I believe? I believe what happened when the Buddha was alive.

I don't forbid meditation, I encourage it. I am a proficient meditator and had been well before I ordained. You'd be hard pressed to find someone more skilled than I am. I meditate to recharge my energy and use that energy to boost my wisdom. Wisdom and concentration are cultivated separately but can be combined to produce a favorable outcome. Wisdom is the arrow and concentration is the bow; the bow helps to propel the arrow further. Concentration helps you see the truth more clearly or sharply. It merely functions as an energy or power source for your mind or body. If you don't know how to apply it, you'll waste it dwelling in meditative absorptions. If you know how to apply it, you can use it to enhance your wisdom. This power of concentration is a double-edged sword. It can be either wrong concentration or right concentration. If it's wrong concentration, you must look to the wrong view at its root and rectify it. That's why it's crucial to start your practice with wisdom

and right view. If you don't understand how to practice concentration, it'll turn into delusional concentration (moha-samādhi).

While the Buddha was alive, there were plenty of savvy meditators. Was that serene meditation considered wrong concentration? Not yet. It was moha-samādhi. They were absorbed in the bliss and happiness that emanated from tranquil meditation. When they died, they headed straight to an interminable existence in the brahma realms. For it to be right concentration, once your mind enters that focused state, you have to cultivate understandings and realizations of the truth. That's what they did when the Buddha was alive. Wrong concentration occurs when you meditate and gain wrong views and understandings, like when you see a meditative omen (nimitta) and believe it to be true. You really have to do your research before you begin to meditate.

It's so difficult to find your way back to right concentration once you've traversed the wrong concentration path. It'll only keep leading you astray and deeper into the abyss. It's like you've drilled a screw into the wall, but it's crooked. You wish to correct it and make it straight, but you can't simply re-drill the screw into the same pulverized hole or even an adjacent spot. It is beyond repair. Once you've already developed wrong concentration habits, it'll be a challenge to reform them. You'll essentially be forced to abandon any hopes for nibbāna. Today's meditators don't understand these principles and don't distinguish between wisdom and concentration. They don't realize how concentration and wisdom mutually support one another.

You must understand the two concentration techniques: focused concentration and tranquil meditation. What is considered alert and focused concentration? What is considered tranquil meditation?



Don't rush into meditating however you see fit without first comprehending their distinguishing characteristics. Once you understand, you can launch your practice straight away, minus the guesswork. You will realize what kind of concentration is before you. Alert and focused concentration is paired with wisdom, while tranquil meditation is used for rest. If your concentration is calm and serene, you've already bypassed wisdom. No one in a calm trance can utilize wisdom to contemplate. How are they teaching this? When your mind is silent, how can you use your wisdom to think? You can't.

You must recognize the limits and boundaries that define focused concentration and tranquil meditation. Alert and focused concentration is characterized by momentary mindfulness (*khaṇika-samādhi*) and access mindfulness (*upacāra-samādhi*). Tranquil meditation is characterized by full meditative concentration (*appanā-samādhi*) and form-based meditative absorptions (*rūpa-jhāna*). If your mind is silent, how is wisdom supposed to emerge? If someone is sleeping, how can they accomplish any work?

They can't. A serene mind will only progress further and further into meditative absorptions.

If you wish to think or cultivate wisdom, you must pull back from that serene state and into focused concentration. It is this momentary mindfulness that magnifies wisdom. Mantra meditation is not necessary to establish alert and focused concentration. You can opt to implement that technique or opt not to. Where there is focus, there is concentration. This focus can stem from wisdom or it can stem from the repetition of a phrase. When you work, you can concentrate. When you drive, you can concentrate. You don't need a mantra to lead you there. While you're contemplating something and analyzing it scene by scene, you're already concentrating. It's focused concentration. See, concentration and wisdom go hand in hand. They are life partners. They work together.

When you consider meditation, you have to analyze the cause of serene meditation. Who practices serene meditation? You already know the cause of focused concentration – the cultivation of a wisdom-oriented personality (paññāvimutti). Likewise, the cause of serene meditation is the cultivation of a concentration-oriented (cetovimutti) personality. If you are one of the paññāvimutti and attempt to foster a cetovimutti personality, you will only die in the futile attempt. The personalities are too dissimilar. Focused concentration is sufficient for the paññāvimutti, as they aren't versed in tranquil meditation or concerned with appanā-samādhi. Meanwhile, the cetovimutti need to repeat a mantra only briefly before effortlessly plunging into serene mediation, appanā-samādhi, or rūpa-jhāna. But they still need to pull back into momentary mindfulness in order to access their wisdom and contemplate.

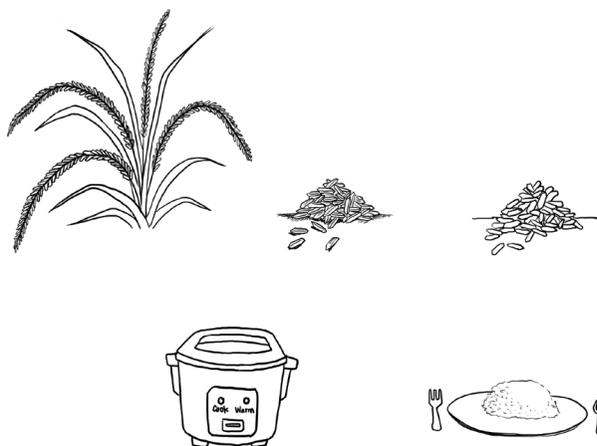
Read the scriptures and you'll discover that during the Buddha's era, there was a faction of cetovimutti who attained enlightenment, but there weren't many of them. They were expert at meditative absorptions. Their meditative prowess had been cultivated over many lifetimes as hermits and ascetics (tāpasa). That being the case, they had to preface their practice with the meditative states and jhāna they habitually occupied. The bulk of practitioners were of the paññāvimutti faction; probably eighty percent or so.

If those cetovimutti lived in this current era, they'd have a hard time. Being born during the Buddha's lifetime, they had hope in the form of the Buddha. He was the only one who could teach them. Due to their supernormal attainments, the cetovimutti are prone to exceptional pride and conceit (diṭṭhi-māna). The Buddha had to use his unmatched, consummate supernormal powers to get these masterful meditators to yield and submit to his superior prowess. Then, the Buddha was able to teach them about the detrimental repercussions of their attachment to meditation. Once the seasoned meditators feared the harmful consequences of their practice, they could recalibrate and start to train their wisdom. And that's how the cetovimutti could become ariyapuggalas back then.

It's a bleak outlook for today's cetovimutti. Today's seasoned meditators – ordained or otherwise – who experience tranquility, meditative absorptions (jhāna), or supernormal insight (abhiññā) have basically forfeited any chances of reaching enlightenment. Their heads are stuck in meditation. They are unable to make any headway toward wisdom because they're too busy savoring meditative bliss and contentment. No one can teach them.

It's a shame that while most of today's practitioners are paññāvimutti, they resist their natural tendencies and pursue cetovimutti techniques. They can meditate all they want, but the paññāvimutti will never achieve serenity. It is counter to their temperament. The paññāvimutti tend to think and contemplate, and this is good. The wisdom-oriented types can meditate in order to complement their wisdom, but they needn't venture deep into meditation, as they would risk losing their way. Wisdom is what allows you to see the objective truth. This is the Buddha's teaching. If you don't have wisdom, how can you possibly see the truth? Today's practitioners attempt to pass off the scriptures' truth as their own understanding of the truth, and that's just absurd. You must use your own individual wisdom, not textbook wisdom, to penetrate the undisputable truth. How can you contend that the theory is your own wisdom? Which of the scholars during the Buddha's time were able to use theoretical knowledge to shed defilements? None of them. You can read all you want, but you won't be able to exploit that scholarly wisdom to shed your own defilements or convert wrong view to right view. Just like Venerable Pōthila. He was an accomplished, erudite, and charismatic teacher, but he was wholly unable to internalize his own teachings and achieve his own salvation.

People don't understand the principles of studying. Back then, the Buddha would simply teach a few stanzas of Dhamma, and his pupils would seize a phrase and contemplate on it, interpret it, and expand their understanding of it. People in those days didn't possess theoretical knowledge, but they already innately possessed wisdom, so it was not difficult for them to become ariyapuggalas. Anyone who is buried up to their necks in theory, whether in this era or any other era, will encounter problems. Their wisdom becomes extinct.



The manuals contend that wisdom results from studying (sutamayapaññā). While this is accurate, it is only accurate in the acquired knowledge, pariyatti-sense. But has your applied practice, paṭipatti-based wisdom arisen yet? How can you cause wisdom to arise from your Dhamma practice? Wisdom gained from practice is unlike wisdom gained from theoretical studies. You must use the theoretical wisdom as the soil in which to grow your organic wisdom. Nowadays, however, practitioners attempt to farm their wisdom exclusively through learned knowledge. They busy themselves analyzing a potpourri of Dhamma topics and Dhamma groupings. And what good does it do? While the Dhamma is accurate, studying the name of dhamma doesn't help you grasp the actual dhamma or engender detachment.

The Dhamma in books is a raw material, like crude oil. Can your car run on that crude oil you've extracted from the ground? No. You need to filter and process the crude oil before it can fuel your vehicle. The same principle is illustrated by rice. You can't eat the raw rice kernel straight from the plant. The rice is edible only after it has been dehulled and cooked. Likewise, you need to use wisdom

to process the raw Dhamma extracted from the manuals. In this way, the result will be a genuine understanding aligned with the truth of reality. You have to use your own wisdom in order to gain any benefit. You innately possess wisdom, only you're unaware of it. This wisdom is your mind's light and your mind's eye. See, our minds are blinded by ignorance (*avijjā*). We need to train our wisdom to serve as our mind's eye, so that we can illuminate and penetrate the truth.

That's why I teach people wisdom, so that they can learn how to think and contemplate. What do the Three Common Characteristics (*Tilakkhaṇa*) denote? What does *yonisomanasikāra* mean? It's all wisdom. I don't forbid meditation. Do it. But I will forbid binding meditation to the generation of wisdom. Don't think in this way. Because of your inability to separate concentration and wisdom, your meditation will unwittingly produce wrong concentration.

Any questions? Rest is necessary. It's tiring giving a sermon. If you're tired, you should rest. I try to teach people with wisdom. Wisdom is crucial. My own meditation practice has always been rooted in wisdom. Once your wisdom is sound and thorough, meditation is a cinch. It'll only take a few minutes before you establish concentration. If you don't have a *cetovimutti* personality, you'll never achieve anything in your meditative pursuits. You'll only die trying. The more you meditate, the dumber you become. Veteran meditators can easily attain meditative absorptions and supernormal powers – but to what end? Their meditative practices come at the expense of wisdom. Meditation doesn't give rise to wisdom, it quashes it. Tranquil meditation evicts wisdom from the mind. The Buddha didn't teach that wisdom will emerge from serene meditation



like today's books do. These frivolous manuals are disseminated across the world. What a waste. And the truth remains buried. I'll do my utmost to ensure the survival of the true path. In fact, I may be the only one to do so, but I do not fear the backlash. Now, what questions do you all have for me?

P: What techniques can I use to build up my wisdom and to embolden my existing wisdom? Basically, what can I do to ensure a continuous flow of contemplations?

LPT: The boldness of wisdom hinges on the frequency of contemplation. Each person must cultivate their own wisdom. Thought begets wisdom. So, make sure that you're continually thinking, analyzing, and evaluating, and that your contemplations conform to the Three Common Characteristics. Furthermore, you should meditate in order to energize that wisdom, because wisdom cannot stand on its own; it needs to draw strength from concentration. Don't use the scriptures as your mouthpiece. Contemplate using your own wisdom, use your own reasons as evidence and support. Once you reach a conclusion and that conclusion mirrors the manuals' truths, then you'll know it's bona fide wisdom. Don't squander time trying to emulate the manuals. While the content is true, it's merely theory-based wisdom. The wisdom we're talking about cultivating here is individual, personal wisdom.

The exegeses of Pāli proverbs reflect the author's wisdom. With practice, you can write these essays, too. For instance, suppose you are prompted to write an exegesis on a line from the Ālavaka Sutta, "*By effort is one's suffering quelled,*" as it relates to mental factors (cetasika). The scholarly compositions in the manuals are

eloquent. Can you write an original essay on the same topic without pirating what has previously been written? You must use your own wisdom, not appropriate other people's wisdom. Don't strictly follow the manuals. Just take the topic and expound on it with your own wisdom.

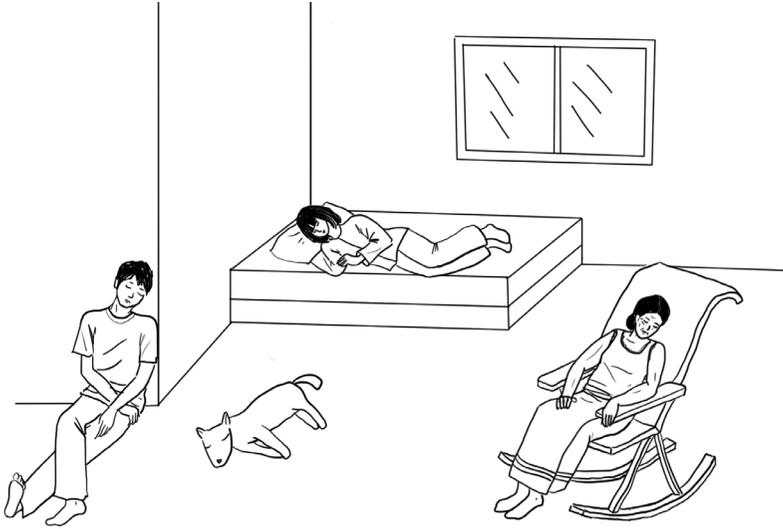
I've done plenty of studying since my sāmaṇera years. As a novice, I was easily able to hold my own as questioner or answerer in two-chaired exegetical debates. Because I was so well-versed, whenever I contemplated on a discourse, my mind would default to the scholarly take on it. It took a long time for me to shed the learned knowledge reflexes. I had to actively admonish myself in order to undo that conditioning. I would try to ignore the theoretical knowledge and only extract the topic to contemplate on. To this day, I haven't finished reading the primary level Buddhist studies text. I know the Dhamma they refer to, but not the nomenclature or ordering as presented in the texts. I have my own understanding of those concepts. I was fiercely determined to detach from theoretical learning at that time.

Long ago, when Luang Ta Mahā Bua arrived to study under Luang Pu Mun, Luang Pu Mun told Luang Ta Mahā Bua, "If you're here to be my pupil, don't bring your Mahā with you." In other words, don't bring that trove of knowledge with you; leave the scriptures behind and come as you are. Back in the Buddha's time, scholarly Venerable Pōthila was unable to practice because all the other monks refused to accept him as a pupil. So, he went to a young sāmaṇera. What did the novice teach Venerable Pōthila? If he taught Venerable Pōthila the scriptures, what good would it have done? Venerable Pōthila was a renowned sermonizer who could recite all of the scriptures from rote. So, how could the sāmaṇera teach him? He instructed

Venerable Pōthila to toss out all the learned knowledge and start as an empty vessel. As the sāmaṇera instructed him, he was to follow along and use his instinctual wisdom, not learned wisdom, to contemplate on the teaching.

If you use your own wisdom, you won't have such a rough time at practice. You can analyze any topic and the contemplation will flow smoothly. This is called dhamma-vicaya, using the dhamma as a basis for your investigation or analysis. The principles of rationality already exist. Namely, the Three Common Characteristics. Hold fast to these three principles. Whenever you contemplate on something, it isn't necessary to be detailed and meticulous every time. But it must always adhere to the Three Common Characteristics. If you do this, you can't go wrong. Even if your details are off, if your contemplation conforms to the Three Common Characteristics, you won't be off-track.

Take this morning's meal, for example. Did any two people eat the exact same meal? There were many dishes to choose from, each person selected what they wanted, and everyone ate until they were full. When you eat, success is gauged by satiety, not the specific foods consumed. The same goes for meditation or contemplation. Serenity is the measure of meditative accomplishment. You can employ any technique, so long as your mind remains in the present, and you'll have achieved your meditative goal. Wisdom is the same way. So long as your contemplations abide by the Three Common Characteristics, you've achieved your wisdom goal. The truth is the gauge of success in contemplations. When you go to bed, the goal is to sleep. You can sleep on your side, face up, or face down, in an air-conditioned room or out in the open air. It doesn't matter, so long as you fall asleep.



The same applies for contemplation. Realization and understanding of the truth is what is used to assess a contemplation. This understanding must be your own, not the manuals'. The literary texts can supply you with an understanding of the concepts, but they cannot supply you with a realization of the concepts. This is because seeing and realizing the truth is a matter of individual wisdom. A true understanding of the academic principles is merely knowledge of the truth. *Dassana* means seeing the truth through right view; it refers to individual wisdom.

These days, books authored by monks and laypeople alike present elaborate interpretations of the Dhamma. The single word "Buddho" is taken to mean one who knows, one who is awakened, and one who is enlightened. Why the mess of interpretations? This is precisely why people are lost in their practice. My teaching casts wisdom as it relates to view in the lead, and meditation in the supporting role. Meditation is for taking a breather from thinking.

Meditative energy recharges wisdom. If you practice meditation without wisdom at the foundation, you'll never see wisdom arise. It's an entirely separate issue. Though an elephant is strong, if you never train it to drag loads, its strength is worthless. Likewise, you must train your mind's strength so that it can support your wisdom.

Don't expect to gain intelligence or shed any defilements or attachments. Just teach yourself to develop right view. Shedding defilements is easy. It's establishing right view that is challenging. Right view is the middle way (*majjhimā paṭipadā*). Anyone who walks the middle path already has right view.

Let us take a break and meditate in order to provide our minds some rest. You've been focused on listening to my sermon for many minutes now. I'm tired too. I've been preaching for two or three days. You need to conserve energy before you run out. Let us meditate. Now when we meditate, don't expect to achieve tranquility right off the bat. Just let it be ordinary concentration first – focused concentration. Focused concentration is being fully conscious of whatever you are doing. You're not calm and tranquil. When you think of your mantra, you are conscious that you are thinking of the mantra. You breathe in and are conscious of breathing in. If you are fully conscious, you are in focused concentration mode, not tranquil mode. Meditative calm will arise naturally for the *cetovimutti*. But if you aren't in their club, you won't experience that calm. You'll just remain in the focused concentration state.

Continue practicing whatever works for you, whether it's repeating a mantra or entering a tranquil state. The important thing is to keep your mind in the present. That's what meditation is, a mechanism for being in the present. Don't think about the past and don't think

about the future. Meditation is about prohibiting thought. Wisdom is about encouraging thought. After we break from here, go your separate ways and continue to sit and meditate. It's safe here, there's nothing to be afraid of or worry about. It's ideal for contemplating.

When we speak of concentration, it has nothing to do with eyes. It's your mind that concentrates. If you prefer, keep your eyes open, keep them shut, leave your mouth open, do whatever works for you. Sitting too long in meditation surpasses the point of moderation. Meditate until you're focused, and that's enough. Go off and meditate on your own, don't concern yourself with others. Once your mind is sufficiently calm, carry on contemplating with your wisdom. Don't wait for wisdom to arise. You have to actively contemplate. You've already prepared this wisdom and cultivated it, so you can put it to work. It's like you have a task set up but you are going to rest first. Once you're rested, you can carry on working right away. When you wake up, you can drive right away. If you have a car, that is.

P: Can you provide an example of a wisdom contemplation?

LPT: Do you know what the Three Common Characteristics are? They are *anicca* – change or impermanence; *dukkha* – anything that is difficult to tolerate, torment, a strain on the body and mind, bodily or mental stress; and *anattā* – to cease to exist, not-self, nothing is the sense of “self.” It is crucial to study and develop an understanding of the Three Common Characteristics because they apply to the entire universe, including the Three Realms of Existence. They are applied in both an internal and external sense. Internal refers to us, as we are sitting here right now. There is impermanence in us, there is suffering in us, and there is not-self in us. But to simply contemplate on ourselves is too limited. So, we must also look outward for a more

complete and comprehensive understanding. The Three Realms of Existence – the desire-sense sphere (kāma-loka), the form-sense sphere (rūpa-loka), and the formless sphere (arūpa-loka) – are entirely comprised of the Three Common Characteristics. With enough wisdom, you can determine precisely how so. With modest wisdom, begin by reflecting on yourself and your surroundings. Make sure your contemplations are aligned with the truth.

What is the purpose of thinking about the Three Common Characteristics? To develop true understandings – a true understanding of impermanence, a true understanding of suffering, a true understanding of the cessation of existence; and to develop true realizations – a true realization of impermanence, a true realization of suffering, a true realization of the cessation of existence. A true understanding and realization according to the reality of existence is the heart of wisdom contemplations. The frequency of these reflections is directly correlated to the amount of wisdom generated. It is like writing a book or an exegesis. Your first stab at it, you can't even fill a page because you've never tried it before. If you continue to write more regularly, you will become proficient and progressively more able to produce convincing explanations. Our thoughts follow the same principle. Through frequent contemplations, you will be able to expand the boundaries of and uncover the causality inherent in more of your thoughts. Consider the impermanence in your body and compare it to the impermanence in those things external to you. Then compare the impermanence common to the various external things around you. How are they similar?

Don't fear unfocused thoughts, for they are a beneficial aspect in the development of wisdom. Whimsical thoughts are only harmful



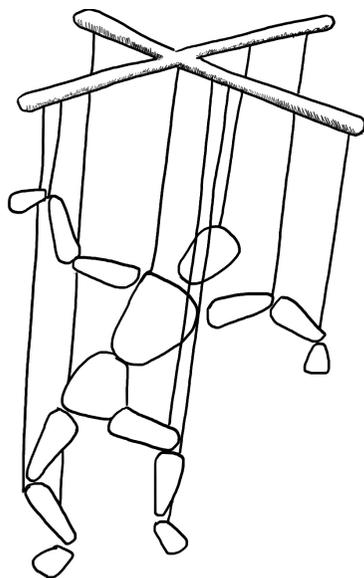
towards the course of meditation. Without these distracting and random notions, thought would never be generated. For example, if you were to write a letter to someone, absent imaginative thoughts, there would be nothing to write about. You need to scour your imagination for the appropriate words to write a letter to your parents. What kind of vernacular would you use in a letter to your friends? What type of words would you use in a note to your spouse? What type of language would you use in a note to your children? How would you write to your teachers? There must be imaginative thought involved in coming up with appropriate terms. You can't use stock phrasing for every circumstance, you have to change it up. The "What's up, baby?" that you wrote to your lover isn't appropriate for your parents. You must adjust the tone according to the person to whom you are writing. What are the characteristics of the person to whom you are writing? You must discern this. What is their position, and what tone of writing would be appropriate? You must adjust your tone to their relative position. You'd write to your lover



one way, your parents one way, and your teachers one way. You must constantly adapt your words. In the process, you will come up with the appropriate words to use. If you didn't have imaginative thoughts, how could you write the letter? If you didn't have imaginative thoughts, how would you think at all? Let your imaginative thoughts support your wisdom.

There are three categories of unfocused thoughts: Dhamma-related, imagination-based, and distracted. Practitioners must become familiar with the defining characteristics of each of these. People don't consider the different types of unfocused thoughts. Don't go and say, "Hey, don't think, because it will only be a distraction." Today's practitioners are afraid of distractions to their silent meditation, and so they don't think. In avoiding thinking, they have indirectly shut off their wisdom valve. They should be contemplating and analyzing. Instead, they will wear their badge of ignorance until the day they die. They have no wisdom. They've shut the door on it. They have not read the historical accounts from the Buddha's era. Otherwise, they would realize that wisdom is the path to enlightenment.

For example, the morning chanting verse, *Buddho susuddho* pertains to the five aggregates. What does *rūpaṃ aniccaṃ* mean? What is the point of chanting the Contemplation of the Body verses? The nails, hair, teeth, and skin are contemplated in terms of impermanence. Or the Five Subjects for Frequent Recollection: *I am subject to death. Death is unavoidable.* All of these verses are, once again, entirely wisdom based. Consider the rationality behind how and why people age. *I am subject to illness. Illness is unavoidable.* How does illness manifest? What is the root cause of illness? What is the cause of suffering? Despite blindly chanting all these verses



daily, wisdom has never reared its head. So then, what is the point of chanting? These are all thought-evoking, wisdom-based verses. Invoke your wisdom and think.

*I am subject to death. Death is unavoidable.* People who lack wisdom finish chanting and just stop there. Why not use death as a topic for contemplation instead? Death is the basis for cessation of existence, or not-self (anattā). What are the different ways in which people die? What part of us dies? The body ceases to function and the elements cease to be once the soul departs from the vessel. We're just like puppets. With someone pulling and tugging on the strings, our limbs and mouth can still move. But once the puppeteer puts down the strings, nothing moves. Anattā is this cessation or extinction. Pivot inward to consider your own death. Then pivot outward to contemplate the deaths of others, death in the past, and death in the future. It all must be considered.

The next verse is, *I will grow different, separate from all that is dear and appealing to me*. Again, this is pure wisdom. It is the bedrock of wisdom contemplations. Once you must separate from what you hold dear, what happens? Do you experience happiness or suffering? People don't think about this. They're stuck in the dark.

Then the following phrase, *I am the owner of my actions, heir to my actions, born of my actions, related through my actions, and live dependent on my actions*. Today's practitioners merely echo the wisdom of these verses. They don't develop their own wisdom. Realizations and understandings of the truth are achieved through each individual's contemplations, not by parroting someone else's knowledge. Yet, people sponge up the manuals and squeeze them right out. You must fashion your own style of wisdom. Can you do that? Defilements (kilesas) fear autonomous wisdom; they're deathly afraid. However, they are not the least bit frightened by scholarly knowledge. Arrogance and conceit thrive on this scholarly, academic knowledge. The more you know, the prouder you are of it. This conceit will create the perfect shield for defilements. The more book knowledge you mine for, the more defilements are unearthed. The Achilles heel for defilements is individual wisdom, not scholarly knowledge. The foundation of Dhamma practice is building up your own wisdom in order to take down the defilements.

P: I'd like to ask about what another monk taught in one of his Dhamma recordings. He said that when those who practice watching over their in-out breathing (*ānāpāna-sati*) to a level of proficiency die, their body won't rot. He didn't delve deeper into the reasoning behind it. But a different monk's pupils claim that their master's corpse hasn't deteriorated or rotted at all.

LPT: Don't pay attention to these things.

P: I'm not really that interested. I'm just wondering why his body hasn't decayed. Is it because controlling his breathing somehow affected his physical body?

LPT: If it's different from what the Buddha taught, don't practice it. Don't pay it any attention, either. Contemplations must correspond to the Three Common Characteristics. Anything else, don't give it your time.

P: I have a question. Can you meditate and do kammic cleansing?

LPT: No. That's something different.

P: What kind of meditation can you do?

LPT: No, no. I'm a Buddhist. One hundred percent Buddhist.

P: You don't see anything?

LPT: No. When I meditate, I don't see anything external – only the body.

P: Because I have an issue and I'd like you to meditate on the kamma behind it.

LPT: No, I can't do that.

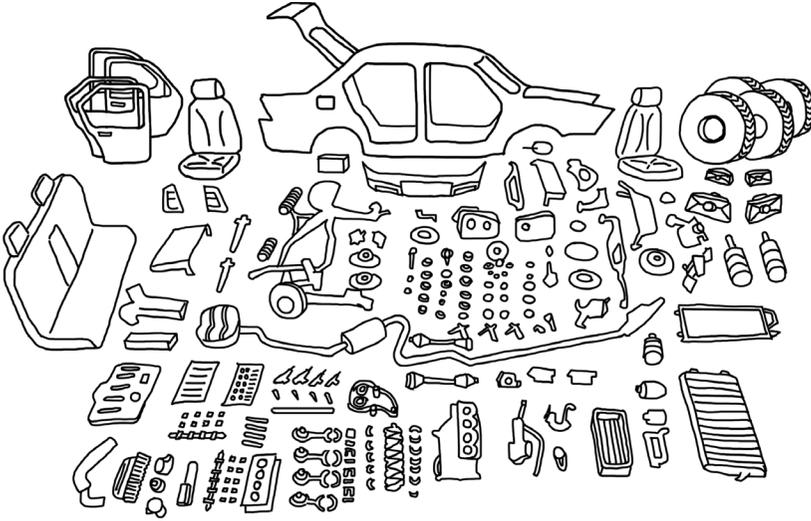
P: I also have a question. I'm trying to contemplate but it's not progressing past *hair of the head* (*kesā*), *hair of the body* (*lomā*), *nails* (*nakhā*). Am I doing something wrong?

LPT: No, it's not wrong. It's just not advancing, is all. Those who possess wisdom are skilled at imagining things. They're good at

making comparisons, investigating, and analyzing. Knowing the result, they can trace back to the cause. Knowing the cause, they can extrapolate the result. What results from having desire as a cause? Desire leads to becoming (bhava) and rebirth. The stress that we suffer through every day is a consequence of what? Birth. Birth is the cause.

You must assume a broader view of things – not merely listing *hair of the head, hair of the body, nails*. You can't do anything with that. When you contemplate on hair of the head (kesā), in what ways is that hair impermanent (anicca)? How is hair of the head suffering (dukkha)? How is hair of the head not-self (anattā)? This is the formula. You apply it as you consider each body part in the list. Skin (taco) – how is it not-self? How is it filthy and unattractive? There are many techniques for wisdom contemplation.

In considering form (rūpa) and mental components (nāma), you must understand that form is the four elements of earth, water, wind, and fire. When you think about mental components, how does the mind-soul (citta) rely on the corporeal form? Our body is not the mind. The mind is not the body. When you die, the mind does not die with the body. The mind and body go their separate ways. Contemplate on the impermanence of each body part. Once the citta departs, what happens to the body? In a few days, how will the body rot? Contemplate according to what actually happens, according to the truth. Whatever the reality is, that is what you should contemplate on. What is the truth as it relates to impermanence? What is the truth as it relates to suffering? What is the truth as it relates to not-self?



It's not enough to merely think, *hair of the head, hair of the body, nails, teeth, skin*. You have to expand the contemplation to all body parts. What are the four elements? Which body parts are comprised of the water element? Which are of the wind element? Which are of the fire element? Which are of the earth element? It's like contemplating on a car. How many different types of cars are there? You must break the car down into each and every component that forms the car: front wheels, rear wheels, etc. Which component is the car? There is no car. There are merely parts of the car, but not the car itself. Only once those components are assembled, is it labelled a car. The body is the same way. If you disassemble the parts, there is no self to be found. There are merely symptoms of the elements. There is no human, no animal. This is not-self (*anattā*). You have to treat each separately in order to understand and see the truth of its nature. This is how to use wisdom.

P: But usually, when I attain meditative calm, I am able to solve my problems. Understanding arises.

LPT: Are you actually able to solve your problems?

P: Mostly, yes.

LPT: What is the nature of the problem?

P: Money problems.

LPT: That's a separate issue. When we talk about problems, we are concerned with defilements, lust, anger, and delusion. You can do whatever you want with meditation. It provides energy regardless of whether you practice wrong concentration or right concentration. Can thieves practice meditation? Yes. Meditation is a universal concept. It isn't exclusive to Buddhists. Anyone in the world can do it. According to the Buddha, the true measure of practice is insight development (*vipassanā*). However, meditation has managed to worm its way in.

If you read the manuals, you'll see that there are two aspects of training: *gantha dhura*, which is the burden of intellectual study (*pariyatti*); and *vipassanā dhura*, which is the burden of using wisdom to gain insight and understanding. Monks and laypeople alike have these two burdens of study. You take the intellectual concepts and contemplate on them in order to develop insight. Does *samādhi dhura* exist? What do the manuals say? There are only two duties, and neither of them are meditation. Somehow, meditation has insinuated its way into contemporary teachings.

P: When I meditate, my body and mind are light and relaxed. I don't really feel suffering. If I think too much, won't it make my brain ache?

LPT: No way. What is it you are thinking about that brings on the headache?

P: Oh, this and that.

LPT: It's irrelevant. If you think in terms of impermanence, you won't get a headache. Wisdom is about contemplating on the Three Common Characteristics, not thinking about mundane topics. Thinking about dhamma cleans and lightens your mind. It enables you to stop gathering and collecting. If you think about acquiring, that will be heavy; that will give you a headache. The point of wisdom contemplations is to cast off and detach. If you're contemplating in order to gain, that's another matter.

P: But, whenever I think, it's about gain.

LPT: No wonder you get a headache [laughs]. If you think in a manner that enhances your greed – calculating earnings, planning various techniques to obtain more, *if I do this, who will buy my product?* – and you can't solve your problems, that's what will give you a headache. Your thoughts are killing you. If you think yourself into a dead end, who will help you? If you can think your way into the clear, that's preferable.

P: But if we're always thinking about casting off, then what money will we have with which to make merit?



LPT: This is yet another wrong way of thinking [laughs]. They are two different things, gaining and contemplating. You have to be wise about gaining. Be smart about it. Do you know how to think about how nothing belongs to us? About how we must separate from what we hold dear? No? You have to contemplate often.

P: Thinking like that makes the mind-soul (citta) depressed.

LPT: That's exactly what we want. Let yourself be depressed, let yourself cry. That's how you'll be able to escape this world. Contemplating is for the purpose of breaking free of the world, not for remaining in it.

- |   |   |
|---|---|
| 1. Think about wanting                          | Think about not wanting                 |
| 2. Think about pleasure                         | Think about displeasure                 |
| 3. Think about ownership                        | Think about how ownership cannot exist  |
| 4. Think about happiness                        | Think about suffering                   |
| 5. Think about gaining                          | Think about losing                      |
| 6. Think about loving                           | Think about hating                      |
| 7. Think about being delighted                  | Think about being sad                   |
| 8. Think about staying together                 | Think about parting ways                |
| 9. Think about being rich                       | Think about being poor                  |
| 10. Think about right                           | Think about wrong                       |
| 11. Think about good                            | Think about evil                        |
| 12. Think about permanence                      | Think about impermanence                |
| 13. Think about self                            | Think about not-self                    |
| 14. Think about being born                      | Think about dying                       |
| 15. Think about being born in this present life | Think about being born in the next life |
| 16. Think about merit                           | Think about demerit                     |

*In training your wisdom, you must contemplate on the cause and contemplate on its resultant effects. You should not only think about the cause on its own. Nor should you only think about the result on its own. Contemplate on the cause leading to the result; contemplate on the result leading back to the cause. Contemplate often, and your views and understandings will gradually conform to your contemplations.*



**June 1, 1998**

[Distributes handwritten note] This is a model for Dhamma practice. For those who lack wisdom, use what I have written as a template for how to think, how to practice and train yourself, and how to traverse the world's currents. Whatever you think about, consider it from both sides, from both angles. Think about the good and the bad, think about right and wrong, think about love and hate. If your reflections are too heavily one-sided, your thoughts will be so far gone that you won't be able to yank them back.

I have written on many topics. Select one that speaks to you and apply it in your contemplations. Or, don't follow what I've written. Simply observe yourself throughout the day. What do you like to think about? Mostly, people tend to think about pleasing topics like how to gain, acquire, achieve, and become beautiful. In other words, topics that we find agreeable.



People cause these thoughts, but don't consider the results that will follow. That is why you must apply different perspectives and reflect on both sides. When you think about the cause, you must also think about the effects. If you think about attractiveness, you must also think about its opposite – unattractiveness. The contemplation on attractiveness and beauty is called *subha*. We must also reflect on *asubha*, or filth, in order to counter those contemplations and achieve equilibrium. Thinking about attractive topics ignites lust and excitement within our minds and stimulates our pleasure over defilements and desire. This is precisely why you must contemplate on filth – to counter those thoughts. Using thoughts to refute thoughts is how you train your wisdom. If you cultivate your wisdom in this way for a long time, it will ripen into insight-development (*vipassanā*). It doesn't stem from tranquil meditation (*samādhi*). Rather, it develops from wisdom (*paññā*). Does anyone have questions before I continue the lecture?

P: Please expound on the meaning of “thorough wisdom”?

LPT: I cannot expound on it because the practitioner doesn't have any wisdom. Even if I describe it, it's akin to a blind person reading a book. You have to practice your ABCs first. It is pointless to expound on it because you are a blind person reading a book. You won't know what I am talking about.

This note I have written is a model for wisdom development. Developing wisdom is something you must do on your own. Don't attempt to train your wisdom by mimicking others. If your teacher advises you to do something, do it right away. It is childish to expect your teacher to instruct you every step of the way. It's as if you don't know how to walk, so your parents must physically thrust your leg



forward each time you take a step. If your parents stop helping you, then you must also stop. What is the point of that? You'll die stupid. Training your wisdom isn't that difficult. Your teacher's suggestions are more than sufficient. If you need your teacher to explain everything, you will merely commit it all to memory. That is not wisdom.

These days, folks lack wisdom. Instead, they are full of recollections (saññā). Every word purporting to be Dhamma wisdom is actually a regurgitated memory. What can you actually do with that borrowed wisdom, other than flaunt it? It is fine to boast and brag, but that is not how defilements and desires are eradicated. Borrowed wisdom will not make your contemplations profound or flush away any lingering doubts you have about the world's truths. Even if you can recite the truth and speak accurately on every Dhamma topic, you still will not have eradicated any of your doubts. You want your mind to transform and change. But change is an individual process.

You shouldn't attempt to develop your wisdom by imitating others. All you really need is just a few pointers to get you going.

For example, I heard a sermon, "Arise. Cease." That's it. And I was able to put it into practice. I interpreted it as, "Arise" – what arises? "Cease" – what ceases? I could expound on it, but you would be all the dumber for it. You would only be borrowing someone else's wisdom. If your aim is significant personal benefit, you must train yourself as much as possible. Even if your wisdom is lacking, there is still great value in its being yours. Tell me, what is one topic you jotted down from yesterday's discussion?

P: We must think about what we desire and think about what we don't desire.

LPT: That's right. People tend to think about that which they yearn for: desire, pleasure, happiness, material cravings, longing for the sense-based pleasures – tangible form, scents, sounds, flavors, tactile sensations – riches, acquiring more, etc. For the most part, our thoughts are guided by these various wants. This is characteristic of what we call *saṅkhāra*, or mental fabrications that satisfy these personal desires. All humans possess this trait, regardless of religion. The only difference is the degree of craving, or *taṇhā*.

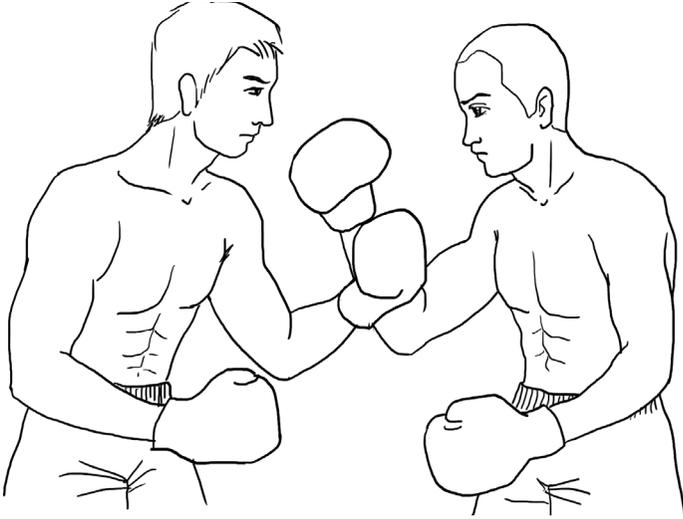
When it comes to the topic of desire, everyone is an accomplished thinker. We must take the very same method we employ in thinking about craving and apply it in thinking about not craving. It's the same story, just told from a different perspective. From the front of the hand to the back of the hand, that's all. The same item, viewed from one angle is beautiful, viewed from another angle is ugly. That's all there is to it. The same object viewed from different perspectives. Try to observe yourself as you think about that which

you desire. The more you mull over it, the more the urgency to achieve these desires intensifies. These thoughts pave the way for your mind to abide by its cravings. That is why these thoughts are a double-edged sword.

Desire is the foundation upon which greed is built. Once your desires grow out of control and extend beyond moderation, they morph into greed. You want all the treasures in the universe. These cravings exceed the realm of moderation, and you work day and night to satisfy them. All the people in this world, regardless of physical location, allow saṅkhāra to lead them by the horns. Some of these mental fabrications are similar in nature, while others differ. You must reveal to yourself what your imagination has designed and concocted. Don't permit your saṅkhāra to multiply and grow. Contemplate on the opposing view. This technique is the same as *like cures like*. Whatever your imagination conjures up, you must brew an antidote of opposing views to counter it.

This can also be likened to boxers with fists of the same size and force, or Muay Thai fighters equipped with complete arsenals of natural weapons. The only difference lies in the speed of each fighter's instincts. You can win if the punches you throw are strong and sharp. If you have trained well and can clearly discern your opponent's intent, once your opponent charges, you will know how best to fade or return punches. If you can read your adversary, you can definitely defeat them. Your opponent is defilements (kilesas), desire (taṇhā), and imagination (saṅkhāra). Once your imagination journeys down a road of contemplation, you must immediately dispatch an opposing train of thought to compel it to reverse course.





Thus, drawing from the boxing example, in the first round, you must read your opponent. Once you know your adversary's methods, you'll know how to counter them. Those with wisdom are the same way. What kinds of thoughts are being cast by defilements and your imagination such that you are heavily enchanted each and every day? You must examine your thoughts. We all have desires, only the particulars differ. I'm only providing a general framework here. People have two types of desires: those leaning towards the good and those leaning towards the bad. What are good desires? What are bad desires? You must be able to discern the differences.

What are bad desires? When someone puts a bad cause into motion, what kind of consequences do they earn? Once they act according to their desires, they have secured a ticket to a bad existence as a resident of hell (naraka), a hungry ghost (peta), or a demon (asura); these are the outcomes of bad desires. Good desires lead you to blissful existences in heaven, as a deity in a Brahma realm, or enlightenment (nibbāna); these are the outcomes of good desires.

We must choose between these two options and know how to tell them apart. They exist as a pair. Once a desire is sparked, you must immediately bring its pair into focus. Don't allow the desire to traverse only one direction. Everything in this world is of a dual nature. Electricity has both a positive and negative charge. Humans have both a left leg and a right leg. As a desire pops up, can you identify its inseparable pair? This is how wisdom is used to quash desires.

The craving for possessions exists in all people. The degree differs in each person, but it exists all the same. There is attachment there. Practicing Dhamma is the process of training your mind to unfasten all of its attachments and cast off its every bond. It is a fight you can win by engaging your own thoughts and views. This is the principle of practice.

Prior to the start of my second rains retreat (*vassa*), I was trekking through the forest and mountains and encountered many ghosts and tree spirits, as I have previously explained. During that period, I was practicing in Pa Dak Cave, where ghosts and tigers thrived. Two kilometers removed from our group of practitioners was a large, deep cave known as Jan Dai. Ācariya Wahd, who had been residing in that cave, had instructed a novice to construct a raised platform for use in sitting meditation. No more than two nights later, the cave spirit forced him to leave. If he were to stay, he would have to grant the spirit's wishes. Because it was a female ghost, he was compelled to leave.

By the time the rains retreat started, Ācariya Wahd was already settled in at a different cave. He had whispered to the novices, "Let's see if Kru Ba Thoon – who is rumored to be accomplished, brave, and worthy – will be able to reside in the cave with that ghost!" He

*June 1, 1998*

then advertised the cave to me as superb, complete with a sitting platform and clean water, all conducive to contemplating Dhamma. It sounded good to me, and I was unaware that he had fled from that very same cave because of the fierce ghost. A novice carried my monk bowl to the cave. His parting words were, “Kru Ba, just don’t flee the cave in the middle of the night!” I thought it odd but didn’t know what to make of it.

That night, as I was lighting a candle, I could hear a tiger roar. It was the first time in my life I had ever heard a tiger roar. The thunderous baying of a large tiger carries immense power and might. That first night, I could not do anything. I sheltered under my mosquito net, which was not fine enough to obscure the form of a human. I didn’t sleep a wink that night.

The second night, I could hear the tiger bellowing again. It rendered me unable to contemplate Dhamma. I had asked my peers about what to do if a tiger were to come near. They told me that if I built a fire in the cave then the tiger wouldn’t come. So, I built the fire and did walking meditation (*caṅkama*). That night, I was able to fall asleep. When I awoke, it was pitch dark. So, I got up to rekindle the fire that had burned out. At that very moment, my eyes landed on the enormous tiger sitting near me. How long had it been there? If I had had bad *kamma*, it surely would have already eaten me. Yet, there I was, sleeping soundly and completely unaware of the tiger lying beside me. Thus, I must still have good *kamma*. I retreated under my net and shooed the tiger away by banging sticks together. Then I built a new fire. But my fear still prevented me from sleeping that night. I was afraid back then; afraid of ghosts too. It was only my second *vassa*.

The next morning, I relayed what had happened to my friends. I also consulted a hunter, who informed me that I shouldn't start a fire. A fire summons the tiger because it indicates that a hunter must be sleeping in the forest; and where there's a hunter, there's a hunting dog for the tiger to eat. He told me it was imperative that I not build a fire. Will you look at that! Forest monks tell you that you must build a fire in order to deter the tiger from coming near. Contrary to their uneducated assumptions, the fire actually draws the tiger right to you!

Residing in the midst of a thriving tiger population prevented me from practicing Dhamma and training my wisdom. All I could do was retreat into meditation. I was determined that if I had to die, I'd die meditating. So, I focused on my meditative mantra and continued to meditate, reasoning that whenever a tiger bit my neck, my soul would immediately enter a blissful realm.

Nearly a month later, my mind entered a serene state that was so deep I couldn't breathe. Everything had a raw and coarse quality to it. I couldn't focus on my *Bud-dho* meditative phrase. I trained my focus on my in-and-out breathing (*ānāpāna-sati*), but that didn't work either. My breathing was so harsh it was like I wasn't breathing at all. Any thoughts came out with a rough texture, so thinking became impossible. I stopped thinking about breathing and let it be. As I sat there, everything vanished. I could still perceive things, but I was no longer breathing because I ceased to know how. I was trapped in that meditative state all night. I concluded that it didn't feel right, but I didn't know a cure for it or have a teacher to guide me out of it. Thus, I had to craft my own solution.

I did not care for that meditative state because it was too serene and still. However, other teachers would instruct you to push deeper

into a fine immaterial meditative absorption (*arūpa-jhāna*). Once you achieve that serene state of meditation, your whole life disappears. Your wisdom will not emerge to contemplate on anything. If you are averse to that meditative state, you can extract yourself from it by reading books. I picked up the monk's code of discipline (*Pātimokkha*). Initially, I was disinclined to read it. But, whenever I was reminded of it, I'd pick it up and read. Later, the text progressively became easier to tackle until I was ultimately able to read it aloud. The more I read, the more my mind was able to break free from that meditative state. Seven days later, I was fully liberated from the serene meditative state. I stopped doing meditation because it puts wisdom in a deep freeze.

As for the fierce cave spirit, why did *Ācariya Wahd* have to flee? Well, as I was meditating one night, I heard a loud cracking noise. It sounded like the cave was going to break. When I scanned my surroundings, everything was brightly illuminated. The doors glided towards each other like metal sliding doors. A woman said, "Kru Ba, Kru Ba! *Ācariya*, please open the door." I replied, "No, you cannot come in." But she disregarded my response and entered anyway. Dressed in full costume, she came and hugged me from behind. The more I struggled, the tighter she held on. "Luang Pee," she addressed me in more intimate terms – there was no more Kru Ba or *Ācariya* now – "I've noticed you in here for a while now. I want you for my husband. I've been widowed for many years and I want a new husband. I really like you. Let's get married."

How could I have a ghost wife? I'd have to be dead in order to live with her. I proposed, "Let's do this. I'm determined to spend the vassa here. Let me finish up the rains retreat and then we can discuss." She tried to squeeze a promise out of me. I remained firm, telling her,

“After the rains retreat ends, then we can discuss.” As she released her arms, she took a knife and sliced into the platform, causing it to collapse. She was a truly fierce ghost. I concentrated on intensifying my Dhamma practice. Eventually, the ghost was no match for me.

There were monkeys and other ghosts that wanted to bite and kill me, but the drive from my heightened focus enabled me to vanquish all adversaries. Some nights, a tiger would sleep above the cave’s mouth, right above my head. A tiger’s breathing sounds like that of a cat’s – only a much larger cat. I sat there listening to it, unable to leave for my alms rounds. I had to yell at the tiger, “Get out of here! Don’t sleep here! I need to go on my alms round!” It just stared at me. Later on, I became so accustomed to the tiger that the days in which it was absent felt incomplete. It reached the point where I no longer had to retreat from the tiger, as I was always praying and projecting loving kindness (*mettā*) onto it.

After the end of the rains retreat, there was a large tiger roaming Nam Som province. Any human it encountered became a meal. Countless people had already died at this tiger’s bite. Now, the tiger would stay at the Pa Dak cave once a year. One day, a bull hunter encountered tiger footprints and immediately rushed over to tell me, “You must leave! If the tiger finds anyone here, it will eat that person. Don’t fight this. This tiger comes here because of the expansive sand flats. It frolics and sends its loud bellows reverberating from here.” I was smack in the middle of the sand flats, but I didn’t flee. If I had to die, so be it.

I wasn’t afraid during the day. In the evening, however, fear crept into the deep crevices of my soul. The elders say, if a large tiger heads in a particular direction, a wind will precede it. This wind is like a premonition. If an animal is to die by this tiger, this wind will not

*June 1, 1998*

materialize, and the animal will not catch the tiger's scent. The wind forewarns of the tiger's imminent presence. Animals doomed to die by the tiger will not catch the scent, while animals to be spared will smell it and escape death. At that moment, a breeze wafted through the tips of the grass stalks. I resolved that I would not leave.

Though fleeing a tiger is absolutely understandable, if I were to flee, I would be losing an internal battle. I was only in my twenties with two vassas completed. Whatever happens, I will use my life and my body – flesh, skin, all of it – as a tribute to the Buddha, the Dhamma, and the Sangha. Once the tiger comes to eat me, I will die. I am fine with that.

I sat down directly in the tiger's path, waiting for it to arrive. Once it walked up to where I was, it would take me in its jaws and make a meal of me. It's just death. I was feeling that brave. I believed in the Buddha's words that the Dhamma protects those who uphold the Dhamma. I trusted in that one hundred percent.

If I sat facing the tiger and opened my eyes, I would be afraid. I rotated ninety degrees, so that I would have my side to the tiger. But then I would be able to glimpse it out of the corner of my eye. I shifted again, this time so my back would be to the tiger. As it was my final day, while awaiting my impending death, I hastened my Dhamma practice. After I emerged from the depths of meditation, I glanced at the moon and saw that it was around midnight. It appeared that the tiger never showed. I walked over to a small hut and meditated until daybreak.

On my way to the morning alms round, I stopped by to see whether the tiger had come. Tiger footprints, two meters from where I had been, indicated that it had been standing there – only I hadn't seen it!



This was due to my mind being engrossed in a deep meditative state. At that point, I was confident that I would not die because of a tiger. I was filled with full courage to go wherever I heard a tiger roar. That morning, the hunter came expecting to recover my corpse, but instead discovered the remains of the water buffalo that had been the tiger's meal.

When you dwell in the forest, practicing dhūtaṅga kammaṭṭhāna, you have to be tenacious and brave. You must have the gall to accept death and be ready to die wherever you are. When I encountered ghosts in the caves, I resolved to die right then and there. If I hadn't accepted death, I would be anxious and jumpy for fear of ghosts. But once I decided that the ghost would protect me, or once I accepted that it would eat me, it made things so much easier. There was no longer anything to fear, because I believed in kamma. We are all afraid of something. You don't have to come face to face with a ghost to start sweating. Even the dark can be scary.



And if you can't overcome your fear of the dark, how on earth can you practice Dhamma?

Thus, we must trust in kamma. If it is time to pay your kammic debt with your life, then accept it. I firmly believe that, *Dhammo have rakkhati Dhammachārim: one who safeguards Dhamma will be safeguarded by Dhamma*. Luang Pu Thue said that humans aren't as good as dogs. Wherever dogs go, they aren't afraid of ghosts – but humans are. Thus, dogs are better than humans. We should use them as a model. My practice was always littered with obstacles, but I never retreated. I have never seen a ghost with my waking eye, only with my inner eye.

Dhamma practice has to carve out time for meditation and time for wisdom contemplation. The majority of my time was spent on wisdom contemplations. Wisdom can be used to command anything. For instance, wisdom can be used to dictate the depth of your meditative penetration. Or if you want to contemplate on something, you can do as you desire. It's like having a good car. When your accelerator and brakes are good, you can step on the gas all the way and still brake in time to avert an obstacle that has suddenly crossed your path. Most people only have good brakes but don't know how to drive, or the car has no gas. So, they just brake and won't even try to drive. Or else, they only drive and won't brake. Whether it is driving a car or driving your Dhamma practice, you must know when to speed up or slow down.

Don't expect much from this world that we live in; we're in it to leave it. Our responsibility on Earth is merely to cultivate perfections of character (pāramī) in order to buy our exit. Don't mind all of the people who are hoping to gain from this world. Haven't you had

enough? What does your mind cling to each day? What kind of suffering is tied to those worldly attachments? Because our thoughts are pulled by the world's currents, we must cancel them out with thoughts that traverse that current. We have been swept along the world's currents for incalculable aeons. Let us swim against it in this lifetime. Even if you can't break loose, at the very least you will cultivate traits that will carry on into your next life.

Every single Buddha teaches the same thing – right view (*sammādiṭṭhi*). Every era's holy individuals (*ariyapuggalas*) are the same. Every era's stream-winners (*sotāpannas*) are the same, every era's once-returners (*sakadāgāmis*) are the same, every era's non-returners (*anāgāmis*) are the same, and every era's fully enlightened (*arahants*) are the same. This is because all the Dhamma topics are the same, as is the technique used to eliminate defilements and desires. If you successfully train your wisdom to cultivate right view within this current lifetime, then your Dhamma will connect with that of Buddha Metteyya, because the Dhamma is the same.

If your wisdom is already strong, conducting meditation will not prove difficult. But if your wisdom is weak, everything will pose an impediment. You have to be smart and thorough when it comes to conducting *samādhi*. For instance, if you do mantra meditation and your mind never settles into tranquility, what are you to do? You have to know how to adjust and adapt in order for your mind to be calm. You must do this on your own, as you are best equipped to solve your own particular problems. Do not rely too much on the wisdom of others. Do rely more on yourself.

Other than thinking about desires, you must contemplate on what you are pleased with and what you are displeased with. If you think

about things you like, you are thinking along the world's currents. If you think about things you don't like, you are thinking against the world's currents. Take whatever you are pleased with and shine your mind's light onto it in order to see it clearly. Contemplate on it until you are displeased with it. Being pleased is the cause, being displeased is the result. You negate pleasure with thoughts of displeasure.

Once you are pleased with something, you will bind yourself to it and come to be born in a future existence that is linked to it. The reason you have been born into this present existence is because of contentment, love, and attachment. Thus, you must use the things with which you are discontent to teach your mind. Use wisdom to refute thoughts of contentment. Don't think in a one-sided manner. All the examples I have written about start off with a cause and end with the refutation of that cause as the result. Like cures like.

You must figure out a way to solve your problems. Don't let your problems get the best of you. You've been letting these one-sided thoughts direct your every move. You've essentially lost to them each and every day. Don't carry on like this. Retrain your wisdom!

Everyone is tired. I am tired. The people listening are tired, but the person teaching is even more tired. Let us meditate in order to provide our minds some rest. Train your mind unto oneness. Now, there are two approaches to focused concentration: the contemplative wisdom-based approach and the meditative mantra approach.

I will explain the meditative mantra technique first, because you have already done the first technique while actively listening to my sermon. Now we will direct our focus on a meditative phrase. If you are comfortable with a single meditative phrase like *Buddho*, that's fine. Or you may choose to focus on a longer phrase,

like *Buddho-Dhammo-Sangho*. Alternatively, you may prefer to focus on matching the rhythm of your meditative phrase with your breathing. It's all the same concept. There isn't much to meditation other than being in the present. It's not like wisdom practice, which journeys all around the world. Meditation is easy. You don't recollect on what has passed and you don't think of the things that have yet to occur. You only remain in the present, right here, right now. It's that simple.

While wisdom practice is challenging, meditation practice is merely about being still. There are no burdens. Simply exist. Just relax. Meditation entails banning all thoughts. Empty your mind. Imagine you are the only one here. Your body is here. Your mind is here. Your focus is here. Be mindful of here. Now, keep doing this.

Focus on your own meditation. If sitting makes you tired, you can try walking. Walking meditation is just a way of relieving physical stress. You cannot only sit or only lie down; you must alternate between the postures. Standing, walking, sitting, or lying down are body-related matters. The same basis of meditation practice applies to each and every posture. Try to meditate, but don't spend too much time on it. Five or ten minutes is sufficient. You should invest the bulk of your time training your wisdom to become adept at thinking about Dhamma. If you sit for too long, you'll train yourself to not think. For a thinker, ten minutes is the limit before thoughts barge in to break the silence of sitting meditation. You should think; don't prohibit it.

P: While we are thinking, should we still focus on our breathing?

LPT: No, they are unrelated. Thoughts aren't connected to

breathing. Breathing is breathing – it's a part of serene meditation.

P: Must we be mindful of the fact that we are thinking?

LPT: You already know that you are thinking, that's why you are able to think. Focus on whatever you're thinking about. It is like when you drive a car. You must be vigilant and cautious of many things. Training yourself in how to think is not the same as repeating a meditative phrase, nor is it breathing. Rather, it is directing your focus on whatever it is you are thinking about.

When you are writing, working, or cooking a meal for guests, must you be mindful of your breathing? No, you just do the work. You would think about breathing at a later time.

[Gives a mug with remaining hot water to a practitioner]

LPT: Here, take this leftover wisdom. I'm giving you wisdom.

P: Water of wisdom.

P: I pray to penetrate the dhamma like you have, Luang Por.

LPT: The pauper is always begging. People who have, do not beg. Read the handout. Use the principles to train your wisdom. Thinking in line with the first column – the cause – exists in all of us. But the important part, the second column – contradicting and refuting the cause – how will you manage that? This is a model for training your wisdom.

P: If I have a problem with it, I'll ask you.

LPT: Think first.

P: I'll think about it later and ask you when I see you next month.

P: That's too far off. Ask tomorrow!



**June 2, 1998**

*First Sermon*

There are two modes of thinking: thinking in accordance with defilements (kilesas) and desire (taṇhā), and thinking in a way that refutes those thoughts. You must find a way to oppose those thoughts, and you must do it promptly. If you are unable to summon thoughts to counter defilements and desire, you will have lost the battle. Whenever you start thinking about something, whichever fanciful direction your imagination takes you, you must find a way to U-turn and refute those thoughts. Once you've stepped into the ring, you need to discern your opponent's fighting style. You must counter and discredit your adversary to the best of your ability. Don't allow them to keep kicking you. You have to find a way to kick them, too. When they punch you, you must punch back. Don't allow your opponent to throw all the punches. You have to crush your opponent with a strong rebuttal. This is the second mode of thinking – extinguishing (nirodha), which is part of insight development

(vipassanā). Vipassanā is the insight into the truth of the world that results from wisdom development. If you practice this mode of thinking on a frequent basis, you will be on the path to nirodha, the cessation of suffering.

What I have written in the handout incorporates all of the tenets in the Four Noble Truths: suffering (dukkha), the cause of suffering (samudaya), the cessation of suffering (nirodha), and the path to the extinguishing of suffering (magga). The first column pertains to thoughts that lead to suffering and the cause of suffering. The second column pertains to thoughts that lead to cessation of suffering and the path to that cessation. Once you become familiar with the two different types of thoughts, your practice will be easy and free from obstacles. This is where everything comes together.

In my third rains retreat (vassa), I was practicing at Yod Thon in Phitsanulok province. On an evening stroll, I came across a group of ants carrying dirt to a hole they were shaping into their home. I sat down and watched them, wondering how they worked together in such harmony. I was determined to glean a Dhamma lesson from them. I saw the ants carrying the dirt and placing it around the perimeter of the hole in the ground. Another group of ants was not working but were keeping the other ants in line. In a human company, one group of ants would be the workforce, while the other group would be the management.

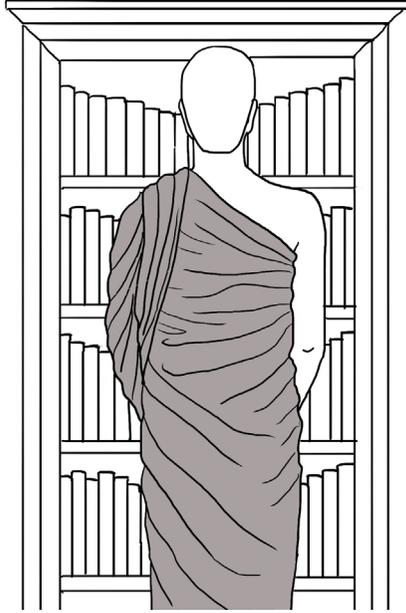
The ants were working hard. I internalized what I saw in order to derive Dhamma from it. Was I better than the ants? Not really. The ants were laboring tirelessly and nonstop, while my practice had breaks in continuity. The ants were going back and forth, transporting dirt to build a home. This home was a vihāra dhamma,



the place where the mind resides. I was a forest dwelling monk. Was I better than the ants? I was inferior to them. They had me beat. Henceforth, they would be my teachers. There were times when I was lazy and would just sit around. If I were as diligent and industrious as these ants, I would complete various tasks more rapidly. I used the ants to teach myself Dhamma. Whatever we see can be a source of Dhamma.

As I was squatting in front of the ants and processing the Dhamma lesson, my hand was gripping a broom handle. In that moment, Dhamma knowledge spontaneously formed into my mind, *strongly adhere to the Four Bases of Mental Power (Iddhipāda)*. I tried to recollect what comprised the Four Bases of Mental Power. I had delivered countless discourses on the Four Bases of Mental Power – it was easy to understand this clear example of wisdom development – yet I couldn't locate the information in my memory. I sat there attempting to summon the knowledge until I grew weary. So, I walked up to the main hall to consult the holy manuals. But it occurred to me, would it be prudent to rely on the manuals? Would that be unwise? Back when I could recollect the information, how did I know it? Why didn't I know it when it came to real-life application? I knew the theory from reading the manuals. But if I were to consult them now, would that be a smart move or a stupid move?

As I stood in front of the bookcase, I desperately wanted to reach out and grab the manual. I wanted to silence the question that was nagging at me. I hopelessly wanted to read the text, but I decided to turn and walk away. If I read it, I would know the answer, but I would be forever stupid because of it. I wouldn't be wiser in any way.



I proceeded to do walking meditation (*caṅkama*) in order to mull over a way to retrieve the information without reading the manuals. I reviewed all the groupings of fours: The Four Noble Truths, the Four Foundations of Mindfulness, etc. However, the Four Bases of Mental Power was the one grouping of four that I couldn't recollect. I did some walking meditation, then sat and meditated. This continued for many days.

On the afternoon of the third day, as I was doing walking meditation, I accepted the futility of the situation. If I didn't know it, then I didn't need to know it. My mind waved a white flag. I continued to do walking meditation, focusing on selecting my next contemplation topic. A few hours later, the definition of the Four Bases of Mental Power suddenly arose in my mind! Thereafter, I trained myself to be proficient in the Four Bases of Mental Power and used my understanding of it as a basis for understanding other Dhamma topics.

When I heard the “Arise. Cease.” sermon from Luang Por Boonma, I penetrated arise and cease in a profound way. I knew what arise meant, what cease meant, what arise meant in an external sense, what arise meant in an internal sense, how external things like animals and plants and mountains arose, and how they ceased. I knew it all. The same kind of profound understanding poured out of me when it came to Four Bases of Mental Power – chanda, viriya, citta, vīmaṃsā – I knew them all. My understanding was clear, deep, detailed, and thorough. It wasn’t book knowledge. From then on, I contemplated on each of the Four Bases of Mental Power.

Chanda is zeal, pleasure, or contentment; chanda is on course to cessation (nirodha). There are two types of chanda: zeal for doing bad and zeal for the Dhamma. *Dhammakāmo bhavaṃ hoti: one who loves the Dhamma prospers.* Whatever is considered good in a worldly sense can also be considered Dhamma. Chanda to do honest work is a form of Dhamma. Do you feel content to conduct walking meditation, sitting meditation, perform religious work, or break free from the chains of suffering? All of these good endeavors fall under the umbrella of chanda. Whether worldly work or religious work, they count if they are virtuous undertakings like giving to the less fortunate, upholding the precepts, or practicing the Dhamma. Zeal for committing evil does not count.

Viriya is effort, exertion, perseverance, or diligence. There are also two types of effort. What are the characteristics of a fool’s effort? What are the characteristics of a sage’s effort? The wise exert effort in thinking about positive endeavors, while fools exert effort in thinking about negative endeavors. Fools tend to think in themes of evil. Forms, sounds, scents, flavors, and touch are desirable and serve as prime material for the imagination (saṅkhāra). My handout



details the two sides: wisdom (pañña) and imagination (saṅkhāra). Effort (viriya) also has two sides. What counts as wisdom-based effort and what counts as imagination-based effort?

For the most part, people believe that effort denotes sitting with your eyes shut, shutting out all noise, and repeating a mantra. That's superficial effort. True effort (viriya) is all around us and can be practiced at any time. The foundation of effort lies in strong mindful wisdom. If your concentration is strong and your wisdom is sharp, whatever you do will produce positive results. Brushing your teeth can be a time for mindful and meticulous examination. If your focus is strong, sitting is not a requirement. You can be mindful and focused while brushing your teeth, washing your face, shampooing your hair, or sitting on the toilet. Continuous wisdom contemplations produce diligent effort. The form they take doesn't matter.

How can you recognize the quality of diligent exertion in someone? It's difficult to tell. Others aren't living their lives like you are. They can live their lives however they please while exerting themselves. For instance, can you exert yourself in worldly matters? Yes. Just make sure you're endeavoring for good, because effort is a double-edged sword. The diligent efforts of the fool include endeavoring to bait fish, calculate a way to commit robbery, form stinging epithets, hurl cruel and venomous insults, disparage others, or best others. While they are diligent exertions, they are immoral in nature. The diligent efforts of the wise take a different tone. Their exertions are for the sake of improvement. The two counter each other.

You must be able to tell the difference between endeavoring higher and endeavoring lower. When you practice, focusing on how others are practicing is not considered effort. Walking meditation isn't necessarily considered effort. Standing, walking, sitting, and sleeping are merely natural postures. Sitting with your eyes closed in meditation isn't some kind of impressive effort, either. You may be sitting with your eyes closed, but you're thinking and imagining in a worldly manner that feeds defilements and desires. These are not efforts that pull you higher. The wise diligently apply themselves towards doing good, working hard to unbind themselves, to let go of attachments, and to endeavor to penetrate the truth in a particular matter. It's hard to appraise a practitioner. You have to know yourself. Are you a Dhamma practitioner? You know the answer.

Citta is striving, pursuing, concentrating, and thinking about the goal. It is interest in the work that you are doing. Striving in a worldly manner leads you lower, while striving for Dhamma leads you higher. This is yet another double-edged sword. Fools (*bāla*)

strive for evil, scheming to kill animals, to rob and steal, to commit adultery, to lie or insult others. In other words, they concentrate on pursuing evil. In contrast, the wise (paṇḍita) strive for virtue, applying themselves in the cultivation of wholesome deeds (kusala) and training themselves to strengthen their perfections of character (pāramī). Even more honorable is striving to practice Dhamma in order to break free from this world. Striving is seeking or pursuing. When it comes to your own Dhamma practice, are you striving and seeking Dhamma models to contemplate on? Striving in this manner is the wisdom side, the side of nirodha.

Vīmaṃsā is analysis. It is seeking out Dhamma models to contemplate and analyze. Is this action wrong? Is this speech wrong? Is this way of thinking wrong? Is this perception wrong?

Everything was clear to me at that moment. From that point on, I firmly established myself in the Four Bases of Mental Power and set about weaving the four tenets into the fabric my character.

The manuals speak of the Factors of Enlightenment (Bodhipakkhiyā-Dhammā), which are:

1. The Four Foundations of Mindfulness (Satipaṭṭhāna)
2. The Four Right Exertions (Sammāpādhāna)
3. The Four Bases of Mental Power (Iddhipāda)
4. The Five Spiritual Faculties (Indriya)
5. The Five Strengths (Bala)
6. The Seven Factors of Awakening (Bojjhaṅga)
7. The Noble Eightfold Path (Ariya-Magga)

These thirty-seven qualities are divided into seven groupings. It is impossible to tell which of these qualities someone possesses. Only you can know this for yourself. Some possess the attributes of the Four Foundations of Mindfulness, while others embody the characteristics of the Seven Factors of Awakening. It isn't necessary to possess the complete set of traits delineated in the seven groupings – one is sufficient. Many people claim that it is necessary to develop all thirty-seven Factors of Enlightenment; this is untrue. Pick one of the groupings for yourself, keeping in mind that the Noble Eightfold Path encompasses all the others. It is for each practitioner to choose which of the first six groupings to put into practice.

Vīmaṃsā, using wisdom in analysis, actually covers all of the groupings. Wisdom is woven into the threads of any Dhamma grouping you choose to contemplate. For instance, there is actually more to the two-stage contemplation example that I provided earlier. Consider what you think about each day. Desire is what kicks off the thought process, only we don't realize this. You have to be mindful of your thought process, cognizant of where your imagination is leading you. Mindfulness is most often tied to consciousness of breath. Applying mindfulness in that manner is minor. It is more consequential to be aware of what you are thinking, being mindful of whether it is Dhamma-themed or desire-themed, and being cognizant of how it corresponds to defilements. You must examine your thoughts to determine if they lean towards love and affection, and to recognize the type of cravings represented in them. Mindfulness of breathing is minor; it is only mindfulness in meditation. Do you know what mindfulness in wisdom is? Most people do not.

Mindfulness is divided into two categories: mindfulness in meditation and mindfulness in wisdom. These days, it is mostly mindfulness in meditation that is taught. You could say that in this current era, I am the only one teaching mindfulness in wisdom. Mindful wisdom is extremely important, yet it is not being taught. You must be mindful of whether your thoughts correspond to defilements or desire. If they are defilement-related, which specific defilement is represented? Or is it a group of defilements? There are many. You must be aware of your mind's movements. When you think that something belongs to you, is that related to desire or defilements? Once you've kick-started these imaginative thoughts, you continue building on them until you completely believe them to be true. When you think in this manner, do you have the mindfulness to recognize it? What are you thinking about? Once you can identify desire as the basis for your thoughts, do you know how to get rid of that desire?

On the other side of the battlefield stand your adversaries: dukkha and samudaya. Can you build an army of nirodha and magga to oppose them? If you haven't yet reached the point of nirodha, you can still develop the strength of your Dhamma-based wisdom. Nirodha is the extinguishing of suffering. But what is actually used to extinguish suffering? It is wisdom that extinguishes suffering because it is wisdom that generates nirodha.

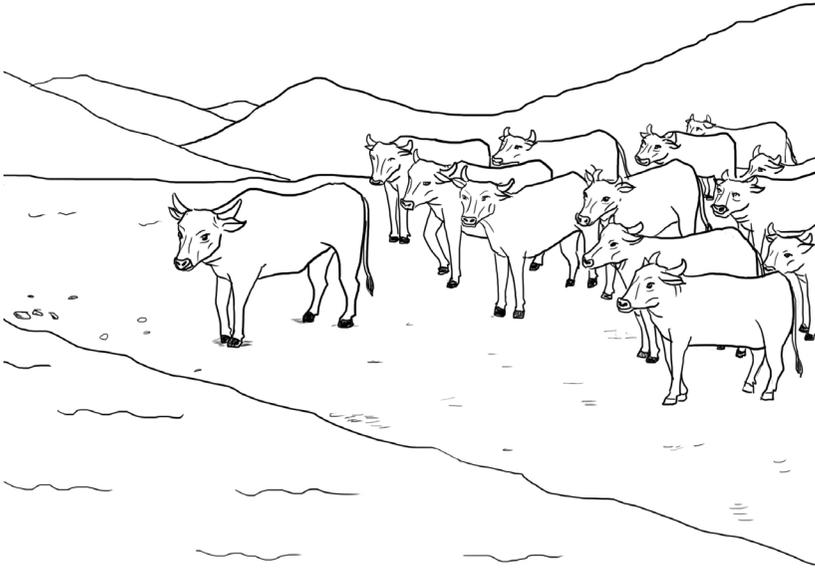
Magga is the path to eliminate suffering. What is the foundation for the entire Noble Eightfold Path? Right view (*sammādiṭṭhi*) and right thought (*sammāsaṅkappa*) are the main essence of the path. The remaining path is comprised of supplemental elements: right speech (*sammāvācā*), right action (*sammākammanta*), right livelihood (*sammāājīva*), right effort (*sammāvayama*), right mindfulness



(sammāsati), and right concentration (sammāsamādhi). First on the path is right view and second on the path is right thought – both of these are wisdom-based elements. Your practice must follow the correct sequence in order to achieve the cessation of suffering.

In this day and age, it is primarily taught that cessation of suffering is achieved through meditation (samādhi). It is claimed that once the mind achieves a serene state, all suffering will extinguish. Apparently, all you have to do is focus on a mantra and all your suffering will miraculously melt away. This is crazy talk! How on Earth does that eliminate suffering? Extinguishing suffering means destroying the cause of suffering; suffering won't arise again, and your soul will not arise in this world again. Once you extinguish all desires for sensual pleasures, you will no longer be reborn in this world. It's not like when suffering disappears during meditation; once you emerge from that serene meditative state the suffering is waiting to greet you. No, that is not nirodha. Nirodha means extinguished, completely gone, not a trace left behind. Nirodha is like dousing burning red coals with water – the fire is completely extinguished in that instant and cannot return because its source no longer exists.

People teach that defilements will vanish once you attain a tranquil state of meditation. That isn't the cessation of suffering. It is merely a method of temporary mind control. This is what is being taught these days. I feel for them, because these instructors have no clue what they are teaching. They won't make it when the blind are leading the blind. It's a shame, too, because this era's Dhamma practitioners have such a high level of determination. All they lack is a leader. It is due to the leader's inaccurate information that they are lost and circling the drain.



When a herd of oxen has a good leader – a leader who has made it across the stream before and knows the terrain, the currents, and the crocodiles – he can bring the herd safely across the stream while successfully averting all dangers. But if the herd follows an inept leader, it will encounter whirlpools, crocodiles, and other perils. A great number will die in the struggle to make it to the opposite bank. That is why it is crucial to select the right leader. This isn't my original teaching. The Buddha taught this analogy. You must select the proper Dhamma topic to contemplate (Dhamma-vicaya). If your wisdom is lacking, you may be unable to select the right leader. Instructors who don't possess proper understanding of the Dhamma will merely parrot what they find in manuals. They are like the Kalamas, people who believe every claim printed in the manuals. That is why practitioners must train their wisdom – to be able to discern right from wrong.

In my third year as a monk, I spent the rains retreat with Luang Pu Bua of Nong Saeng. He had ordained at the ripe old age of fifty but had been interested in Dhamma since his years as a layperson. Luang Pu Bua was illiterate, so when he practiced the chanting for his ordination rites, he had to repeat each phrase and commit it to memory. Once ordained, he listened to a discourse given by Luang Pu Mun and penetrated the truth more profoundly than the educated monks. When you aren't versed in the manuals, you instead possess an accurate memory of the teachings you've heard. You strive hard, pay close attention, and apply the Dhamma lessons in a clear and precise manner. You may not be able to do all the chanting verses or give all the blessings, but when it comes to giving sermons – man, oh man! People would sit, their rapt attention fixed on Luang Pu Bua. When he went to Bangkok, no one wanted to listen to the learned monks. They all requested Luang Pu Bua's sermons. He was country-born and bred, and his discourses were given in the old language. But it wasn't the sound of the sermon that was the focus. It was the material. Luang Pu Bua sermonized in the Isaan language (northeastern Thai regional dialect) particular to Roi Et province, Phon Thong district. When his audience paid close attention, striving to understand his every word, they were exerting effort in listening. Luang Pu Bua was an excellent orator. His discourses weren't long-winded. Rather, he presented short Dhamma riddles or analogies of Dhamma practice.

Once, Luang Pu Bua asked me, "Thoon, have you ever triumphed over suffering?" I asked him how one triumphs over suffering. He replied, "You sit until day breaks. Have you ever done it? Try it." He told me that there was a nun named Sai Bua who, as a layperson, had sat from dusk until dawn without moving an inch. So, I went and

interviewed Mae Chee Sai Bua. She told me that you simply sit, without moving at all. She relayed the pain, fever, chills, and other symptoms that plagued her, and declared that even if you aggregated the pain of giving birth to each of her six children, it still would not compare to a sliver of the torment of sitting through that night. Nevertheless, she triumphed over suffering.

Upon hearing this, I thought, *she's a woman. I am a man. And I am a practicing monk. If she can do it, I must be able to do it. She didn't die from it, and I won't die from it.* At 6 p.m. one night, I got into position. Whatever would happen would happen. If I were to die, so be it. The first hour was not too bad because I was accustomed to meditating. The second hour started to wear on me. The third hour was when it got intense. The pain was unbearable. It was as if my leg would tear into pieces. This was too challenging. I am a risk taker, always testing my limits. I had to endure it, fight through it. Now, sitting through the night in order to triumph over suffering means you must experience suffering. It doesn't count if you dodge the pain by retreating into tranquil meditation. That would be akin to evading your fear of ghosts by sleeping through the night. You triumph when you can stare the ghost in the face. "I'm not afraid, I fell asleep" doesn't count. If you've really got the guts, then you engage in direct confrontation. Triumph comes from facing it head on.

I confronted the suffering with raw tolerance and fortitude. I didn't flee into meditative absorptions. Around 9 p.m. or 10 p.m., it felt like my limbs were being ripped apart, but I trudged on. Thereafter, the pain gradually subsided. At 11 p.m., the pain had vanished, and I returned to a normal state. It was neither suffering nor bliss, and the tension felt ordinary. In the midst of excruciating pain, I could not contemplate on anything. All I could do was bear it. The one

thing in my mind was, *I'll die if I must*. The pain prevented any other thoughts. But once the physical torment vanished, I was able to contemplate on the Dhamma. What was the suffering that I experienced? It had been physical pain. Suffering is not of the mind; rather, it passes from the body to the mind.

Around midnight, a fire started burning through me. It felt like I was sitting smack in the middle of the roaring inferno. My bones, skin, and tendons all cracked and melted away. The fire was eviscerating my body. I bore the pain, thinking that the flames of hell were much hotter than this. Around 2am, the burning sensation retreated. I thought about hell, about how I had been to hell for various offenses. It was a way to console myself.

The third stage was ice cold. It was as if my entire body was frozen inside of a huge ice cube. I had severe chills. I thought, if I had to die, I'd die. But for now, I'd endure the freezing pain. Around 4am, the frigid cold melted away, and I sat there applying my wisdom in contemplations. I synced my meditative phrase to my inhales and exhales. Around 5am, my mind became still. I experienced a vision of Luang Pu Khao hoisting an umbrella above me, inviting me to go with him.

Triumphing over suffering is not for the physically unwell. If you are healthy, go ahead and give it a try because there's nothing for you to worry about. But if your health is already compromised, your thoughts will swim in a pool of your past ailments, imagining how they will reappear and wreak havoc on your body once more. Basically, you will make excuses for yourself. Triumphing over suffering is merely a way of challenging yourself. It doesn't eradicate any defilements. It is simply a test of your personal

ability and forbearance. How much can you tolerate? Is your fortitude strong enough?

One night, as I settled into a serene meditative state, Luang Pu Bua came and brought me to a river. There was a single bamboo pole as thick as my arm, casually draped across the two banks of the waterway. Luang Pu Bua walked across the pole and reached the other side. The pole didn't appear to move at all. I thought, *if he can make it across, so can I*. When I stepped on the bamboo pole, instead of bending under my weight, it remained firmly solid. I balanced myself as if I were on a tightrope. While I navigated my way across the pole, Luang Pu Bua told me to look below. I saw an enormous human raft formed by hundreds of thousands of people, both dead and alive. In the dense human soup, the bloated corpses bobbed along while the living grabbed hold of what they could to remain afloat. Some yelled, "Help me!" and attempted to claw their way up the treacherous banks of the river. As they struggled to ascend, they cried and bawled. Ultimately, the surface was too wet, and they ended up slipping back down again.

It was a sad sight, people being pulled by the current. I didn't know where these throngs of people came from. There were too many of them, I could not even see where the vast sea of humans ended or began. When I looked below me, the water appeared to be eight or ten meters deep. Everyone was crying out; they were all suffering. Some were even riding on corpses, singing and dancing. Some sobbed as they took their final breaths. You could find every possible permutation in that human river. A cacophony of lamentations rose from the water and filled the air. It was just like my vision of the herds of people in front of the doorway leading to nibbāna – only

these people were in the water. In that earlier vision, the people were on land, but their actions and mannerisms were precisely the same.

When my mind released from the meditative state, I arranged my thoughts and realized that the world is confined by riverbanks of desire. *Natthi taṇhāsama nadī: there is no river like craving.* Our minds are pulled along the currents of our desires and defilements. Desire has no bounds. There is no end to our mind's limitless desires. We get carried along the currents out to the vast ocean. I was once like those people, endlessly drifting along in the sensual pleasures (kāmaguṇa) of form, sound, scent, taste, and delicate sensation. Whatever it is we crave, therein lies desire.

In this lifetime, practice and see if you can break free of this world. If you cannot break free, you will continue to be dragged along the world's currents. If someone wants to keep floating along, he can go right ahead. But not I. You must use wisdom to train yourself in this way more often. I wrote about this in my autobiography, in the chapter on my third rains retreat.

Taṇhā is desire, which is the cause of suffering (samudaya). Kāma-taṇhā is the desire for sensual pleasures. Bhava-taṇhā is the craving for becoming or existence, such as desiring to be born into a good life; it is wishing to be reborn. A common aspiration is, *may I be attractive, wealthy, intelligent, well-mannered, and of a proud lineage.* This is the core of worldly existence. It is why we desire to be born.

Physical attractiveness is something for which both males and females strive. Having an appealing appearance improves one's chances of securing a life partner. Wealth also increases the likelihood of being chosen. Intelligence, talent, and being lauded for

accomplishments also help. Society welcomes those with refined deportment, so having good manners also serves as a strong selling point. When your parents descend from proud lineages, and your family name is well known and highly regarded, you can be ugly and still appear attractive to potential suitors. That's why people wish to be attractive, wealthy, intelligent, well-mannered, and of a proud lineage.

This desire for a particular kind of life is what is meant by craving for existence (*bhava-taṇhā*). It is the desire for your next life to be an improvement over this one. What will be upgraded? Your partner, perhaps. Next time around, you want to have a wife or husband that is attractive, rich, and well-mannered. Both men and women share these same desires. This clinging and attachment (*upādāna*) is why we are so intricately tied to, and unable to untangle ourselves from, this world.

It is like if you were in the middle of a delicious meal, and someone tugged on your ear in an attempt to yank you away from it – you'd allow your ear to rip right off; nothing could stop you from enjoying your food. They could pull your arm, and you'd let them tear it off before you put down your fork and went with them. This is clinging and attachment. This is what we need to focus on fixing. Everyone desires to live out a good existence (*bhava*). No one wants a bad one.

*Vibhava-taṇhā* is not yearning for a bad existence. It is the opposite of *bhava-taṇhā*, which is yearning for a good existence. When you desire something, but the opposite occurs, though you may not want that unfavorable existence, there is no way to escape *kamma*.

For instance, imagine a couple which lives together in peace and harmony until the husband becomes paralyzed. The wife must



accept that kamma, despite her aversion. You may not want it, but you have to accept the physical qualities you inherit – eyes, ears, arms, legs, all of it. This is vibhava-tañhā, not desiring an unpleasant existence. But once born, you must accept the cards you are dealt. Suppose you're born into a dirt-poor family and must beg for handouts. You would have to put up with that predicament because your own past deeds (kamma) have come full circle. An unfavorable existence isn't something anyone desires but it is something everyone must encounter.

The Four Bases of Mental Power (Iddhipāda) should be applied in considering how to improve yourself. In order for your wisdom to grow, select one of the Four Bases of Mental Power to be serious about: zeal (chanda), effort (viriya), consciousness (citta), or analysis (vīmaṃsā). In my handwritten note that was distributed to you all, the first column belongs to desire (tañhā) and imagination (saṅkhāra). The second column belongs to wisdom (paññā) and cessation (nirodha). Wisdom and cessation must be cultivated in order to take down desire and imagination. Don't allow desire to call all the shots. You must build up your wisdom in order to counter desire. Fight fire with fire.

If you were sick, you would have to search for an antidote. You wouldn't continue to eat whatever caused the sickness in the first place. If you are experiencing suffering, you must find a way to cure it; wisdom is that cure. *Paññāya parisujjhati: through wisdom one is purified.*

You have been seduced by desire, defilements, and this world up until this very moment. How much longer will you continue to be spellbound? You must snap out of it in time. You should get moving now that you have a teacher showing you the way.

P: What must I do if I want to be reborn as a human? I do not want to be born as a cow or buffalo and made to toil.

LPT: You must fully uphold the five precepts.

P: What are the eight types of noble individuals (ariyapuggalas)?

LPT: The path of stream-entrance (sotāpatti-magga), the fruit of stream-entrance (sotāpatti-phala), the path of once-returning (sakadāgāmi-magga), the fruit of once-returning (sakadāgāmi-phala), the path of never-returning (anāgāmi-magga), the fruit of never-returning (anāgāmi-phala), the path of complete enlightenment (arahatta-magga), the fruit of complete enlightenment (arahatta-phala). The path (magga) is what brings you to the results (phala). In actuality, no one dies in the state of the path, as the path and the fruit of the path are virtually a breath apart. If someone has attained the path, they will instantly achieve the fruit. You cannot remain in the state of the path for a long time. It is merely the stepping-stone to the fruit. It is like when you're eating – your final bite is the path and feeling full is the fruit. Search for your own example of what can transform into an instant result. For instance, when you are circling around, lost, and unable to find the way in, once you see the entrance you instantly realize that this is the way in. In this case, knowing the way in is the path, and actually arriving there is the fruit.

Do the foreigners understand? Be sure to translate for them, too. They were born in the wrong place. [laughs] It is good that they have good friends, or kalyāṇamittas. Kalyāṇamittas give you pointers and pull you in the right direction. Do you have foreign friends interested in practicing? You ought to find many friends to join you.

I was told there were around five hundred Americans in New York interested in hearing me give a sermon.

P: They practice meditation, though.

LPT: I don't know if they'll listen to me. My teachings conflict with all of their practices. If they won't listen, leave them be. Today, there are many translated books and many interpretations of how to practice. As a result, people are confused as to what is right or wrong. In Thailand, mostly everyone practices meditation. All they aim for is tranquility. The manuals claim that once one enters a calm state, wisdom will arise and wipe out various defilements. One will simply sit there and effortlessly achieve a level of enlightenment. How dumb can people be? Monks teach this concept as well.

It isn't easy when I go and teach people. When I speak, how many people will actually understand the rationale and meaning of my words? How could it ever be possible for wisdom to arise from meditation? I have studied it all and know what it was like while the Buddha was alive. During that era, these practices did not exist. So, why do they exist today? Who authored the scriptures that advocate these notions? You'll have to do your own research. These teachings were written so long ago that the authors are all dead. Their writings can no longer be changed. The authors can no longer take responsibility for what they have written. The subsequent generations were not bold enough to change the writings, so they left them untouched. They assumed that all that the elders taught must be true, so they continued to follow the teachings. This is characteristic of the Kalamas. This wrongness has infected the entire country.

The Buddha's teachings exist, yet why don't people follow them? I have read the scriptures, and those who achieved a level of enlightenment during the Buddha's time – the ordained and laypeople alike – all did so by starting with wisdom. Why then, do people today start with meditation? Today's teachings substantially conflict with the Buddha's teachings. There are even conflicting teachings within the same book. The Buddha's authentic teachings still exist. In fact, there are multitudes upon multitudes of his teachings. Just take a look at the scriptures. Why don't people teach these authentic teachings in our current era? Why do they opt to teach the unsound claims of the ascetics and hermits?

In contemporary times, people mostly practice meditation. That is the ascetic way. You practice like an ascetic but wish to obtain the Buddha's results. It's impossible. How can you act one way but expect completely different results? People don't consider this. They study a lot, with many in Thailand having attained Pāli Scholar level nine, which is the ultimate in higher Buddhist theological studies. There are a great number of Mahās in Thailand. Tens of thousands of them, in fact. But do any of these monks think in this way? No. They also don't understand. They merely follow the manuals. They don't possess wisdom, they only possess knowledge. They are unable to realize how these conflicting paradigms affect Dhamma practice, and they are unable to discern right from wrong. They only know what they've read, so that's what they follow. They have no wisdom, only knowledge.

The bookshelves are full of the Buddha's teachings, yet they do not contemplate them. Did these practices exist during the Buddha's era? Not at all. The hundreds, thousands, tens of thousands, or hundreds of thousands of people who turned to the Buddha or any

ariyapuggalas were all taught to start with wisdom. There was no mention of meditation. No one proclaimed, “Now that you’re all here, let us meditate in order to generate wisdom.” They didn’t teach that during the Buddha’s time. If it was taught, to whom? It wasn’t taught to anyone at all.

I’ve read the entire Tipiṭaka. I know how the laypeople of the Buddha’s era attained levels of enlightenment. I don’t encourage people to practice too much meditation. You ought to meditate, but only in order to support wisdom. Once you’ve meditated, you should fuse that meditative power with your wisdom. Your wisdom must be developed through different means. Your meditative strength will automatically augment your wisdom. It isn’t difficult. It is wrong to teach only meditation, and to teach that that wisdom will arise from meditation. If it were true, then why didn’t wisdom arise when Prince Siddhattha became an ascetic and practiced meditation? Do people consider this? No. People who are educated and sufficiently knowledgeable should be able to realize this. If meditation truly begat wisdom, then why didn’t wisdom arise in Bhikkhu Siddhattha during the five years he trained under the two hermits? People ought to realize this. How can people in contemporary times claim that wisdom arises from tranquil meditation? Regardless, I will continue to teach this. In the limited time that remains, I will teach as much as I can. Whatever will happen will happen.

[A practitioner relays a story]

LPT: That is the worldly interpretation. How would you draw a Dhamma parallel from it?

P: Let’s say that this tree is a person who has come to be born. You make your way through life, acquiring things, but ultimately



you must depart empty-handed. The birds that peck at one another, fighting over scarce resources, are like humans who are fighting over worldly possessions. In the end, you cannot take a single thing with you. You have to leave it all here on this earth. And your desires and hunger for more will draw you back into this world, just like this tree.

LPT: Yes, this is good. Now keep thinking, don't stop at just one example.

P: I have another question. I used to think that my husband was the one attached to me; but now I see that I'm the one who clings to him. I want to leave, but I cannot. When I try to analyze why, I realize that I'm scared I won't make it. I'm scared I'll return and find that he has a new wife. What will I do with no possessions to my name? So, when I really think about it, I'm not so concerned about him as I am about myself.

LPT: This is good. What are the causes of suffering (samudaya) that you have cultivated? These thoughts belong to desire (taṇhā) and the cause (samudaya); there is an abundance of these thoughts, only you've always neglected to see them. So, start over. You must find a way to flip these thoughts. Don't let defilements (kilesas) and imagination (saṅkhāra) drag you along without a struggle. Once you've turned the wrong way onto a one-way street, you must realize your mistake and find a way to turn back around. If you don't realize what you have done, then you will continue to drive on into the sea. Then, your only hope will lie in your next rebirth. Dhamma practice is the same. If you only think in one way, you won't get anywhere. You need to find a way back.

P: Luang Por, I've tried to contemplate and follow along with your teachings. But when something comes to me, it pops up spontaneously. Is that usable?

LPT: It's uncertain. It could be desire (taṇhā) playing a trick on you. It could be right; it could be wrong. It's unreliable. It's not like when you are actually contemplating on something. Don't wait for wisdom to spontaneously arise. Instead, you should develop it; that is the real deal. If you wait for it to arise, it's risky. It's more likely to be wrong than right, or even completely wrong.

P: But thinking as you've instructed is so depressing – you don't want to acquire anything or do anything.

LPT: That's the point. You want to cast off greed.

P: But if you aren't greedy, what will you have to survive on?

LPT: You'll have moderation. Greed is excess – you want so much that you don't have time to rest or sleep, and you suffer for it. Greed

lies within your mind, not in the number of belongings. You must separate the two. If greed lodges in your mind, you can feel greed over a single dollar. But if greed doesn't inhabit your mind, you can have a billion dollars and not be greedy; you'll know how to exercise moderation. Having a lot of money is merely a benefit, so take it. Greed exists in the mind, not within the items themselves.

For instance, your housing development rakes in a hundred thousand dollars. So, take the money. You aren't being greedy. Then next year, you earn three hundred thousand dollars. Take it, you're not greedy. People misunderstand that greed is characterized by a large amount. That's inaccurate. It's a completely separate issue. *Don't take too much, that's greedy.* No, that's not how it works. It's about your mind's perception. *If you take a lot, that means you're greedy.* No, this is incorrect.

P: If you take a lot and use it to make merit (puñña), that's good right?

LPT: That's merely an excuse [laughs]. It's like when people slaughter an animal in order to make merit with it. How can murder become merit? How many pounds of the cow you slaughtered will actually be dedicated to making merit? What will you do with the remainder of the meat? Or when you earn ten thousand dollars, how much will you actually donate to make merit? Ten dollars? This is characteristic of being deceived by defilements.

P: In one of your sermons, you say that people mistakenly believe that they are happy in their family life, when in reality it is laden with suffering. Because if one person were to die, how sad and devastated would those left behind feel? I tried to contemplate on this but cannot come to terms with reality because I am too



strongly attached to my husband of twenty years. I practiced thinking about what I would do if I didn't have him in my life, but it was heartbreaking and unbearable. Luang Por, do you have any suggestions?

LPT: I don't have any suggestions. Go and prostrate before a dog. Ask it, "How can you not have a husband yet continue living? How do you do it? Why can't I be as amazing as you?" [laughs] You see, you don't realize the truth. Separation exists, only you refuse to accept it. The belief that you are living together is a figment of your imagination. "My wife," "my husband," "my child," are all presumptions made by your imagination. Think about it from the opposite angle – separation is inevitable. Train your mind to see that "wife" and "husband" are merely worldly conventions or constructs (*sammuti*). It's like tying a male and female together by the neck, having them cohabit, and claiming they are husband and wife. You're being duped by worldly constructs. When you don't have wisdom, you get fooled by worldly conventions.

Being a good wife is an external, behavioral role. You have to know the Dhamma. You do your duty as a wife and do it well. Your outward actions (*kiriya*) should reflect whatever responsibilities a wife must fulfill. Internally (*akiriya*), you know that you are no one's wife. In fact, your own self-identity doesn't even exist, let alone your identity as someone's wife. You have to understand that the role you play is external, a mere social construct. You must follow the expectations of that role. Meanwhile, internally you train your mind. It is because you don't know how to train yourself that you feel this way. You've already fully submitted and offered your body and soul to him. Why would you give yourself to him? You are you and he is he. You have to know how to keep things apart. When you're dying,

can he help you? You are you; he is he. You must use your wisdom to see this dissociation.

P: If people were to think like that, then all your followers would ordain.

LPT: No, I wouldn't allow it. Getting them to come to the temple is challenging enough – they don't need to ordain.

P: Do you have any notions on how to break the marital bonds of attachment?

LPT: You have to discover them yourself. You know yourself best. You have to unearth the root of your attachment to him. I am not his wife, how am I supposed to know? You are his wife, so you have to know what keeps you captivated and clinging to him. I am nobody's husband. I am nobody's wife. You have to uncover it yourself.

P: When living together, it is more than just husband and wife. It's also father, brother, friend, and child.

LPT: That's right. You'll know it yourself. You must understand the Buddha's teaching, *attāhi attanō nāthō*. What does it mean?

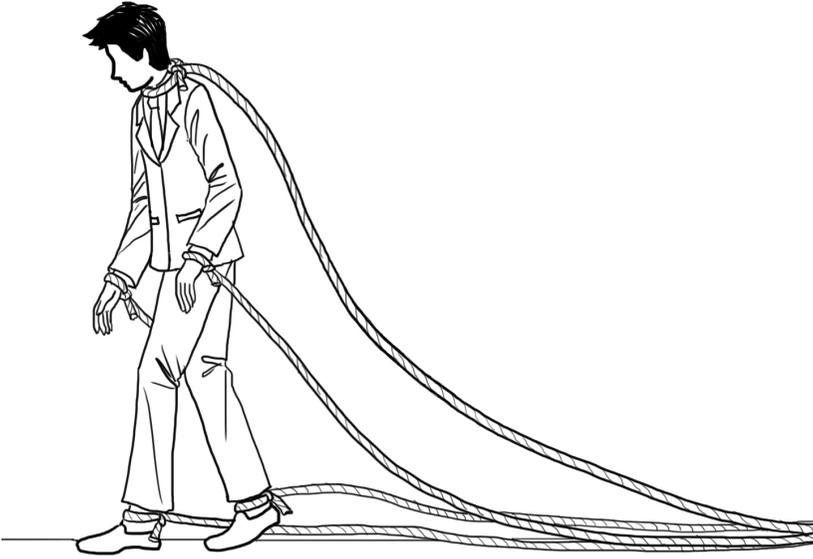
P: One is one's own refuge.

LPT: That's right. How will you be your own refuge? You cannot rely on others. There's no way. Relying on yourself means that you must know how to solve your own problems. You can't have others fix them for you. You created the problem, so you must fix it. Like cures like. Who will cure you? You must cure yourself. The Buddha's teaching that one must be one's own refuge is exceptionally clear. You've been reborn into this world for countless aeons. Who has tethered you to this world? You have. You are the one who did the

binding, so why are you making a ruckus trying to get others to unbind you? You knew how to bind, but don't know how to unbind. Is this wise or foolish?

Imaginative thoughts shackle us to this world. We produce them all day and night; it is a skill in which we are exceptionally proficient. But we don't know how to undo them. We need to figure out a way to unshackle ourselves. In the handout I distributed last night, the final stage is about using wisdom to solve one's own problems. The first stage – thinking in a way that binds yourself – is a skill that does not require instruction because we are already adept at that manner of thinking. But how can you think in the manner of the final stage – in a way that unbinds yourself? This is simply an example. There are many ways in which people attach themselves to this world.

Thinking in a manner consistent with the cause of suffering (samudaya), desire (taṇhā), and imagination (saṅkhāra) keeps us spellbound and charmed by this world. Thinking with insight development (vipassanā) and cessation (nirodha) in a fashion that counters the enchantment and eliminates suffering is a skill you must develop to proficiency. When the spell-binding thoughts surface, you must counter them with the spell-breaking thoughts. Don't continue to believe in the illusion of “my wife” or “my husband.” You must find a way to shatter that illusion by yourself; you must admonish yourself. If attachment to your husband is the issue, then you must turn the spotlight on yourself. If your grandparents and parents didn't wed you to this man, and you lived out your separate lives, would you feel anything? No. Even if he were to die, he would die without your feeling anything about it. If you hadn't married him, you would feel nothing over his death. See?



You are deluded by worldly conventions. You just don't have the wisdom to realize it. If you did, the remedy would be clear to you and you'd detach yourself in an instant. You'd realize, *oh, I let the world deceive me*. We all know how to think in ways that bind us, but don't know how to think in ways that unbind us.

Suppose you were to see a couple walking along and the man's arms and legs are tied to the woman's. What would you think? Would you think they were sane or crazy? *Putta gīvā – a child, around the neck; dhana pada – riches, around the foot; sāmībhariyā hattha – a spouse, around the hand; whoever can undo these three bonds will be liberated from the cycle of rebirth*. You've made a mess binding yourself – is that wise or foolish?

P: Is gratitude a worldly construct?

LPT: Gratitude is a positive worldly construct (sammuti). It is Dhamma, but you must know how to practice equanimity (upekkhā).

The Four Great Virtues (Brahmavihārā) are loving-kindness (mettā), compassion (karuṇā), sympathetic joy (muditā), and equanimity (upekkhā). Equanimity has the last word. It provides the counterbalance. You must grow your equanimity to an expert level, so that you can find relief in even the most painful of situations. When your love becomes a poison, don't run around wailing, "my husband, my husband, my husband," without any equanimity. Equanimity is your counterbalance. Don't drown in the notions of "my husband" and your love for one another. Otherwise, once something happens, you will feel unbridled sympathy for "my poor husband," and you will find yourself overcome with suffering as a result. Why don't you put equanimity to use? It's easy, if you have wisdom.

When you miss someone, it isn't all of the time. Look at that practitioner – when I was here last year, she was constantly crying and missing her husband. But this year, I don't see a single tear. Her tears have stopped because now she knows better.

P: I'm trying out different methods. For instance, when I wake up in the middle of the night, I imagine what it would be like if I found my husband had stopped breathing. He would simply turn into a corpse. I am trying to find a way to detach myself, but these techniques aren't proving effective.

LPT: The method is unimportant. What is important is whether or not you can truly feel it and accept it. If you can, even a tiny spark of feeling is valuable. If you can't, you could have a million techniques and they would all be worthless. It's the same as knowing that there is food before you, but not knowing how to eat it. That knowledge is meaningless. You recognize that this here is food, and that there

is food – you possess that knowledge, yet you don't know how to cook it. Now, there are many ways to cook the food. It isn't necessary to know all the methods. One method is enough to be able to eat; and it is that method that is of the greatest worth and benefit. See? You can have a million techniques, but the most crucial point is whether or not your mind can digest it.

For example, I am detail oriented and thorough – in both issues involving myself as well as those involving others. It is in my nature to want to teach others. I have to be like a vast ocean, far-reaching and deep. For you practitioners, you don't need to set your bounds that far. You need only aim to get by. You don't need to follow in my footsteps. I have to be more comprehensive and consummate in Dhamma because of my teaching role.

It's like how each government department must possess all the knowledge related to the jobs and duties of that department. When anyone asks a question, they must be ready with the answer. The president must have consummate knowledge of the roles of each of those departments, so that when anyone asks, he has the answers. Meanwhile, government officers like yourself aren't required to be as knowledgeable.

As a teacher, I have to be armed and ready with an arsenal of comprehensive, wide-ranging knowledge. You, on the other hand, only need a bit of general knowledge in order to be a virtuous person. All you need to aim for is getting by and making it across to safety. Setting your boundaries far beyond your wisdom's ability is like setting yourself up for failure.

It's like endeavoring to preserve a massive catch of fish with a grain of salt – it's too disproportionate – or expecting to freeze a truckload

of fish with a single ice cube – the fish will surely spoil. If the boundaries you set for yourself are too vast and challenging, you won't have sufficient wisdom to analyze various issues or solve your own problems. You have to set goals befitting your abilities. If you had a huge stock pot of stew, would a pinch of salt be sufficient to flavor it? How could it? You must recognize your own capability. You can have many topics to contemplate, but they will all be squandered on your feeble wisdom. There is no point.

“Practicing the right Dhamma” denotes being thorough in whatever topics you are contemplating. It does not mean spreading your thin wisdom over a multitude of Dhamma topics. That would be an incredible waste.

You can't try to be like me. I have to teach the public. That is why my wisdom must be complete and utterly exhaustive. I can answer all the questions you may have about the Buddha. Every morsel of my wisdom is rich with reason and detail. I am that flavorful large pot of stew – the liquids and solids in the stew are well proportioned, the flavor is consistent.

P: In the past, I had practiced meditation in hopes of attaining enlightenment. But after meeting you, I lowered my aim to something more attainable. Now, my practice is less strained.

LPT: Your dreams were too big and your goals were too high. What's worse, you were aiming in the wrong direction.

P: I have a question. I know that doing this thing isn't right. Yet everything pushes me to do it and I am unable to stop myself. So, then I end up doing it. Do you have a way for me to force myself to stop this behavior?

LPT: You have to do a lot of contemplating on kamma. You must use kamma as the final, divisive word. You must accept that you are heir to your actions. What is the relationship between cause and effect? When this cause is put into play, what is the result? Do you fear that result?

P: I do, but I still want to do it.

LPT: Then you're beyond help. If you have analyzed the resultant suffering and adverse consequences and still want to do it, and nothing can stop you – well, if someone won't listen, then all there's left to do is toss them in the jungle. People are dumber than dogs. When an alligator has its jaws open, a dog won't walk in. But if a human will, then give them a push on their way in. You can see the suffering, you can see the negative consequences, and you can see the future perils. But if your mind still won't listen, then give it a hearty send off. You need to experience real consequences before your mind will listen to your entreaties. That's the only way you'll have had enough. You have to lose a leg first, then you'll be scared straight.

There was a young nun at Wat Tham Puang in Song Dao district of Sakon Nakhon province. She came to see me because she wanted to quit being a nun. After interviewing her, it came to light that she wanted to pursue worldly pleasures because she felt her life was lacking something. I empathized with her, because I had also felt that way in the past [laughs]. I tried to educate her on the sufferings tied to worldly sensual pleasures (*kāmaguṇa*) – the stresses inherent in having a family and children. Regardless, she wanted to take the plunge and experience it all for herself. In a case like this, all there is to do is send her off with a big shove into the gator's mouth [laughs]!





P: While I was listening to your sermon last night, your face disappeared. In its place, all I could see were white bones. No matter how I tried, I couldn't see you. This persisted for a while. It was unclear what I was meant to contemplate.

LPT: Your wisdom is weak and dull. If it were strong and radiant, you would see everything clearly. What you experienced indicates that your contemplations lack clarity and thoroughness. This lack of depth and comprehensiveness leaves room for doubt and questions, as is evident in this very moment. You have to retrain your wisdom.

P: Last year, I woke up in the middle of the night to my wrist appearing translucent. The veins and tendons were all visible. I don't know if I contemplated on this correctly. I recollected Luang Pu Khao's experience in which he saw his own foot as bones. He proceeded to contemplate until his entire body appeared in its skeletal form. Can I apply this same technique to myself?

LPT: Yes. But your wisdom is a tiny speck. You need to grow it. You have to increase your meager wisdom in order to expand on this contemplation. You have to build up more wisdom and start over.

P: How do I start?

LPT: Contemplate on the same issue, only with new wisdom.

P: This issue?

LPT: You can contemplate on something that you've already contemplated on or contemplate on something new. It doesn't have to be this issue. It can be any issue.

P: Meaning, I have to exert myself more, right?

LPT: Yes, you have to put forth more effort. It doesn't have to be this issue. It can be any issue that falls under uncertainty. What does uncertainty mean? What does self or ego (attā) mean? Reflect on these topics as often as possible. Analyze the various ways in which the physical form changes. Make it common practice to think about impermanence (anicca) and not-self (anattā). Once your wisdom increases, your contemplations will become clearer and more thorough. And once you become more thorough, you won't need these visions. Once you follow the wisdom path, these visions will all disappear. They aren't necessary to your Dhamma practice. Profoundly penetrating the world's truths does not require these supplemental visions. You'll stop wondering and doubting. You'll realize, *oh, this is how it is*.

P: In contemplating the physical form (rūpa), you told us to start by viewing it in terms of the four elements. But wouldn't contemplating on the body in terms of filth (asubha) be like skipping levels?

LPT: I am having you contemplate on impermanence, not filth. In contemplating the physical body, each topic must remain separate – impermanence is one thing, filth is one thing, suffering is one thing, and not-self is one thing.

P: Luang Por, last night, I was so determined to practice according to your instructions. As I was speaking with this practitioner, her face morphed into that of an old lady's – it wrinkled, started to rot, and bones jutted out. Now, she told me to follow through with the contemplation, to think about the body's unattractiveness, but I couldn't do it. I was too scared. In fact, it gave me such a fright, I was even afraid to walk to my tent! In a situation like this, what am I supposed to think about?

LPT: Use dogs as your friend. Are you better or worse than dogs? Go ahead and let that fear of ghosts kill you. Whatever you are afraid of, that's where you must go. If you fear ghosts, go to them. If you encounter a ghost, ask them why they have come. What do they want? Talk to them.

P: It was too spooky. I had to turn my back to her. I couldn't look at her, I couldn't sleep, I couldn't think. The day before, I could contemplate on the body's filth, but when I was confronted with her rotting face, the terror of it crippled my thoughts.

LPT: If you are afraid of ghosts, you have to establish ghosts as your contemplation topic. What is a ghost? If you are afraid of ghosts, you have to see them. You can't just simply fear them. People are afraid of ghosts because they do not see them. What is a ghost? You need to see this first; you have to see this with your wisdom. You cure the fear with wisdom.

P: I know that one day I will become a ghost. My mind knows this, but I can't accept it.

LPT: Your mind doesn't see it. You must pretend that you are a ghost.

P: But I still want to be beautiful.

LPT: Well, there you go [laughs]. This is your point of contention. This is where you must fix it. If you still want to be beautiful, you have to be a beautiful ghost – a decorative ghost that resides in something fragrant [laughs].

P: If my time is limited, what is more important: chanting or contemplating?

LPT: Contemplating is more important.

P: I believe that chanting can protect us from harm. That is why I do it.

LPT: You are placing your safety in the hands of something external. Chanting is done in order to honor and exalt in the virtues of the Buddha, the Dhamma, and the Sangha. It is not a fortress that shields you from danger. You must trust in kamma – whatever is supposed to happen will happen. You don't have to prevent it. Let it come, if it is a part of your kamma.

Chanting is done to calm yourself, to praise the Triple Gem. But practicing the teachings is more important. When it comes to paying tribute, chanting is an extra, while actual Dhamma practice is the lead actor.

P: Can I just meditate for five minutes and then contemplate? And then if time allows, wrap up with some chanting?

LPT: Sure. You can do the chanting. You know, you don't need to chant the long verses. When I was practicing dhūtaṅga in the forest, I would chant short and simple verses, or the monk's code of discipline along with its translations. I did it when there were lots of ghosts around, so that the ghosts would be more receptive and more likely to listen to me.

P: When normal laypeople do chanting, do we need to chant the invitation to the celestial beings (devas) so that they will come and listen?

LPT: When I do chanting, devas come even though I didn't invite them. They come on their own. Devas go where there are upstanding Dhamma practitioners. They recognize virtue. Take yourself, for example. You'll go where there are good people, and you don't have to be invited. And you'll distance yourself from wherever there are evil people. It's the same. The invitation of devas is only a formality.

P: Will they really come?

LPT: If someone invites you, but you don't like them, will you go? If you invite them, and they don't like you, will they come? The invitation is a mere formality. It isn't necessary. I never invite them, and they always come.

P: Last night, I tried to contemplate on my hair. How it was black when I was young but is graying and falling out in my old age. I thought about how my hair is not-self (anattā). I then proceeded to examine my nails. I cut them when they are too long. When they are long, they are not-self.

LPT: No, that is impermanence. The state of being "long" is attā, and cutting them is change, or anicca. Keep thinking and the

thoughts will start to flow. Think continuously and frequently. Start small and evolve. Don't get greedy and try to take all of it on at once; your analysis won't be thorough. In making an asphalt road, only three to four centimeter's thickness of asphalt is poured at a time. It is then spread, flattened, and compressed before the process is repeated. They don't pour the entire truckload and attempt to compress it all at once. That's not how it works. Your thinking must also be gradual. Keep at it and your thoroughness will progressively advance.



**June 2, 1998**

*Second Sermon*

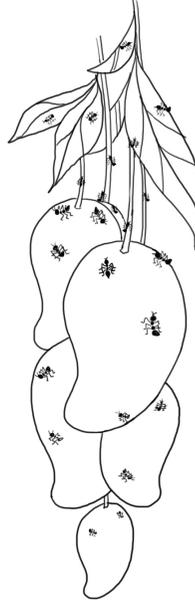
The Buddha's teachings span a multitude of topics. Of all the people born into this world, how many will understand the Buddha's teachings? *Kiccho manussa paṭilābho: rare it is to gain birth as a human being.* Think about it. How is a human birth a boon? How is it a rare privilege? Will others share in this sentiment? Or will they simply be born and leave it at that?

*Kiccham maccāna jivitaṃ: difficult is the life of mortals.* Surviving the days, months, and years is also an incredible boon. We must reflect on how other people don't survive for long. In a few days, months, or years, they will die. They won't get the opportunity to study the Dhamma like you. Why should you think in this manner? To console yourself in this lift (*paggaha*) and censure (*niggaha*) game of good cop, bad cop. You console and lift yourself in order to further strengthen your conviction (*saddhā*) and so you don't live life heedlessly. Now that you've already been born, carry on with strong exertion and perseverance.

*Kicchaṃ saddhamma savaṇaṃ: hard is the hearing of the Sublime Truth.* Throughout all of our incalculable past lifetimes, it has been extremely difficult to hear the Buddha's teachings. It isn't an easy endeavor, because the Buddha's teachings don't exist in every era; they only exist in certain periods. Although you may not have been alive during the Buddha's actual lifetime, being alive during a period when the Buddha's teachings still exist and there is a teacher who can explain them to you – well, this is an incredible boon. It is something you can be personally proud of; it is an immense privilege. Billions of others inhabit this world with you, yet they don't have the opportunity to hear the Dhamma like you do. Even if they do get to hear the teachings, they likely won't contemplate on them the way you do. They will leave the teachings lying about, meaningless, like casting pearls before swine. *Tamotamaṇḍarāyana: he who is in darkness and bound for darkness.* They come blind and they leave blind. They come deaf and they leave deaf. They don't understand anything. The Dhamma is explained to them and they are unaffected. At most, all they know is what is written in the manuals. This verse says this, that verse says that. It's like rain falling on an overturned bowl – the bowl cannot hold any of the water. Those who will hear the Buddha's teachings and understand them are few and far between.

They are like an army of red ants crawling all over a delicious mango tree – no matter how sweet the mangoes are, the ants will not get to savor the fruit. All they can do is march. Some people read the Buddhist scriptures but do not taste the flavor of the Dhamma. They don't understand what is written. They can recite the passages but cannot put them into actual practice. Only once you practice will you truly appreciate how the flavor of Dhamma differs from that of





the world. You must contemplate each of these stanzas until you reach a point of bliss and contentment.

Finally, the last stanza of the Four Rare Opportunities: *Kiccho buddhānam uppādo: rare is the appearance of the enlightened ones*. It takes a lot before a Buddha can arise. There are three types of Buddhas, and our Buddha belongs to the wisdom predominant (paññādhika) type. This kind of Buddha achieves enlightenment and penetrates the Dhamma the quickest and easiest of the three types. After Dīpankara Buddha confirmed Gotama Buddha's aspiration of future Buddhahood, twenty-four Buddhas arose in the world. This is considered incredibly quick.

Gotama Buddha spent nine immeasurable, incalculable aeons silently aspiring to Buddhahood in order to free people from the Three Realms. This is an incredibly long time. Thereafter, he spent seven incalculable aeons voicing the aspiration, "I wish to be a Buddha in

order to free people from the rounds of rebirth.” The scriptures don’t mention how many Buddhas arose in the world during these sixteen incalculable aeons of our Buddha’s aspiration; there must have been many during that interval. Afterwards, as he cultivated more advanced perfections of character (*pāramī*), he was born in the era of Dīpankara Buddha as a hermit named Sumedha. He made his aspiration in front of Dīpankara Buddha, who made the prediction that in four incalculable aeons, Sumedha would become Gotama Buddha. Dīpankara Buddha said that Gotama Buddha would live in Kapilavattu, during a period of a 100-year average human life span, and provided the details about his future father, mother, and disciples.

How long is four incalculable aeons? It is long enough for twenty-four Buddhas to have arisen in the world. The period between each Buddha’s arising in the world is incredibly long. Our Gotama Buddha came to be born in a time when the human life span was one hundred years, and he was the fourth Buddha of this Buddha era. The five Buddhas of this era are: Kakusandha, born in a 40,000-year human lifespan period; Koṇāgamana, born in a 20,000-year human lifespan period; Kassapa, born in a 10,000-year human lifespan period; Gotama, born in a 100-year human life span period (although he only lived to 80); and Metteyya, the Bodhisatta yet to be born. We are in a period of decline, in which the human lifespan decreases by one year every one hundred years.

Gotama Buddha’s history states that Prince Siddhattha became an ascetic at the age of twenty-nine, but his first six years of practice were a waste. He didn’t yet know how to practice in order to become a Buddha, so he did what he thought was correct. Thus, he went to practice meditation with two hermits. Siddhattha the ascetic was

exceptionally skilled at meditation and attained all the advanced meditative absorptions (jhāna) and supernormal insights (abhiññā). He spent five years doing this, but alas, he could not attain Buddhahood, eliminate any stress, nor develop wisdom. Sure, while his mind was in a meditative state, it seemed as if Siddhattha's woes over his home and his love for his wife all vanished. But once his mind released from that meditative state, the concerns over his home, wife, son, city, and everything else came pouring back in. He'd dive into meditation and those stresses would disappear, and when he'd emerge from meditation they would reappear. He tried everything. Ultimately, he realized that meditation is not done for realizing the indisputable truths of the world, nor for the sake of enlightenment. So, he left in search of answers.

However, in our current era, it is widely taught that once one attains a serene meditative state, wisdom will emerge. Though this erroneous claim severely contradicts the Buddha's own experience, people still contend that it is correct. Who is the expert in this matter? Do people not believe the Buddha? Or are they misinterpreting his words? The Buddha said not to do this because it was a waste of time – he paid for this realization with six years of his own life – yet people do it regardless. The scriptures substantiate the truth I am bringing to light here. It is not something people can't get their hands on and read. Why don't those who teach this erroneous claim do some research? Why don't they analyze what the Buddha actually taught? All they do is instruct people to sit and meditate in order for wisdom to arise and wipe out desires and defilements. Is this a correct or incorrect view? You be the judge.

The more the erudite study, the dumber they become. The truth exists, yet they neglect to contemplate it. There are texts and

scriptures that corroborate what I am saying. If you believe me to be wrong, then point out the text that contradicts it. Show me where I have erred. There is no error, because what I'm saying is entirely accurate. Only, people don't care to believe it. It seems we are in an era in which the Buddha's teachings are endangered. People are unwilling to teach the truths that the Buddha taught. Instead, people seek out that which the Buddha did not teach and practice that which he did not train his students to do. The era of Buddhism's extinction is upon us.

The Buddha stated that the religion would last for five thousand years, and we have already passed the halfway mark. Hardly any time remains before Buddhism vanishes. Though the Buddha's teachings will disappear, the dhamma will continue to exist as usual. You must interpret this correctly. Why doesn't the dhamma vanish? What is the dhamma? The truth of the world will still remain the truth of the world. Countless souls will be born into the world and the Three Realms, and throughout it all, the dhamma will exist. Dhamma is not the teachings of any religion. It is the universal truth to which all the world's creatures are subject. Once born, we must age – this is the truth, this is dhamma. Anyone who is born must die – this is dhamma. The dhamma exists in all of us. Anyone who bows to greed, anger, or delusion is part of the world's dhamma. The truth does not vanish from this world; it will remain embedded in the soul of the world for all time. Only, no one will realize this dhamma, this truth.

Anyone who reads the news and watches television can see that in many non-Buddhist countries people don't know the word "dhamma," yet they are on intimate terms with it; it is what they call life or nature. Birth is an occasion marked by congratulations and happiness. Every culture, every language rejoices in birth. Hugs and

smiles welcome the birth of a child or grandchild. Even when the newborn is covered in filthy fluids and exuding odors, we cheerily nuzzle and embrace it. This is natural to us.

We become ill, age, and suffer. We shed tears over all kinds of misery. This is the conspicuous truth. When we are pleased, we rejoice, laugh, and express our delight. This is the dhamma inherent in each of us. When death visits, we cry, hold each other close, and are overcome with sorrow, as is customary for all humans. This is natural. This is the world's dhamma. Each of us is born with greed, anger, and delusion in tow – this is the truth of the world. The Buddha taught people to understand these truths. He righted the overturned bowl, so that we could see the truth that lay inside. All of us have dhamma in us, only we do not notice or recognize it for what it is.

All of you have read many Dhamma books but you haven't seen the dhamma. You read Dhamma texts and know the name dhamma, yet you do not know the true dhamma. You're lying on top of it, but you don't see it. This is because it isn't our flesh eye that sees the dhamma, but our mind's eye. And what is our mind's eye? Wisdom. We train our wisdom in order to understand and realize the dhamma for what it is. Our flesh eye on its own cannot know the dhamma. We must train wisdom to be our mind's eye. We must develop the wisdom that we already possess, so that it can see more clearly.

Someone who lacks formal education can become literate by practicing reading and writing. Practice and training can allow us to be versed in foreign languages, like English, as well. Thus, if we retrain ourselves, we can eventually come to know and realize the dhamma.

The Buddha taught us to know birth, aging, sickness, death, and suffering. We are to contemplate on these realities. Simply repeating a meditative mantra while sitting with your eyes closed cannot facilitate the understanding of these truths and realities. This is where people are greatly mistaken. They meditate and calm their minds, and then when they want to know the Dhamma they reach for a book. What is the point of Dhamma knowledge gained from reading a book? That's not how it's done. You must first use your wisdom to contemplate until you see the objective truth. Then you will know the dhamma. It's not about mimicking knowledge from a textbook. If it were, then there would be tons of people penetrating the dhamma and becoming noble individuals (*ariyapuggalas*).

Why then, do we study Dhamma manuals? We use them for inspiration. You extract a textbook concept and internalize (*opānāyiko*) in order to see the parallel between the written truth and the actual truth from your own experience. For instance, upon reading about greed, anger, and delusion, you reflect on how these Dhamma topics manifest in your own life. This analysis is how you solve your problems. You study the Dhamma in order to examine how that Dhamma is reflected in you.

When it comes to studying, there are two types of people: *asekha-puggala* and *sekha-puggala*. *Asekha-puggala* denotes someone who no longer needs to study; namely, an individual who is enlightened (*arahant*). The *arahants* are completely finished; their holy life (*brahmacariyā*) is complete, and their studies are complete. Nothing remains to be studied. They know the truth of everything, they see the world in its true form. The *arahants* are *kata karaniya*—those who have no more tasks, no more obligations, and nothing left to study.

Sekha-puggala denotes someone who still needs to study Dhamma. This includes the stream-winners (sotāpannas), once-returners (sakadāgāmis), and non-returners (anāgāmis). Though these noble ones (ariyapuggalas) are perched on at least the first rung of enlightenment, they have yet to clear the top rung. This deficiency obligates them to seek out their own path to ultimate freedom from worldly suffering. Discovering and navigating this path to enlightenment requires more research and practice; they still have more studying to do.

Another group of sekha-puggala consists of Buddhist practitioners who are studying and practicing the Dhamma, but on a more ordinary, general level. They, too, wish for the Dhamma to convey them from suffering. Before they study any further though, it is imperative that they first develop an understanding of the objective truth. Higher aspirations like shedding attachments and reaching equanimity should be shelved until they can grasp the basics. Once they understand the fundamental principles, then they can start practicing.

Practicing means training yourself – training your actions, training your speech, and training your mind – to correspond to learned Dhamma principles. If you cannot train yourself in this way, you're signing yourself up for a treacherous journey. Simply possessing knowledge of Dhamma doesn't lessen or eliminate defilements (kilesas); that's not how it works. You have to train your actions, speech, and mind.

How can you train your actions and speech in Dhamma? One way is through morality (sīla). The precepts can compel us to be circumspect in action and speech. Action and speech can prove



revealing, as they are the very embodiment of the mind; they function as the mind's henchmen. They are the notorious criminal's cronies. This infamous criminal is, of course, the mind. All actions and speech receive their mandates from the mind. If the cronies set off on a robbery, it is only at their chief's behest. While you have yet to nab the elusive ringleader, you must kill as many henchmen as possible. When they show their faces, you kill them. The more henchmen are eliminated, the more their leader's power is diminished. Eventually, the notorious chief will be the only one standing. That is why you must gradually stamp out the henchmen. You can attack the chief more easily once all of his cronies have been wiped out.

Thus, be circumspect in action and speech, as they are the mind's henchmen. You must not allow your behavior or words to support or embolden defilements in any way. You must guard your actions



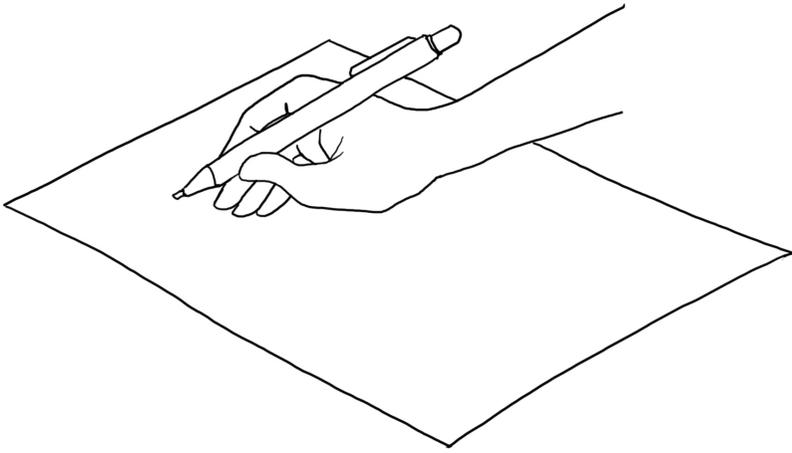
and speech in order to prevent defilements and desires (*taṇhā*) from functioning. As it stands now, your actions and speech are the channels in which defilements and desires can freely operate. You must strive to ameliorate any deficient behaviors or speech. What constitutes bad actions and speech? Killing animals, stealing, and committing adultery are all examples of bad actions that provide a stage upon which defilements can perform. The more discretion we exercise in action and speech, the more we chip away at the power of defilements and desire.

This discretion in action and speech is regularly interpreted to mean guarding your actions and speech by sitting with your eyes shut while repeating a meditative phrase. While technically accurate, you cannot do much with this application; it proves inadequate. This is because you must exercise this prudence every day, every hour, every minute, and every moment. It's not about merely guarding your actions and speech for a wink of time and then taking off to chat with one another. You must use your wisdom to discern how to be effectively guarded in action and speech. Any time you are about to speak, you must be able to judge whether it would be right or wrong to verbalize those thoughts. It must be right for you and right for your listener. It must be right for both parties. You shouldn't chastise someone simply because it is right for you but wrong for them. The same principle applies for actions – it must be just and fair for both parties. This is the comprehensive-wisdom version of discretion. Discretion isn't guarding your actions while meditating and thereafter acting as you wish, speaking as you wish, and thinking as you wish, all without any understanding of right and wrong. If you lack this kind of comprehensive wisdom, your Dhamma practice will prove arduous.

You can speak of having trained under a Dhamma teacher for many years, but it isn't the years that measure your level of discretion. Rather, it is your present comportment. Time spent proves an ineffective determinant, because if it is spent practicing incorrect principles, it is equivalent to practicing in vain. The same principle applies for monks. The number of rains retreats for which a monk has donned saffron robes does not prove anything. During the Buddha's time, even a newly ordained individual could attain a level of enlightenment. In fact, laypeople who practiced for mere days or months were able to become noble individuals (ariyapuggalas). Time ordained is not a prerequisite. A true realization coupled with a true understanding is the only requirement for enlightenment.

In any worldly occupation, understanding can be gauged by work performance. For instance, when it comes to calculating invoices, you can add all day. But if – for lack of a functioning understanding of basic math principles – you fail to line up the proper digits, then your calculations will be incorrect. In contrast, for someone skilled at math, it doesn't take long to compute a sum. It is imperative that you understand the work. If you fail to understand it, you will vacillate and be consumed by uncertainty.

Take the lottery, for example. Someone who doesn't understand how to choose lotto numbers will forever be unlucky. Every time is a near win. *If only I swapped two digits or switched the order!* Dhamma practice is the same way. If the topics don't fit or an imbalance exists, that Dhamma topic is useless. When it comes to the topic of discretion, you must be mindful and wise in order to exercise good discretion. You must be smart and comprehensive in your analysis.



People these days don't possess any wisdom or intelligence; they don't even know what wisdom is. At most, all they have is mindfulness. But mindfulness by itself is insufficient when it comes to Dhamma practice. Mindfulness needs to be coupled with wisdom. Mindfulness is like a sharpened knife. Can the knife itself do the work for you? No. The knife must be paired with a human in order to accomplish any work. If you lay down a pen on a sheet of paper, will it write on its own? No. You need a person, an actual hand on the pen, in order to ink any words. And it is owing to your comprehension of the alphabet and word composition that your writing is legible and meaningful. Without this comprehension, they are merely nonsensical scrawls, no better than tracing a crab's wobbly gait.

That is why it is essential that you study and understand what you've studied before you begin to practice. Actual practice is so important, but you have to know how to do it. Ordinarily, people regard shutting your eyes and ears in meditation as Dhamma practice. While accurate, it is merely partially accurate; not even sufficiently accurate.

I task you with studying what it means to contemplate (bhāvanā) and what it means to actually practice the Buddha's teachings (paṭipatti). How do you contemplate and how do you practice? What people conventionally engage in constitutes contemplating, but not practicing. Meditators contemplate on mantras and compete to see who can attain a deeper level of serenity. But this is only contemplation. Do they even know how to practice? Practice means training yourself to personify the theoretical Dhamma that you have studied. How can you prevent yourself from acting, speaking, and thinking in a detrimental manner? Focusing on a meditative phrase doesn't provide the answer to these questions. You can do it, but it won't illuminate how to embody the Dhamma you have studied. Contemplation and practice must go hand in hand.

Use the world as a model for contemplation. Study it in order to uncover the motive or aim that propels your frequent rebirths. What is so great about the world? You must study this until a clear understanding emerges. Dhamma practice is about understanding why we are so enamored with this world. Are the things we love and cling to truly a part of our identity? Do they truly belong to us?

We must constantly remind ourselves that this world is like a prison for animals. Why do we like confinement and fences? Why do we desire to be born behind bars, continuously cycling through the endless wheel of rebirth (saṃsāra)? It is because of the alluring enchantments. We gravitate toward dance and song, but distance ourselves from the truth. Wherever there are movies or plays, people will manage to squeeze through a sliver of a doorway to join the crowd. Meanwhile, the temple's doors are wide open and there are sermons ready to be heard, yet people do not enter. Why is this? Why do we so desire to be born? We must look inward as well as

outward for the answer. What is so good about this world? It is precisely this “good” that ties us to worldly rebirths. Once you understand this truth, you will see the “good” for what it truly is and will cease to be reborn.

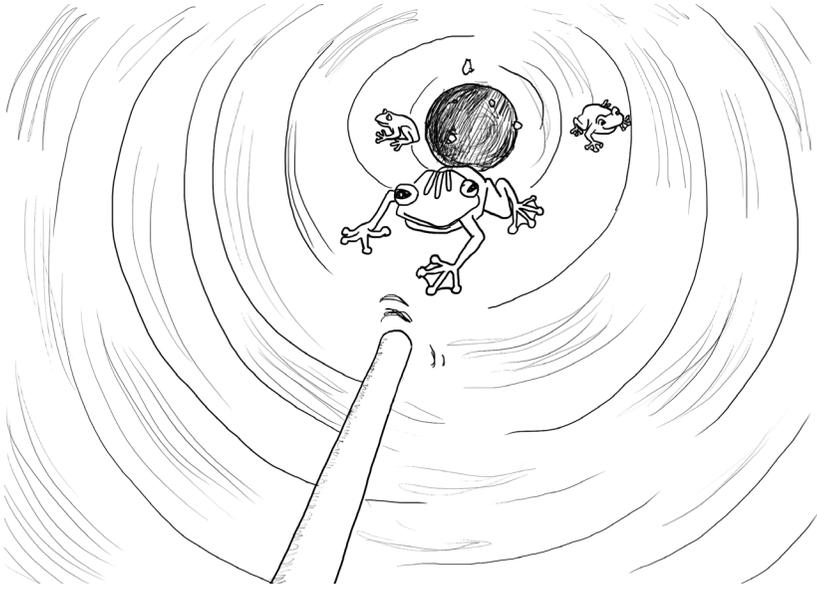
It’s like scoping out a job. Once you discover what is entailed, you realize there’s nothing good about it, so you decide to turn back and head home. Meanwhile, there’s a group of people that can’t return home because they have lost their bearings. These people have surrendered themselves to the intoxicating five sensual pleasures (kāmagaṇa) of form, sound, scent, flavor, and touch. Once they realize the resulting harmful consequences and future perils, it’s too late to remedy things. At that point, all that remains is acceptance. It’s an unfortunate situation.

Many monks find monkhood challenging and decide to disrobe. These ex-monks often remark that had they known how difficult the lay life would be they never would have disrobed. There is great suffering involved in daily survival. Laypeople often echo that sentiment in hindsight – *if only I had known, I never would have started a family.*

Alas, you’re already ensnared in the situation. You’re like a fish in a net. Once bait is tossed in, the sole thought coursing through the fish’s mind is how to reach the bait. The fish searches for a way in, but does it ever consider figuring a way out? Nope. It’s a one-way ticket. Once it enters, it won’t be able to exit. At that point, the fish is as good as grilled and plated. This is how desire kills. People are the same way. If only they had known, they never would have married. Once you’re already knee-deep in that situation, all you can do is accept it.

Now, many of us are trying to find a way out, and there is some room to struggle. Many of us are like caged birds. The instant we awaken, we peck holes here and there in an attempt to escape from our prison. We do this exercise every single day. This is good. We are constantly seeking to break free from a displeasing circumstance. And you never know, when the timing is right, a decisive peck may reward you with freedom. This trajectory is preferable to that of pigs that only eat and sleep – they don't think or possess wisdom. The pigs don't question why they are regularly gifted food when their sole contribution is sleeping. Once they are round and plump, they are taken and massaged. Here, the pigs are convinced they are being pampered. But in actuality, the massage gauges whether or not the pig is primed for cooking. However, the pig continues to view its life as luxurious – up until it's brought to slaughter, that is. But by then, it's much too late to do anything about it. Being like a pig is not good. It is preferable to be like one of those birds determined to break free. Though you have suffered delusions in the past, don't allow yourself to repeat those mistakes. Most people allow these delusions to bait them further and further, much like the fish, until they ultimately die.

Practitioners must not be reckless with their lives. Whatever is wrong must be righted. Don't allow yourself to cling to your status quo. We are all born into this great ocean of life and we are all riding in the same boat. Once the boat cracks and sinks mid-ocean, it's each man for himself. At that point, all notions of father, mother, husband, or wife disappear. Each person channels all their efforts into getting themselves to shore. This is a natural reaction. When these perils are not yet upon us, we call out to our loved ones for help. But once we are staring danger in the face, no one extends a



helping hand and there are no more futile calls for rescue. Each person is too preoccupied with his or her own survival. When a boat capsizes, who can help another? You must help yourself. Sure, you are worried about your father or your wife or your husband, but will you carry them on your back while you're struggling to survive? No. Those bonds take a backseat when your sole priority is reaching dry land. Only when out of harm's way can you attempt to rescue those left bobbing in the ocean by tossing out a rope or a piece of driftwood.

I will never forget something that happened when I was a child. There was a large cluster of frogs attempting to get out of a well. They were leaping onto each other's backs in an attempt to reach the top. I cut a piece of bamboo and extended it into the well for the frogs to latch onto. Once they grabbed hold of the bamboo, I pulled them out of the well. The rescued frogs hopped up and down in

delight. I was very pleased with myself. I felt like I had rescued them from imminent death. And in a childlike fashion, I continued to liberate the frogs until nearly all had been removed from the well. But there remained a group of frogs that were unwilling to be saved. They would duck underwater and hide from my bamboo stick. I patiently waited until they resurfaced and presented the frogs with the bamboo once more, but they would just submerge themselves again.

After I had ordained, I reflected on my life as a layperson, and these frogs became a Dhamma metaphor for me. Latching on indicates latching onto the Buddha's teachings. These days, who will declare, *Buddhaṃ Dhammaṃ Sanghaṃ saraṇaṃ gacchāmi*, that the Triple Gem is their refuge? How many people latch onto or even touch the Dhamma? You are one of those people. As for the others, they can take it or leave it. If they behave like the frogs hiding underwater, they won't get far. This is the basis of Dhamma practice – every incident can be viewed as a lesson to foster your understanding of the Dhamma.

The Buddha's teachings are treasures. It does not matter who transmits his teachings, so long as they speak the truth. When I was a teenager, I enjoyed extracting the dhamma from old women. The young men and women were too self-conscious to divulge the truth. The old folks were open and unabashedly honest. Once, an old woman came to observe the eight precepts at the temple. I arranged time to speak with her, and even brought along a tape recorder. I interviewed her and tried to extract all the dhamma I could from her story. I told her I wanted to hear about when she was a teenager. Did she still remember? I asked her to tell me whatever she could recollect.



Young or old is not important. The truth about a woman's life is the same in any era. I asked about her childhood a bit, and then I coaxed her into revealing her teenage experiences. My many questions steered her toward my true interest – “Just tell me, you don't have to be embarrassed. We're all your children and grandchildren here. Though I'm a monk, I'm still like one of your grandchildren. I'm a monk. I'm male, not female. I want to know how females feel, what it's like for women to live in this world.” So, she told me. She disclosed how old she was when she was shot by cupid's arrow and detailed the experience of that first love. I was like a reporter, asking questions that dug deep to the root of the issue. All of those female feelings – the lust and desire – are not unique. The old woman's tale was representative of every woman's story. How did lust ignite in her heart? I shepherded my questions toward this topic. Desire was another main focus. She told me about it, how she couldn't eat or sleep, how her beloved lingered in her every thought.

Next, we tackled the marital period of her life. What was her objective in marrying? I asked seemingly unrelated questions in order to home in on the material I was really after. What was she thinking at the time? What did she expect from marriage? Happiness, she said. What form of happiness, precisely? I continued asking questions. Someone in contemporary times would be shocked at the audacity of my questions. I asked every single question about everything. How did it feel to be married? When she reached middle age, did she bore of him? Did her lust for him subside? I asked about her marital life until we caught up to the present.

This is dhamma. Later, when I was alone, I listened to the tape. I now had proof of how females think. When it comes to physical desire and emotional lust, women are not that different, even across

cultures and languages. The same goes for men. Lust and desire are the same for all. If you've heard one, you've heard them all. It is like eating sugar. Eating sugar in Thailand is the same as eating sugar in America – it tastes sweet. This is how we study the lives of the world's citizens. We are already well versed on one person's life – our own. But I wanted to know about other people's experiences, so I could measure them against my own.

I asked the old woman what kind of physical suffering and emotional suffering she experienced throughout her adolescence, teen years, and as a married woman. And she told me. I had two full cassette tapes of these interviews. I re-recorded them so that only the old woman's voice was audible, and then asked the devotees whether they were interested in listening to a sermon. Then I pointed the microphone at the speaker and told them to contemplate on the recording. After listening for a few minutes, they erupted in laughter. I asked them why they were laughing. They said that they recognized the owner of the voice in the recordings. This is dhamma.

I also liked to interview nuns. Older women revealed many truths. Sometimes, I anticipated what I would hear, and that's what I would end up hearing – I would hear about peoples' lives. And after researching peoples' lives, I would move on to study animals' lives. I would focus on lust and desire. For instance, what happens when a dog becomes horny? Animals are the same in this regard. This is the truth of the world that you must study, because this is what enchants you. Whatever enchants you must be studied. What will shield you against the enchantment?

We must search for the dhamma by studying others and ourselves. This means studying our mannerisms, action, and speech, as well

as studying the mannerisms, action, and speech of others. Because between us and them, there exists a relationship, a correlation. When it comes to matters of the mind and heart, we are not different. So long as we both still possess defilements and desire, we are akin. Thus, being circumspect in action and speech is a priority. The core of practice entails training our minds and hearts. It is not about acquiring knowledge. You can know the Dhamma but be clueless about converting theory into action. You have to train your mind to understand and see the objective truth. Practice means training your mind to fully experience the simulation of the theory.

The two main objectives are: to understand and realize the objective truth according to Dhamma principles, and to compel your mind to personify and experience the theories that you know. If your mind cannot breathe life into the theory, the benefit is lost. Once you know a concept, your mind must inhabit the concept's soul and immerse yourself in its reality. For instance, take the concept of impermanence – how does it feel to grasp the truth of impermanence? Or the concept of suffering – how does it feel to suffer through emotional anguish? The same goes for the concept of anattā, or not-self – what is the feeling of not-self? Anattā refers to the absence of identity, non-existence, the complete deterioration of a construct, or the end of that which we adore.

There are some things we consider to be attā – our self, our identity. Then there are the things we believe to be our belongings. We must dedicate the bulk of contemplation time to these two topics. What constitutes self and what constitutes the self's belongings? This is key. There are many other Dhamma topics, but you must stick to these two as they form the core of your practice. It is these two topics that have us firmly lodged in the world's endless cycle of rebirth.

Now, there are innumerable objects in this world, and different individual tastes favor different objects of delusion. Nonetheless, the delusion is the same; namely, the delusion of self and self-belongings. That's all there is to it. It's not much. You just have to uncover this taproot of delusion.

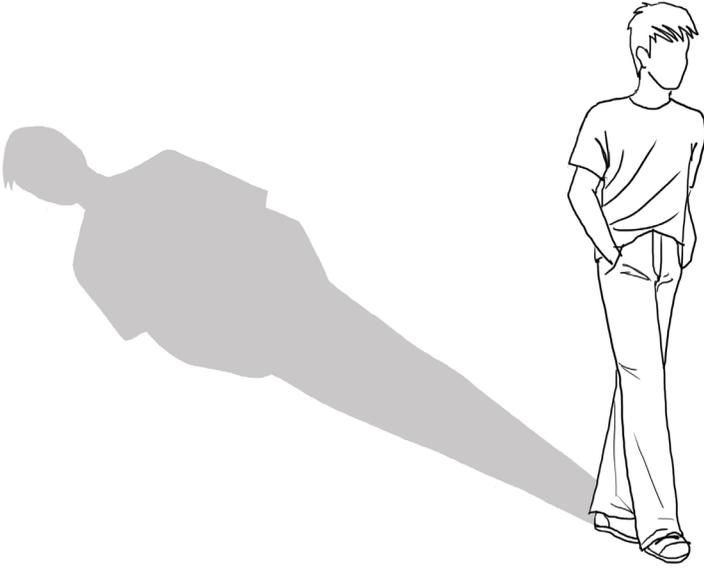
So, remember this – people who are enchanted by the world misunderstand the concepts of self and self-belongings. Remedying the issue of self-belongings is secondary. The primary issue is self-identity. The delusion of self is the precursor to all other delusions. If we are yet unequipped to fix our misconceptions about the self, we must first remedy the issue of self-belongings. Stabbing holes into our wrong understanding of self-belongings will effectively weaken the supporting structure of our self-identity. The delusion of self-identity is a colossal issue. If you can uproot and cast off the self (*attā*), you will have crossed the finish line and joined the ranks of the arahants.

The first step is to eliminate the misconception about self-belongings. If you're successful, you will enter one of three levels of enlightenment: stream-enterer (*sotāpanna*), once-returner (*sakadāgāmi*), or non-returner (*anāgāmi*). You must analyze how nothing in this world truly belongs to you. Everything is temporarily available to you, only for day-to-day use. Certain things are considered yours because of conventional realities (*sammuti*). For instance, notions of husband or wife are social constructs. A child is considered yours only in terms of worldly convention. Food, money, and other possessions are yours merely in a conventional sense. Everything is *sammuti*, everything is a construct. Don't marry yourself to the notion that these things truly belong to you. Instead, understand that they are only yours in a conventional sense. If you

can grasp this, you will be content. Being too attached to self-belongings leads to delusion. Once one of you undergoes an adverse experience, you will shed grief-stricken tears for your husband, your wife, your child. Suffering results from possession. And this possession is merely a supposition or construct.

To solve this problem, you must not cling to anything. You cannot hold onto self-identity or cling to views or theories (upādāna). There are two kinds of upādāna: clinging to the notion of self and clinging to the notion of self-belongings. Start with an elementary analysis of self-belongings. Do the money and items in your possession truly belong to you? Yes, in a conventional sense. Do not allow yourself to be consumed by these possessions. If you have them, fine. If you do not, then go out and earn them. You seek out these belongings in order to utilize them to benefit yourself and your Dhamma practice. But these things do not actually belong to you, so don't label them as such; they belong to the world. Once we are born into this world, we must procure money and the four requisites to use as a crutch while we are still standing on this Earth. When we relinquish our final breath, we simultaneously relinquish all claims to those belongings. Do not cling to them. While your physical body requires the use of these belongings, procure them and use them. But do not become dependent on and attached to them. All those things are considered yours only in the sense of worldly convention.

When it comes to possessions, what is the corresponding relationship between desire and action? If you want possessions, you can have them. Does having them automatically denote greed? No. You can take according to your station in life, your duty, or when appropriate. If you were to receive one hundred thousand dollars today, would you accept it? You should. Does this classify as greed?



Not yet. The wise can earn one hundred thousand dollars per day and still not be considered greedy. This is because the wise know that nothing is theirs; it's only in their hands because of their role or duty. The money is used to benefit themselves as well as others, while they're still living and breathing, during this lifetime. The wise know the belongings can't be transferred over into the next rebirth, so they aren't attached to them.

You must train your mind to understand this. Our physical bodies and the four elements are also subject to this reality. Study the truth, study your mannerisms, actions, speech, and mind. Dhamma practice is an asset affixed to your soul, staying with you even after the soul and body part ways. *Chāyā va anapāyiniṇi: kamma follows you like a never departing shadow.* This is your principal occupation. All other jobs are for the public, benefiting the community, or are

carried out according to your role and capabilities. Don't struggle too much over your job – just keep at it.

I've already provided sufficient examples. If you have a question, you can ask it. Giving a sermon and talking so much is exhausting. But see, I'm fulfilling my duty, too. Speaking the Dhamma is something that anyone who contemplates and has opinions is capable of doing. Some are skilled orators with something valuable to say. Some are unskilled orators, with something valuable to say. Some are skilled orators but don't have anything valuable to say. In my experience, delivering a sermon is fairly easy, but writing a book is difficult. I've noticed that when a book drifts and roams, the reader becomes disinterested. The same can be true for sermons – it sounds good live, but it's worthless when transcribed. Do you have any questions?

P: Luang Por, I can't sleep because I'm afraid of ghosts.

LPT: Do ghosts really exist?

P: I'm not sure, but people have seen them.

LPT: Well, are there ghosts here?

P: Yes.

LPT: Yeah? Where are they? Are they really haunting people?

P: Yes.

LPT: Those are fake ghosts. Are you sure they aren't ghosts of your imagination? Ghosts and humans are the same. Ghosts are purely spirit, lacking the four-elemental body. And we are spirits coupled with a physical four-elemental body. We are like them, and they are

like us. The ghost's spirit is just like your spirit. There's really no difference, because once you die, you will be just like those ghosts. You fear them now, but where will you go when you die? You'll be right beside them, riding the Ferris wheel of life and death. You have to consider the reality of the situation. Suppose ghosts are your friends and leave it at that.

P: Are ghosts the same as spirits?

LPT: Ghosts, spirits, angels, and humans are the same. They're ultimately all spirits. The nomenclature varies in a worldly conventional sense: spirit, soul, mind. Call it whatever you'd like. When the body has a pulse, we embrace it and sleep beside it. When there's no longer a pulse, we are repulsed by the body and fear the spirit. We are fooling ourselves. When someone dies, their spirit departs from their body, that's all. Any other questions?

P: My daughter is twenty-eight years old. When she was young, we didn't have any problems with her, as she was well-behaved. She would listen to her father, but not her mother. But during her teenage years, she became unwell. When she was seventeen or eighteen years old, we committed her to a mental health institution for three to four months. The doctor diagnosed her with depression and prescribed medication. I didn't believe the diagnosis. As her mother, I couldn't accept it.

LPT: *Kamma bandhu kamma paṭisarano: whatever they do, for good or for evil, to that they will fall heir.* The doctor's conclusion is that it is the child's own illness. But as her mother, you cannot accept that she is sick, because you wish your daughter would turn out as perfect as you had dreamed. You don't believe the doctor and you don't believe kamma. You want everything to be as



you wish it to be. And when your expectations aren't met, you experience suffering.

When a child is born, you cannot choose her personality. You can furnish her with a body, starting from a microscopic contribution from each parent. But you cannot choose your child's past kamma. She must harvest the fruit of her past actions. You cannot force it to be any other way because your child has already sown her own seeds of kamma. All of the world's sentient beings must obey the laws of kamma. Understand that in one aspect, she is your child. But in another aspect, this is her kamma. You cannot carry the burden of her kamma on your own shoulders. Each of us is the owner of our actions and heir to those actions.

If the doctor tells you that your daughter is ill and that it will be a difficult road to recovery, then you must come to terms with it. Don't be mad at your daughter. Don't rebuke her. If someone is born into your life in this manner, clearly you share some kind of past kammic relationship. She is disrespectful to you, as her mother, but respectful to her father. It's impossible for any soul born into this world to be one hundred percent perfect. It's also impossible to have the same father and mother you were pleased with in a past life. Souls want to be born but cannot pin down a destination when there aren't any past bonds to act as a conduit. Sometimes, a child is born to parents they don't share a past relationship with. Consequently, the child does not listen to her parents. That's how it is.

Say you are in search of a father and a mother. You want to be satisfied with both selections in order to be born. It's a challenge. Suppose you have your past-life father in your sights and now you're scanning around for your past-life mother. Where is your mother?

In heaven. But your father is already living on Earth. Therefore, your mother is no longer viable; you'll have to settle for a substitute. Your spirit then compels your father to couple with this substitute mother, so that you may finally be born in human form. Once you're born, you favor your father over your mother, because he has had the advantage of a stronger past connection to you. Now, if the situation is that you have found your past-life mother, but your past-life father is unavailable – let's say he's in hell – once you are born, you will favor your mother over your father. These are kamma dynamics.

If the situation is that the father and mother have shared a past-life relationship, have comparable kamma, and are born on Earth in the same time period, then a child born unto them will cherish both parents equally. But the child's kamma remains a separate issue; you cannot correct it because it has to play out in its own way. Some kamma can be remedied, like trivial kamma (lahukamma). However, when it comes to serious kamma like grave, weighty kamma (garukakamma), there is nothing the doctor can do. Acceptance is what will put your mind at ease. Do you understand? Any other questions?

P: The situation with my daughter is similar. She didn't do anything wrong. She's always fulfilled her household chores. But she fell in love with someone I judged unsuitable. When I told her what I thought, she declared that she loved him very much. So, I told her that if she's so smitten with this fellow, she's free to leave. She needn't stick around for me to see her face. Before she moved out, I told her, "If I die, don't come to my funeral." When she moved back in after three months, I told her that we were no longer mother and daughter. She said that she had wanted to return home because life

hadn't turned out how she expected, and she was repentant. And things were smoother this time around.

LPT: Saying things like that can help your daughter realize what she's done. There's the ancient saying, *if you love your dog, tie it up; if you love your children, spank them*. It's actually, *if you love your cow...*, but forget about the cow. The dog is a better substitute because dogs bite people.

Most people love their children, but don't have a method of teaching them. Instead, they aim to gratify their children. What you said to your daughter classifies as a teaching technique. It helps your child wake up to reality. *If I die, don't come to my funeral*, is akin to a heavy spanking. You're still deeply concerned for her, but you said it regardless, because you want her to realize the consequences of her actions. Your words invoked pain and startled her awake.

If your child is as you've described, normal words may not rouse her or make a dent. You would have to let her be for a bit, but then on a select occasion, shock her back to consciousness with harsh words. That being said, you must also prepare yourself. If she really were your child in a past life, she will be remorseful. If she does not repent, this is where your paths will diverge.

This is when it comes to your children. But when it comes to Dhamma practice, your mind must be exponentially stronger in order to accept whatever outcome life throws at you. If the situation is one that cannot bend, but must break, then so be it. Toughen your mind for defense and offense, and brace yourself for gain and loss. When the results are positive, great. When the results are negative and you must part ways, take it in stride. Each person's life is in his or her own hands. You cannot expect anything from this world;

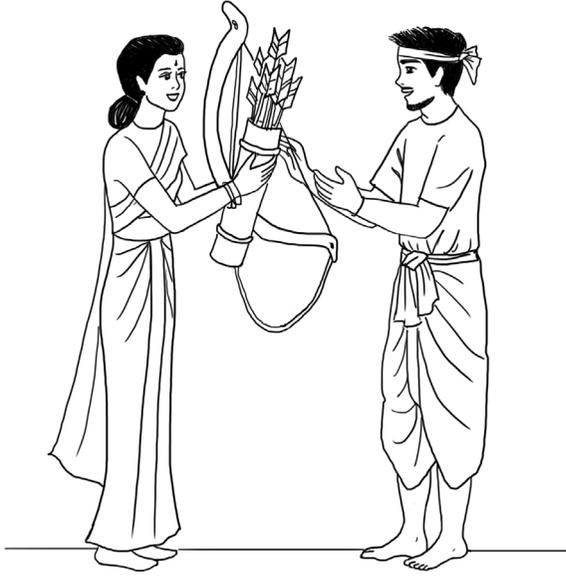
you're only here to practice Dhamma. If you have done everything in your power yet the outcome still proves unfavorable, then save yourself. Cut your loved one loose. Detach yourself from notions of "my child," "my husband", or "my wife." They are merely conventional realities (*sammuti*).

If things don't turn out well, tell yourself that it would not be the least bit strange for your beloved – essentially a clump of blood – to be discarded anywhere. A clump of blood can be tossed to dogs, just like saliva is spat and discarded, without bearing any significance. Don't worry over your husband, your wife, or your child. If they turn out unfavorably, let them go.

What happens when a dog births a litter of pups? What happens when a hen lays eggs? What happens when a frog lays eggs? Observe how after a mama frog lays her eggs, she leaps to shore and goes her own way; she doesn't stick around to raise them. The eggs are left to nature, to mature and hatch on their own, and somehow, they manage to survive. Let the frogs be your teacher. If you've done all you can to nurture and assist your loved ones and they still don't fall in line, then release them. They're only a clump of blood, after all. This is how you ensure your own survival.

When you raise a child, it's impossible to prevent them from conforming to the world's conventions. Just like when Venerable Mahā Kassapa was born an elephant – despite being exceptionally well trained and obedient, he could not resist the seductive charm of sensual pleasures (*kāmaguṇa*). Sometimes they are irreparably damaged and sometimes they can redeem themselves.

During the Buddha's time, there was a *sotāpanna* named Sumitta. Having only achieved the first level of enlightenment, the young



woman was still a slave to lust and sensual pleasures. Sumitta was smitten with a hunter who came to Savatthi to sell meat. She didn't see their discordant castes or her status as a stream-enterer as a barrier to their being together. Having resolved to live out her days with this man, she followed him, keeping pace behind his ox cart. Puzzled by her actions, the hunter shooed her away, warning her that the path was deserted and perilous. But she refused to turn back, telling him to mind his ox cart. Once they reached the expansive forest, she confessed the truth to him – that she intended to be his wife.

When it comes to lust (*rāga*) and desire, even the stream-enterers are overpowered. They're just like any ordinary person in that sense. Eventually, Sumitta and her hunter husband became parents to seven boys. Before each hunt, Sumitta would fulfill her wifely duty and arrange food, arrows, and other hunting tools for her husband. Upon his return, she would collect and maintain his equipment. She was simply carrying out her duty. Was Sumitta, a stream-enterer,

sanctioning or encouraging the killing of animals? No. She was only fulfilling her responsibilities as a wife. Many years later, her seven sons matured and they each took wives. The entire family lived together under the same roof.

One day, the Buddha discerned through his divine sight that Sumitta's family was ripe for Dhamma attainment. Their past cultivated perfections of character (pāramī) qualified them for this attainment, despite their having killed and based their livelihood on the deaths of countless animals. Realizing their potential, the Buddha decided to grace them with a visit. But first, the Buddha ensured that all of the snares and traps were broken and out of commission. Upon discovering all of his traps empty, the hunter became enraged. *Who is behind this sabotage? I'm going to kill him!* He saw the Buddha standing before him, but the hunter was ignorant of the Buddha's identity. *This bald man must be the one who caused all the damage.* As he drew his bow, it appeared as if someone hit pause; his entire body froze in the archer's pose.

As the moon began to rise, Sumitta became concerned. Why hadn't her husband returned? She sent her seven sons out to find him. When they came upon their rigid, motionless father, the seven sons immediately drew their bows and took aim at the Buddha. And like their father, they too found themselves rooted to the spot, completely immobile.

As the sky continued to darken, Sumitta's concern morphed into worry. Her husband and all seven sons were now missing. Sumitta ventured out in search of her men, with her seven daughters-in-law in tow. When she found them, she exclaimed, "Don't shoot my father! Don't shoot my father!" She meant her father in Dhamma.

The hunter, however, interpreted it to mean her biological father, and dropped his arrow. Sumitta proceeded to round up her husband, their seven sons, and their seven daughters in-law, and together they all prostrated before the Buddha. The Buddha then blessed them with a discourse and all fifteen of them achieved the first level of enlightenment as sotāpannas.

This happened when the Buddha was alive. How could someone with the noble traits of an ariyapuggala have been a hunter? There isn't a virtuous behavior prerequisite for someone to attain a level of enlightenment. The five precepts aren't a mandatory requirement. Sumitta's family was a family of hunters who had tallied thousands of kills between them. When the Buddha bestowed his teachings upon this family, did he launch right into the five precepts? No. Did the Buddha direct them to do sitting meditation and tell them that once their minds entered a tranquil state, wisdom would arise? Again, no. What he did do was talk to them about the truth. Prior to their Dhamma attainments, this family of hunters was ignorant of the five precepts. They also knew nothing of tranquil meditation. This is a poster case for the necessity of studying the historical accounts of holy individuals (ariyapuggalas) during the Buddha's era.

The majority of people, in their pre-ariyapuggala lives, were utterly unfamiliar with the five precepts. The precepts came into existence after their relative attainments. This is why it is crucial to study the Buddhist scriptures (Tipiṭaka). It is imperative that you comprehend how people attained enlightenment despite their ignorance of the precepts. Another classic example is that of the one hundred and twenty thousand members of King Bimbisara's court. None of them were familiar with the five precepts or meditation, yet they all

managed to attain a level of enlightenment. Now, what could possibly explain that? Use your wisdom to deduce the logical reason.

Yet another case is that of Magandiyā's parents. Magandiyā was supremely beautiful and many wealthy suitors and kings yearned to have her as their wife. Her parents shopped around, resolved to select only a suitor whose features were worthy of their daughter's. One day, as Magandiyā's father was working away from home, he encountered the Buddha. He was captivated by the Buddha's consummate beauty – his handsome face, his glowing skin. The only potential problem was his shaved head. Magandiyā's father determined right then and there that the perfect specimen before him would become his future son-in-law. He called to the man, directing him to wait right there for his swift return, and sprinted home. Upon his arrival, he yelled to his wife to quickly get their daughter dressed in her most exquisite clothes, complete with the full set of glistening adornments worthy of their station. Then the three of them left home.

On the way, Magandiyā's mother saw the Buddha's footprint and exclaimed, "Husband, this footprint does not belong to one who is a slave to sensual pleasures!" Incredulous, her husband continued to search for the Buddha. In reality, the Buddha was right there, a mere ten meters from where they were standing. But his supernormal powers prevented the threesome from seeing him. After some time, Magandiyā's father found the Buddha. He dragged his daughter over to assess their physical compatibility. The Buddha stated, "See here, Brahmin. I have something to tell you." Note that while they listened to the Buddha, they were standing, not sitting. The Buddha pointed out the truth, that "once someone is born, there is nothing beautiful in head hair, body hair, nails, teeth, skin, flesh, sinews, bones, and



the other remaining thirty-two parts of the body. Every part of the body is filthy and repulsive.” Considering this as a personal affront, Magandiya became livid. “I’m incomparably beautiful, yet you dare to say I am not?” Her parents paid her no mind, as they were deep in the contemplative zone. Ultimately, the two of them achieved the penultimate stage of enlightenment – anāgāmi. Penetrating the truth of the thirty-two parts of the body marks anāgāmi or arahant level attainment.

Magandiya’s parents were unaware of the eight precepts. They had never attained deep meditative absorptions (jhāna). They had never concentrated on a meditative mantra. Rather, they exhibited alert and focused concentration while they were standing there listening to the Buddha’s words with rapt attention. Alert and focused meditation does not need to enter the realm of tranquility. I have studied the accounts of what occurred while the Buddha was alive and discovered that people entered the stream of Dhamma first, and the five precepts appeared afterward. The term *silabbata-parāmāsa* – attachment or clinging to rituals – didn’t exist then. There were no misgivings over the breaking of precepts; these worries did not yet exist.

People these days don’t properly understand what they read. Following the Buddha’s death and final enlightenment, there were five Buddhist councils. The teachings were still clear then. Afterwards, the authors of commentaries on the Pāli Canon (*atthakathācariya*) took the Buddha’s teachings and misinterpreted them, cutting and pasting as they saw fit. Mostly, these alterations were done by monks who hadn’t attained any stage of enlightenment. That’s the main reason the edits were problematic. Consequently, the Buddha’s teachings shifted.

Next came the era of the authors of commentaries on the atthakatha commentaries (ṭīkācariya), during which the edited teachings were further twisted out of shape. Then, during the era of the authors of commentaries on the ṭīka commentaries (anuṭīkācariya) that followed, those twisted teachings were warped even more. As a result of this chain of edits, the distorted teachings that have trickled down to our era now assert the order of the threefold training as: morality, concentration, wisdom – or *sīla, samādhi, paññā*. This is a modification of the Buddha's original instructions. The basis for the Buddha's original teaching still exists. I know it and I have explained it, but people do not believe it. People do not properly study the Buddha's teachings.

Nowadays, people are taught, *sīla paribhāvito samādhi mahapphalo hoti mahānisaṃso: when virtuous conduct is fully developed, concentration will be gained*. Who wrote this? It surely was not taught when the Buddha was alive. What is the source of this false teaching? Where is the logic that supports it? People believe that all of these teachings are attributed to the Buddha. But in reality, these teachings were commentaries authored by the sub-sub-commentators (anuṭīkācariya) for the express purpose of commemorating new monks during ordination ceremonies. Who penned the teaching, *samādhi paribhāvita paññā mahapphalā hoti mahānisaṃsā: when concentration is fully developed, wisdom will be gained*? The sub-sub-commentators (anuṭīkācariya), that's who. They're arrogant in thinking that they know better than the Buddha. This teaching was absolutely not attributed to the Buddha himself.

If it were true that when virtuous conduct is fully developed, concentration would be gained, then what of the people who don't

behave virtuously, are unaware of the five precepts, or are ignorant of the eight precepts? Can those people concentrate? Absolutely not, according to the scriptures. But absolutely yes, according to reality. Virtuous conduct is virtuous conduct and concentration is concentration; they are two separate topics. The non-virtuous can still perform serene meditation.

Moral conduct or the precepts (*sīla*) is a concept created by the Buddha only after the Buddhist religion had arisen in the world. When the religion didn't yet exist, neither did the precepts. The precepts originated after someone did something wrong, just as laws are created after someone does something wrong. People existed before laws existed. Only after someone acted wrongly would a law be created in order to restrict or control that behavior. Similarly, the precepts were created after the Buddha's teachings already existed. Once someone acted wrongly or a monk behaved inappropriately, that's when the precepts were created.

The first of the rules entailing expulsion from the monastic community (*pārājika*) came about because of a misbehaving monk called Sudinna. He had been married prior to becoming a monk, he committed a sexual act, and this rule was established in response. Nowadays, there are many precepts – a lot of wrong conduct leads to the creation of a lot of precepts. In the past, there were many *ariyapuggalas* and there weren't many precepts. During the time of the five first disciples (*Pañcavaggiya*), Venerable Mahā Moggallāna, and Venerable Sāriputta, there weren't any precepts in place. The five precepts, the eight precepts, the two hundred and twenty-two precepts – all of them had yet to exist. How, then, did the five first disciples become *ariyapuggalas*? Prior to the establishment

of the Buddhist religion and thus prior to the invention of the precepts, how were the two ascetics able to achieve such deep meditative absorptions?

Clearly, morality (*sīla*) and concentration (*samādhi*) are two different things. These days, people greatly suffer from attachment to rules, rituals, and ceremonies (*sīlabbata-parāmāsa*). They want to practice meditation, but first they must assess whether or not their adherence to the precepts can be faulted. If they failed to uphold the precepts, then they don't want to carry out meditation. Because they are unclear about the state of their virtue, *sīlabbata-parāmāsa* arises. Without the protective armor of wisdom, people can be consumed by worries and misgivings. These days it is so difficult to practice Dhamma. There are so many rules. That's why it's imperative that we study what occurred when the Buddha was alive.



**June 3, 1998**

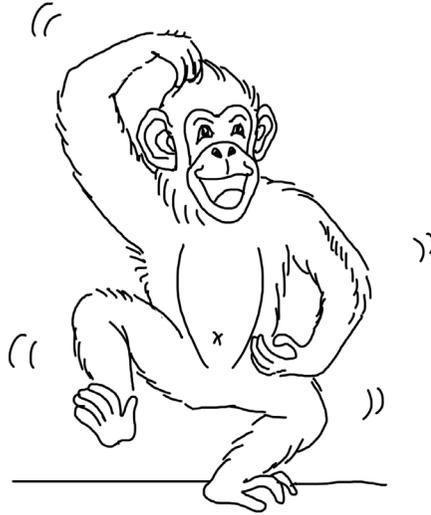
I am teaching you what the Buddha taught. How did the noble individuals (ariyapuggalas) practice back in the Buddha's time? You must study this. Don't immediately accept the teachings as true. There's a lot that is incorrect today. What parts are incorrect? Those written by the commentators (atthakathācariya), sub-commentators (ṭīkācariya), and sub-subcommentators (anuṭīkācariya) on the Pāli Canon. Are the Buddha's original teachings wrong? No. They are entirely correct. However, subsequent generations have come to misinterpret the Buddha's teachings. The original teachings have become so distorted, but there's nothing we can do about it.

I have read all the contemporary teachings on meditation. The teachings paint the power of the mind-soul (citta) in such an exquisite light. Their manuals teach how to meditate, and detail the powers of insight (ñāṇa) and meditative absorptions (jhāna). They make it appear as if all arahants possess ñāṇa, when in fact they do

not. All of these teachings actually came from only a few monks who were of the deliverance of mind personality type (cetovimutti). They were proficient meditators who easily settled into tranquil meditative states and were capable of reading other people's minds. Using a single person as the model for everyone else is detrimental in this case, because it leads people to mistakenly understand that all ariyapuggalas or arahants must follow this meditative path. It is untrue, yet it is what most people believe. They don't know the truth.

You ought to research what it was like during the Buddha's era. What were the paññāvimutti like? What were the cetovimutti like? You must understand what it was like back then. I have thoroughly studied meditation, but I am not too interested in it because I am not one of the cetovimutti. I am one of the paññāvimutti. When you practice, you must recognize what kind of personality you have. You use yourself as a basis for research and contemplation (bhāvanā). These days, no matter where you go in the world, you'll mainly encounter people practicing meditation.

Earlier, someone mentioned that there is a Sri Lankan temple nearby, about two hours from here. Their practice is intense, and they stay up until midnight discussing Dhamma and contemplating. That is how the Sri Lankan monks practice. Their temple provides huts (kuṭis) to stay in, vegetarian food to eat, and a pavilion to rest in. They stay in separate kuṭis and don't speak to one another. Going there will improve your practice. Last night, I considered whether it would be good for our group to go. I concluded that it would not be because they take in humans, not monkeys. [laughs] So, all of us are out of luck. We can't go.



There's a time for everything there: a time to practice, a time to eat, a time to drink hot water, a time to strike the gong. Not following the schedule is considered a violation of the rules. None of the practitioners are allowed to speak while practicing there. This is precisely what disqualifies us. [laughs] How many days can a monkey last without speaking? While keeping silent is good for you, you'd explode.

The vegetarian food isn't a problem, as it's tolerable for the five or seven days you are there. It won't kill you. Rather, it's the monkey nature that is the problem. Monkeys will jump around, causing a ruckus, leaping here and there. Upon awakening, a monkey will dash off to procure itself a cup of coffee. That won't do. The abbot of the Sri Lankan temple is well mannered, orderly, and friendly. He is polite and courteous, and doesn't raise his voice like we do. If we were to go to his temple and bounce off the walls, it would shatter the peace. What's more, it would tarnish my good name! You ought to consider whether going there would be a good idea.

P: I've been there. I like it because it is quiet and no one speaks. They have a specific time for showering, too, you know.

LPT: They have a time for everything. Bathroom time is the sticking point. If they forced us to defecate at a certain time, we wouldn't be able to handle it. We would end up soiling our pants first. [laughs] Everything is done at its appointed time. If any of you think you can handle it, why not go next year? You'll scrub your defilements to the bone and squirm to the fullest. Everyone would have to hold water in their mouths at all times. Before visiting one another, you'd have to hold water in your mouth. No swallowing! What do you say?

Last night, I discussed with one of the practitioners whether it would be good for all of us to see the Sri Lankan temple after lunch one day. If it pleases us, then we can make reservations. I did some research on the temple last night, and found that the abbot is kind and very well-mannered. So much so that even I am put to shame! For me though, it isn't a big deal, as I can easily adapt. However, you all are another matter.

P: We prefer to be your students. We don't have to be too orderly, serious, or stressed. We prefer to take it easy.

LPT: Exactly. How can we release monkeys into their temple? You country bumpkins are easy going. I don't mind it. In fact, it's why I let you be – so that you won't feel stressed.

So, do you want to give it a try? It would be a novel experience. See if it kills you. If it kills you to not speak, then so be it. If it kills you to not eat meat, then so be it. Endure it for six or seven days. If we want to go, we would need to inform the abbot. The kuṭis are always



reserved, so they're never vacant. We'd need to reserve kuṭis in advance for the specific days we intend to be there. I think it would be beneficial to give it a try and see just how much your defilements squirm. Battle it out. We are only talking about kiriya, or our actions and speech. We'll leave our thoughts for later. Can you deal with suppressing the brazenness of your actions and speech? Can you be appagabbho, one who is not impulsive in action or speech? When push comes to shove, you can.

While on dhūtaṅga during my fifth rains retreat (vassa), I arrived at Si Wichai village, Wanon Niwat district, Sakon Nakorn province. They had invited me to spend the vassa there. My old teacher, Luang Por Boonma, was also spending the vassa there. Before the start of the vassa, many devotees remarked, "Kru Ba Thoon has come! We will get to hear all of his sermons this year." They said, "Now that Ācariya Thoon is here for the vassa, we will get to hear him give a sermon every holy day (uposatha)." Would you listen to that! What was I to do? I was determined to contemplate and practice, so I had to find a way out of giving sermons. See, I was the only monk there who could give sermons. The devotees didn't want to hear the other monks give sermons, they only had ears for me. I searched for an excuse not to give sermons and eventually found one. For this vassa, I would observe the dhūtaṅga practice of mūgabbatta, a vow of silence. I kept my plan to refrain from speaking a secret.

When the first day of the vassa arrived, it came time for the formal dedication, "Imasamiṃ āvāse imaṃ te-māsaṃ vassaṃ upemi," meaning, "I will remain in this monastery for this three-month rains." Each monk recited the dedication, starting from the most senior monk to the most junior. Once it was my turn and I had recited it three times, I added, "I will not speak during the three

month vassa, from this moment forward. *Evam*, one, two, three,” and clamped my mouth shut. I was that bold.

Upon hearing this, the monks and *sāmaṇeras* tugged my hand and exclaimed, “Don’t do this! Stop! We won’t allow it. You must speak during the vassa!” See, I could tolerate their entreaties. They pulled my hand, bowed to me, and implored me not to take the vow, but I had already begun. I had no clue how the three months would play out. I had never taken a vow of silence before, so I had no idea how to do it or how it would feel. But everything was possible.

The monks, *sāmaṇeras*, and devotees complained that everything was ruined, because I was the one who instructed the monks and *sāmaṇeras* on giving sermons, Dhamma, and the monastic code of discipline. I taught all of it. I had taught as much as possible before the vassa began. That’s why I had to keep my plan to remain silent a secret. No one could know. “One, two, three,” and it was done. Whatever would happen would happen. I’d die if I had to.

The first couple of days, my mouth was itching to say something – so much so that my mouth twitched. The temptation was incredible, but I did not give in. After a month, the desire to speak diminished. I still wanted to speak, but it wasn’t as bad as before. When someone wanted to talk, I’d write down what I wanted to say. I fulfilled my management duties by writing orders down on paper. After two months, my contemplations were excellent. They had never been so calm or on point. Certain thoughts, like those relating to my peers, were completely discarded when I didn’t verbalize them. Meanwhile, my Dhamma thoughts were steady and sure.

Sometime early in the third month of the vassa, after my mind fully settled into a serene state, I experienced a meditative vision (*nimitta*)

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of a magnificent white horse and a man dressed like a royal bodyguard. The dignified man led the horse toward me. The horse was large, beautiful, and had majestic white hair that gleamed and sparkled like gemstones. The horse was radiant. I was sitting in my kuṭi at the time. The man said, “Sir, this horse belongs to you. In a short time from now, you will ride this horse.” I thought about how I wanted to ride the horse. I reflected on my earlier vassas, where I had the opportunity to ride a cotton white horse. In contrast, this horse’s white hairs shone like jewels. I wondered where this exquisite horse would carry me. I so desired to ride it. Both the man and horse disappeared, and I withdrew from the meditative state.

What did “in a short time from now” represent? How many months? How many years? It wasn’t clear from what the man said. I let it be. It didn’t matter how many years it would take, only that I would get there. Meanwhile, I would continue to contemplate. This nimitta was a short one. Sometimes they are short and sometimes they are long.

Refraining from speaking is beneficial to Dhamma practice. You won’t bother thinking about what you won’t get to say. Remember this. Before you say something out loud, you must think it first. If there is a topic you can speak about, you must think of something to say that relates to that topic. Now, if you aren’t able to speak, you don’t think of something to say.

If we were to go to the Sri Lankan temple, we would be prohibited from speaking. I think it is a good policy. Do you want to give it a try for a week and see what happens? The vegetarian food isn’t a big issue. I don’t mind it. It is the ban on speaking for which we need to prepare ourselves. We could even go today. I think it is a good idea. If the ten kuṭis they have there aren’t enough, we have tents. Their

pavilion is large and their grounds are vast. If it rains, there's nothing to fear. You've never experienced something like this in your lifetime. You monkeys have always just taken it easy. They'll teach you the rules and regulations, and you'll have to fend for yourself. But it won't be too challenging.

P: Luang Por, how about we give it a test run here? We could refrain from speaking for one day.

LPT: No, the environment here is not conducive to that. It would only be detrimental. If you are going to do it, you must go all out. If you have your hands wrapped around an alligator's neck, you must make sure it can't escape your iron grip. You can't mess around and hold its tail. You can't catch a snake by its tail, either. You must grab it in a way that won't permit it to move. You can't give something like this a test run. If you're going to do it, you must give it your all and accept whatever happens. If we go today, we would only be scoping out the place. Then, if possible, next year we will spend a week there.

P: We will go wherever you take us.

LPT: But you won't be able to speak. I've done it before. Which brings me back to my fifth vassa. By the end of the vassa, I hadn't given any thought to how my voice would sound. When it came time to speak the end of vassa invitation for admonishment (*pavāraṇā*), "Saṅgham-bhante pavāremi..." my voice was thin. Where did my voice go? Immediately afterward, the monks and *sāmaṇeras* poured into my *kuṭi* and requested a sermon. They had gone without hearing a sermon for three months. At first, my voice was very faint and duck-like. After speaking for about an hour, the quality of my voice improved and started to resemble that of a

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human. If I had refrained from speaking for a year, would my voice have disappeared altogether? This had only been three months.

After three to four hours of speaking, my voice returned. While I was still unable to speak, my peers brought me medicine and lime juice. It didn't do much good, though. Once alone, I continued to speak out loud until dawn broke and my voice was restored. I was able to speak that entire time, although I don't even know what I was saying. It was just like my first vassa, in which the Dhamma gushed out of me for many weeks. Back then, I could've spoken the Dhamma to my friends until daylight. But this was different.

If we do go to the Sri Lankan temple, there will be less listening to sermons and more practicing. Right now, there is more listening to sermons and less practicing. So, there will be a change. You've already listened to my sermons, so you can go ahead and practice.





**June 4, 1998**

*First Sermon*

People believe unfocused thinking to be dangerous, so they avoid any thinking altogether. Distracted thoughts are a threat to meditation (*samādhi*) because meditation prohibits thinking. However, you must train yourself to do both things. Like a properly functioning vehicle that can both accelerate and brake, when it is time to think, you must be able to think. When it is time to stop thinking, you must be able to stop. This dual ability must become second nature to you.

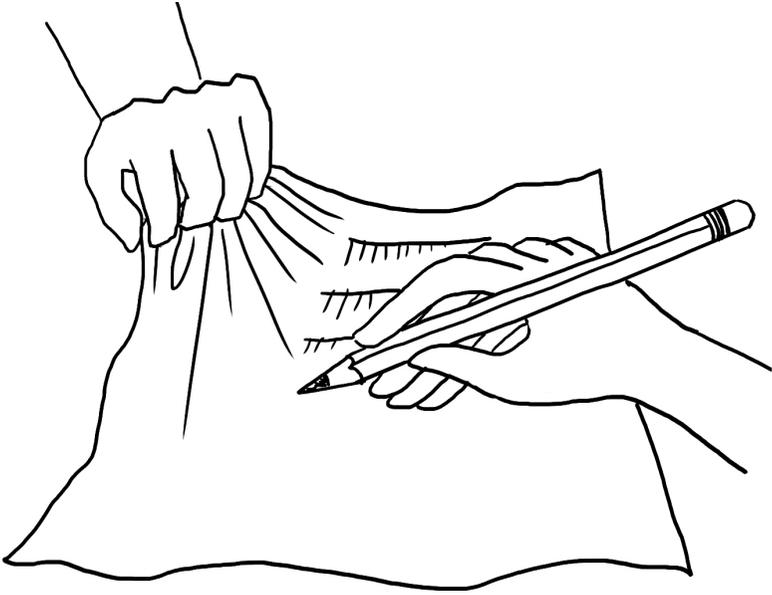
Letting your imagination run amok isn't that easy. The bulk of the thinking you do each day is guided by imagination, or volitional thought (*saṅkhāra*). When imagination has the reins, you think about gaining and about things you find pleasing. It is like the example I wrote and distributed to you all. During the first stage, imagination is in charge. During the final stage, you must find a way to refute those volitional thoughts. You must use thoughts to cancel out thoughts.

If you allow imagination to steer you, then you must learn how to think more Dhamma thoughts. Once you are well versed in Dhamma thoughts, volitional thoughts will cease production. This happens because your mindful wisdom (sati paññā) has evolved enough to forge its own path. The two types of thoughts fear each other. You see this fear dynamic in monkeys and dogs as well. If one of them is howling and a more dominant specimen appears, the howler will be frightened into silence. It's also evident in wild roosters; if a rooster is crowing and a larger rooster steps onto the scene, the smaller rooster will not dare to crow.

Likewise, when wisdom (paññā) appears, imagination (saṅkhāra) is unable to think; it no longer has control of constructs or conventional realities (sammuti). Wisdom and imagination duel over rights to sammuti. Worldly conventions are a double-edged sword. In imagination's hands, they are immediately applied in volitional thoughts; in wisdom's hands, imagination is incapacitated. If you have a single sheet of paper and imagination is doing the writing, it won't hold back. But if wisdom can snatch the paper for itself, it can write all it wants; imagination can't make a single mark. Don't permit imagination to grab hold of worldly conventions. All imaginative, volitional thoughts are characterized by a pleasing nature. Each person's imagination can conjure up hundreds of thousands of thoughts. I have written about only a few of them as an example, but in reality, there are far more.

Teachers instruct you to *watch the mind*, and this is correct. But it warrants clarification – why must you watch your mind? What do you expect to gain? This is something they don't explain. The reason you must watch your mind is to discern what is at work: defilements (kilesas) or wisdom. In which direction is your mind inclined?





What exactly are you thinking? How can you restrain your mind? Simply watching cannot fix anything. Instead, you must watch your mind so that you know what is passing through at any given moment. If your mind is filled with greed, how will you quell its insatiable appetite? What are you hungering after? It's not only money; you can be greedy for many different things. Greed means feeling something is inadequate and wanting more. There can be thought-based greed – thirsting after volitional thoughts – object-based greed, bodily-based greed, speech-based greed, and mind-based greed.

*Watch the mind* is correct, but you must understand the underlying purpose. The Thai folktale of Sri Thanonchai is a prime example. His mother told him, “I’m going out to run some errands. Watch your baby brother,” and Sri Thanonchai obeyed. He watched his brother. Sri Thanonchai watched as his baby brother crawled

around, watched as he played in his own feces, watched as he crawled into the forest, watched as he went in the water. Sri Thanonchai followed his mother's instructions verbatim. She told him to watch, so he watched. But what was the purpose of watching? He lacked the wisdom to discern what should be dealt with or what action should be taken. He didn't know how to think. In his naiveté, he just literally watched. Once the mother returned home and found her baby playing with his feces, she asked Sri Thanonchai why he didn't watch his brother. And he responded that he did watch him. This is typical of the fool – not being wise enough to recognize what must or mustn't be done.

The next time, Sri Thanonchai's mother's instructions were, "Take care of your brother. Don't let him get dirty, and give him a bath." So, Sri Thanonchai carried his baby brother around, never putting him down. At one point, the baby defecated. Sri Thanonchai flipped the baby upside down to get a better look at the soiled anus. He poked his finger inside in an attempt to remove all of the fecal residue. But after he retracted his finger, he saw that more remained. So, he grabbed a knife and slit open the baby's belly. Then he washed out the entire contents of the baby's stomach, making sure not a single speck of food or fecal matter remained. When his mother came home, he informed her that he had washed his baby brother so thoroughly she wouldn't find a speck of feces on him. When the mother checked on her baby, she found him dead. This is a classic example of someone who lacks wisdom. This folktale aims to teach people to think. If you know something, but lack wisdom, you can't put that knowledge to work.

Knowing your mind means knowing what in your mind needs to be addressed and fixed. What does your mind desire? Is that right or wrong? Good or bad? Is it classified as greed, anger, or delusion? This is the mark of true intelligence, not merely knowing for the sake of knowing. There's the saying, *watch the mind's emotions, don't send the mind outward, don't think of the past or the future*. If you watched the mind like that, you would die in vain. You'd be no different from Sri Thanonchai taking care of his baby brother. In Dhamma practice, when you watch the mind, you must identify what needs attention and what needs to be fixed. After all, watching is done for the sake of fixing. For example, if you were to watch food, you would recognize it to be food, but how would you eat it and become sated? You need to train yourself in this way.

Generally, you're aware of your thoughts. You just need to inject some intelligence and wide-ranging wisdom into the equation. It's not enough to know your thoughts; you have to know how to fix them. This is what it means to practice Dhamma. Each person is responsible for his or her own thoughts. You must sharpen your wisdom and find a way to dominate over imagination (*saṅkhāra*). They say, *we learn from mistakes, experience is the best teacher*, and this is accurate. You have to make mistakes first in order to know how to fix things. The examples I handed out earlier are also illustrative of this *wrong before right* concept. How can you fix the wrong so that it is right?

When you speak, don't do so flippantly or casually. You must follow up and seek out the consequences of your words. The same goes for actions. If you act wrongly, you must realize the consequences and make appropriate changes. If you didn't do right this time, then what

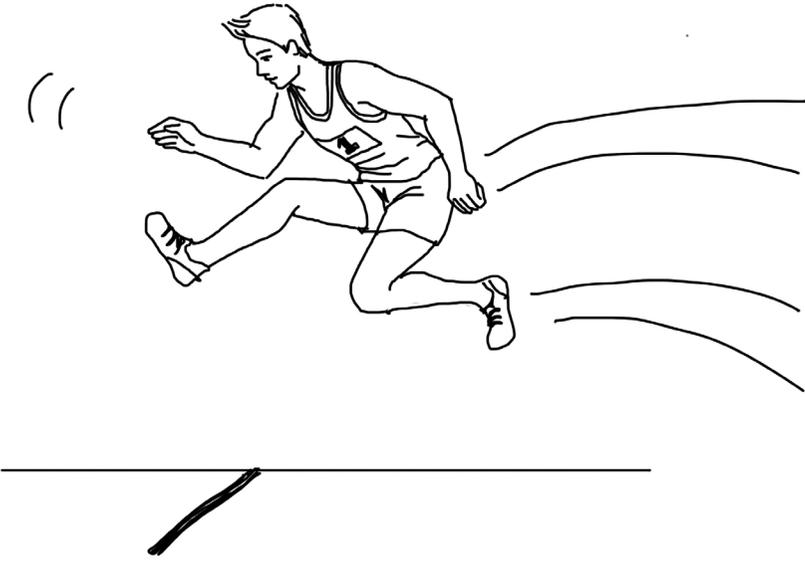
must you do to do right the next time around? For instance, if you are prone to nag and complain, then you must figure out the kind of consequences that arise from nagging. Once you have pinpointed the negative effects, you will be able to cut back on nagging.

All of us are constantly manufacturing problems for ourselves. Defilements (kilesas) and desire (taṇhā) produce these problems; the mind's craving is what it's called. If we don't fix ourselves, who will fix us? Others can only tell you the way, but you must rely on yourself. You are the one who has to actually do the practicing. This is an important point. Many people claim to be practicing Dhamma, yet they sit with their eyes closed repeating a meditative mantra. In fact, what they're actually doing is taking a break from practicing Dhamma. Yet these people mistakenly believe rest to be practice.

How can you practice improving yourself? You have to watch your mind to know when your thoughts are unrefined and know when your thoughts are refined. You must recognize when problems arise and find ways to fix them. In order to fix or improve things, it's crucial to distinguish between what qualifies as good and what qualifies as bad. Good and bad are a pair. You have to look left and look right, look at the cause and look at the result. Don't restrict yourself to thinking only about the good. You can't consider only likes without regard for dislikes, or think only about loves while neglecting to think about hates; that's not right. You must analyze every angle, every side, every avenue. This is how we practice; this is how we fix problems. If you contemplate on white, you must also contemplate on black. If you study an attractive person, you must also compare them to an unattractive person. Appetizing food must be judged against unappetizing food. They come as a pair. Don't limit yourself to just one.

Are unfocused, distracted thoughts bad or good? They are a part of human nature. When your thoughts begin to drift and scatter, you can't stop them. But what you can do is encourage them to drift into the realm of Dhamma as much as possible. As it stands, there is an excess of distracted thoughts in the imagination (*saṅkhāra*) realm; this is what you need to fix. When your thoughts are distracted and random, what are you thinking about? Analyze the outcomes. What are the consequences of these thoughts? It's these outcomes that you must tackle and change; nip them right in the bud. You'll realize that imagination and volitional thoughts are not at all good. Constructs, or conventional realities (*sammuti*) are significant because they provide the raw materials with which imagination can work. Without constructs, imagination is out of work.

Many years ago, a vision came to me during meditation. A flock of people approached, calling out, "If you think you have what it takes, prove yourself in this challenge. He who jumps the farthest wins." One of them claimed to hold the world championship title. Now, I am someone who will not back down from a challenge, so I entered the competition. I directed my adversary to take the first jump, so he ran and hurled himself a great distance. I was determined to leap at least one arm's length farther, and when it was my turn, I bested my competitor by one meter. The second round, my opponent landed one meter beyond my mark, and I proceeded to outleap him by one meter. Neither one of us was willing to yield. The judges declared that the third round would decide the competition. We were to put everything we had into the third and final jump. My rival jumped incredibly far, surely cinching the victory in the minds of his supporters. Then came my turn. When I launched myself into the air, I did not land, but soared into the sky. Only after I glided well



past my opponent's final mark did I stop, and he conceded defeat. Thereafter, my mind released from the meditative state and I reviewed what I had just experienced.

What did the competition represent? Competition of thought. Who will be the better thinker? Who will present more of a compelling rationale? Imagination is the champ. Its thoughts showcase skill, brilliance, and have staying power. When you're composing imaginative thoughts, an entire day is insufficient to wrap everything up. Whenever you mull over worldly matters, you can dedicate an entire day to contemplation and never reach a conclusion. It's easy to get lost in your thoughts. In other words, your thoughts go the distance; they leap as far as possible. Wisdom (pañña) is my delegate in the thought competition. I observe imagination's play – what it is thinking about, how many steps it has taken, how many marks it has made – and use wisdom to erase it all. Wisdom must cancel out

imagination. It's like a debate in which you must refute your opponent's claims. Let your adversary present their argument first. When imagination argues its side for one hour, wisdom must argue its side for two hours. It's a duel of thoughts. If your thoughts are superior, your reasoning clearer and more sound, then you can win.

This is how you think in terms of Dhamma. You have to utilize the distracted thoughts to your advantage. Volitional thoughts and distracted thoughts don't pose any problems. In fact, they are beneficial. You can learn from saṅkhāra. Imitate its technique. Why are we so proficient in volition-based thinking? Why are we so adept at thinking about obtaining but incapable of thinking about discarding? Imaginative, volitional thoughts are all about acquiring, whether related to money or other belongings. It's always about gaining, never about relinquishing. We must learn to think about discarding, letting go. We must understand impermanence. For instance, when it comes to separation from loved ones, we tend only to think about coming together but not about coming apart. We fail to consider how our loved ones are not bound to us, how we are not eternally united, or how it is impossible to be reborn together in every lifetime. Nor do we realize the fleeting nature of the relationship, how our lives converge when our paths momentary cross and diverge when death sends us our separate ways. We cannot carry anything or anyone with us.

Let us all debate the thoughts in our minds. Here's a topic to consider – who is better, dogs or humans? A skilled debater can persuade you to believe that dogs are superior. The best reasoning wins.

There are two forms of tranquility: tranquility from silent meditation and tranquility from wisdom. Mostly, when people speak of

tranquility, they are referring to meditation-based tranquility. People don't consider or teach wisdom-based tranquility. So, what is wisdom-based tranquility? Wisdom is like a battle for land and its inhabitants. Two sides come together to fight, and the outcome of the battle determines the victor. What is the enemy (ari)? Internally, you must battle with defilements and desire. The term "ariya" is the joining of "ari," meaning enemy or opponent, and "ya" meaning far or distant. Fused together, ariya means far from enemies, having won, having achieved peace. But before you can achieve peace and tranquility, you have to fight with everything that you have. Every skill and ability must be invoked in battle. If you can win, you'll have peace. But having peace and tranquility doesn't mean you won't speak anymore. It means you won't have to face another war. Though people remain on that land, no other wars will be waged. This is analogous to the term *calm waters*. When wind thrashes the water, tumultuous waves ensure there is no calm. When the wind doesn't stir up the water, we label those waters calm. Although there is wind, it's calm.

The mind's tranquility is the same way. You can still talk and be calm. A calm mind is a mind that isn't swayed by the things it loves. This is unlike meditative tranquility, in which you must still your thoughts and body. Wisdom-based tranquility is completely different. You can talk and have conversations. The calm refers to not being lured by the mind's predilections. A tranquil mind means being indifferent to the enchantments of love or the influence of greed. A calm mind means being impervious to an enormous mountain of cash set before you. You see it and are unmoved, calm. It doesn't awaken greed. This is because greed cannot function in a



mind that sees things for what they are. Your mind is still, not because you've shut your eyes from reality like with meditative calm, but because your eyes are open and you see all of that reality.

If you were presented hundreds of thousands of dollars, you should accept the money. When your mind is tranquil, you can take it and not be swayed by greed. This is wisdom-based tranquility. The same applies for lust (*rāga*). When you are face to face with someone beautiful, how do you feel? Does your mind glow with love? A calm mind is unaffected and still. You do see them, and can even talk to and embrace them, but you don't love them at all. Your tranquil mind is no longer at lust's mercy. When your mind experiences wisdom-based calm, you aren't swayed by greed, anger, or delusion. With a calm mind, you can go anywhere and be safe from harm. You could go to the theater and be unmoved. You watch the show simply to collect knowledge. This is characteristic of wisdom-based calm. It's completely unlike meditation-based calm.

People don't see the value in unfocused, wayward thoughts, and that's why they fear them. Though these kinds of thoughts are toxic for meditation, they serve as a platform supporting wisdom. If wisdom didn't have access to these wild thoughts, there would be nothing to think about. Distracted, random thinking is a double-edged sword. When aimed toward defilements and desire, these thoughts are a liability. But when aimed toward Dhamma, they are a boon. Distracted thoughts are both advantageous and disadvantageous. A knife is another double-edged sword. When used to decapitate someone it is harmful, but when used to slice meat and vegetables it is helpful. It is the same with fire. It is harmful when used to burn down a house, but beneficial when used to cook food.

You must recognize the two sides that simultaneously exist in that upon which you are contemplating. Drifting thoughts are similarly beneficial and detrimental; they are beneficial to wisdom contemplations and detrimental to serene meditation. You must see the dual nature of whatever it is you are thinking about. Don't only consider one of its sides. You have got to find a way to cancel out the other side. You must train and develop your wisdom so that it is sharp and readily deployable. If your wisdom isn't well developed, you'll find yourself helpless. You must train your mind. If your mind isn't sharp enough, you cannot teach it anything. It's been steered by defilements for so long that it has lost its way. As a result, you cannot redirect it with a few short instructions. You must retrain the mind until it is willing to accept reality. You must cultivate thoughts that can trump imagination. It's a battle of thoughts. You set a thief to catch a thief. Don't fear random, capricious thoughts; instead, boost your wisdom in order to replace them.

In my time, I've experienced numerous meditative visions, and they all end in victory and triumph. Once, I saw a boxer being cheered on by a large crowd of spectators. This undefeated world champion was enormous. He was tall, tan, and boasted a burly, robust frame, complete with ropey, bulging muscles. He challenged me to a match. Now, I had been a boxer in the past, so I knew a thing or two. I glanced up at the imposing, yoked specimen, taking in his jaw-dropping ten-meter height; at my full height, I didn't even reach his knee. But I was not one to back down from a fight. Whatever would happen would happen. We had a fair referee. Though outsized, I was confident in my abilities. The moment the referee signaled the start of the match, a boisterous cheer erupted from the audience. I was the only one on my side. Once the fight commenced,

my opponent surged toward me, poised to snap my neck. Then he kicked, and I dodged. He continued to kick and kick until he began to tire. When I saw my chance, I swiftly leapt into the air, wrapped my legs around his neck in a strangling chokehold, and repeatedly hammered his face with my elbow; I battered his head and face into a pulp. I had the disadvantage of size, but the advantage of technique. I didn't weaponize just one part of my body, but rather my entire body. I pummeled my opponent's head and face, and his blood soaked the boxing ring. He dropped to the ground, lying prone and defeated. I had won.

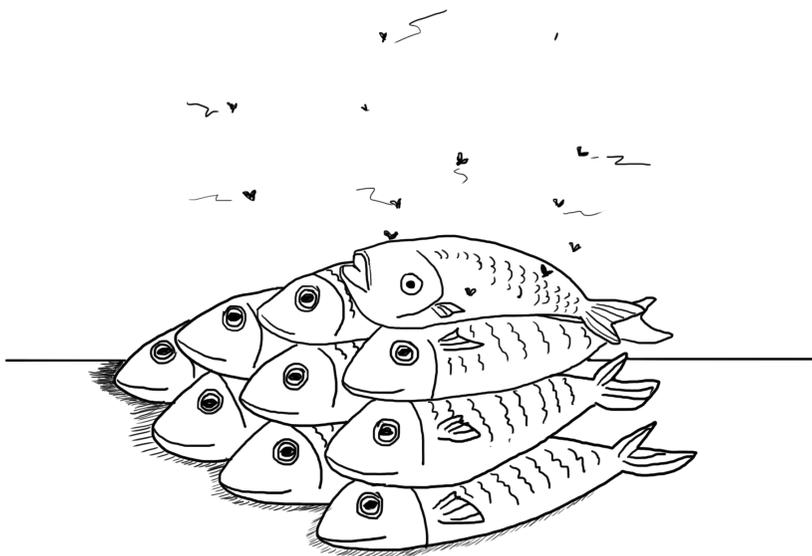
When my mind emerged from the meditative vision, I reviewed the boxing match. He had kicked at me, but I saw it coming and sidestepped it. When he kicked low, I jumped. When he kicked high, I ducked. I was sharp enough to recognize his every move and intention, and to dodge his every punch. My offensive play was to hammer his face with my elbow until I won. This symbolized eradicating my fear of imagination (saṅkhāra). It could fabricate whatever thoughts it pleased. Let it exhibit its work first, and then I'd tear it all down. If you don't do it this way, you won't be able to identify its weaknesses. You defend yourself first, because you're unacquainted with your rival's strengths. If you let down your guard, your opponent can inflict pain and damage. Defilements (kilesas) and desire (taṇhā) are backbiting dogs. If you can't read their moves, you won't have a chance of winning. You must train your wisdom more rigorously than your competitor trains.

If defilements are experts in greed, then you must figure out how to arm yourself in order to quash that greed. If defilements are adept at spawning lust or provoking anger, how will you subdue them?

You can't just leave defilements to their vices. You must find a remedy. If your mind is brimming with arrogance and conceit, and you won't yield to anyone, how will you fix it? You fix it by learning how to yield. Don't fight. Rather, yield like a dog. Let dogs be your teacher. Luang Pu Khao taught that yielding involves training yourself to be like an old rag. Let them step on you. It will lessen your arrogance and conceit. This is how you fix a problem.

What is in the mind of someone who will cross the expansive ocean? We are trapped in desire's tumultuous waters. Ogha means flood or water. Why is it that we know how to dive into the water, but do not know how to leap onto shore? We know how to jump into a cesspit, but don't know how to climb out of it. We know how to plunge into lust (rāga), but don't know how to emerge from it. Why is that? Our minds are that dumb. You must fix this. If you can get in, you ought to be able to find a way to get out.

There are four floods of worldly turbulence (ogha): the flood of sense desires (kāma-ogha), the flood of ignorance (avijjā-ogha), the flood of view (diṭṭhi-ogha), and the flood of becoming (bhava-ogha). All the world's sentient beings are immersed in the flood of sense desires. There are countless specific kāma, but the general definition found in the Buddhist scriptures refer to kāma as form, sound, scent, taste, and touch. Basically, whatever the mind derives pleasure from is considered kāma. This is a mundane, worldly way of looking at kāma. In the Dhamma view, *Dhammakāmo bhavaṃ hoti: one who loves the Dhamma prospers*. Thus, sensual pleasure (kāma) is a double-edged sword – if evil is the source of contentment, that pleasure is of the worldly, immoral sort; but if Dhamma is the source of contentment, that pleasure is of the noble, virtuous sort. That's why *one who loves*



*the Dhamma prospers and Dhammadessī parābhavo: one who hates the Dhamma (and loves immoral kāma) declines.*

What counts as sensual pleasures (kāmaguṇa)? There are two types: vatthu-kāma and kilesa-kāma. Vatthu-kāma is objective sensuality, or sensual pleasures derived from an object. When contemplating on objective sensuality, you must assess each individual possession separately. Are you the true owner of this object? Is this money truly yours? You have to analyze these things piece by piece, one at a time. If you contemplate on belongings as a single entity, you will arrive at a premature conclusion that, *of course they aren't truly mine!* That's a hasty, hollow conclusion, and it will not do.

There's a Thai proverb, *one rotten fish spoils the whole catch*. If you have to toss out the entire ocean because of one rotten fish, frankly, that's unacceptable. You have to pour the catch into a tray, filter out the spoiled fish, and toss it out. The unspoiled fish can be washed and

later incorporated into a meal. Sensual pleasure is the same way. You ought to keep whatever is beneficial and discard whatever is rotten.

How do you contemplate on sensual pleasures? If you were to contemplate on the sensual pleasure embodied in tangible form (*rūpa*), you'd have to ask yourself: what pleasures are derived from visible form? What pleasures are derived from sound? What pleasures are derived from scent or smell? What pleasures are derived from taste or flavor? What pleasures are derived from touch or tactile sensation? Each of these tangible elements inspire various object-based pleasures, or *vatthu-kāma*. You must isolate each tangible element and analyze its corresponding relationship to sensual desire.

As for sensual pleasures embodied in intangible, mental components (*nāma*), you'd have to ask yourself: what pleasures are derived from feeling (*vedanā*)? What pleasures are derived from memory (*saññā*)? What pleasures are derived from imagination, or volitional thought (*saṅkhāra*)? What pleasures are derived from consciousness (*viññāṇa*)? Again, you must give each intangible element individual treatment. What kind of suffering or happiness results? How do you fix it?

Sensual pleasure encompasses both things that don't have a heartbeat, such as items in your home, and things that do have one, such as pets. Objective sensuality (*vatthu-kāma*) is sensual desire derived from tangible objects, including those with a soul and those without one. Subjective sensuality (*kilesa-kāma*) is sensual desire derived from intangibles, or the five aggregates (*khandas*). *Vedanā*, which includes feelings like lust, love, contentment, and pleasure, can be likened to the mind's emotion. There are three flavors of

feeling or sensation (vedanā): positive feeling (dukkha-vedanā), negative feeling (sukha-vedanā), and neither positive nor negative feeling (upekkhā-vedanā). For the most part, people are displeased with negative feelings and pleased with positive feelings. But this kind of thinking is unacceptable, because there are three interlinked manifestations of feeling. When turned to face displeasure and suffering (dukkha), we are discontent. We'd prefer to face pleasure and happiness (sukha). But in reality, displeasure and pleasure are one and the same; they are affixed to one another like two sides of the same coin. Even if you prefer neither negative nor positive (upekkhā), you're still getting the same coin. These days, people believe that fleeing from suffering and into the arms of happiness will improve things, but it's not true. Happiness can only provide a brief respite, as suffering is bound to arise again. Happiness is actually a cause for suffering. It goes around and around, cycling from one feeling to another. Feeling is the mind's emotions that result from contact with sense bases (āyatana).

The correct way to contemplate the five aggregates is to consider each and every pairing. Take each individual aggregate and link it with each of the other four. Don't simply analyze feeling on its own. That's an incomplete analysis of feeling as the result. You must determine the cause. Where did the feeling stem from? What enabled these feelings of love or hatred to form? What is the cause? The cause is form; the mind is pleased with form. Thus, form is a cause of feeling.

Another cause of feeling is memory. When you revisit a memory, it awakens some kind of feeling or emotion in the mind. If you recall an attractive form, you may feel lust or passion. If you recall an unattractive form, you may feel aversion or discontent. For instance,

suppose when you think back to when someone yelled at you, it triggers feelings of displeasure and resentment. The memory of pleasant forms and unpleasant forms serves as the cause of feeling. The memories of pleasant sounds and unpleasant sounds serve as the cause of feeling. The memories of pleasant scents and unpleasant scents serve as the cause of feeling. The memories of pleasant flavors and unpleasant flavors serve as the cause of feeling. The memories of pleasant tactile sensations and unpleasant tactile sensations serve as the cause of feeling.

What about the causality between volitional thought and feeling? When you imagine something or ride a pleasant train of thought, you generate various feelings. These stirrings of love, lust, or whatever else are basically the mind's emotions, otherwise known as *vedanā*. Thus, volitional thought also leads to feeling. All these elements are interrelated; you must contemplate in a comprehensive manner such that you fully understand each and every link.

If you were to consider how memory is a result, you'd find that memory is yet another double-edged sword. If you have mindful wisdom and commit to memory your experience with the Buddha, the Buddha's teachings, or Dhamma teachers, that is a favorable result. But if, instead, you etch the five sensual pleasures into your memory, that is an unfavorable result. Volitional thought may serve as the cause for memory. How does this happen? Other times, feeling may serve as the cause. See, you can flip the elements so that the cause becomes the result and the result becomes the cause. Sometimes, feeling is the cause and memory is the result; sometimes memory is the cause and volitional thought is the result. You must do a thorough job of analyzing this web of connections.



The memory of a feeling, whether positive or negative, is stored in *saññā*. Previously, we scrutinized the memory cause and feeling result. But now let's flip it. Now, feeling is the cause and memory is the result. Another relationship to explore is that of the form cause and imagination result. Once you understand that link, you repeat the analysis, methodically replacing form with each of the remaining aggregates: feeling, memory, and consciousness.

When contemplating on form, you position form as the result and search for the cause. What causes form? Sometimes, you must analyze the result before the cause, and sometimes you have to analyze the cause before the result. This is called one who knows the cause (*dhammaññū*), and one who knows the consequence (*atthaññū*).

Awareness or consciousness (*viññāṇa*) refers to the process of sensing and recognizing. This recognition is neutral, and it can be incorrect or correct. It's also subject to impermanence. Where does consciousness come from? It comes from the mind. All of it comes from the mind: the mind-soul's (*citta*) symptoms and the mind-soul's mental components. You have to analyze the properties of the five aggregates. However, with inadequate wisdom, you'll be hard pressed to contemplate on them. The five aggregates are an advanced, high level Dhamma topic. To successfully penetrate the truth of them would qualify you for non-returner (*anāgāmi*) attainment, at a minimum. Beginner practitioners can put the intangible aggregates aside and focus solely on the tangible form aggregate. Form is stream-entry (*sotāpanna*) territory. When beginners undertake form, the contemplations don't address the relationship between form and filth (*asubha*) yet. They merely analyze form in terms of impermanence (*anicca*), suffering (*dukkha*), and not-self (*anattā*); filth can wait. If you contemplate on filth,

you're venturing into non-returner terrain. The quality of contemplations at each level is not the same. You have to separate the Dhamma topics and tackle them as appropriate to your relative abilities.

To exercise composure of the eyes, ears, nose, tongue, and body really refers to form – being physically composed. But with weak wisdom, you will fail to be calm and collected. Even with your eyes shut, thoughts continue to splash through your mind. Your eyes are composed, but your mind lingers on someone's face. How is that a composed mind? Having a composed mind is a complex, major Dhamma topic. In contrast, keeping your eyes, ears, nose, tongue, and body composed is basic enough that even those with scant wisdom can practice. After they've strengthened their wisdom, they can reassess. Thus, keeping the mind composed is a big topic.

The mind has strong connections to countless, assorted desires. There are many steps outlined in Dhamma theory, but in Dhamma practice there are only a few. The only question is whether or not you possess wisdom. You must grow and expand your wisdom. Don't follow the manuals too strictly. The more you read, the more the theory becomes memory. Practice requires constant thinking, so you should not fear distracted, scattered thoughts. Without thoughts, wisdom would never get to perform. It would shrivel up. All you have to do is shepherd those scattered thoughts toward the Dhamma zone.

If you've managed to carry out a successful contemplation once, the second time won't be so difficult. It'll progress naturally. It's the same principle as found in dancing or singing. After you've learned one move, the second move won't pose such a challenge because you've

become accustomed to the body's movements. The challenge is learning the first move. Similarly, once you know how to drive one car, driving your second car is no big deal because you already know how to drive. You're confident you can drive any car without difficulty. Likewise, wisdom needs to be shown the way once, the first time. It doesn't take much more than that. Can you get past impermanence? If you can figure out impermanence, other topics won't pose a problem. They will all be a cinch. But folks haven't gotten past anything – not past feeling, nor past memory. They haven't even passed impermanence. They know the theory but have never really contemplated on it. And because they've never paid it attention, they've missed out on the reward. They're sitting there watching someone drive, assuming that driving is child's play – *it's just stepping on the accelerator and stepping on the brake pedal, no big deal*. But if you plop them in front of the steering wheel, will they be able to drive? Nope. They'll drive straight into the ocean; they've never driven!

I once had a meditative vision about driving. Now, in real life, I have never driven a four-wheeled vehicle. But in the vision, I was driving a sports car. I lightly tapped the accelerator and the car took off with no gear adjustments necessary. I was speeding, zipping in and out of traffic to overtake every vehicle before me. I drove up mountains with ease; nothing stood in my path. Other times, I would have meditative visions about flying a plane. It felt like I was flying towards the sun. While normal aircrafts floated upward, my plane shot straight up like a rocket. I was the captain and we were flying into outer space. The plane was filled to maximum capacity with passengers.

I interpreted it to mean that in the future, I would definitely lead and teach people. I would be their captain. These visions sketched out my life's path. Whatever plane I was flying, I was always the captain, and there were many passengers following behind me. Do you all have your passports? You should get one. You aren't allowed to embark without a passport. Those deep under the seductive spell of defilements do not qualify for a passport. If you don't have a visa or passport, you'll only be able to observe the tail end of the plane from afar; you can't board [laughs]. I'm flying us to a foreign country that is so foreign, it's out of this world. I'm going beyond sense-based existence. What is out of this world? Nibbāna. What is in this world? An existence within the endless wheel of life and death (saṃsāra); within the Three Realms: the sense-desire realm (kāma-bhava), the form-sense realm (rūpa-bhava), and the formless, immaterial realm (arūpa-bhava). The best you can wish for within the wheel of existence is a pleasant respite in a heavenly realm or Brahma realm before being reincarnated once again. To travel out of this world, you depart the Three Realms of Existence. You must prepare yourself. Have a permanent passport made so that once you depart, you will never have to return to the world. Get your passport ready now. Your eternal visa never expires. Do you have any questions?

P: Luang Por, when you talk about "passing," what kind of result would be considered passing?

LPT: There are many kinds of results (phala), both minor and major. The fruit of the first level of enlightenment (sotāpatti-phala) is a minor result. Then there are the fruits of the second, third, and final levels of enlightenment (sakadāgāmi-phala, anāgāmi-phala, arahatta-phala, respectively).

P: You said that if we can pass impermanence, then that's enough.

LPT: If you pass impermanence, you would pass from being a layperson to being a holy person, or one who has attained a level of enlightenment (*ariyapuggala*); you would pass the first stage.

P: When prostrating before someone, I feel that I am paying respect to that person's virtue. But if a monk is without virtue, I feel reluctant to bow down before him. Is this an indication of my conceit (*diṭṭhi-māna*) or something else? Can you suggest a way to fix this?

LPT: Yes, it's your pride. You have no way of knowing what virtue someone possesses or doesn't possess. Bowing is done to pay respect to the Buddha, the Dhamma, and the Sangha. Though you are bowing before a monk, you are actually bowing to the Triple Gem. You must see this distinction. For instance, when you bow before a Buddha statue, you're really bowing to an ordinary piece of wood or concrete. Don't make bowing about the person. It's about the Buddha, the Dhamma, and the Sangha.

If you must bow to a person that you have reservations about, simply imagine you are chanting – *arahaṃ sammā-saṃbuddho bhagavā, buddhaṃ bhagavantam abhivādemī*, and bow. *Svākkhāto bhagavatā dhammo, dhammaṃ namassāmi*, and bow. *Supaṭipanno bhagavato sāvaka-saṅgho, saṅghaṃ namāmi*, and bow. Be smart about it, use your wisdom.

P: What about corrupt ministers who fleece the country? Wherever they go, people show them respect.

LPT: That's just manners. According to conventional realities (*sammuti*), they are a minister; it's considered good manners to show

ministers respect and bow to them. The bowing is just an outward action that represents good manners. Now, how can we use our actions to get people to love us? Bowing is one way. If your bow is sincere, others will view you as a respectful, humble individual. If you can only bring yourself to bow half-heartedly, others will see you as insincere and having bad manners.

P: Sometimes it goes against what I am feeling.

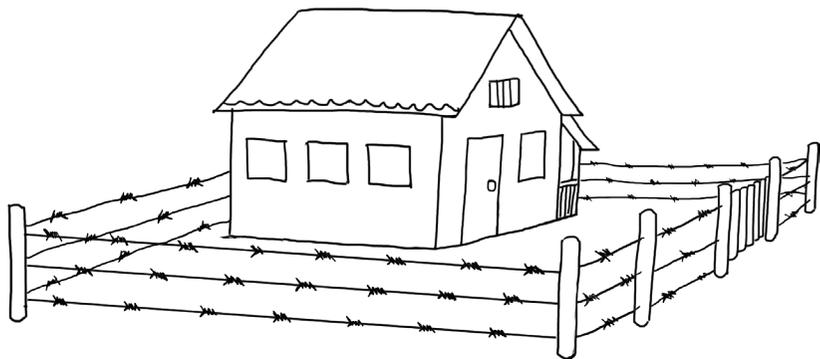
LPT: That's your inflated ego (attā). The disinclination to bow to them suggests that you perceive them to be inferior. You must resist this arrogant tendency and find a way to perform the bow. Greet them courteously. Compel yourself to do it. You must learn to shave down your ego.

P: I am concerned that if I am seen bowing to that person, other people will mistakenly believe that the person is virtuous.

LPT: Don't think like that. What you do or say counts as manners, and manners is the language of society, so you must comport yourself well. Don't leave room for error. Don't cherry pick to whom you bow. You must be humble and able to bow to everyone; you must even be able to bow to a floor mat. You must be able to do it all, because actions and speech are of paramount importance in society.

P: What if you think someone is truly evil? Can you simply refrain from showing respect?

LPT: You could do that. But now you're the one who is behaving improperly, putting your bad manners on full display. Consider this – once you bow to them, they may realize, *hey, I'm not even a good person, so why is he bowing to me?* It might awaken their conscience or pull them up from evil. There is value in taking something bad



and extracting benefit from it. Take thorns, for instance. When you step on them, it's painful, and not good at all. But a fence of thorns is an excellent way to defend your home. While a society of evildoers is not good, you can benefit from having them in your entourage.

When I was a layman, I tried to draw both those of high social status and low social status into my friend circle. I had to exercise caution though. I'd help these friends whenever possible and give them whatever I could give. One day in the future, when they realize the value of my actions, they may express their gratitude by protecting and defending me. This is how the world operates. You have to understand how to keep troublemakers as friends. When they owe you a debt of gratitude, they'll come to your aid when the time warrants it. When I was a layman, I called many of those troublemakers my friends. I knew they were troublemakers, and I don't like troublemakers – I don't like thieves and robbers – but I understood how to use them to protect myself. When someone becomes well-known or becomes a celebrity, who is it that praises

them? These troublemakers, that's who. They're the ones who form your posse and carry you on their shoulders. They're not entirely bad. When you are good to them, they find a way to repay their gratitude by protecting you when you fall into harm's way. These troublemakers were the best defense I could have. As a layman, I was determined not to have my life tied up in grudges and peril. I would be on good terms with everyone in the world.

This issue demonstrates one of the ways to practice – identifying your failings. You can use other people as a model for comparison. A good person can be a mirror to reflect how virtuous you actually are. When you look to a good model, you must also look to a bad model. When measuring yourself against a good person, because they are so good, striving to be as virtuous as they are can be difficult. Now, when you have a bad person as a model, it's effortless to inventory all the bad that they do. When measuring yourself against a bad person, it's easy to mark off the list of things you already do or can learn to do more virtuously. Now, what other questions do you have for me?

P: My problem is that I am greedy in two aspects of my life: work and gambling. I'm obsessed with work and addicted to gambling. One practitioner spoke about the Dhamma model of an insect clinging to a leaf. It uses the leaf as a refuge and safe haven. When people are greedy, they are clinging to the wrong thing. People need to cling onto something strong, like Buddhism.

Another practitioner said that when she gambled, it was exciting, so she kept returning to the casino to relive those thrills. But after she contemplated the harmful consequences of gambling – the loss of money, time, and health – she was able to cut down.



LPT: Greed exists in all of us. It is the voracious, insatiable appetite that tells you, *this isn't enough, next time I want more*. But if you do more, are your gains actually gains? Are you truly getting the result that you desired? If you keep playing and don't win, tally up the wins and losses and ask yourself whether you gained more or lost more. In most cases, it's an overall loss. Once you see the harmful consequences, you'll stop doing it. If you see the damaging effects of alcohol or drugs, you'll stop on your own. No one has to tell you to. On the other hand, if you don't see the harmful consequences, even if someone points them out to you, you won't stop.

Harmful consequences are the key. When contemplating on something, you must view it as part of a pair. When you think about the benefits to be gained, you must also think about the harm to be gained. If you don't get what you want, you must be able to live with it. If you don't have the behavioral tendency or karmic imprint (*vāsanā*) to win money, you will only lose when you gamble. All you will gain is a deficit. For instance, suppose you gamble away five hundred dollars per month. How much does that add up to per year? In the past, I tried my hand at the lottery. I vividly recall having the winning numbers on three occasions. Memories of wins are unforgettable and clear, while memories of losses are shrugged off and never quantified.

In one of my dreams, someone told me the winning numbers. I had no desire to buy lotto tickets, but my brother in-law forced me to. I had purchased one hundred baht or two hundred baht tickets in the past, but this time I bought a one baht ticket and my brother in-law told me we'd have to split it fifty-fifty. I handed over the ticket, but he never paid me his fifty cents. It turned out that I won. I considered what happened and concluded that if I were destined to get rich from

gambling, I would have to have the subconscious inclination (vāsanā) inducing me to throw my money into it. I could have won hundreds of thousands of baht. But I had been utterly disinclined to purchase a ticket. Obviously, I didn't have the karmic imprint for it. You have to assess your behavioral tendency to be lucky in gambling, not just your desire to play. If you have no gambling luck, even if you want to play, you shouldn't.

P: And what if you have the fate to be lucky in gambling?

LPT: Then do it. Don't say no without trying. If, when you try it, it works for you, then go for it.

P: What if you want to take your winnings and donate them? Suppose I dream the winning numbers and set out to buy the ticket, all the while resolved that every winning cent will be used to make merit. Is this alright?

LPT: It is. Once, I went to Phra That Phanom. There, I encountered people living in poverty. Overcome with sympathy, I gave them everything that I had on me. And I aspired to dream the winning lotto numbers so that I could donate the entirety of my winnings. Not a single cent would be kept in my own pocket. I had hoped to win five hundred thousand baht. Alas, that dream never came to pass. I was not destined to help those people with my elusive winnings. But if you tend to divine the winning numbers from your dreams, then go ahead and buy the tickets. You are clearly destined to gain via this method. The caveat is that you must use your winnings to benefit mankind. If you see the money as belonging to the public, you will not suffer. I understood that the money was only for temporary use; I wasn't its owner. The moment you believe yourself to be its owner, you will immediately experience suffering.

P: Would you call this greed without suffering, then?

LPT: This is not greed. You came into the money because of a qualified cause. Greed isn't determined by the amount of money. You can be greedy over a single dollar. Rather, the determining factor is desire. Desire enhances greed.

P: So, if you want it, but you want it for the public, that's okay?

LPT: Yes.

P: What if you win ten thousand dollars and keep it all for yourself? Is that considered greed?

LPT: You have to divide it up appropriately. Some for them, some for you. Don't take it all for yourself.

P: Can we revisit the original question? What about someone who is greedy about work – a workaholic? My obsession with work has expanded my business to the point where I'm unable to manage everything. I'm suffering. How can I fix this?

LPT: You must know moderation, aka *mattaññutā*. Is what you are doing suitable for you? Why are you doing it? You must analyze the cause, the result, and the relationship between the cause and the result. You shouldn't be working fanatically just to purchase things to flaunt your wealthy status; it will only inflate your ego. Your ego swells with pride whenever you think, *I'm successful, I'm rich, my friends are jealous of my large house, I own many properties*.

P: I work many jobs, but I don't use my earnings; I save it all.

LPT: That's called being miserly or stingy. Spending one dollar feels like spending ten thousand. You truly believe that you are the

owner of your possessions, and you fear losing them. So, you hoard your earnings and refuse to use them. This is what fools do. You have a fortune but lack the wisdom to spend it. You don't derive any benefit from your riches while alive, and you can't take them with you when you die. You don't take this into account because you have no wisdom. All you have is a greedy thirst for more. Even if you were to have more money, you wouldn't know what to do with it. This is not something to emulate.

Money belongs to the public, to this world. If your earning money benefits the general public, you should do it. Whether it's earning one hundred dollars per day or one hundred thousand dollars per day, the consequences are positive. After you have analyzed and fully realized how we are truly incapable of owning anything, to imagine that something is yours will make you weak in the knees. You'll be embarrassed just by thinking it because you know better. You know that nothing can truly belong to you. Everything belongs to the public. Your family belongs to the public. You have no real claim of ownership. Don't tie yourself to anything, and your life will be easy. If your duty requires you to acquire more, then do what is appropriate. If you have it, then use it.

When you are born into the world, don't make acquiring these things your goal. Rather, your main goal ought to be cultivating merit and moral goodness. You should work to acquire worldly belongings only in accordance to your station and responsibilities, not to depend upon them as a permanent refuge. If you have money, you can convert it into merit. If you're hungry, you can't just chew on that money and become full. You must convert the money into food first. The same principle applies to merit. When you want to make merit, you can't just create it. To acquire that merit, you have

to do something that can be converted into merit and moral goodness. You must change your mind to puñña, not equate money with puñña.

P: This question is on behalf of all women. Suppose you have pearls, jewels, and diamonds. You contemplate on how they don't truly belong to you and resolve to donate them to make merit. But you mourn the idea of losing them, so you continue to wear them until you're old and they no longer look so beautiful on you. At that point, you'll donate them to make merit. Now, if you've resolved to make the donation, but haven't acted on it yet, would you still receive merit?

LPT: Sure.

P: What if you suddenly die before getting to make the donation? You haven't converted the gems to merit yet. Would you still get merit?

LPT: Not if they were never converted. Pearls, jewels, and diamonds are an innate part of being female. This is widely known. Jewelry and women go hand in hand.

P: Suppose you wear your jewelry tucked under your blouse, out of sight, until you arrive at the event. To pluck them out of your top at that point seems ill-mannered.

LPT: That's too extreme. Take Visakha, for instance. She owned a tiara worth \$1.35M – likely loads more if updated to today's dollars. She was already a stream-enterer (sotāpanna) at that point, but when there was an important event, she would don her tiara. At some events to which she was invited, she would also have to dance for them. This was Visakha, one who had attained a level of



enlightenment (ariyapuggala). She knew what and when something was appropriate, why she would do it, and for what purpose. Don't take issue with why an ariyapuggala was still dancing. No one danced better than Visakha when she was a young woman. Visakha would change her outfit three times a day – each outfit costing one hundred and thirty dollars – powder her face and paint her nails. She followed the five precepts, not the eight precepts. When she wasn't attending an extravagant event, she dressed casually; she only glammed up for special occasions. She wasn't obsessed with her appearance. She was merely doing what was suitable at that time, in that society. People praised her beauty and immense wealth, and she was well respected, but she was only acting in accordance to worldly conventions (sammuti). They honored her by calling her beautiful, so she was beautiful – according to worldly conventions – but she never lost sight of who she was. This is in stark contrast to some beauty-obsessed people who never hit pause on beauty-mode.

Sure, the mirror on your wall tells you that you're beautiful. But dressed up at home with nowhere to go – that's losing sight of reality. Your obsession with beauty has swallowed you whole.

Visakha took great care of her belongings. If someone borrowed an item of hers and returned it, she would permit them to borrow from her again. But if someone borrowed an item of hers and failed to return it, she would not permit them to borrow from her again. The point wasn't how expensive the item was. Rather, it was improper conduct not to return something you've borrowed and then attempt to borrow more. Visakha didn't tolerate it. She wasn't stingy. She was dealing with the person's blatant lack of gratitude.

What were the ten pieces of advice Visakha's father gave her? *Don't bring fire from inside the home to the outside; Don't bring fire from outside the home to the inside.* What is a fire from inside the home? Anything unattractive within your family – unsavory details about your husband, father in-law, mother in-law – are not to be shared with non-family members. Rather, you are to praise and speak kindly of them. However, people tend to share details of household quarrels with people outside the family circle. You want to shame your husband and bring embarrassment upon your own in-laws, children, and relatives. And if someone criticizes your husband or your family, you'll repeat the information to them. That's bringing the fire from outside the home to the inside – not good.

You ought to research the ten pieces of advice Visakha's father gave her before her wedding. Visakha was someone with remarkable wisdom. If someone has sharp wisdom, when they listen to the Buddha's Dhamma, they can easily penetrate the truth and attain a level of enlightenment. Visakha didn't become a holy individual through meditation. Her attainment was the result of wisdom.

When she was seven years old, she and her entourage went to welcome the Buddha into their town. Visakha's entourage stood scattered among the throngs of people crowding to hear the Buddha's concise Dhamma sermon. Visakha became a stream-enterer while standing there listening. She did not sit and meditate, nor did she know of deep meditative absorptions. If you understand her story, you'll see that contemplating Dhamma and attaining a level of enlightenment is not difficult; it is quite easy, in fact, if your wisdom is strong.

Another snippet of Visakha's life worth mentioning was her disagreement with her father in-law, Migara. It all started when Visakha respectfully suggested to the monks that they go elsewhere on their alms rounds because her father in-law was wont to eat stale food. Migara misinterpreted her words, believing stale food to be a euphemism for feces and urine – those with depraved wisdom misconstrue things. This father in-law didn't recognize the dhamma in what his daughter in-law said. Upon misinterpreting Visakha's words, Migara made a fuss, bringing claims against her and threatening to send her away if she lost. Visakha was judged not guilty. It was Migara who lost. Visakha then contrived a way for her father in-law to permit the Buddha to take alms at their house. She made a dramatic show of making preparations to return to her parents. Desperate for her to stay, Migara swore to give her anything she wanted. Visakha accepted his offer, telling him she wanted to invite the Buddha to take meals at their home. Migara acquiesced.

Visakha invited the Buddha and five hundred monks to partake in a meal at her home. She invited her father in-law to offer food to the monks, but he refused. He already had plenty of "arahant" teachers of his own, as he was a student of naked ascetics called



Nigaṇṭhas. The first time Visakha invited her father in-law to pay his respect to the Buddha, a wall of nude ascetics encircled Migara, blocking him from attending the alms offering. The naked ascetics feared that if Migara listened to the Buddha's teachings, he would convert and become a devoted follower of Buddhism. Consequently, they would lose their wealthy benefactor. The second time, Visakha invited her father in-law to make a food offering, but he did not go. The third time, Visakha invited her father in-law to listen to a sermon. Migara considered how refusing three invitations would be a display of improper manners, so he decided to gratify his daughter in-law. He informed the naked ascetics of his decision. They proceeded to give him instructions. He was to raise a curtain that would prevent him from seeing the Buddha's face. So, he followed their directions. He put up a curtain and stood a great distance away, so that he would not glimpse the Buddha's face during the discourse. However, this proved to be no barrier because the Buddha's supernatural powers ensured that his voice reached Migara anyway. The truth in the Buddha's words pierced Migara's heart, and he attained the first level of enlightenment as a sotāpanna.

Take note here. Did Migara have any meditation experience? Did he repeat a meditative mantra? No. But he was able to become an ariyapuggala. Did he adhere to the five precepts? No. He hadn't even requested them yet. How could he have? His views were so crooked that he was a faithful devotee of the naked ascetics! He knew nothing of the five precepts. If you read these accounts in the scriptures, you'll understand what it is that the Buddha teaches. While the Buddha was alive, how did people practice? How did they penetrate the truth and attain a level of enlightenment? It was easy back then.

Upon becoming a stream-enterer, Migara was so choked up with gratitude that he embraced Visakha, put his lips to her chest, and called her “mother.” He realized, on his own, that he was now a sotāpanna – no one had to inform him. There was no inquiring, “Am I a stream-enterer yet?” When you reach that point, you know it for yourself. There’s no need to ask anyone, no need to compare yourself to the manuals; the realization comes naturally. This is how people attained enlightenment back in the Buddha’s time. These days, it’s a mess. I’ve tried to explain about meditation, but people just don’t understand, monks don’t understand. There is such a wide range of topics, how can commoners possibly understand them? The original teachings were compiled by those who had attained a stage of enlightenment, not ordinary people. Ordinary people don’t understand any of it. People are unable to decipher the manuals and, as a result, encounter difficulties in their practice; they are filled with doubt and misgivings.

What other questions do you have for me?

P: So, there’s this wife whose husband tends to purchase a lot of stuff when he’s out shopping. He buys fifty pairs of shoes at a time, has four homes to store all his belongings, and he’s messy. She’s stressed out over it. How can she fix this?

LPT: The person doing all the buying needs to come and talk.

P: He doesn’t realize that what he’s doing is wrong.

LPT: Exactly. He doesn’t realize it. You have to point out the wrongness to him. The key word here is moderation. What is proper and suitable for the situation? This is what he doesn’t know.

P: Suppose someone is sick but doesn't realize it. How can you cure the sickness?

LPT: You can't. Compare this to two people who have fallen in the water. One is floating with his head above the surface, while the other hasn't even realized he's fallen in. You can't help the ignorant person. *Natthi taṇhāsama nadī – there is no river like craving.* If your mind is bursting with desire (taṇhā), but you don't even realize it, you're beyond help. You can only fix that which you know, that which you can see. What you can't see will remain hidden from you. That's why we must use wisdom to dig out and search through that which has been obscured from our view. Once you understand and realize the truth about something, you'll be able to detach yourself from it. If you don't see it, you won't be able to detach yourself from it. Just like a doctor, you have to identify the sickness in order to cure it. If you can recognize your problems, then you can cure your problems.

P: What kind of mantra should the wife use to admonish herself so that she can continue to live with her husband's mess and excess? She is annoyed when she has to tidy up his belongings, or when she stubs her toe on something lying on the floor. There's no space to tuck the mess away.

LPT: She must come to terms with it. Use Sumitta as a model. She married a hunter and her house was filled with weapons and traps. She was a stream-enterer, but because her husband was a hunter, she dutifully organized his hunting tools for him. She recognized each person's role and responsibilities, and she accepted her obligations. If a wife knows her husband's role and the husband knows his wife's role, they will live in harmony. They must each

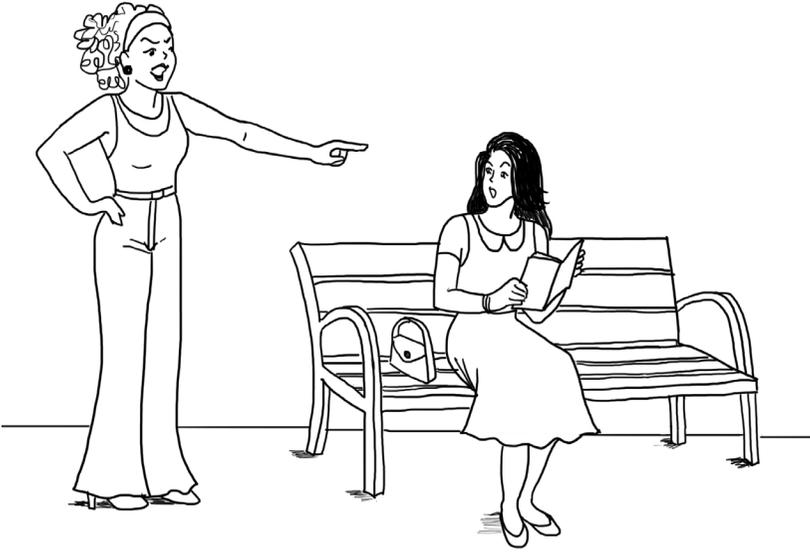
recognize what constitutes proper behavior toward one another. They must each know what is appropriate at a particular time.

Not knowing proper timing is evident when it is well after a respectable time to return home, yet the husband fails to show up. The more frequently he is late, the more the wife frets that something has happened. *What is he really doing out there? Does my husband have a mistress tucked away somewhere?* Though he maintains his innocence, she is already wary of him. All of this is because the husband didn't know proper timing. Or if the situation is flipped and it is now the wife who doesn't know how to choose and keep time – she goes out, loses track of time, and stays out longer than expected – the husband will worry that his wife is having an extramarital affair. Even if the wife denies the accusations, the husband will not be convinced. Suspicion has already taken root. This happens because the wife doesn't know proper timing. Or if it's the children who don't know proper timing – not coming home after school has let out, or going out and failing to return home at a decent hour – their parents will worry. *Is our daughter involved with some guy? Is our son getting himself into mischief?* The children's failure to recognize what constitutes proper timing feeds their parents' mistrust. The more frequently these things keep happening, the more the family will become fractured; they distrust one another. It's important to know proper timing. You have to know proper timing for you and proper timing for them.

As a housewife, you have to know proper timing. You must distinguish between time in a worldly-sense and time in a Dhamma-sense. Time as related to work or to members of your family fall under the worldly category. When should you give time to your children? When should you give time to your husband? When

should you give time to others? You have to ration your time according to your responsibilities. Now, what is the most important time? It is personal time, time to spend on practicing Dhamma. You must know how to divide your time. You've given your children time, given your husband time, given others time. Now how do you give yourself time? Don't allow worldly tasks to drain so much of your time that you're too exhausted to spend any of it on yourself and on your Dhamma contemplations. There is a proper time for everything, but you aren't abiding by it. You must know how to divvy up your time properly. There is general work that benefits others and then there is private work that benefits yourself – namely, practicing Dhamma. It is this private work that is imprinted and carried into each and every rebirth. Worldly work merely allows us to live out the present in happiness. You must carve out time to do your personal work – chanting, practicing Dhamma – as it benefits you exclusively.

In 1969, I judged that I had entirely fulfilled the duty to myself, and it was now time for me to fulfill the duty to others. I would do all I could to impart the Dhamma to as many people as possible. I was only thirty-something at the time and according to the general human lifespan, I had many years left to work with. Now, how would I go about teaching people? Which of the numerous Dhamma topics should be taught to the public? After mulling over it, the spontaneous insight arose within me – *the Sappurisadhamma*. The Seven Qualities of a Good Man is a topic complete in and of itself, and it would be suitable for the public. I knew of this topic since 1969, but I had kept it secret; I spoke of other topics in my sermons. I hadn't yet written a book on it until recently. I wrote it in order to put the complete description out there, and so that if I couldn't teach



people in person, they could read the book. Knowledge of the Seven Qualities of a Good Man came to me by itself. I knew in that moment of insight that the Seven Qualities of a Good Man would prove the best Dhamma model with which to teach people.

The first of the Sappurisadhamma is dhammaññutā, or knowing the cause. The second is atthaññutā, or knowing the consequence, result, or effect. Cause and effect are a pair. Whether you're working on something in the worldly or Dhamma sphere, throughout the task, you must constantly grasp the dynamics of cause and effect. It's not enough to know one. You cannot only know the cause; you must also know the consequence. Sometimes, the cause arises before the result. Sometimes, the result arises before the cause. When the result comes before the cause, how does that happen? Say you are sitting, minding your own business, and someone walks up and starts yelling at you. You're perplexed. Why on Earth are they yelling at you? But

wait a second. People don't yell at someone for no reason. Thus, you must investigate the cause. Perhaps they misunderstood you. These things happen. Or maybe they are unearthing old grudges. You already know the result – that they are yelling at you – so now you have to solve for the cause. Don't default to angry Hulk-mode straight away. Stop and figure out the cause first. What cause did you sow?

The same concept applies when someone suddenly praises you. Don't feel flattered quite yet. You must first track down the cause that led to this result. If you were good to someone, it would be normal for them to reciprocate with gratitude and respect. There is always a connection between cause and result. Sometimes, you see the cause before the result. For instance, suppose you are thinking of something. If you act on it, what are the repercussions? There are two types of causes in human interaction: speech and action. Before you speak or act, you ought to consider the potential result. Suppose someone spoke to you in this way – would you like it? No, the result would be that you wouldn't like it at all. Now, if you don't like it, and you speak that same way to someone else, would they like it? No. The result would be that they wouldn't like it either. Then you shouldn't say it.

Think of the cause and the effect. If the act is a cause that leads to a positive result, then you should do it. If the act is a cause that leads to a negative result, then you should not do it. If the words are a cause that leads to a positive result, then you should speak them. If the words are a cause that leads to a negative result, then you should not speak them. You shouldn't only consider what is right in terms of your desires. You must also consider what is right in terms of Dhamma and right in terms of reality. It must be right for both

parties, for both sides. You have to look forward and look backward. This is how a society of the wise live. In a society of fools, everyone acts according to their own wishes. They do whatever it takes to exploit or beat others. Their view is results oriented. They will not be taken advantage of. They are prideful and will not settle for a draw. Winning is the only option – even if it is a one-point victory.

Consider words and action – people living in society wish to be loved, so how should we conduct ourselves? How do the wise view other people? How do fools view other people? Fools will not yield or accept defeat; they don't know how to lose. Any loss is considered a blow to their pride. Victory is the only acceptable outcome. The fool's desires direct their every decision. They constantly wield manipulative tactics in order to gain a competitive advantage. To them, a draw is unacceptable. They must deploy every trick they have in order to edge out a win, because a win is a win, regardless of how marginal. When they speak, it's the same way. Every exchange is an opportunity for one-upmanship. This is ego, conceit. It's the way fools behave.

When contemplating Dhamma, you must analyze the characteristics of the wise and the characteristics of fools. Compare the two – how do the wise speak and act? How do fools speak and act? Once you see the apparent differences, what do you do with the knowledge? You will be able to select which one of them you wish to model yourself after. How do the two compare when it comes to reasoning? Do fools use reason? Sure, but it is too selective and self-serving. Contrast this with the wise, whose reasoning considers the whole picture and benefits mankind and the greater good. Practicing Dhamma is about comporting yourself – determining the words and actions you will employ in your social interactions – not sitting



still and repeating meditative mantras. Practicing is about words and actions.

Nowadays, people don't know how to practice so they resort to mantra meditation. Is that wise or foolish? They are only prolonging their foolishness. Many complain of not seeing improvement after a decade of practice. They're foolish. They're not practicing in the correct way. They don't know how to practice. How can mantra meditation engender true calm? Sure, it is a factor. But does it endow your mind with the comprehensive wisdom it needs to fix your issues?

You must be able to solve your own problems. This is achieved by evaluating your actions, speech, and thoughts. If you cannot fix your thoughts quite yet, then focus your attention on training your actions and speech. What is appropriate? What is inappropriate? You must train your mind to see things accordingly. You must be able to compel your mind to choose what is right, not what you want. Don't act as you want to act, don't speak as you want to speak. Don't gratify your desires in that way. It only encourages defilements (kilesas) to flourish, and that's unacceptable. When a fool practices Dhamma, they only gain a swollen ego and heightened self-delusion.

In analyzing knowing a cause (dhammaññutā), what counts as a cause? You must always see yourself as the cause. As a part of society, you are a cause that affects the community. Is the cause you have put forth good or bad? What you do affects others. With poor wisdom, you can generate a bad cause for the community. With good wisdom, you can generate a good cause for the community. If people understood this dynamic, everyone would live in peace and harmony. No one would generate bad causes.

Bad causes exist because fools and foolish tendencies are woven into the fabric of society. You must accept that the world cannot exist without the foolish and that you cannot control them. You must figure out how to safeguard yourself from being harmed by them. Do fools have any redeeming qualities? Of course. They're not entirely bad. They are partly bad, partly good. You must be good to fools, and one day they will express their gratitude by being your best defenders and protectors during your time of need. They are no different from thorns. If you run into them, you can get hurt. But you can also erect a protective fence of thorns around your house. Or you can place thorns around a patch of crops to prevent chickens from nearing. You have to be smart about it. You can convert something detrimental into something advantageous. Fire can be harmful, but it can also be beneficial.

P: Whenever I have doubts about Dhamma, I'll pick up one of your books. They always clear my concerns. I'd like to hear your thoughts on this.

LPT: That's not good. You must fully commit to curing your doubts on your own first, before reaching for a book. Clearly, you are too accustomed to relying on others for help; you haven't even tried to figure it out by yourself. No, this isn't a good way to go about it. You must do everything you can to solve the problem on your own first. If you still can't figure it out at that point, then you consider your options. I told you all about how the Four Bases of Mental Power (Iddhipāda) spontaneously popped up in my mind. I didn't crack open the manuals. Rather, I spent two to three days working it out on my own. If you figure it out on your own, your wisdom will be solid and sure. Of course, you can always find the answer in a book, but it won't be your own wisdom. When you have problems, it's a good

opportunity to practice. Don't turn to the books straight away. Give it everything you've got and then let the books be your last resort.

P: It's more like I've pinpointed the problem and am not really actively trying to solve it on my own. I pick up your book, only intending to read it, not seeking an answer of any kind; yet I discover the answer staring back at me from those pages. It happens often. It is more like happenstance. Why does this happen?

LPT: I don't know. I've also heard that others commonly experience this. A professor told me that whenever he is stuck on a problem, he'll flip open a book and instantly find the answer he's looking for. This happens to him quite often. I don't know why it occurs.





**June 4, 1998**

*Second Sermon*

There are two types of thought: the type that classifies as the origin or cause of suffering (*samudaya*), and desire (*taṇhā*); and the type that classifies as extinguishing, or the cessation of suffering (*nirodha*). However, because you've never practiced the latter, your thoughts are always the cause of suffering sort. Dhamma practice is about training yourself to think *nirodha* type thoughts. *Nirodha* refers to wisdom. Wisdom – a refined, advanced wisdom – is the agent that brings about the cessation of suffering. Beginners should start with a more rudimentary form of wisdom, or at the most, the insight development (*vipassanā*) form of wisdom. The wisdom required for *nirodha* is the insight-knowledge (*vipassanā-ñāṇa*) form – it is the advanced form of wisdom used to extinguish suffering.

*Nirodha* has two meanings. The first is to illuminate, as in seeing and understanding the truth in a clear and illuminating way. The second is insight-knowledge. It's the same word, the same topic,

but the conventional (*sammuti*) terms are different. Call it *nirodha*, *vipassanā-ñāṇa*, or illuminating realization and illuminating understanding, or realizing the truth and understanding the truth – it's all *nirodha*. The instant you experience illuminating understanding and true realization, your doubts and questions will be extinguished. In other words, you will have completely extinguished your wrong understandings, extinguished your wrong views, and extinguished your delusions. *Nirodha* extinguishes *samudaya*.

Just like in the handwritten Dhamma I have already explained, the first stage belongs to the cause and the final stage belongs to extinguishment. We are experts in *samudaya*. Every thought corresponds to imagination or volitional thought (*saṅkhāra*), and desire. Every thought is self-serving. We've been following that trend since countless aeons ago up to the present. We only think in one direction – toward gaining and toward whatever pleases us. We need to think more in the extinguishment direction – toward detachment, toward letting go, and toward realizing and understanding the truth – in order to cancel out our cause-based thoughts. Don't let *samudaya* be the sole contributor. You must build up more *nirodha* thoughts in order to neutralize *samudaya* thoughts. The more you divert your energy to *nirodha* thought, the more *samudaya* will be left incapacitated. Then, when your distracted thoughts take flight, they will journey toward *nirodha* and reality; they will be Dhamma-themed thoughts. Without those thoughts, you will be unable to contemplate. Distracted thoughts are a platform for wisdom. You only need to ensure the thoughts scatter in the right direction. Don't fear distracted thoughts. You just need to practice more.

That's why I try to teach people to know how to think. Once you know how to think, your thoughts will continue to be of a right (*sammā*) nature. If you don't know how to think, your thoughts will be laced with wrongness (*micchā*), your views will be wrong, and your practice will be wrong. Thinking is not even the full picture – it's only the one half. The other half is convincing your mind to feel whatever you're thinking about. If you can't feel it, it won't do. You can't only think in the right way and be done with it. You'll only be someone who knows how to think. Whenever you can come to terms with or accept what you're thinking, that's when you'll savor the true value of Dhamma.

When it comes to watching your mind, don't merely watch. You must also be cognizant of your mind's leanings. Are you currently on the cause side or on the extinction side? You have to cultivate more on the extinction side. Wisdom is the path to extinguishment. You won't arrive at the cessation of suffering right away, though. If you exercise your thinking muscles more and more frequently, and your wisdom forms more and more understandings, your wisdom will morph into insight development. Then, after amplifying the frequency of contemplations on those very same topics, your understanding sharpens, and insight development transforms into insight-knowledge. Once your understanding becomes clearer and the truth is fully illuminated, insight-knowledge graduates to extinguishment. This is the way to *nirodha*. Wisdom arises from thinking, evaluation, and analysis – not from meditation or tranquility. We ought to be more diligent thinkers.

When training your wisdom, don't read too much theoretical knowledge (*pariyatti*). Put it aside. Only retain the major classifications and important principles: impermanence (*anicca*),



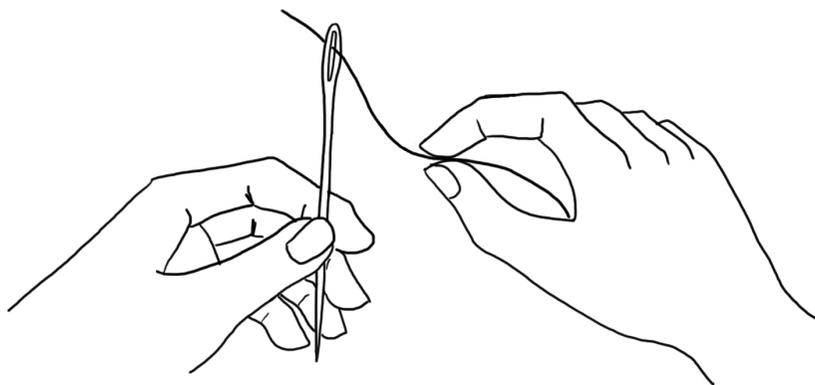
suffering (dukkha), not-self (anattā), and nothing truly belongs to us. Keep the topics but interpret them exclusively through your own dialect of wisdom. Don't read the Dhamma. That'll land you in trouble because your wisdom will be limited to traversing the grooves etched by the theory, unable to roam elsewhere. Learned wisdom is memory-based (saññā) wisdom; it wipes out your chances. Though the theory is true, you can't do anything with it. What is it that defilements (kilesas) and desire (taṇhā) fear? They fear the wisdom each individual has fostered in themselves, not the memories of theoretical knowledge. Defilements cower from the Dhamma derived from each person's unique wisdom, not from the Dhamma gained from memorized theory. In fact, defilements revel in this learned knowledge; they steal it and parade it around as if it were their own. Because your wisdom has failed to tend to the Dhamma that you've studied, defilements, desire, and conceit (diṭṭhi-māna) will snatch it from you and make a feast of it. All that remains with



you is an empty shell, for defilements and desire have seized the lion's share of the meat. When you speak of Dhamma, it's purely superficial. You don't have any actual knowledge of the Dhamma.

When conversing about Dhamma, you must be mindful. Are your words the shell of Dhamma or the meat of Dhamma? Conversing with the shell of Dhamma is simply tapping into memory, reciting the things you've once heard. Your mind is bone dry, and your words are a joke to anyone listening. Your regurgitation of theory will earn you the name Miss Pōthila, or Mister Pōthila, or Venerable Pōthila (Venerable Pōthila was a learned, erudite monk who lacked actual experience). They'll laugh at you. Sure, you can speak of the Dhamma, but can you animate the Dhamma within your mind? Aren't you embarrassed of yourself? You ought to take better care of your mind and train your mind.

Earlier, I explained about those who strive for sensual pleasures. They are stuck in the flood of sensuality, or *kāma-ogha*. The next topic is *avijjā-ogha*. *Avijjā* means ignorance, and *ogha* means flood or water. *Avijjā-ogha* is someone who is ignorant of the truth, ignorant of reality – someone enveloped by darkness. *Tamotamaṭārayana*: *he who is in darkness and bound for darkness*. Dhamma exists in every molecule of your being, yet you lack the wisdom to realize it. You're floundering in the flood of ignorance, immersed in darkness because you don't possess wisdom. The truth is ubiquitous – in the home, in the city, in the country, in the world, in the wheel of existence (*saṃsāra*) – still, you don't know it. In contrast, you are well-versed in counterfeit Dhamma, wrong understandings, and wrong realizations. This is the flood of ignorance, the mind's blindness; you don't see anything.



So how can you expel this ignorance from your mind? You must use your wisdom to uncover the truth and put that truth on display for your mind to see more and more frequently. Wherever wisdom exists, there will be light. The objects of your delusion will become clearly visible, and the things you don't know will be known. Ultimately, though, wisdom is not the eliminator. Rather, it is a tool, an instrument that encourages the mind to let go. We say, "wisdom eliminates..." but in reality, wisdom doesn't do it. It is the mind that wields the sword of wisdom and severs the attachment.

Suppose you are out on a night stroll, guided by a flashlight. You see a tiger. Now, it's not the flashlight that flees from the predator. Rather, it is the person holding the flashlight who flees, it is the person who avoids the enemy. When it comes to doing housework, whether it is sewing, reading, or cleaning, it is not the light that does the work. Light merely provides an element of convenience to your work. It allows you to read, write, and work. But the task itself is

only completed after you actually carry out the work. Light is merely an instrument that facilitates the work's completion. That's why we must try to produce as much light as we can. The brighter it is, the more thorough your complex, advanced-level Dhamma contemplations will be.

The eye of a needle is tiny, yet thread can still pass through. Absent any light though, you would never be able to thread the needle. Your attempts would only result in jamming the thread in vain, because you're essentially blind in the absence of light. When you thread the needle, you must focus on the eye of the needle and the thread end you will pass through it. You can't simply open your eyes very wide. You need to focus on the critical point. When there's light, even the tiniest eye of a needle can be threaded.

Any work, whether Dhamma-related or worldly-related, relies heavily on light. Doctors need light to examine x-rays and determine which body parts are infected or broken and which parts are functioning properly. Light allows people to see the truth. Similarly, in wisdom terms, light represents understanding the truth. We must produce as much light as we possibly can.

Many people caution you not to think because your thoughts will only veer off course. If you truly intend to practice, you ought to ignore those warnings. Simply put, if I tell you this, are you going to listen? If you won't, then so be it. This is the problem, though; watching your mind will not do you any good. The whole paradigm you've subscribed to thus far – that silent meditation will cause wisdom to arise – is a falsehood. Stop already. You need to direct your energy towards thinking. The more you think, the more you'll wise up and figure things out.

You can observe this principle in writing. If you want your handwriting to be beautiful, you must practice writing often. The more you practice, the more you will improve. You must exercise your wisdom often, so that you can acclimate to the light. Wisdom is the mind's light and the mind's eye. The mind's ignorance (avijjā-ogha) is extinguished once the light has vanquished the darkness. Wisdom has shone its light on the truth, exposing everything. You needn't force the darkness to retreat. It will do so once you turn on the light. As much as you despise ignorance (avijjā), you don't have to compel it to disappear. It'll vanish on its own. It's simple, really. All you need to do is build up your wisdom, and this wisdom will automatically destroy ignorance. The flood of ignorance will be obliterated implicitly.

Next is diṭṭhi-ogha. Diṭṭhi means view, and there are two kinds of view: wrong view, a perception misaligned with the truth (micchādiṭṭhi); and right view, a perception aligned with the truth (sammādiṭṭhi). Look inward and assess whether your mind is in the wrong (micchā) or right (sammā) camp. To recognize the characteristics of right, you must first know wrong. Once you can differentiate between right and wrong, then you can accurately choose right. Nowadays, people don't know what wrong is, so they end up taking the whole lot. The wrong gets swept in there, unwittingly misclassified as right. You must use wisdom to probe and analyze both wrong view and right view, while employing principles of causality as a metric.

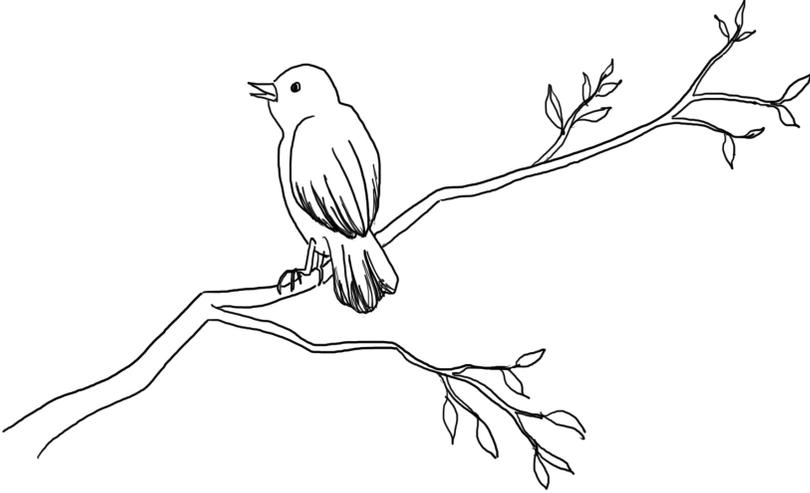
When we say, "wrong view," what is it that makes it wrong? It's wrong in terms of the path to enlightenment. So, what is right? It's possible to be right in a worldly sense but wrong in a Dhamma sense. This wrong occurs at more advanced levels, for those who are

journeying toward enlightenment. Does micchā exist in the more elementary levels? Yes. When you're still on your Dhamma ABC's, sammā of a basic level will suffice. Charitable giving, making merit, and cultivating virtue are all characteristics of what is right in a worldly (lokiya) sense, as well as what is considered wholesome in the sensuous plane (kāma-vacāra-kusala). You make merit (puñña) in hopes of acquiring happiness and prosperity. But these very acts which are considered right in a worldly sense suddenly become wrong once you climb the steps to higher level Dhamma.

At that point, anyone who persists in having a wrong view, or any view on merit is instantly incorrect; you must shift your stance. If you still cling to merit and wholesomeness (kusala), that's wrong. For those who are bound to cycle through more rebirths, merit is right. But for those on the supramundane, transcendental (lokuttara) track, merit is something that must be completely cast off. Whenever you want merit, you'll be wrong. For now, you should view merit as desirable. Leave the higher level Dhamma for later; your wisdom isn't strong enough to tackle it. Stick to the basics. You need to train your wisdom, first.

The views of the foolish (bāla) are one way, and the views of the wise (paṇḍita) are another. View (diṭṭhi) can take many paths. Usually, the views of the foolish are wrong views. We must contemplate and uncover the truth. Wisdom is the bright light that exposes everything and washes away darkness.

The final flood of worldly turbulence is bhava-ogha. Bhava-ogha signifies those who are caught in the flood of rebirth and becoming. Bhava means existence, birth, becoming. Wherever there is attachment, therein lies an existence, a birth. You must analyze what



kind of birth you have designed for yourself. You have already conceived your own becoming. The instant you die, you're lined up for your subsequent birth, only you don't realize it. You're the creator, yet you're oblivious to this fact because the flood of ignorance has obscured your view. You arrive in darkness and leave in darkness. You've already latched onto your next existence. If you are attached to your home, once you die, you're not going anywhere; you'll be reborn in that same house. If you are bound to your children or grandchildren, you will be born as one of their children or grandchildren. If you are attached to the gardens, forest, or trees, you will be reborn as a sparrow residing in that habitat. Or you'll become a worm burrowing through that area. You can't go anywhere. Whatever it is you are attached to, that is precisely where you will be reborn; it is a self-contrived existence.

Don't allow your mind to cling to anything that you own. These belongings only serve to aid your day to day survival. Everything is on loan, for your temporary use. Things are yours in a sense of conventional reality, only because you habitually use them. If you dig deeper, you'll realize that you can't keep any of it. None of it is yours. The moment you die, you instantly relinquish all claims. You must not worry over or cling to anything at all. Using wisdom, you must constantly urge your mind to see the suffering, harmful consequences, and perils inherent in those belongings. You must arrive at these facts through rational thinking, through understanding the dynamics of cause and effect.

These days, your thoughts march to the beat of samudaya's drum. You are always thinking of the cause of suffering because you're so accustomed to it. It's due to this tendency that you've been traversing the wheel of rebirth since countless aeons ago up until today. Let us retrain ourselves to counteract that cause and to nullify it. Don't only see one side of it, learn to view things as pairs. Use the extinction side to cancel out the cause side, as I have already explained. This is how you protect yourself against the flood of becoming.

In conclusion, the four floods of worldly turbulence include the flood of sense desires (kāma-ogha), the flood of ignorance (avijjā-ogha), the flood of view (diṭṭhi-ogha), and the flood of becoming (bhava-ogha). Once swept up in these floods, you will be catapulted into the perpetual cycle of rebirth, with no end in sight. The only course to remedy this is to build up more wisdom. If you are still deluded by these floods, you must boost your wisdom, so that it can shine as your mind's light. With light, you can locate the shore. And if you can see the shore, you can make your way to it and exit the water. As it stands, though, you cannot see the shore. You're like a blind

person floating aimlessly in the vast ocean in pitch darkness. Eventually you drift right into the jaws of a shark. You can't just float around, haphazardly choosing a direction. If there's light, you will be able to spot the island or the shore; then you can get out of the water. Light is the mind's best helper. Wisdom is the only thing that can save you. You must train your wisdom to be your mind's eye. Contemplate often. Don't squander away your days and nights.

Some people are berated by their husbands so often that they become desensitized to the criticism. Dhamma works in the same way. The more you listen to the Dhamma, the more you become numb to it. You know it, but you're apathetic. You ought to listen to the Dhamma once and let that be enough. Jot down what you comprehended and what piqued your interest. Then, contemplate on those things further, expand your understanding, siphon more out of it. Too much listening can desensitize you. Sometimes people listen to Dhamma recordings while tossing together a meal, scolding their children, or sitting on the toilet. How has it come to this? The Dhamma has become repetitive and uninteresting. Listening to Dhamma recordings diminishes the value of the Dhamma by fifty percent. You listen, but you lack any measure of respect or faith, and that degrades its worth. On the other hand, if you take that same tape and listen to it with rapt attention and focus, your mind will flourish in the Dhamma. A live discourse is even better. Basically, if you have strong wisdom, you can listen to the tape, extract something beneficial, and improve yourself. But if you have weak wisdom, you can listen to the identical recording, and it will only serve to extend your lease on stupidity.





**June 5, 1998**

*First Sermon*

When I was at Wat Tham Klong Pen, I cautioned the monks and novices (sāmaṇera) not to drink too much coffee. Elsewhere, their habits could pose a hardship. But they didn't heed my warning. Once, a group of novices journeyed to the forest to practice dhūtaṅga, the thirteen austere practices. Instead of packing lots of candles, they stuffed their bags with many kilograms of sugar and coffee. Exhausted from their trek into the forest, they ravenously drained the entirety of the coffee provisions. With their supply completely depleted, they decided to return to the temple. They couldn't push on without coffee. You see, coffee is addictive.

When considering addiction, it's not what you would typically think. Narcotics like opium, marijuana, and heroin aren't the only addictive substances. You can get hooked on other things as well. What things are you addicted to? When the substance isn't a known drug, the addiction is marginalized and considered normal. Some people must



shower first thing in the morning, and if they skip that shower, they feel grumpy and irritable. That shower has unwittingly become an addiction. If you train yourself well, you won't even need to shower. Look at me – I only shower once a day. In fact, it's been three days since I last showered; it's too cold [laughs].

Some people have established a rigid breakfast routine of donuts and coffee. Is this an addiction or not? We can develop a fixed habit without even realizing it. It isn't necessary for you to eat it. You must train yourself. There are many other addictions. You need only scan your home to see all that you're addicted to. Addiction means that something has become a habit, a part of your personality. If someone is wont to complain, if they don't get their fix, they become restless. They'll release some of that pent-up agitation by yelling at a dog in lieu of a person. Other people are gossip junkies; it feels like their air supply is getting cut off whenever they are prevented from

disparaging others. They must find some way to malign others. There are also people who are addicted to talking. Everywhere they go, they prattle on like a chatty parrot. The subject matter and content are inconsequential. They're happy so long as they get to speak. These are all addictions.

You must take everything into account when studying behavior. Don't limit your Dhamma studies to the manuals – they cover so little. Real dhamma is people. There's so much dhamma to be culled from the study of people. Within each of us is a vast, comprehensive well of dhamma. That's why we must learn the dhamma by examining people. Notice people's mannerisms and conduct – what do they do, what do they say? Analyze it until you understand. Normally, an individual's behavior betrays their mind and heart. If you want to understand their mind, you must first understand their words and actions; this will put you in proximity to the truth. What are soft-spoken, gentle-mannered people like? What are boisterous, rowdy people like? Their words and actions are the best indicator. They say that actions and speech reflect one's mind. This is generally true; it is close to the truth. When you observe them, you must catch them unaware, in their normal state; don't watch them when they have already made themselves presentable.

After looking outward and analyzing others, you must turn your attention inward and analyze yourself. What are you like? Are you like them? You must compare yourself to others. What are you going to fix about yourself? If they speak well and act well, then you should follow their lead. Do this immediately. Studying Dhamma has two aspects to it: the good that you should adopt, and the bad that you should discard. You should observe the behavior of someone who is an exemplary model. Solely reading the manuals is inadequate to

form a full understanding because they contain mere theory; you must substantiate that theory through actual practice. Observe someone who is well-mannered and learn to emulate them. If you can't completely mirror their example, you can at least come close. This is how you learn Dhamma.

Knowledge based on learning (*sutamayapaññā*) is wisdom (*paññā*) gained from Dhamma. There are two ways to learn Dhamma: by theoretical knowledge (*pariyatti*) and by applied practice (*paṭipatti*). Most people believe that studying means burying one's head in a book and absorbing theoretical knowledge. Wisdom, or *sutamayapaññā*, arises from studying. If wisdom truly arises from studying, and you've already studied, have you ever experienced this eruption of wisdom? Not likely. You know what you've absorbed from manuals, but how do you convert that knowledge into actual wisdom?

You must study people, because all Dhamma comes from people. After you read, you must turn to people – whether it is someone else or yourself – and apply the theory. The Dhamma in the books is the result; the cause of Dhamma is actual people. You must study people. This is that applied practice side of learned knowledge. The short-sighted limit their studies to the manuals. In contrast, someone with applied practice experience will study and analyze themselves. What are your good traits? You must address all defective actions, speech, thoughts, and views. You must correct them all, and thoroughly. You must fix the entire operation; in other words, you must fix your problems. The whole purpose of practicing Dhamma is to rectify and ameliorate, not to simply know the theory inscribed in manuals. Applied practice means you must mend and improve things.

If your practice is short on mindfulness and wisdom (*sati paññā*), you may have knowledge, but it won't be clear, illuminating knowledge; you won't be able to generate a disillusioning awakening. You'll find yourself right where you started. Your knowledge won't expand. While you know, you don't understand. You can read but you can't write. Or you can write but you can't read. You're like those immigrants to America who can converse in English but cannot write in English. Some can write their ABC's but cannot speak the language. Their language skills are incomplete.

Therefore, it is of the utmost importance that we rectify our views. Our minds are swept up in the world's currents and trends; we've never seen the way to traverse it. We let our merits (*puñña*) and demerits (*pāpa*) convey us through life. Muslims and Christians don't teach about merit or demerit, but they must still be heir to their each and every action. The Buddha's teachings cover the entire world, whether or not you know of them. It doesn't matter what race you are, what language you speak, or whether or not you subscribe to Buddhism. You are heir to your deeds and actions (*kamma*). If you do evil, you will reap the fruit of that evil; if you do good, you will reap the fruit of that good.

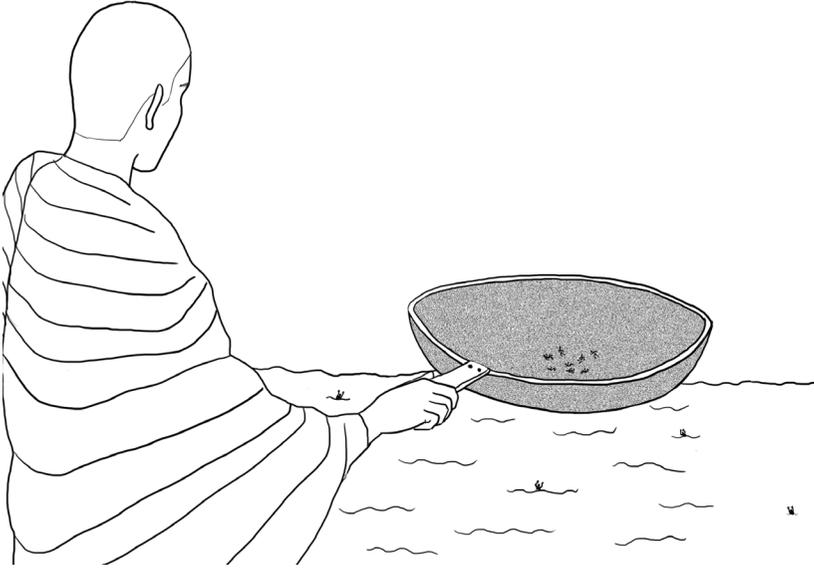
The Buddha's teachings are all-encompassing; he is *lokavidū*, knower of the world. Demerit, merit, rewards, and punishments are limitless. They don't only apply to Buddhists. You don't have to know the rules of *kamma* to be subject to them: do evil, reap evil; do good, reap good. We are born into this world because of *kamma*. People who hold nihilistic views as to future existences can deny reincarnation all they want. Their ignorance doesn't change the fact that they must still be reborn – all the world's sentient beings must be. Once these people are born, do they realize or understand the

truth as the Buddha has laid forth? No. They simply go about their ways. Even with exceptional intelligence, they can't penetrate the truth. The sharpest minds in America and Russia have launched satellites into outer space, but let these geniuses try to practice Dhamma. How will they fare? Worldly intelligence is no guarantee of success in Dhamma practice. Rather, it is perception or view that is most crucial. Perfections of character (pāramī) and cultivated merit are important. Without pāramī, even with superior intelligence you won't get far.

Everyone owns their past deeds. The cultivation of merit and wholesomeness (kusala) is wholly separate from a monk's blessing. Thai people customarily invite monks to chant *kusala dhamma* at funerals. Non-Thais don't have *kusala dhamma* chanting; they practice different funeral customs. Regardless of the type or presence of any custom at all, the deceased may still go to heaven. That's because what other people do has zero effect on whether you go to hell or heaven. Rather, it's your own actions, your own kamma, that dictates your destination. And if you really scrutinize the words in *kusala dhamma*, you'll see that the chanting is not for the benefit of the dead, but for the benefit of the living. It serves as a reminder and it helps them realize the truth about death. Regardless, people believe that if a monk performs the funeral chanting, the deceased's soul will be sent to heaven. People aren't wise enough to assess the validity of their simplistic beliefs. What about someone who is maxed out on demerit? Will a monk's chanting truly convey them to heaven? These people only think about one thing – going to heaven. They neglect to consider the other side. You must contemplate what it would be like from both angles: going to heaven, and not going to heaven.

Forget about ordinary people. Let's consider Venerable Mahā Moggallāna's mother, Moggallani. She held wrong views (*micchādiṭṭhi*). Venerable Mahā Moggallāna tried to instruct his mother, tried to convert her wrong views to right views (*sammādiṭṭhi*), but she would have none of it. His efforts to get her views to align with the truth as it exists were in vain. Moggallani came from a lineage of wrong views – wrong views begat from wrong views. After she died, Venerable Mahā Moggallāna went in search of his mother. Where had she been reborn? He combed through the heavenly realms but could not find her. He traveled to the Brahma realms but failed to locate her. Where was she? Was she in hell? He visited every single hell realm, but still found no trace of his mother. To where did she disappear?

The Buddha told him, "If you wish to find your mother, look behind your house." And indeed, Venerable Mahā Moggallāna discovered his mother there. She had assumed the form of a worm, writhing in feces, entangled with other wriggly crawlers. He then used his supernormal powers to communicate with his worm mother, "Mother, come out from there. Why are you in a place like that?" And she replied, "Son, I'm so happy here. There's nothing better; I don't even have to do anything and every day, many people deliver food to me. I'm having so much fun! I'm living in the lap of luxury here!" There was nothing he could do. Forget about *kusala dhamma*; Venerable Mahā Moggallāna was an enlightened chief disciple of the Buddha – his left-hand man, in fact – and yet he could not reroute his mother to heaven. How, then, can ordinary people expect to send their mothers there? With serious bad kamma, one can't just walk into heaven.



After his mother died from her worm existence, she was reborn in *avīci naraka*, the lowest level of hell. The life span in that realm is quite long – it takes one hundred years for a miserable soul to ascend to the mouth of this hell realm. After popping up for a breath, they take another one hundred years to sink back down to the bottom of the hell realm. They cycle through this tedious ascending and descending pattern.

Venerable Mahā Moggallāna implored the god of hell (Yama) for a degree of mercy, which he was granted. He entered a higher meditative absorption (*jhāna*) and used his supernormal powers to cool the waters of hell. He scooped his mother up with a super-fine sieve. Imagine a mustard seed sliced into seven parts, and one of those parts further sliced into seven more parts. Consider how infinitesimally small the final slice would be after this process has been repeated seven times. The sieve was so fine that a fragment



that microscopic in size would not fall through. However, when Venerable Mahā Moggallāna scooped his mother into this sieve, she kept slipping right through. The sieve managed to catch other souls though; the rescued souls were then reborn. For the entire three months of the rains retreat (vassa), Venerable Mahā Moggallāna kept trying to scoop his mother up with his special sieve, but he was ultimately unsuccessful. Even now, his mother still resides in the hell realm (naraka).

Moggallani's son was a fully enlightened monk (arahant), but he still couldn't save her. How can you possibly expect someone ordinary – who is ignorant of even the most basic *namo tassa* chanting – to send their mother to heaven during the funeral chanting? The reasoning is misaligned with the truth. People think the *kusala dhamma* chanting will help, and so they invite the monks over. They neglect to consider whether someone with bad kamma will be able to be pulled to heaven. They don't think. If someone has cultivated good kamma, they don't need the *kusala dhamma* chanting – they may go to heaven regardless.

While the Buddha was alive, he never instructed Venerable Mahā Moggallāna or Venerable Sāriputta to chant *kusala dhamma* in order to send someone who had died to heaven; it never happened. The Buddha never tasked any other monks with it either. If someone who has committed good kamma dies, they may go to heaven. It has nothing to do with kusala dhamma. *Kusala dhamma* is merely a contemporary Thai funeral custom meant to be a salve for the relatives and loved ones who are still living. Seeing a monk makes them feel as if the deceased will now get to go to heaven. It's heaven in their thoughts, not heaven in reality; reality is different.

Heaven isn't only for Buddhists. Before the advent of religion, how did people get there? Back then, they never listened to *kusala dhamma* chanting, yet they still managed to go to heaven. Their good kamma sent them there. These days, people adhere to too many superstitious practices. At funerals, people compel their children, grandchildren, and every possible relative to ordain. They are especially pleased if the ordination is done at the invitation of a ranked, elder monk. This magnifies the auspiciousness. This is what people believe. They are comforted by their belief that these acts will dispatch the deceased to heaven, but are they actually headed there? If you study what happened while the Buddha was alive, you'll understand what causes a heavenly rebirth.

If you are invited to a funeral, should you go? Yes. But you're there to observe your surroundings and learn why people are practicing these traditions. Superstitious customs are a problem for contemporary practitioners, but they are also beneficial if the children and grandchildren are heartened by the belief that their making merit has transported their dead parents to heaven. They ought to continue the traditions – I'm not against it – because it deludes people into feeling comforted, and there's value in that. In reality, their parents may have already gone to heaven, or may have already gone to hell. They feel better for dedicating merit to their deceased parents despite the fact that it may never even reach them.

As I've stated before, there are four situations in which the deceased does not receive merit dedications: the deceased has already been reborn in heaven, the deceased has already been reborn in hell, the deceased has already been reborn as an animal, or the deceased has already been reborn into another family. Now, if the deceased is

reborn as a hungry ghost (peta), there is only one of the twelve groupings of peta that can receive merit dedications from their children and grandchildren, and that's because these peta have relatively lighter kamma.

Thais observe so many traditions. As a Dhamma practitioner, we must study everything. When you are invited to a funeral, should you go? Yes. But deep in your mind, you know the truth; you aren't superstitious like the others. You must use wisdom to understand the situation. That way, if your loved one dies, you won't be consumed with anxiety and worry. Go ahead and follow the customs. People who are too attached to these rituals will be unable to handle themselves. If they fail to find a monk to send their loved one to heaven, they'll become worried and distressed. They've essentially sabotaged their loved one's chances of getting to heaven. Conversely, someone who practices Dhamma will understand the truth, that it has nothing to do with monks or chanting. When their loved ones die, they simply bury them or cremate them. These people know the meaning of Dhamma practice.

*Aciraṃ vatayaṃ kāyo paṭhaviṃ adhisessati chuḍḍo apetaviññāṇo niratthaṃva kaliṅgaram: Before long, alas! This body will be laid upon the earth, discarded, devoid of consciousness, and useless like a log of wood.* The soul of the departed has already cultivated its merit and wholesomeness. It has already determined its destination. Monks have nothing to contribute to the matter. If you understand this accordingly, you will be content. You could bury them or cremate them, and it wouldn't matter either way.

In 1966, I spent the rains retreat in Phangnga province. It was my first time travelling to Southern Thailand. At the start of my journey,

I was still able to have a conversation with various passengers travelling in my direction; we all spoke the Central Thai language. But as I rode further south into Chumphon province, I found myself staring with a blank expression at my bus-mates who spoke the Southern dialect. While we exchanged words, we failed to exchange any comprehension. I let the bus driver know that my destination was Khok Kloi township. When we arrived, he told me it was time to disembark. I am so touched by the kindness of Southern Thais. They didn't know me at all, but wherever the bus stopped, people would walk up and offer me coffee. This occurred so often that my stomach couldn't handle anymore! I had travelled all over Thailand, and at that point in time, no other region could beat the south. We were strangers – why would they offer me coffee? Initially, I assumed they were trying to sell me some coffee. When I told them that I didn't have any money, they shook their heads and told me that they wished to make an offering of it. The deep appreciation that I have for the Southern Thais remains with me to this day.

When I reached Takua district of Phangnga, it was right around mealtime. The locals invited me to take alms at a restaurant, and they paid for my meal. They didn't know me, yet they acted with such kindness and generosity. Northeastern Thais are not like this, and I'd know because I've travelled all over the region. Wherever you go, you must be sure to bring money to pay for food. Northeasterners aren't thoughtful or generous. When they go to the temple, it's only with white rice. They don't consider what the monks will have to eat along with it. It's a peculiar trait found in northeasterners. They'll drive a house monk back to the temple after his alms round, but if they encounter a travelling monk, they don't pay him any attention. They are unconcerned with whether he has

food to eat or a place to stay. I've suffered hard times going on alms rounds in the northeast.

Once, I was in Ban Thon with a *sāmaṇera*. All we received on our alms rounds was plain white rice. Many households had plenty they could have offered: ten of those huge ceramic jars filled with fermented fish and sun-dried fish hung throughout the home. Be that as it may, none of it was offered up for alms. Even a tiny strip of fish would've helped. And it wasn't like they didn't have bananas lying around – there was an abundance of them, and ripe too! If they didn't want to offer an entire banana, half a banana would've been fine, but they never offered them.

There's really something about the innate nature of northeasterners. The first day, there was nothing to eat, so I told a *sāmaṇera* to grill rice over a fire. We didn't have salt. After eating the grilled rice, the novice became feverish, and we didn't have any medicine. Three days passed and we still didn't receive any offerings. I couldn't take it anymore, so on my alms round, I asked, "What is in those huge ceramic jars?" Of course, I already knew the answer. The woman replied that it held fermented fish. I asked what the fermented fish was for, and she replied that it was for sale. I really wanted to ask her if she knew how to make merit with the fish, but I didn't want to be too direct.

The next residence had dried fish hanging all over the place, and so I asked the homeowner, "What's all that over there?" The old woman answered that it was dried fish. Again, I asked what the fish was for, and again the answer was that it was for sale. I had this disheartening exchange over and over, and I ended up eating plain rice again. Northeasterners are really hopeless.

The south I encountered was strikingly different. During my travels there, they never allowed me to pay for anything. Throughout my journey to Khok Kloi, my meals and other considerations were sponsored by benefactors. Once I arrived in Khok Kloi and disembarked, I turned to an old man beside me and asked for directions to the Rat Yothi Temple. While he understood everything I said, I couldn't understand a word of his Southern Thai dialect. I kept begging him to speak the Central Thai dialect. Soon someone arrived who I could communicate with and gave me a ride to the temple.

I spent one vassa in Southern Thailand. During that time, my father passed away from malaria in Wanon Niwat district in the northeastern Sakon Nakhon province. He died without any children, grandchildren, or friends by his side; he did have a younger brother with him, though. My father liked to purchase arable land, farm it, sell it, and then return home. That's what he was up to in Wanon Niwat.

Only after visiting home post-vassa did I discover that my father had essentially died alone. None of his children knew he had come down with malaria. His farmer neighbors visited him and discovered his dead body; they were the ones who sent my family the news. My siblings spent two days making the long trek to my father; and they arrived only in time to collect his cremated remains. How wretched to die alone, with not even one of your children by your side!

They weren't any monks to perform *kusala dhamma* chanting for my father. Once his remains were brought back to Udon Thani province, I considered the best way to dedicate merit to my father. I told all my relatives that this funeral would be special. They were

forbidden from slaughtering a single animal. Instead, they were to purchase dried foods and fresh produce. Everyone had to adhere to the five precepts and there would be no entertainment allowed. They were to invite monks to do the traditional funeral rites, chant, and give a discourse. All this merit was expressly for my father. This kind of funeral arrangement was unprecedented back in those days.

In my walking and sitting meditation sessions, I contemplated on the merit dedicated to my father. Would he receive it? If so, how? If not, why not? At one point, my mind converged and I found myself enveloped in a brilliant light. I felt myself follow the smooth, levelled path before me, which led to an enormous steel door. A thick line of imposing guardian of hell (Yama) sergeants stood sentry, each armed with a menacing spear. I walked up to them to inquire after my father; I wanted to ask him whether he received the merit we dedicated to him. The sergeants were courteous, asking me what business I had there. I explained my mission and asked whether my father was there. They didn't answer but invited me inside.

The gargantuan door slid open and revealed a bald, red-faced colossus of a man sitting behind a desk, the officer in charge. His subordinates brought out an enormous chair for me to sit on. The head officer politely asked me what business I had there, and we spoke like any two normal acquaintances. I told him that my father had died, I had already dedicated merit to him, and I wanted to know if he was there. He asked me my father's name – Uddha Nonruecha. He inquired after my father's complete address – house address, village, subdistrict, district, province – and he wrote the information down on a census-like form. He also asked for the year my father died – 1966. There were countless meter-tall by half-meter-wide volumes of ancient palm-leaf manuscripts, each corresponding to a

specific year. Every individual who died in each year was fully accounted for in those bulky volumes. The head sergeant pulled the 1966 tome down and used his finger to slice the book open. It immediately flew open to the relevant entry. He established that my father was still there and hadn't yet gone to heaven, as his case was in review. I told him that I'd like to visit my father. The head sergeant told me that was unnecessary. He would summon a subordinate to fetch my father.

My father appeared in the same clothes he was wearing when he died. The Chinese drape their dead in beautiful outfits, so they will have good clothing to wear in the afterlife. Thais don't believe in this. When Thais die, they are left with only the clothes on their backs. The right side of my father's face was shabby and clouded over, while the left side looked like any ordinary face. As he walked toward me, he turned his left side out. He appeared ashamed and self-conscious, but I pretended not to notice. My father bowed to me.

LPT: Do you remember me?

F: I remember.

LPT: What's my name?

F: Thoon.

LPT: A few days ago, your children and grandchildren dedicated merit to you – did you receive it?

F: Some of it. When I went to collect the rest, there was only merit in name but no actual tangible merit.

What could explain this? The senders' virtue was impure. They had failed to uphold the precepts. When we did the traditional offering



of white cloth on behalf of the dead, we had divided it into two piles. One was offered to monks of perfect virtue, while the other was offered to monks of imperfect virtue. It was the offering made to the monks with tarnished virtue that my father couldn't recover. The merit was made in vain; it was a fruitless expenditure.

LPT: While you've been here, have they hit you or hurt you?

F: When I first arrived, yes. But it was a formality – not so cruel or severe. It was appropriate treatment for a prisoner.

LPT: Do you have any time to pray?

F: Yes, I do my chanting every day.

LPT: Do you get to contemplate on Dhamma?

F: Every day, without fail.

LPT: Is there much kamma left to be accounted for? They told me they were in the process of investigating some kamma – what is that all about?

F: Killing a cow.

All of his other minor kammic debts, like killing small animals, had all been repaid; only the grievance related to the cow's death remained to be redressed. What had happened was that my father was an honest man who served as the head of the village. The villagers under his charge had stolen a cow from another village. After they pulled off the heist, they returned to my father's village and slaughtered the cow. The farmers had been turning over the soil at the time, so they buried the carcass in the ground that very night. My father was involved in the cover up. It was this case that the officers were looking into.

LPT: How many times has the case been to trial?

F: Three times. They're not finished yet.

LPT: Is it nearly concluded?

F: Yes.

I glanced over at the officer, who was eyeing us. I asked him about the status of the case, requesting that he close it and allow me to adopt the kammic burden in my father's stead. The officer consulted his gigantic tome and replied that my father's case was scheduled to close that very day. He agreed to release my father.

I asked my father whether he wanted to ordain and wear white. He told me he did. Somehow, I had brought white cloth with me. My father immediately climbed into the white clothes. Instantly, his countenance was completely transformed. His skin became bright and radiant. We said our goodbyes and my father floated upward. I kept my eyes on him until he disappeared into the air. There was a period in the past where I instructed my father on meditation. He had a talent for it but neglected his practice in order to tend to the farm he was prepping to sell. After he died, he resurrected his meditation practice, and his attainment of meditative absorptions (jhāna) was renewed. Now, he was bound for the fine material world, wearing the white uniform characteristic of its inhabitants.

As I was talking to the officer, a chaotic crowd careened toward the huge door. They were fighting and killing each other. The most common offense was pānātipātā – the killing or destroying of living creatures. Husbands and wives were tied at the neck, tears flowing and blood washing over them as they thrashed and pummeled one another. I noticed another area, removed from the violence, and



inquired about it. The officer told me that it was a pavilion of a thousand rooms. I asked what it was used for. He told me the offices were used to investigate kamma. If someone died and had ample merit, they would immediately be shipped off to a heavenly realm; no inquest was necessary. But if they had demerit, they would have to remain in the pavilion until the probe concluded. The pavilion was so vast that one couldn't even perceive where it ended. There were one thousand rooms dedicated to the review of kamma, which indicates one thousand ongoing cases – that's no insignificant number! Along the journey to the examination room, the various animals that had been the deceased's kammic creditors – cows, oxen, ducks, chickens – would chase and peck at them with a vengeful ferocity. Bloodthirsty oxen charged at their targets, piercing them with their sharp horns, razing them to the ground. It was a chaotic scene to behold.

I had the opportunity to observe the investigations. There was no segregation based on status or race. Everyone gathered in the same

place regardless of ethnicity: Thai, American, or otherwise. There was only one court, the court of kamma; kamma dictated the verdict. Cases weren't decided as they are in our world. It was like there was a computer screen exhibiting the defendant's kamma. All the merit and demerit – significant and insignificant – were on display. Whether or not the defendant could recall the deeds was irrelevant. An exhaustive account of their kamma was reflected on the screen.

An appraisal was then performed on the good and bad kamma – if the two were of equal magnitude, the offense could be forgiven. However, some kamma was too substantial to be reconciled with meager merit. It isn't like merit washes away demerit. It's more like an assessment of which side is more dominant. If the scales tip in merit's favor, they'll go on to enjoy the fruits of their merits first, despite the existing demerit in their kammic account. They essentially receive an extension on paying for the demerit; sometimes, that means postponing the reckoning of the demerit to a future rebirth.

I was well-versed in how the officers decided the cases because everything was plainly on display. There were different entrances and exits. Those carrying weighty demerit would stream out towards a separate door. It took only about fifteen minutes to reach a verdict. There wasn't a prosecutor or an investigator asking questions. Everything was laid out on the screen. No involvement was necessary to decide a case. The kammic computations were automated. When it comes to kamma, it doesn't matter whether you are a monk or not. Monks who behaved immorally were punished just like any other person. I don't want to talk too much about this because it can erode a devotee's faith.

Some people claim there is no heaven or hell. You shouldn't argue with them. Leave them be. You know what's actually true. I am knowledgeable in matters relating to various realms because I have visited hell realms and hungry ghost realms alike. I could write a thick manuscript on it, and I'd fill it with more detailed knowledge than anyone else in this era could, but who would believe the book? Owing to my extensive meditative expertise, I've seen the heavenly deva realms. But most people these days won't believe it, and that's their prerogative. Knowing the realms is a mundane, trivial matter; it is not the path to enlightenment (nibbāna). In Dhamma practice, one doesn't aim to have insight into the realms; one aims for the supreme goal of nibbāna.

When you make merit for a deceased loved one, don't pour all your hope into the monks' chanting of *kusala dhamma*. A person's destination is determined by their own kamma; they are the only person who dictates where they are headed. Don't expect salvation from *kusala dhamma*. Attachment to rites and superstitions makes a mess of things. I don't reject the traditions, because they are a balm for the pain and concerns the relatives carry. Back in the Buddha's time, there wasn't any funeral chanting; even the wealthy were simply buried in a cemetery. These days, there are too many rituals. Practitioners must use rationality in any analysis, so that they clearly see the truth as it exists. If it isn't possible to resist the world's trends, then go along with them. I, for one, go and chant *kusala dhamma*. It's a worldly tradition practiced every single day, so I go. But I don't attend the funeral mindlessly. Because I have done my research, I go with my eyes open and my mind stocked with an arsenal of knowledge and rationality. There's no pulling the wool over my eyes. This is in stark contrast to some monks and laypeople,

who attend funerals equipped with illogical views, and get further swept up in the superstitious rites; they haven't researched the truth about this world.

Lokavidū, knower of the world, mostly refers to the Buddha's teachings. It is the Buddha's onus to proclaim the teachings. He is lokavidū – his disciples are not. While his disciples also know the dhamma, they are nowhere near the Buddha's match in terms of the vastness in scope and depth of comprehension. Through his distinctive powers of insight, the Buddha sees all the truth that exists in the world.

P: They say that whatever you're thinking of when you die, that's where you will be reborn. Someone said they tried to focus on you – Luang Por Thoon – so that when they die, they will go and be with you.

LPT: I don't have anywhere for you to stay. I don't have anything for you to cling to. I don't even have a place to stay. There's nowhere in this world for me. How can you stay with me? I'm not staying in this world.

P: I think they're cheating, looking for the easy way out. They believe you're going somewhere good, so they want to grab hold of your coattails, so to speak.

LPT: Sure. If you think of *Buddham Dhammam Sangham*, you'll be able to go with me. Just make sure you hold on tight during that moment you're about to pass from this world.

P: But mostly, they can't hold on.

LPT: [laughs] It's like scaling a steep cliff face – you can't hold on,

so you slide back down. When someone is about to die, whatever they're clinging to is where they will be reborn. In other words, their attachment gives rise to their next becoming (bhava). For practitioners, before their soul departs their body, their minds will enter another bhava, called bhavaṅga. Then after bhavaṅga, their soul slips out. In bhavaṅga, they will not feel anything – it's completely silent; they won't register the whispers of *Buddho* in their ear. Prior to entering bhavaṅga, a symbol of kamma – called kamma-nimitta – will appear. If you are anxious over something or thinking about your past transgressions, evil or bad-kamma will cut in. It's frightful, like someone is about to assault or murder you. Some even see the personification of the bad kamma. You'll go out in hysterics. This is characteristic of the appearance of bad kamma. Alternatively, others leave this world with a smile plastered across their face, as if the devatās have come to escort them to heaven. The individuals move on to a pleasing destination.

Once you've thoroughly contemplated death, there's really nothing to fear. When you think about death now, it seems terrifying. What are you afraid of? You're afraid because you're imagining how your friends will carry on in your absence. You're afraid you'll never see your friends again. Who will take care of all your properties? Who will manage all your money and treasures? You're afraid to part with that which you hold dear. You're afraid of not having a noodle café or a coffee shop to patronize. You're afraid you'll never get to eat your favorite foods again. This is what you're afraid of. In reality, death isn't something to fear.

Some people are incredibly terrified of death, yet when death actually rears its head there's no drama or fear. In fact, they go out smiling. They're now out of harm's way, unlike the rest of us. There's a

lightness after you've shed the physical body. The intangible aggregates – feeling (vedanā), memory (saññā), volitional thought (saṅkhāra), and consciousness (viññāṇa) – converge in the mind-soul (citta). The soul is buoyant. It doesn't do any work; it is simply conveyed by your kamma.

If you have a wealth of good kamma, you may be destined for the higher heavenly realms, like Tāvātimsā. But if you have a more modest measure of good kamma, you may be bound for a human existence or a rukkha devatā existence. The Buddhist affiliated rukkha devatās have their rituals and traditions, while non-Buddhist affiliated rukkha devatās carry on with their cultural traditions. Regardless, all who die will speak the same language – the universal language of the mind. The language of the mind is an important feature of this world. Every single person who dies from any corner of the world will be fluent in it. While alive, humans cannot comprehend each other's languages, but once they die, they understand each other perfectly.

I have an abundance of experience in these matters. Long ago, when in a meditative state, I would converse with ancient souls from bygone eras, and I understood everything uttered in the exchange. After I emerged from the meditative state, I could no longer understand them. I had forgotten the language. It wasn't Thai – it was some other language – but we understood each other's mind-language.

Take the higher-level devas for example. I've been to that abode. I've visited so many heavenly realms that I've become incredibly bored of them. I feel that living in a heavenly realm is a waste of time. One misses out on fostering the perfections of character (pāramī).



The devas pass the time with amusement and play, reveling in the gratification of the five sensual pleasures (*kāmaguṇa*). They derive pleasure from mental objects (*dhamma*). It is not the coarse, crude version of sensual pleasure that we humans experience. Their experience of happiness is unlike human happiness; it's pure happiness of the mind, that's all. The instant their minds perceive happiness, it washes over them and they luxuriate in it. It's unlike human happiness. I know the heavenly realms inside and out. This is what it's like in the higher heavenly abodes.

In the lower heavenly realms, there are the tree deities (*rukkha devatās*). I am similarly well versed on the *rukkha devatās*, so well that it's become quite boring. I've written all about it in my autobiography. You should read it. Or don't read it, if you prefer. I was the leader of the *devatās* in an expansive forest. The *rukkha devatās* have an advantage over the other celestial beings in that they are in close vicinity to humans. As such, news and communications can be transmitted between humans and the celestial beings. The *devatās* have a director in charge to whom they'd report all their movements; they can't just come and go as they please. The tree deities are structured and orderly.

If someone were to host merit making (*puñña*) at their house, they'd chant *sagge kāme ca rūpe...* to invite the *devatās* to partake in the auspicious ceremony. Does this legitimately work? Yes, partially. See, sometimes you send out an invitation to one of the *devatās*, but an entire group shows up. It's no different from humans. I've truly shed all fascination over the *devatās*. Their lives mirror ours; they are repetitive and uninteresting. Their deportment is unlike that of humans, though. Suppose you receive an invitation to attend an auspicious event. Your friends ask to tag along, so you attend as a

group. Sometimes the group is small and sometimes it is large. Now, how do the tree deities learn of the meritorious affair? The house deities (geha-devatās) provide news and information for the tree deities. Once the house deities receive the *sagge kāme ca rūpe* invitation, they forward the details to their tree counterparts.

When I was the chief tree deity, every day was spent hard at work. I had many employees working for me, though. On some days, I'd grant them a break so they could join in a meritorious event. Sometimes many groups would attend. As was their practice, each tree deity dutifully came to check in before they left and after they had returned. On major Buddhist holidays and holy days (uposatha), I would personally lead the flock to make merit somewhere. The smaller devatās would be thrilled and excited whenever their big boss led them on the auspicious outing. We mostly sailed into the sky by boat – sometimes on a brig – not reaching high altitudes but soaring just above the tree line. Other times we rode in translucent glass vehicles. Young or old, small or big groups – everyone enjoyed themselves. These tree deities were many times better than humans. They reveled in abundant happiness and suffered negligible stress.

When there was to be an auspicious event, the devatās would show up in advance of humans. For instance, if the event was scheduled for 6 a.m., they would arrive at 5 a.m. Sometimes, they would pay their respects to the monks and leave before people arrived. Other times, the devatās would stick around to observe human mannerisms. Humans and devatās have very different bowing and chanting styles. Devas bow in unison, in an exquisitely graceful and gentle manner akin to a bending banana stalk. In sharp contrast, humans have an unrefined style more reminiscent of attempting to catch a leapfrog than bowing.

When I was at Wat Tham Klong Pen during the uposatha, the devatās congregated to chant before dawn – I very much enjoyed listening to their melodic chanting, as it was done in unison and sounded divine. They also did evening chanting. The main discrepancy between human and devatā chanting lies in the way the devatās treat their end notes. We chant *viññūhīti*, while they chant *viññūhī...ti*; we chant *buddho bhagavāti*, they chant *buddho bhagavā...ti*. The rukkhā devatās have an advantage over other devas due to their proximity to humans. They have the opportunity to join in merit making. So, you see, death is really not something to fear. It's only scary before you actually die; once you die, it's not scary at all. In fact, after you've died, you won't even want to be reborn.

P: Luang Por, seeing as how there are devatās in Thailand, are there devatās in other countries as well?

LPT: There are. Only, their mannerisms and behavior will differ. Thai devatās are well-versed in chanting and paying respects to monks. Meanwhile, non-Thai devatās behave as non-Thai humans do.

P: Are there any devas here with us now?

LPT: Why are you asking? Devas are not particular to Buddhism. So long as you do good, you can become a celestial being. Similarly, it's not only Buddhists that go to hell. Regardless of your identity, if you commit evil, you may go to hell. The ability to know these things comes from an individual's pāramī.

While I resided in the forests and mountains, I enjoyed my time with the devas. There isn't only one class of devas; there are many, just as with humans. I even encountered one with a mistress! They were



some lower rank of celestial beings, either tree deities or earth-bound deities (bhumma-devatās). I sat there observing an older male – probably sixty or seventy years of age – carrying some items. His young mistress barked, “Old man, you must serve me! As my husband, you must obey my every command.” He had to comply because he had already shared her bed; a young and beautiful mistress wields substantial power over an older lover.

P: How do the celestial beings live? Do they have houses like humans do?

LPT: Earth-bound deities live in modest huts, and some of them are impoverished, no different from humans. When I went to investigate the lovers’ hut the next morning, I found that it was merely an ordinary bush. Sometimes, the devatās would play at night. Upon closer inspection, I discovered that they were playing around a tree, in the castle of their imaginations.

P: If someone is a homosexual in human life, will they also be homosexual in deva form?

LPT: I wouldn't know, I'm not a homosexual [laughs].

P: Can devatās have children?

LPT: Yes, in the sense of children as a construct (sammuti). The souls of new devatās are like their children.

P: Sometimes, when I'm practicing Dhamma, I hear sounds like someone lulling a child to sleep. What could it be?

LPT: Those are lower level deities. Their lives are dreary and monotonous, similar to that of humans. If you're going to be a deity, don't go lower than the rukkha devatās; the tree deities have the advantage of being able to make merit, just like humans.

P: If I aspire to break free of suffering, and dedicate myself to Dhamma practice (paṭipatti) and contemplation (bhāvanā), but am ultimately unable to enter the stream by the time I die, will this good kamma send me to a heavenly abode?

LPT: Yes. It has everything to do with your good kamma, and nothing to do with monks chanting *kusala dhamma*.

P: When you said that if someone is about to die and they recollect on *Buddho, Dhammo, Sangho*, they can go with you, what does that mean? Does that mean they actually go with you to enlightenment or are they merely destined for a favorable existence?

LPT: I'm merely a conduit. It's each man for himself; you have to go on your own. I've opened hell's door for you, but you must walk out on your own accord. I only provide a guarantee of the path.

P: Can you please explain what type of good kamma corresponds to what deva realm?

LPT: It's not so much a matter of good or bad kamma. It's more about what you are attached to in the moment leading up to your death. Even if you've poured hundreds of thousands of dollars into making merit, you can't go to a heavenly abode if you're attached to something. On the other hand, someone who makes merit with a single dollar can be reborn in a heavenly realm. And some have never even made a single dollar's worth of merit and have never given to charity, yet they can still go to heaven if their minds are steadfast in their devotion to the Triple Gem.

P: Heaven first, then to hell later?

LPT: Some go to heaven first, then to hell; some go to hell first, then to heaven. It's not the same procedure for everyone.

P: If someone has committed evil deeds their entire life, but sees an image of the Buddha the instant before they die, will they go to heaven?

LPT: Yes, they'll go to heaven first.

P: And then they'll account for the bad kamma afterward?

LPT: Yes, they'll go to hell next.

P: What is bhavaṅga?

LPT: It's the state before the soul makes its exit. Bhavaṅga is an existence or becoming (bhava) before the soul departs the body.

P: Is it similar to a dream state?

LPT: No.

P: Is it like an empty state of being?

LPT: Yes. Everyone experiences it. You will no longer hear the people around you once you've entered bhavaṅga. You can only hear your loved ones saying *Buddho, Dhammo, Sangho* prior to your mind entering bhavaṅga.

P: So, once you've entered bhavaṅga, your next becoming will be whatever it is your mind lands on? No one has the power to pull you back?

LPT: That's how it is. That's why you must practice training your mind to an expert level. While you're living, your mind must not be attached to anything. That way, once your final day draws near, you won't have to worry about anything. No one needs to whisper *Buddho, Buddho* in your ear, you don't need to worry about anyone, and you won't have to concern yourself with whether monks will chant *kusala dhamma* for you. How your children handle your funeral is up to them; whether or not they have someone perform a ritual to guide you to a favorable abode is not of your concern. You've ensured that you've done your utmost prior to all that. What your children elect to do is a separate issue.

P: Suppose you're about to die and experience a nimitta and feel pain –

LPT: There's no feeling (*vedanā*) in the state of bhavaṅga. Once you're in bhavaṅga, it's absolutely silent. Prior to entering bhavaṅga, if you have weighty kamma, you'll experience pain and suffering; your kamma will catch up to you. But if you have merit and wholesomeness, you'll depart in peace and quiet.

P: Is bhavaṅga like when someone is about to die, and their eyes lose their focus?

LPT: No.

Bhavaṅga is a state of mind; the eyes are completely unrelated.

P: Luang Por, I'd like to ask about ghosts. Why do some people claim that ghosts haunt them, while others don't? What causes a ghost to spook someone or not spook someone?

LPT: Who is the ghost spooking?

P: Well, people talk about it. What do you say to someone who is frightened of ghosts?

LPT: What can you say? Whatever you say, they'll still be afraid. They won't believe you because the fear is too deeply ingrained. Whether or not someone is afraid of ghosts is contingent on their contemplation – how well they understand the truth about animal and human spirits.

P: There was a monk who was afraid of ghosts.

LPT: That's not a monk; a true monk doesn't fear ghosts because he believes in kamma. That monk is just someone's son who shaved his head and donned saffron robes. His monkhood isn't complete; he's merely a monk by convention. A real monk is unafraid.

P: So, we don't have to fear ghosts?

LPT: Why would you fear them? It's just like I've said – they're merely of a different plane of existence. Because of my extensive experience in these matters, wherever I go, I'm unaffected.

P: My brother wants to change his name, as it's unlucky.



LPT: That's ridiculous. Whether someone is good or bad is not decided by their name, but rather by kamma.

P: My name is also unlucky. A monk had chosen my name, and my father disliked its masculine sound. He wanted me to change it, so a monk gave me a new name.

LPT: Monks can be so credulous. Why do they even become monks?

P: There are people who believe these things. You can't contradict their faith (saddhā).

LPT: Yes, you can.

P: These monks are afraid the laity will be displeased.

LPT: I'm not afraid they'll be displeased.

P: That's because you're a senior monk.

LPT: No, junior monks can say no, too. Those monks only serve their own interests.

P: Is making merit with a senior monk better than making merit with a junior monk?

LPT: Not necessarily. There are senior monks of low caliber and poor virtue; there are junior monks of high caliber and great virtue.



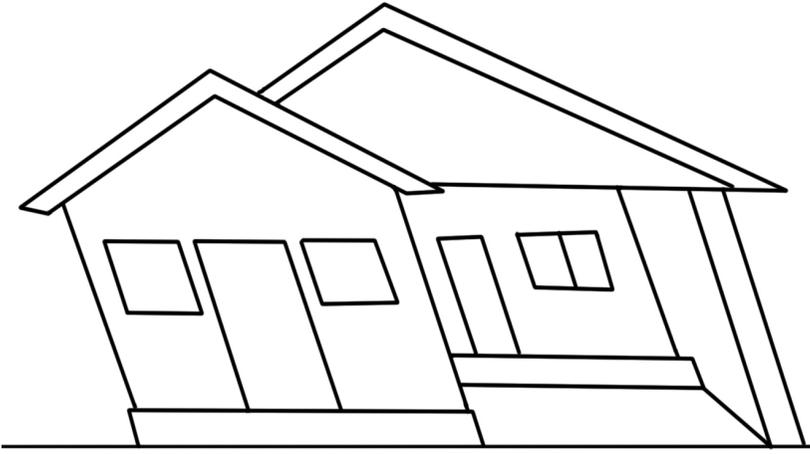


**June 5, 1998**

*Second Sermon*

I try to be direct and straightforward in my books. I wonder why it is so difficult for practitioners to understand my Dhamma teachings. After mulling this over, I concluded that the answer lies at the very beginning. If the foundation of your practice is skewed, whatever you build on it will be skewed. In other words, when you still have wrong views (*micchādiṭṭhi*) about how to practice, the practice you build upon it will subsequently be wrong. And it's no wonder that people are confused about how to practice. There are too many styles and factions to choose from and each of them make different claims.

When you practice, it's crucial to analyze what constitutes wrong practice (*micchā-paṭipatti*) and what constitutes right practice (*sammā-paṭipatti*). If your views are still wrong, your practice will be also be wrong. If you start with right view (*sammādiṭṭhi*), your practice will be right practice. In order to establish the foundation of right practice, you must first know what wrong practice is. Without a comparative definition, it's difficult to recognize what



right (*sammā*) is; you need something to measure it against – namely, wrong (*micchā*). So, the first step is analyzing and understanding the characteristics of wrong practice.

Study what the Buddha taught when he was alive and compare it to today's teachings. Which teachings are the direct path to ultimate enlightenment (*nibbāna*)? What did the Buddha teach? What are people teaching now? How do they compare? At the foundation of the Buddha's teachings lies wisdom (*paññā*). With good wisdom, your path will be right. The countless individuals who learned from the Buddha each started their practice with wisdom. These people were brimming with wrong view when they encountered the Buddha, so their very first step was to change wrong view to right view. Since the first five monks (*Pañcavaggiya*), each person had to first establish a right foundation upon which to build their practice. The Buddha taught people the way to *nibbāna*, so of course he knew the best course of instruction to establish for his students.

When it comes to practicing Dhamma, if you're missing wisdom, you're missing everything. For instance, you need wisdom to

understand morality (*sīla*), and you need to understand morality in order to abide by the moral code. If you're a monk and you lack the wisdom to understand the two hundred and twenty-seven precepts, you won't understand how to comply with them, and that'll buy you a ticket to the lowest hell realm (*avīci naraka*). The same concept applies for novices (*sāmaṇera*) upholding the ten precepts and laypeople upholding the five or eight precepts; you need wisdom to understand how to uphold the precepts.

That's why the Buddha established wisdom as the foundation of practice. These days, tranquil meditation (*samādhi*) is the foundation of practice; what a sharp contradiction to the Buddha's teachings. Back then, he laid a strong foundation of wisdom (*paññā*), right view (*sammādiṭṭhi*), and right thought (*sammāsaṅkappa*). Then followed the morality (*sīla*) grouping of right speech (*sammāvācā*), right action (*sammākammanta*), and right livelihood (*sammāājīva*), and then the concentration (*samādhi*) grouping of right effort (*sammāvayama*), right mindfulness (*sammāsati*), and right concentration (*sammāsamādhi*).

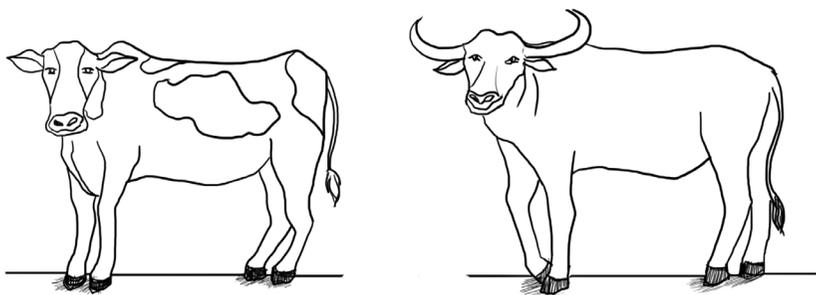
You must use your wisdom to study the morality grouping before you adopt the precepts. You must use your wisdom to understand the concentration grouping before you practice tranquil meditation. Don't just blindly plunge into meditation. Open your eyes and understand how to meditate before you start. Otherwise your concentration may become wrong concentration, or *micchā-samādhi*. Those who practiced *samādhi* during the Buddha's lifetime had to train their wisdom first, in order to ensure their concentration followed the correct principles; in this way, the corresponding *samādhi* could be right concentration, or *sammā-samādhi*. Would today's meditation practice even count as right concentration?

Practitioners don't know the answer to that, but what they do know is they'll start their samādhi practice with meditative mantras. In a single book, you'll encounter countless contradictory claims. Pick up any of today's books and you'll see.

After the fifth Buddhist council came the era of the authors of commentaries on the Pāli Canon (atthakathācariya). These commentators – the majority of which were ordinary, not enlightened people – reinterpreted the Buddha's teachings. Then followed the era of the authors of commentaries on the atthakatha commentaries (ṭīkācariya) in which more reinterpretations were made. Then in the subsequent era of the authors of commentaries on the ṭīka sub-commentaries (anuṭīkācariya), additional reinterpretations were made to reflect the times and customs. So, it's no surprise that what has trickled down to our era is this distorted.

In the Buddha's original teaching, the abbreviated grouping of the Noble Eightfold Path follows the correct order: wisdom, morality, concentration. In contemporary times, the teachings reflect the sub-sub-commentators' (anuṭīkācariya) efforts to simplify practice by reordering the path. While the edits theoretically simplify practice, they actually complicate practice because they're impossible to follow. The threefold training (sikkhā) of this era follows the sequence: morality, concentration, wisdom. The original threefold training of the Buddha's era corresponded to wisdom, morality, concentration.

So how does someone actually follow today's morality, concentration, wisdom doctrine? And how can following this new sequence lead you to enlightenment? I ask you this simple question – if someone who doesn't have wisdom tries to follow the precepts, will they be able to? No. It's like ordering a group of manicured, wealthy women



who have never cooked a day in their lives to cook a pot of food. Will they be able to? No, because they don't know anything about food or how to cook it. All they know is how to eat it. You can send them to the kitchen, but they won't be able to do anything. Similarly, if you order someone to follow the precepts, but they don't know what the precepts are, will they be successful in their endeavor? No. In order to adhere to the precepts, they must first know what the precepts are and how they are to be adhered to.

These days, they make it out to be so simple. But how can you tell someone to uphold the precepts when they don't have the wisdom to do so? It's like sending someone to look after the water buffaloes and cows, but they don't even know how to identify them. They don't know anything about the animals. How many of them are there? What color are they? Black? White? Are their horns short or long? If they don't know anything about the animals, how could they possibly take care of them? Before you can take care of something, you must first know what it is. How can you look after the precepts if you lack wisdom? You can't just suddenly uphold them; to do that would be senseless, unreasonable, and unrealistic, not to mention incongruous with the Buddha's teachings.

The Buddha taught wisdom before precepts. He taught us to use our wisdom to examine and understand each individual precept. He taught us to recognize the harm and resultant kamma that may arise from breaking each precept. You have to be smart and thorough in your knowledge of the precepts, so you'll know what to expect if you violate the moral code. Morality is a type of learned knowledge (*pariyatti*). You must study morality in order for your understanding of it to be comprehensive. Concentration is also another learned concept; it must also be studied and understood before being practiced.

But these days, practice follows an opposite course; it simply doesn't jive with what happened during the Buddha's lifetime. Sure, there are books that buttress these warped claims, and even Pāli quotes to seemingly place the teachings in the ancient time. But it really isn't difficult to produce Pāli words or phrases to corroborate teachings. It's not only the arahants that communicate in Pāli; highly educated people can also tie Pāli words to teachings. Pāli is no different from Chinese in that some concept exists, and the language is merely used to express that concept; you can attribute Pāli words to any contrived lesson.

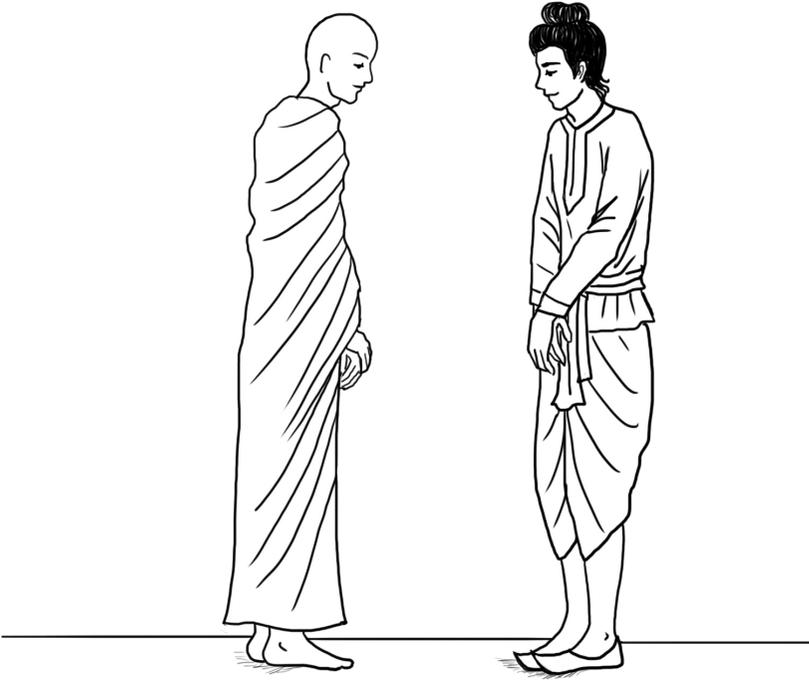
This Pāli teaching is well-known: *sīla paribhāvito samādhi mahapphalo hoti mahānisamso*: when virtuous conduct is fully developed, concentration will be gained. It sounds good, but how easy is it for people to completely conform to the precepts? It's easy to say, but difficult to do. Anyone can request the precepts, but how do you actually uphold them? Do you have the wisdom to understand how? No. Wisdom isn't even mentioned here. See, there are all these paradoxical teachings. The Buddha didn't teach this.



According to the aforementioned Pāli, concentration only arises from perfect morality. Could an individual who was deficient in their adherence to the precepts practice meditation? The truth is, yes. Meditation is a universal notion; the principles of meditation far predate the advent of Buddhism. Adherence to the precepts is not a prerequisite to meditation. All the ascetics and sages that practiced meditation did so without upholding the precepts. Of course, it's great if you follow the moral code – your practice will be much more straightforward – but that morality has to be right first, not wrong.

I've read up on all of it; I've studied the Tipiṭaka until I was weak in the knees. I sought the truth and discovered that things have changed so much since the Buddha's time. The most significant alterations took place during the era of the sub-sub-commentators (anuṭīkācariya), when morality, concentration, wisdom became the new dogma. The authors never considered how to actually put it into practice; their concerns were solely scholarly.

The second part of the Pāli teaching states: *samādhi paribhāvitā paññā mahapphalā hoti mahānisaṃsā*: *when concentration is fully developed, wisdom will be gained*. Is this accurate? Where's the evidence? When, where, and to whom did the Buddha teach this? Of the hundreds of thousands of people who attained a stage of enlightenment – stream-enterer (sotāpanna), once-returner (sakadāgāmi), non-returner (anāgāmi), or fully enlightened (arahant) – whose wisdom sprouted from meditation? I've gone through the scriptures with a fine-tooth comb and have never found a single case of this. No models of the theory exist, yet the theory exists. People subscribe to these paradigms but don't seek out evidence to either prove or disprove them. I can even challenge you



to find a single discourse that authenticates this modified concept. You won't find one. No noble individuals (ariyapuggalas) derived wisdom from meditation; rather, it was the reverse – wisdom begat concentration.

What happened when Venerable Sāriputta listened to Venerable Assaji's discourse? Did Venerable Assaji tell Upatissa (Venerable Sāriputta) to sit down and meditate first? On his alms round in Rājagaha, did the Elder Assaji direct Upatissa to start practicing by concentrating on a meditative phrase until he entered deep meditative absorptions (jhāna)? Is that what the scriptures reflect? No. Elder Assaji simply relayed the teaching, *Of all those things that from a cause arise, Tathāgata the cause thereof has told; And how they cease to be, that too he tells; This is the teaching of the Great*

*Recluse*, and Upatissa became an ariyapuggala. This is what you'd find in the original scriptures from the Buddha's era; it's simple and straightforward. There wasn't a morality or meditation prerequisite. When Upatissa went to his friend Kolita (Venerable Mahā Moggallāna) and relayed the teaching, he didn't warm him up with a meditative mantra or meditative absorptions. Back then, it was purely wisdom that enabled individuals to win a stage of enlightenment.

Nowadays, before you can become an ariyapuggala, you are required to do meditative acrobatics and weave in and out of various meditative absorptions. For someone who doesn't understand the founding principles of Buddhism, these requirements can induce a migraine. There are so many stages and steps to practice – it's quite overwhelming. Supernormal insight (*nāṇa*), the labyrinth of meditative absorptions (*jhāna*), the sixteen stages of insight (*vipassanā-nāṇa*), etc. – it's all a big, tangled mess. No wonder Dhamma practice is so difficult for today's practitioners. The teachers have a hard time at it, too. If they researched what the Buddha really taught, they'd be encouraged; the doctrine is really quite simple, and the practice is quite simple.

Today's practice is complicated because there are more steps to follow and more *jhāna* requirements. People don't understand how to practice because the instructions are too convoluted; meditation practice is much too elaborate and complex. During the Buddha's lifetime, which ariyapuggalas derived wisdom from meditation? I've thoroughly studied this and there are no instances of meditation giving birth to wisdom. I sympathize with today's practitioners; it's quite the headache.

People say they practice vipassanā-kammaṭṭhāna, and it sure sounds fancy. But when you ask them what this elaborate practice entails, what they describe is simply mantra meditation; it's not even the forty objects of meditation (samatha-kammaṭṭhāna). They can profess to practice whatever they want, but the contents of their practice don't correspond to the label they've slapped on it. When you practice, don't discard the Buddha's teachings. Everyone says they're following the Buddha's teachings, but what they are actually following is the ascetics' teachings. Sitting with your eyes and mind shut is the ascetic's way. So, what will come of it? Well, if you practice like an ascetic, you become an ascetic. It's the opposite of the Buddha's teachings. Today's instructors purport that wisdom arises from meditation. Is this accurate? I will be the only one to stand up and tell you that it is not. The more the state of serenity expands within your mind, the more your wisdom will contract; this is for certain. You'll stop thinking and instead dwell in an equanimity-based meditative absorption (upekkhā-jhāna). I've studied up on meditative absorptions and found that compared to us, the ascetics and seers (tāpasa) of those days were exponentially superior in their meditative attainments, yet none of them experienced wisdom arising.

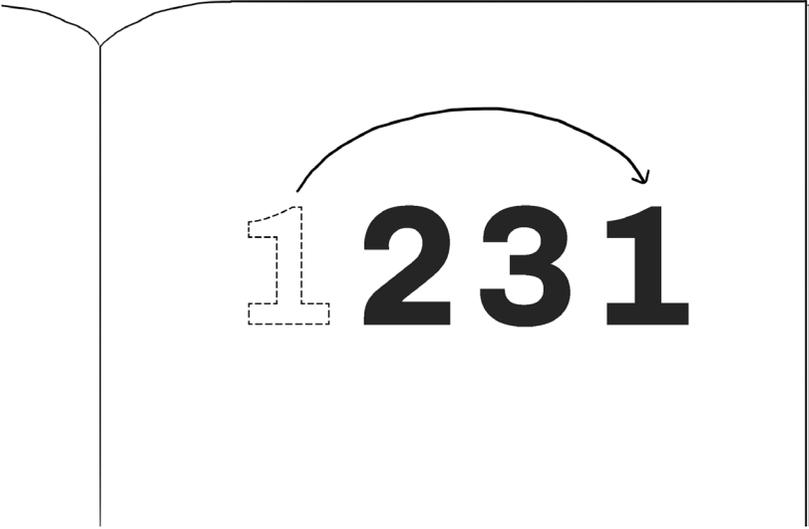
When our Buddha was under the tutelage of the two ascetics, he was immersed in deep meditative absorptions for over five years. The Buddha had cultivated a wisdom-prominent personality (paññādhika), and after five years his mind had achieved the ultimate level of serene formless meditative absorptions (arūpa-jhāna, jhāna-samāpatti), and still, no wisdom arose. This example is so plain to see; why don't people open their eyes? These days, people shut off their eyes and ears and teach each other. As it stands, I haven't even gone full blast with these revelations. That campaign is yet to come.

Whatever will happen will happen. I'm going to tell the world the truth about how to practice Buddhism. Today's teachings have become so mindless. I don't care whom I offend. In Thailand, I'm already starting to shine the spotlight on these illogical doctrines, and some people are shocked and scandalized by it. It challenges their views.

You can ask me anything about the Buddhist doctrine – in fact, I challenge you to. How did they practice during the Buddha's time? How did they so easily attain a stage of enlightenment? There are two main personality types: the deliverance through wisdom type (paññāvimutti) and the deliverance of mind type (cetovimutti). How did their practices differ? You must study all of this. Otherwise, you'll lose your way. The claim that you must journey through tranquil meditation, like the ascetics, before attaining a stage of enlightenment is absolutely false. People completely misunderstand this.

How did the cetovimutti actually practice? How did the paññāvimutti actually practice? The steps were very clear back then, but muddled today. Nowadays, if a teacher instructs you to practice, everyone immediately thinks of meditation, as if practice is limited to mantra meditation or meditation in general. Who teaches wisdom? No one does. Once you start to think, they forbid it for fear of unfocused thoughts. You are made to stop thinking. Therein lies the problem – you do meditation but want wisdom to arise. Now how on Earth would that happen? You'll only encounter the concept in sermons, but never in real life. Meditation hampers wisdom; it doesn't open the door for thoughts to emerge, but rather it closes it.

Were the sub-subcommentary authors (anuṭṭikācariya) ariyapuggalas? No. If they were, they would have written instructions in line with



what the Buddha actually taught. They would have simply abbreviated the Buddha's teachings; his teachings were already explicit. Right view and right thought – both wisdom-based – came first. Then, right speech, right action, right livelihood – all morality-based. Finally, right effort, right mindfulness, right concentration – all concentration-based. You have to write it how the Buddha prescribed – wisdom, morality, concentration is the authentic sequence. But what is practiced today? It's the reverse path. That's why I proclaim it loud and clear, wherever I am giving a sermon. Anyone can debate it with me. Bring the Tipiṭaka – any page you flip to oozes wisdom.

What did the Buddha teach his students, from the first five monks (Pañcavaggiya) and onward? Did he teach wisdom or meditation? Wisdom. What did he teach the five monks? Wisdom. He taught them the five aggregates. What did they employ to contemplate on it? Wisdom. From those first five monks to his final student, the

Buddha always taught wisdom. Notably absent were the meditation contests and the notion that after achieving a tranquil meditative state, wisdom would burst forth; you'll find evidence of this concept in manuals, but you won't find it in people. However, there are many people who demonstrate the credibility of what I am teaching. There's both written proof and human proof. Come contest it! There's no human testament to the claim that wisdom comes from meditation, only a paper testament. That's incomplete. My teaching is complete. I've got the paper testaments and the human testaments. I've read the Tipiṭaka many times.

Before I die, I want to leave this nugget of truth with the world, so that people can think about it and consider whether what I've said is accurate or inaccurate. Is it inaccurate? Yes, when pitted against some theory, but it's accurate when pitted against a mere ounce of reason. We have to use reason if we're going to talk about the Buddha's era. Teachings of this era are a separate issue. You have to employ rationality when contemplating. This is part of Dhamma practice.

The explanation is long winded because it's not easy to get someone to reverse course and be right (*sammā*). Because today's manuals have written diversions into the path of truth, it's difficult to decipher the map of how to practice. There are numerous meditation masters in Thailand; everyone teaches meditation. The more they teach meditation, the dumber they become. They have no wisdom. They tell you, *if you want to know Dhamma, read the manuals*. The manuals are manuals – not wisdom. All you'll extract from manuals is knowledge, not actual wisdom.

During the Buddha's time, in olden days, people possessed little knowledge. When the Buddha taught them, they'd immediately

contemplate on his words and become ariyapuggalas. Consider King Bimbisara and his company of one hundred and twenty thousand – when the Buddha blessed them with a discourse, did he instruct them to meditate until serene? No. He gave a sermon, and they used their wisdom to follow along. See, they already had wisdom; everyone has wisdom within them. It's only a matter of training that wisdom so that you can understand the truth as it is.

When they speak of wisdom arising, what is it that arises? Understanding arises – understanding according to the truth of reality. After contemplating, understanding arises. The majority of people subscribe to the belief that after you attain a tranquil meditative state, wisdom will burst forth like mushrooms or fireworks, and go on a defilement (kilesa) killing spree. Once those defilements have been eliminated, you'll simply glide into the ranks of the enlightened. This is what people believe. Is this wise or foolish? They don't know any Dhamma; they are in excess of stupidity. How can wisdom so effortlessly materialize from meditation?

The Buddha didn't teach magic or superstition. It's not like you chant an incantation and the defilements are expelled. The Buddha taught dhamma, not superstition. How could silent meditation simply trigger wisdom to pop out and wipe out defilements? It's crazy talk. People are too gullible. It's quite difficult to get people to change their minds on this. They understand the Buddha's teachings to have magical underpinnings – meditate on *Bud-dho-Bud-dho-Bud-dho* and some great power shoots out and vanquishes all defilements. People are that credulous. Why don't they take stock of what the Buddha taught, what he clearly left out in the open? I'm the only one teaching this in the entire world. I accept my fate – if I must die, I'll die – but I'm leaving this truth in the world.





**June 6, 1998**

P: How can we know what is good? What if we say something is good, but others say otherwise?

LPT: You use reality as your basis. Even if others disagree with your assessment, leave them to their opinion. You must see the truth as it exists in reality. If something arises, exists momentarily, and then ceases to be – that’s definitely real and true. Once born, we must part from that which we adore – that’s absolutely true. There is nothing eternal in this world, everything must die – this is all true. Impermanence is real and true. Everything must change. If you have a partner or husband, there is constant change – this is reality. Things change on their own; this truth is innate.

P: If there’s nothing real in this world, there’s no true value. Why should we even do anything? Why should we go to school or work?

LPT: It’s true in a conventional (sammuti) sense; it’s real while you’re in this world. You must work because you’re still alive. Why would you eat, if nothing is real?



P: We should eat with moderation, for the sake of survival.

LPT: Right. *Santuṭṭhī paramaṃ dhanam: the greatest wealth is contentment.* Dhamma practitioners don't require much; they're content to have enough to get by.

P: I can't just let go of these things because other people have given me much to carry. I don't want them, but my family has placed these heavy burdens on my shoulders. So, what am I to do?

LPT: Carry them if you have to. They're only heavy if you don't know how to bear them. When we speak of not carrying burdens, it's about whether or not the mind carries them. There are two ways to shoulder responsibility: mentally and physically. While you may be physically compelled to take on the obligation, you are not mentally compelled to do so. Whether or not you suffer the burden is measured by your mind; attachment and clinging are mental facets. You'll be attached only if your mind provides that opening. It's as if robbers come to your house and you open the door to let them in. You must try to close up the opening so they can't get in; if they step inside, they'll cause pandemonium.

The mind is a big deal – Dhamma, good, or bad is all determined by the mind. You can choose who you let into your home; who should enter and who should not? You can't let everyone in; you must know how to choose. There is good out there. What will you let into your mind? You must have wisdom in order to know how to choose. What is good? What is bad? You can't let it all in and then determine what is good or bad afterwards; you must choose before you let them in.

It's like taking medication. You have to know what the medicines are before you take them. You can't just take them at random; you could end up taking a laxative and die. You have to choose before you take it, not take it before you choose. It's the same when you select a husband or wife. You have to choose before you take them. If you take them before you choose, you'll encounter problems. Everything is this way – you must choose before you take.

P:      What if you don't know what to choose?

LPT:    If you can't choose, too bad for you. It's every man for himself. If your wisdom is sharp, you'll be able to choose. If you've made your best choice and still meet unfavorable results, you can chalk it up to your kamma. You have to accept it, as it's what you've chosen.

Choosing is an important issue. You have to choose when selecting a partner. You also choose whether or not to buy a particular house. When you choose a necklace, you turn it over and over in your hands – why? You have to be able to discern whether or not it's genuine. When you pick your mate, you're sure they'll prove an excellent life partner: they're attractive, courteous, and financially stable. And in the beginning, things are great, but after a couple years, they've shed all pretenses and let loose their true tiger nature. You have to accept it.

P: Whatever you pick, it's all fake. A bit of real mixed in but mostly fake, or a bit of fake mixed in but mostly real.

LPT: Too much fake mixed in isn't good. A combination of more real than fake is still preferable.

P: So, then we shouldn't pick anything. We should choose to not choose.

LPT: You could do that, but then don't come complaining after the fact. People who don't choose can still make mistakes. That's how things are. When you want to buy a car, you don't just buy any old car – you don't decide to buy a car simply after hearing the selling price. You have to consider many factors: the number of years it's been driven, its mileage, its maintenance history.

P: Choose not to buy it. Choose not to drive a car.

LPT: If you choose there's a set of consequences, and if you don't choose there's a set of consequences. If your friends drive past you in their cars, all you'll be able to do is stare. I have a student in Khon Kaen, a doctor with a nurse for a wife. This doctor couldn't take his wife to any societal functions because her talking would spoil the atmosphere and jeopardize his relationships. She didn't know what should or shouldn't be said; she spoke without thinking first. The husband told me that he was planning to divorce his wife. She didn't meet his expectations, no one wanted to associate with her, people were disgusted with her, and she neglected to care for her family. He couldn't take it anymore; he was at the end of his rope with her.

I told him, "All that you've told me here is good!" He asked me how on Earth could it be good when his wife was driving him up the wall and he couldn't tolerate any more of her. I responded that he was



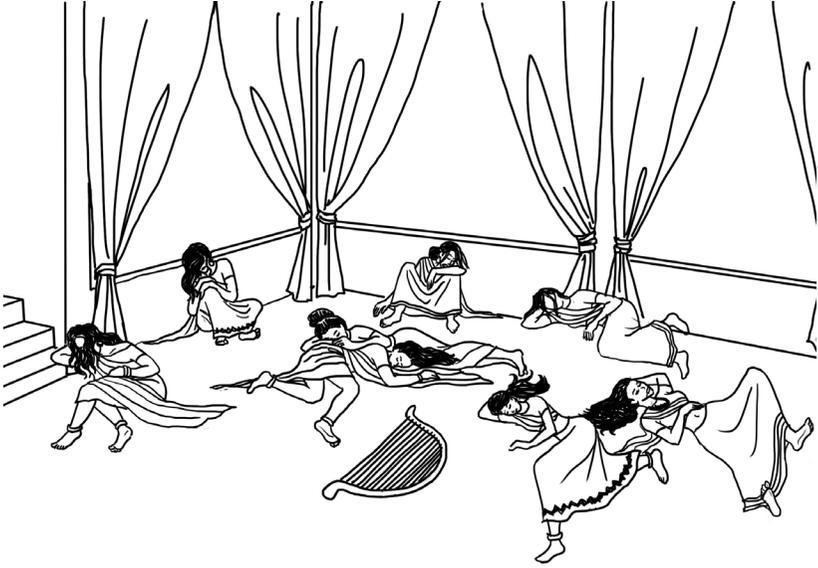
wrong at the very start. This wife was all his perfections of character (pāramī) could afford him. Who says a wife like this is easy to come by? In fact, it is incredibly difficult to obtain a wife like his. He looked at me, perplexed – *a wife like this is difficult to come by?*

Don't go hunting for dhamma in books; it's a waste of time and it destroys your vision. Instead, read the dhamma from your own life. It's a rare find, a golden nugget. You have an invaluable opportunity to see the true nature of women: how they think, how they talk. It's not easy to come across a blessing like this. You clearly have ample merit (puñña). If you had a better wife, you'd be at her mercy. You've been enchanted with the world for much too long. Now that your wife has gifted you this rare opportunity, use it to teach yourself, to foster your Dhamma practice.

In a sense, what you have here is a good match. It may not be a good match for destiny, but indeed a good match for a Dhamma practitioner. If a practitioner has a partner like this, it's a boost, propelling you towards enlightenment (nibbāna). It's a boon. If you had a wife that was warm and amiable, you'd be charmed and spellbound for ages. This outcome is great; she's the ladder you scale to reach nibbāna. Take it all in until you've truly had enough and are fed up with rebirth. You must possess the fortuity and pāramī to apply what you have towards Dhamma practice in the right way. Good wives are for fools, not for the wise. The wise recognize how an unfavorable wife can easily convey them to enlightenment.

Each time you're born, you glimpse the nature of women. Will the next rebirth be like this one? Yes, it'll be the same. You have something to contemplate on. You have a terrific chance to study the world, to study women, starting with your wife. Just accelerate your practice such that you experience disenchantment (nibbidā) from clearly penetrating the truth about women. When you look into the future, you should experience a weariness with the world. A good wife isn't good – she's only good for fools. The wise use their wives for Dhamma material. If this wife is what your destiny and pāramī allow, then take it; it's good.

From that point forward, he stopped complaining about her. It got to where his wife came to inform me that her husband's admonishments had completely ceased. She was clueless to the fact that though he stopped voicing his dissatisfaction, he was still inwardly lamenting her actions; he was merely using it for Dhamma contemplations now.



Women are the easy route to nibbāna. Women must study men, and men must study women. Each gender must analyze its counterpart. This is where dhamma lies. There's the adage: *first to rise, last to sleep*. It's absolutely spot on. If any woman doesn't follow this advice, she'll lose her husband in no time at all. If a woman rises after her husband or sleeps before her husband, he'll become weary of her after seeing her sprawled on the bed in an unkempt manner. That's why the wife must sleep after her husband goes to bed and rise before her husband awakes, so that he doesn't witness how she sleeps. Wives who don't observe these practices won't be a wife for much longer. Slumbering women are like corpses or zombies. When Yasakulaputta happened upon his consorts and servants sprawled across the floor, he was overcome with disgust; reminded of zombies sleeping in a cemetery, he instantly resolved to ordain. Women have to be vigilant of many things; the same applies for men, as well.

Practitioners don't expect much from the world. They don't obsess over lovers and spouses. As half of a couple, these fathers, mothers, grandfathers, and grandmothers carry out the remainder of lives in residence with their partners. But in their minds, they are not in residence; they are only fulfilling their commitments and duties. Their minds are focused on ripening their Dhamma practice. Practitioners simply act in accordance with conventional roles. As a wife, you must fulfill your wifely duty to the best of your ability. As a mother, you must fulfill your motherly duty to the best of your ability.

But your mind is a separate matter. You have no husband nor children – there's only you. There aren't any burdens or responsibilities tying you down. When something happens, you respond as is appropriate for your role. If your husband or children take ill, you tend to them according to your duty, but your mind doesn't bear that burden. This is how practitioners are. They don't shed rivers of tears upon their husband's passing, lamenting how there is no one like him in this entire world and they'll never love again. Then a couple of days after the cremation, these inconsolable widows are dressed to impress; that's what you get with women. A woman's words are like a tongue, flipping back and forth, unable to be pinned down.

P: Men are the same way, Luang Por!

P: It's not true, Luang Por! I wish to contradict that – it's not true for everyone.

LPT: Yes, but it is for most [laughs].





P: Personally, I admit that I am exactly like you've said. My husband responds favorably whenever I sweet talk him. When I've done something wrong and my husband comes home, I wrap myself around his leg and wheedle him with syrupy words.

LPT: You must know how to solve the problem, and solve it in time, too. There's a folktale from northeastern Thailand. There was a wife who greatly despised her husband. Whenever cock fighting season arrived, he'd neglect his work in order to dedicate every waking second to ministering to his prized cocks. While the wife manually pounded the rice, her husband never lifted a finger in assistance; she was exhausted and utterly exasperated. She considered how she could solve this problem. She would have to kill all his roosters. How would she do that? If she didn't plan carefully, she could suffer serious injuries while attempting to kill them. She began to plot the massacre. When her husband wasn't around, she took her pestle, whacked a rooster on the head, and threw it into her mortar. Then her husband returned home drunk. She considered

the best time to disclose what she'd done. If she caught him at the wrong time, he'd wallop her, because she had killed a prized cock of incredible value. She had to pick an ideal time to confess, one that wouldn't land her under his foot. Who knows when that would be?

P: When the husband wants to make a trade.

LPT: Precisely. What does he want to trade?

P: Everyone knows! [everyone laughs]

P: Then what happened?

LPT: The husband concluded that it was the cock's kamma! [laughs] See, you have to be smart about it.

P: The husband is suddenly happy to attribute the death to kamma.

LPT: Right. This is *kālaññū*, knowing proper timing. When something happens, what will you say to get yourself off the hook? You must be smart about it. When the time came, the wife said, "While I was pounding the rice, the cock leapt into the mortar on its own! I couldn't stop in time and the pestle struck the cock – [in a sweet tone] it was the rooster's kamma" [laughs].

See, this is *kālaññū* – knowing the appropriate words to say and the appropriate time to say them. Even if you've done wrong, with proper timing, you won't get kicked. But with improper timing, you'll die alongside the bludgeoned rooster. You have to be smart with your words. Wrong can turn into right, heavy can turn into light. With sharp, expert mindful wisdom, you'll be smart about what you say and do.

Some wives make a mistake and then turn on the charm; by clutching their husband's leg and using honeyed, deferential words, they've struck the right male heartstrings. Once the wife has hit the right spot, the husband instantly softens. This is smart. You have to craft a strategy, first; you must be confident that it'll prove successful.

P: I went out and bought an expensive purse and now I have to figure out how to explain myself to my husband. I don't know what to do yet.

LPT: If you have wisdom, you can lessen the effect of the repercussions. Instead of harsh admonishment, he may only lightly chide you.

P: If he has strong words for me, I'll just take him upstairs; that takes care of it. This is the wily charm of females.

LPT: There are countless feminine wiles.

P: At that point, it doesn't matter how many thousands were spent on the purse!

P: It was the rooster's kamma!

LPT: The rooster's kamma [laughs].

I am an observant person. I've studied it all – a woman's life from youth, to teenage years, to adult years, to family life, to old age. How was it when she started her family? In one case, when she first went to live with her grandmother, she was courteous and shy, like a neatly folded cloth. She'd eat in a prim manner, only taking small portions. But after giving birth to her first child, her true stripes began to show. After her second and third children were born, her true nature was completely unrestrained. Her grandmother had to

concede defeat. And if this is what it was like at her grandmother's house, imagine what it was like when she left to cohabit with her husband; he basically became her servant. She spoke to him with barbed words, and she was shrewd and cunning. If her husband neglected some responsibility, she'd speak to her child while her husband was within earshot. For instance, when her son informed her that they didn't have any coal to cook with, she would say in a stage whisper, "Don't speak too loudly; if your father comes and sees, he'll do it himself." [laughs] Women have many tricks up their sleeves. Men have to yield to women because they simply can't keep up. They always find themselves outfoxed. A man who can outwit a woman is a rare and amazing specimen.

Women are always back biting. [laughs] You can't put down your guard. They're always scheming and planning. They keep all old accounts tucked away in a trusty basket. When it comes time for reckoning, they pluck from their collection all the incriminating evidence. At that point, the husband can only admit defeat.

Most women – present company excluded – are two faced. They don a different mask when your back is turned. The deadliest female weapons are tears and tone of voice; they're truly lethal. Women can adapt them to their use whenever they so desire. When something goes wrong, [in a saccharine tone] "Oh dear..." – the female voice shreds the male heart. And if their tone of voice doesn't finish the job, women simply turn on the water works – that'll cinch it.



*KPY USA Retreat at Wat Yarnna Rangsee Buddhist Monastery, VA*

## Glossary of Terms

**Abhiññā** – supernormal insight; psychic power; intuitive powers that come from the practice of concentration; the six higher powers: magical powers like flying and walking on water (iddhi-vidhā), clairaudience or divine ear (dibba-sota), telepathy or knowing others' thoughts (ceto-pariya-ñāṇa), recollecting one's former existences and past lives (pubbe-nivāsānussati), divine eye or knowing others' kammic destinations (dibba-cakkhu), certainty of the extinction of all cankers (āsavakkhaya).

**Ācariya** – teacher; regular instructor.

**Ādittapariyāya Sutta** – Fire Sermon Discourse; sermon given to fire worshippers on the topic of achieving freedom from suffering through detachment from the five senses and mind.

**Akiriya** – not kiriya; non-action; non-deed; non-performance; that which is not displayed externally; that which is kept inside – personal and private.

**Anāgāmi** – non-returner; the third level of enlightenment on the path to nibbāna; noble disciple on the third stage of holiness.

**Anāgāmi-phala** – the fruit of never-returning; the result of a non-returner.

**Anāgāmi-magga** – the path of never-returning; the path of the non-returner.

**Ānāpāna-sati** – mindfulness of breathing; meditation on in-out breathing.

**Anattā** – not-self; non-self; not-ego; cessation of existence in a conventional or supposed form; substanceless.

**Anattalakkhaṇa Sutta** – Not-Self Characteristic Discourse; aka Pañcavaggiya Sutta, or Group of Five Discourse; the second sermon given by the Buddha.

**Anicca** – impermanence; change; transience; inconstancy.

**Anumodanā** – rejoice; an expression of thanks, gratitude, or appreciation; sympathetic joy.

**Anuṭṭikācariya** – sub-subcommentary; authors of commentaries on the tika commentaries.

**Appagabbho** – not impulsive; free from boldness or impudence; retiring; modest.

**Appanā-samādhi** – absorption meditation; full meditative concentration; fixed concentration.

**Arahant, arahat** – one who has reached ultimate enlightenment and will not be reborn again.

**Arahatta-magga** – the path of enlightenment; the path to arahantship.

**Arahatta-phala** – the fruit of enlightenment; the fruit of arahantship.

**Ari** – enemy.

**Ariya** – noble; distinguished; one who has attained higher knowledge.

**Ariya-magga** – the Noble Eightfold Path; the sublime paths of the holy life; the sequential path leading to the end of suffering:

1. right view (sammādiṭṭhi), 2. right thought (sammāsaṅkappa),  
3. right speech (sammāvācā), 4. right action (sammākammanta),  
5. right livelihood (sammāājīva), 6. right effort (sammāviriya),  
7. right mindfulness (sammāsati), 8. right concentration (sammāsamādhi).

**Ariya-phala** – the fruit of enlightenment; having attained a level of enlightenment from following the Buddhist path, or magga.

**Ariyapuggala** – *lit.* a noble person; a holy individual; noble ones; one who has attained one or more levels of enlightenment: stream-

enterer (sotāpanna), once-returner (sakadāgāmi), non-returner (anāgāmi), enlightened (arahant).

**Ariya-sacca** – noble truth; objective, universal truths; the Four Noble Truths: suffering (dukkha), origin of suffering (samudaya), cessation of suffering (nirodha), the path of practice leading to the cessation of suffering (magga).

**Arūpabhava** – an existence in the fine immaterial realm.

**Arūpa-brahma, arūpa-loka** – the world of immaterial form; the fine, immaterial sphere of existence; four heavenly realms devoid of substance and form: the infinity of space, the infinity of consciousness, the infinity of nonbeing, the infinity of neither perception nor nonperception; rebirth in these realms is caused by attainment of formless meditative absorptions (arūpa-jhāna).

**Arūpa-jhāna** – fine immaterial jhāna; states of deep and tranquil meditation; four states of formless meditation; four levels of non-material meditations.

**Āsava** – mental intoxicants; mental impurities; cankers.

**Āsavakhayaṇṇa** – the knowledge of the cessation of mental intoxication.

**Asekha-puggala** – one who does not require any further training; one who needn't study; an arahant; the adept.

**Asubha** – filthy; ugly; unattractive; loathsome; foul.

**Asura** – demon; titan; demi-god; lower-level deities known for their anger and supernormal powers.

**Attā** – self; identity; ego; conceit; pride.

**Atthakatha** – authoritative commentaries.

**Atthakathācariya** – commentary; authors of commentaries on the Pāli Canon.



**Atthaññū, atthaññutā** – one who knows the meaning; one who knows what is good; knowing the consequence; knowing the result; knowing the meaning or purpose.

**Avīci** – *lit.* without waves; the lowest level of the hell realm.

**Avijjā** – ignorance; delusion; delusion about the nature of the mind; unawareness; lack of knowledge.

**Avijjā-ogha** – the flood of ignorance.

**Āyatana** – sense bases; there are six internal sense bases or cognitive faculties (five sense organs – eyes, ears, nose, tongue, body – and the mind) paired with six external sense bases which are their respective objects (visible form, sound, scent, taste, touch, mental objects).

**Bala** – strength; stability; powers; the Five Strengths: faith (saddhā), effort (virīya), mindfulness (sati), concentration (samādhi), wisdom (paññā).

**Bhava** – becoming; existence; life; realm; birth; state of becoming.

**Bhava-ogha** – the flood of becoming.

**Bhava-taṇhā** – craving for existence; craving to be; desire for a feeling to remain the same.

**Bhāvanā** – contemplation; development; cultivating; producing; mental development.

**Bhavaṅga** – life-continuum; ground of becoming; latent ground state of consciousness; passive mode of intentional consciousness; mental process which conditions the next mental process at the moment of death and rebirth.

**Bhikkhu** – Buddhist monk; monk; a fully ordained monastic; a fully ordained disciple of the Buddha; a monk who abides by 227 precepts.

**Bhikkhunī** – Buddhist nun; nun; a fully ordained female monastic; a nun who abides by 311 precepts.

**Bodhipakkhiyā-dhammā** – virtues partaking of enlightenment; requisites of enlightenment; seven sets of enlightenment qualities; thirty-seven qualities contributing to or constituting enlightenment: Four Foundations of Mindfulness (Satipaṭṭhāna), Four Right Exertions (Sammāpādhāna), Four Bases of Mental Power (Iddhipāda), Five Spiritual Faculties (Indriya), Five Strengths (Bala), Seven Factors of Awakening (Bojjhaṅga), Noble Eightfold Path (Ariya-Magga).

**Bodhisatta** – a Buddha-to-be; a future Buddha; he who will necessarily become the Buddha; a term used to describe the Buddha in his former existences and pre-enlightenment.

**Bojjhaṅga** – enlightenment factors; the Seven Factors of Awakening; the Seven Factors of Enlightenment: mindfulness (sati-sambojjhaṅga), investigation of the law (dhamma-vicaya-sambojjhaṅga), energy (viriya-sambojjhaṅga), rapture (pīti-sambojjhaṅga), tranquility (passaddhi-sambojjhaṅga), concentration (samādhi-sambojjhaṅga), equanimity (upekkhā).

**Brahma** – a divine being of the form sphere or formless sphere; inhabitant of the higher heavens.

**Brahma-loka** – Brahma world; a heavenly realm comprised of the form-material realm (rūpa-brahma) and formless-immaterial realm (arūpa-brahma); see: Three Realms of Existence.

**Brahmacariyā** – complete chastity; religious life; holy life; refers to observance of vows of holiness, particularly of chastity.

**Brahmavihārā** – Four Great Virtues; the four sublime abodes attained through development of loving-kindness (mettā), compassion (karuṇā), sympathetic joy (muditā), and equanimity (upekkhā).

**Buddho** – awake; enlightened; an epithet for the Buddha.

**Bummatta devatā** – ground dwelling devas; earth-bound deities; less powerful deities residing near the earth.

**Cakkhu-ñāṇa** – see: dibba-cakkhu.

**Caṅkama** – walking meditation; meditation in the form of walking back and forth along a prescribed path.

**Cetasika** – *lit.* belonging to the mind; mental factors; mental states; mental events; concomitants of consciousness; fifty-two mental factors; mental factors that coexist with the citta or co-arise with the citta and fall away with the citta.

**Ceto-pariya-ñāṇa, cetopariyañāṇa** – telepathy; penetration of the minds of others.

**Cetovimutti** – deliverance of mind; freedom of mind; awareness release; those with the concentration-oriented personality type.

**Chanda** – zeal; will; the will to do; resolve; impulse.

**Citta** – mind; soul; consciousness; state of mind; as one of the four bases of mental power: striving, seeking, pursuing, concentration, attention, thinking about the goal.

**Cīvara** – monastic robe; any of the three monk garments; the upper or inner robe.

**Dassana** – *lit.* seeing; sight; realizing; intuition; insight.

**Deva, devatā** – *lit.* radiant one; deity; heavenly or celestial being; divine beings.

**Dhamma** – truth; the Truth; the universal truth; ultimate reality; nature; constitution or nature of a thing; justice; righteousness; in relation to the āyatana: a cognizable object, mind-object, mental-object, idea; when capitalized: the Buddha's teachings, the Doctrine.

**Dhamma-vicaya** – investigation of the Truth; research on the Doctrine; search for the truth.

**Dhammaññū, dhammaññutā** – one who knows the Doctrine; knowing the cause; knowing the dhamma; knowing the law.

**Dhura** – duty; burden; responsibility; charge.

**Dhūtaṅga** – *lit.* shaking off; renunciation; a group of thirteen austerities or ascetic practices: using only abandoned robes, wearing only three robes, all food must be collected on alms round, not skipping houses or showing favoritism on alms round, taking one single meal per day, only eating from your own alms bowl, refusing all further food, to remain secluded (forest dwelling), to remain beneath a tree without a shelter or roof, to remain in the open air without shelter, to reside among graveyard or cremation grounds, to be satisfied with any dwelling, to live in the three postures (walking, standing, sitting) and never lie down.

**Dibba-cakkhu** – divine eye; clairvoyance; supernatural sight; ability to know the kammic destinations of others; ability to see beings in other realms; ability to see the future.

**Dibba-sota** – divine ear; clairaudience; supernatural hearing; ability to hear sounds – human or otherwise, near or far.

**Diṭṭhi** – view; perspective; position; vision of things; theory; belief; dogma.

**Diṭṭhi-māna** – see māna.

**Diṭṭhi-ogha** – the flood of view.

**Dukkha** – suffering; misery; anxiety; discomfort; bodily pain; mental pain; unpleasant or undesired feeling; the first of the Four Noble Truths: suffering.

**Dukkha-vedanā** – painful feeling; negative feeling; dislike.

**Evam** – thus; in this way; so; this term is used in Thailand as a formal closing to a sermon.

**Four Noble Truths** – see: Ariya-sacca.

**Gantha dhura** – the vocation of books; book duty; the burden of intellectual study.

**Garukakamma** – heavy kamma; grave, weighty kamma that cannot be obviated by any other kamma.

**Geḥa-devatā** – house deities.

**Iddhi-vidhā, iddhividhā** – supernormal powers; psychic powers; various magic powers like replicating and projecting bodily-images of oneself, invisibility, passing through solid objects, diving into and rising from the solid earth, walking on water, floating or flying through the air, touching the sun and moon, ascending to the Brahma world in the highest heavens.

**Iddhipāda** – the Four Paths of Accomplishment; the roads to power (or success); the means of accomplishing one's own end or purpose; the Four Bases of Mental Power: zeal (chanda), consciousness (citta), effort (virīya), analysis (vīmaṃsā).

**Indriya** – the sense-faculties; spiritual-faculties; Five Spiritual Faculties: faith (saddhā), concentration (samādhi), energy (virīya), mindfulness (sati), wisdom (paññā).

**Jaṭila** – matted hair ascetics; ascetics with clotted or entangled hair; the three fire worshipping brothers (Tebhātika-Jaṭilas): Uruvelā Kassapa, Gayā Kassapa, Nadi Kassapa.

**Jhāna** – meditation; absorption; meditative absorption; a state of serene meditation; deep mediation.

**Jhāna-samāpatti** – meditative attainment.

**Kālaññū, kālaññutā** – one who knows the proper time; the quality of one who knows the proper time; knowing how to choose and keep time.

**Kalyāṇamitta** – noble friend; admirable friend; honest friend; good companion; a mentor or teacher of Dhamma.

**Kāma** – sense-desire; desire; sensuality; an object of sensual enjoyment; sensual pleasures; subjective sensuality (sense-desire) or objective sensuality (five sense objects).

**Kāma-loka** – the sensuous world; the world of sense desire; realm of desires; sense-based realm; sense-sphere; eleven realms dominated by the five senses: seven are favorable destinations (one human and six deva realms), and four are unfavorable destinations (demon, hungry ghost, animal, and hell realms).

**Kāma-ogha** – the flood of sensuality; the flood of sensual desires.

**Kāma-taṇhā** – sensual desire; sensual craving; craving for sensual pleasures.

**Kāmabhava** – an existence in the sense-desire realm.

**Kāmaguṇa** – *lit.* strings of sensuality; sensual pleasures; objects of sensual enjoyment; objects of the five physical senses: form or visible objects, sounds, scents, taste or flavors, touch or tactile sensation.

**Kāmavacara** – sensuous sphere; belonging to the sense sphere.

**Kāmavacara-kusala** – wholesomeness of the sensuous plane.

**Kamma, kamma** – deed; action; volitional action.

**Kamma-nimitta** – sign of previous kamma; symbol of kamma.

**Kammaṭṭhāna** – the place of work; work, trade, occupation; subjects of meditation; meditation exercises; ground for mental culture; where the mind goes to work on spiritual development; today, it connotes meditation.

**Karuṇā** – compassion; pity.

**Kaṭhina** – the Kaṭhina ceremony; the annual robe-presentation ceremony (in the month following the end of the rains retreat); post-retreat robe-offering.

**Khanda** – aggregate; category; five groups of existence; specifically, the five aggregates: form (rūpa), feeling (vedanā), memory (saññā), imagination, volitional thought (saṅkhāra), consciousness (viññāṇa).

**Khaṇika-samādhi** – momentary mindfulness; alert and focused concentration.

**Kilesa, kilesas** – *lit.* torment of the mind; defilements; mental impurities; mental pollution; stain; depravity; poison; passion; impairment; the object or embodiment of desire.

**Kiriya** – action; deed; performance.

**Kusala** – wholesome; karmically wholesome; skillful; good; morally good; meritorious; can refer to moral goodness or technical skill.

**Kuṭi** – hut; single room monk hut; typical abode of forest dwelling monks.

**Loka** – the world; a world; plane of existence.

**Lokavidū** – knower of the world, knower of the cosmos; an epithet for the Buddha.

**Lokiya** – worldly; this-worldly; mundane; belonging to the world; related to cycling through rebirth.

**Lokuttara** – other-worldly; supramundane; transcendental; beyond these worlds; related to the pursuit of enlightenment.

**Mae, Mae Chee** – *lit.* mother, honorable mother; a Thai Buddhist nun; a female renunciant who is not a bhikkhunī; a nun who abides by the eight or ten precepts; a female devotee or pious laywoman.

**Magga** – *lit.* path; the path; the way; the noble path; the path leading to enlightenment; the fourth of the Four Noble Truths: the path leading to the cessation of suffering; the four transcendent paths (lokuttara-magga): path to stream entry, path to once-returning, path to non-returning, path to arahantship.

**Mahā** – great; superior; a monk who has passed Pāli grade 3 studies.

**Majjhimā Paṭipadā** – the middle path, the middle way.

**Māna** – conceit; pride; arrogance.

**Manomaya-iddhi, manomayiddhi** – the magic power of the mind; mind-made magical power; assuming another form; shape shifting.

**Mattaññū, mattaññutā** – knowing moderation; knowing how to be temperate; knowing the measure or limit; sense of proportion.

**Mettā** – loving-kindness; benevolence; goodwill.

**Micchā** – wrong.

**Micchādiṭṭhi** – wrong view; false view; a perception misaligned with the truth; a view converse to the truth of reality.

**Moha** – see: avijjā; delusion; ignorance; stupidity; dullness.

**Moha-samādhi** – delusional concentration.

**Muditā** – empathetic joy; sympathetic joy; altruistic joy.

**Mūgabbatta** – custom of being dumb; a vow of dumbness; a vow of silence.

**Nāga** – a serpent-like water god; an applicant or candidate for ordination.

**Nāma** – mind; mental factors; mentality; intangible, mental components or aggregates; mental phenomena: feeling (vedanā), memory (saññā), imagination, volitional thought (saṅkhāra), consciousness (viññāṇa).

**Naraka, niraya** – hell; hell realm; abyss.

**Nibbāna, nirvāna** – *lit.* extinguished; the fires of greed, hatred and ignorance extinguished for lack of fuel; the extinction of all defilements and suffering; the supreme goal of Buddhism; enlightenment; one who has reached nibbāna has extinguished rebirth.

**Nibbidā** – disenchantment; dispassion; disinterest.

**Niggaha** – censure; blame; reproach; rebuke; chastise.

**Nimitta** – *lit.* sign; vision; omen; symbol; portent; mental sign; mental image.

**Nirodha** – the third of the Four Noble Truths: cessation of suffering; cessation; extinguishing; extinction.

**Noble Eightfold Path** – see: ariya-magga.

**Ñāṇa** – knowledge; real knowledge; wisdom; insight.

**Ogha** – a flood; stream; current; water; that which sweeps a man away from emancipation; the four floods of worldly turbulence: the



flood of sense desires (kāma-ogha), the flood of ignorance (avijjā-ogha), the flood of view (diṭṭhi-ogha), and the flood of becoming (bhava-ogha).

**Opanayiko** – draw inward; referring inwardly; internalize; an epithet for the Dhamma.

**Paccattam** – personal; individual; separate.

**Paggaha** – lift; hold up; support; console; uplifted energy.

**Pali, Pāli** – ancient variant of Sanskrit; literary language of early Buddhists; language the Theravāda Buddhist Canon is written in.

**Paṇḍita** – wise; wise man.

**Pañcavaggiya** – *lit.* belonging to the group of five; the five bhikkhus; the five ascetics; the first five monks to whom the Buddha preached his first sermon at Isipatana Deer Forest: Aññā-Kondañña, Vappa, Bhaddiya, Mahānāma, and Assaji.

**Paññā** – wisdom; insight; intuitive insight; thought; intelligence; knowledge; examination; analysis; discernment.

**Paññādhika** – wisdom predominant; one of three types of Bodhisatta: wisdom predominant (paññādhika), faith predominant (saddhādhika), effort predominant (viriyadhika).

**Paññāvimutti** – deliverance through wisdom; freedom through understanding; discernment release; those with the wisdom-oriented personality type.

**Pāpa** – evil; wicked; wrong action; demerit; the opposite of puñña.

**Pārājika** – major offenses; defeat; a grave offense entailing expulsion from monkhood.

**Pāramī** – cultivated virtues; meritorious acts; perfections of character; qualities developed over many lifetimes; the ten perfections: generosity (dāna), morality (sīla), renunciation (nekkhamma), wisdom (paññā), diligence (viriyā), patience (khanti), commitment (sacca), determination (adhiṭṭhāna), compassion (mettā), equanimity (upekkhā).

**Pariyatti** – learning of theory; theoretical knowledge; knowledge obtained through reading, study, and learning; theoretical teachings of the Buddha; the scriptures; study of the scriptures; the Teachings to be studied.

**Patibhāga-nimitta** – conceptualized image; counterpart sign.

**Pātimokkha** – the monk’s code of discipline, the 227 rules monks must observe.

**Paṭipatti** – practice; applied practice of the Buddha’s teachings.

**Pavāraṇā** – invitation; invitation for admonishment; ceremony at the end of the vassa in which monks are invited to speak of any offense they saw, heard, or suspect was committed by the monk extending the invitation.

**Peta** – a departed being; ghost; hungry ghost.

**Phala** – fruit; fruit of one’s actions; fruition of results of actions; result; effect; the fruit of enlightenment (ariya-phala); having attained a level of enlightenment from following the Buddhist path (magga); fruition of any of the four transcendent paths.

**Puñña** – merit; meritorious action; virtue; righteousness; worth; a beneficial and protective force which accumulates as the result of good deeds or thoughts; the opposite of papa.

**Rāga** – lust; passion; sensuality; desire; attachment; greed.

**Rukkha devatā** – tree dwelling devas, tree deities.

**Rūpa** – tangible form; matter; form; physical components; corporeality; the body and physical phenomenon in general; object of the eye; visible object.

**Rūpa-brahma, rūpa-loka** – the world of form; the fine-material sphere of existence; 16 heavenly realms free from sensuous desire but still conditioned by form: 13 deva realms, and 3 Brahma realms; rebirth in these realms is caused by attainment of meditative absorptions (jhāna).

**Rūpa-jhāna** – fine material jhāna; form-based higher meditative absorptions; four states meditations on material objects.

**Rūpabhava** – an existence in the form-sense realm.

**Saccadhamma** – the truth; Truth; the ultimate truth; the undisputable truth; the universal truth.

**Saddhā** – faith; devotion; conviction; confidence.

**Sādhu** – *lit.* it is well; an expression of appreciation, assent, or approval;

**Sakadāgāmi** – once-returner; the second level of enlightenment on the path to nibbāna; one who has attained the second stage of the Path and will be reborn on earth only once before attaining final enlightenment.

**Sakadāgāmi-phala** – the fruit of once-returning.

**Sakadāgāmi-magga** – the path of once-returning.

**Samādhi** – concentration; one-pointedness of mind; mental discipline; two types of meditation or concentration: 1. alert and focused meditation and 2. serene, tranquil meditation.

**Sāmaṇera** – novice monastic; one who is ordained by taking the Three Refuges and observes the ten precepts.

**Samatha** – calm; tranquility; tranquility of the mind; meditative calm; quietude of the heart.

**Samatha-kammaṭṭhāna** – forty meditation subjects: ten wholes (kaṣiṇa), ten objects of repulsion (asubha), ten recollections (anussati), four stations of Brahma (Brahma-vihāra), four formless states (arūpa-jhāna), perception of disgust of food (aharepaṭikulasaññā), and analysis of the four elements (catudhatuvavatthana).

**Sammā** – right; correct; aligned with the truth of reality.

**Sammājīva** – right livelihood; right living; right means of livelihood; right pursuits.

**Sammādiṭṭhi** – right view; right understanding; a perception aligned with the truth.

**Sammākammanta** – right action; right conduct; right behavior.

**Sammāppadhāna** – right efforts; supreme efforts; the Four Great Exertions: restraint of the senses (saṁvara-padhāna), abandonment of defilements (pahāna-padhāna), cultivation of enlightenment factors (bhāvanā-padhāna), preservation of concentration (anurakkhanā-padhāna).

**Sammāsamādhi** – right concentration.

**Sammāsaṅkappa** – right thought; right intention; right mental attitude; right aspiration.

**Sammāsati** – right mindfulness; right attentiveness.

**Sammāvācā** – right speech.

**Sammāviriya** – right effort; right exertion.

**Sammuti, sammati** – construct; social constructs; convention; conventional reality; pretend, assume; appointment; supposition; election; anything that is conjured into being by the mind.

**Saṁsāra, saṁsāracakka** – *lit.* faring on; the round of rebirth; endless rebirth; wheel of existence; rebirth process; the process of birth and death; the cycle of rebirth; the continuous process of being born, getting sick, growing old, and dying.

**Samudaya** – origin; source; cause; the cause of suffering; the origin of suffering; the second of the Four Noble Truths: there is a cause for suffering.

**Saṅgha** – community; assemblage; company; a chapter or four or more Buddhist monks; the Order; the Buddhist clergy; the Buddhist community of monks, nuns, novices, and laity.

**Saṅghāṭi** – the outer robe of a Buddhist monk; monk robes used as overgarment and worn for various occasions.

**Saṅkhāra** – imagination; mental formations; volitional thought; all forces that form or condition.

**Saññā** – memory; perception; idea; ideation; recognition; association; interpretation; as an aggregate, it recognizes the known and gives meaning to one’s perception.

**Sappurisadhamma** – virtue of the righteous; virtues of a gentleman; the Seven Qualities of a Good Man: 1. knowing the cause, knowing the law (dhammaññutā); 2. knowing the consequence, knowing the meaning or purpose (atthaññutā); 3. knowing oneself (attaññutā); 4. moderation, knowing how to be temperate, sense of proportion (mattaññutā); 5. knowing the proper time, knowing how to choose and keep time (kālaññutā); 6. knowing the assembly, knowing the society (parisaññutā); 7. knowing the individual, knowing different individuals (puggalaññutā).

**Sati** – mindfulness; attentiveness; awareness.

**Satipaṭṭhāna** – the Four Foundations of Mindfulness: mindfulness of the body (kāyānupassanā), mindfulness of feelings (vedanānupassanā), mindfulness of mental conditions (cittānupassanā), mindfulness of ideas (dhammānupassanā); four ways of attending to mindfulness; setting up of mindfulness.

**Sāvaka** – hearer; disciple; distinguished disciples of the Buddha.

**Sekha-puggala** – the learner; one who must still study; one who has reached one of the stages of holiness except the last.

**Sikkhā** – threefold training, threefold practice; the practice sequence derived from the Noble Eightfold Path groupings: wisdom (paññā), morality (sīla), concentration (samādhi).

**Sīla** – morality; moral practice; moral conduct; virtuous conduct; virtue; ethics; code of morality; precepts; right conduct; behavioral discipline; Buddhist ethics.

**Silabbata-parāmāsa** – adherence or clinging to rules, rituals, or ceremonies; clinging to rituals and vows; overestimation regarding

the efficacy of rules and observances; believing wrong practices to be right; dependence on superstitious rites.

**Sota-ñāṇa** – see: dibba-sota.

**Sotāpanna** – stream winner; stream enterer; the first level of enlightenment on the path to nibbana; one who has attained the first stage of holiness; one who has abandoned the first three fetters that bind the mind to the cycle of rebirth.

**Sotāpatti-phala** – the fruition of stream-entrance; fruit of stream-attainment.

**Sotāpatti-magga** – the path of stream-entrance; path of stream-attainment.

**Subha** – pleasant; beauty.

**Sukha-vedanā** – pleasant feeling; positive feeling; like.

**Suññata-vihāra** – abode of emptiness; empty of craving or desire, hatred, and delusion.

**Sutamayapaṇṇā** – knowledge based on learning; understanding acquired by learning; wisdom resulting from study.

**Sutta, sutra** – *lit.* thread; dialogue; discourse; a discourse or sermon by the Buddha or his contemporary disciples.

**Taṇhā** – craving; desire; want; thirst.

**Tāpasa** – a hermit; ascetic; ascetic practices; austere spiritual practices; the self-mortification Buddha practiced before encountering the Middle Way.

**Tathāgata** – *lit.* one who has truly gone; the accomplished one; the thus-come; the thus-gone; the truth-winner; an epithet of the Buddha.

**Tāvātimsā** – the realm of the thirty-three gods; the second heavenly abode, of which Indra/Sakka is the king; a higher heavenly abode; deva realm.

**Theravāda** – *lit.* doctrine of the elders; the oldest form of the Buddha's teachings; an orthodox branch of Buddhism based on the

Pāli Canon; the dominant form of Buddhism in Thailand, Sri Lanka, and Burma.

**Three Common Characteristics** – see Tilakkhaṇa.

**Three Realms of Existence, Three Realms** – the three spheres; the three planes that together comprise the entire universe of sentient existence; the three spheres of existence: the sense sphere (kāma-loka), the form sphere (rūpa-loka), and the formless sphere (arūpa-loka).

**Ṭīkācariya** – sub-commentators; authors of commentaries on the atthakatha commentaries.

**Tilakkhaṇa** – the Three Characteristics; the Three Common Characteristics: suffering (dukkha), impermanence (anicca), not-self (anattā); the Three Signs of Being.

**Tipiṭaka** – *lit.* three baskets; the Pāli Canon comprised of discourses (sutta-pitaka), monastic rules (vinaya-pitaka), and abstract philosophical treatises (abhidhamma-pitaka).

**Triple Gem, Three Jewels, Three Refuges** – the Buddha, the Dhamma, and the Sangha.

**Uggaha-nimitta** – visualized image; mental image; learning sign; abstract sign; sign to be grasped.

**Upacāra-samādhi** – access mindfulness; proximate concentration; approaching concentration; access-concentration.

**Upādāna** – clinging; attachment; grasping; sustenance for becoming and birth; attachment to views, precepts, and practices; theories of the self.

**Upekkhā** – equanimity; neither positive nor negative; neutrality; indifference.

**Upekkhā-vedanā** – neutral feeling; neither positive nor negative feeling; ambivalent feeling.

**Uposatha** – observance; observance day; holy day; Sabbath day; on

full moon and new moon days, monks recite the Monastic Code of Discipline (Pātimokkha) and devotees observe the eight precepts.

**Vāsanā** – subconscious inclination; behavioral tendency; habitual disposition, or karmic imprint that influences present behavior.

**Vassa** – rainy season; rains retreat; Buddhist Lent; period during the rainy season in which monks are required to reside in a single place and wander freely about; a year of monastic life.

**Vatthu-kāma** – objective sensuality; sensual pleasures derived from an object; lovely sense-objects.

**Vedanā** – feeling; sensation; there are three types of vedanā: pleasant, unpleasant, or neither pleasant nor unpleasant.

**Vibhava-taṇhā** – desire for non-existence; desire for an end to a feeling; craving for non-becoming; craving for self-annihilation; craving for (or attachment to) sensual pleasures connected with the view of nihilism.

**Vihāra** – an abode; a dwelling place; mode of life; passing the time; a sanctuary; a monastery; temple.

**Vihāra Dhamma** – *lit.* dhamma residence; dhamma as a dwelling place.

**Vimamsā** – analysis; investigation; discrimination.

**Vinaya** – discipline; monastic code; monastic regulations; the code of monastic discipline; rules.

**Viññāṇa** – consciousness; act of consciousness; taking note of sense data and ideas as they occur; sensing and acknowledging stimuli that come into contact with us through our eyes, ears, nose, tongue, body, and mind; life force; mind.

**Vipassanā** – insight development; clear intuitive insight; insight into the true nature of reality as a product of wisdom development.

**Vipassanā dhura** – internal study; mental training; concentrated introspection.



**Vipassanā-ñāṇa** – insight-knowledge; insight that arises from vipassana.

**Vipassanūpakilesa** – imperfections or defilements of insight; insight that deceives a meditation practitioner into believing that enlightenment has been attained and hampers any legitimate insight-knowledge from developing; the ten imperfections of insight: 1. illumination, luminous aura (obhāsa); 2. knowledge (ñāṇa), 3. rapture, unprecedented joy (pīti), 4. tranquility (passaddhi), 5. bliss, pleasure (sukha), 6. fervor, assurance, resolution (adhimokkha), 7. exertion, well-exerted energy (paggāha), 8. established mindfulness (upatthāna), 9. equanimity (upekkhā), 10. delight (nikanti).

**Viriya** – effort; diligence; persistence; energy; vigor.

**Yakkha** – demon; a class of powerful non-human beings – sometimes kind, sometimes cruel and murderous.

**Yama** – ruler of the kingdom of the dead; the god of death; god of hell; prince of death; guardian of hell; grim reaper; the dead are led before him to be judged according to their kamma.

**Yogāvacara** – one who practices spiritual exercise; one devoted to mental training; one who trains in samatha or vipassanā.

**Yonisomanasikāra** – thorough attention; systematic attention; wise consideration; analytical reflection; critical reflection; having thorough method in one's thought.

Definitions sourced from scriptures, Ācariya Thoon Khippapañño, Access to Insight's online glossary, Bhikkhu P. A. Payutto's *Dictionary of Buddhism*, the Dhammayut Order's *A Chanting Guide*, Ven. Nyanatiloka's *Buddhist Dictionary*, Wisdom Library, and various online dictionaries and websites.



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## About the Author

Venerable Ācariya Thoon Khippapañño (Thoon Nonruecha) was born May 20, 1935 at Nong Kho village, Bua Kho sub-district, Mueang district, Maha Salakam province, Thailand. He was the fifth of Uddha and Chan Nonruecha's ten children.

At the age of twenty-seven, Thoon Nonruecha left his family to ordain as a monk in the Dhammayut Order. On July 27, 1961, he took ordination at Wat Photisomporn in Udon Thani, with Ācariya Dhammachedi (Joom Bandhulo) serving as his preceptor.

In his early years, Venerable Ācariya Thoon set out on dhūtaṅga to various forest destinations and practiced Dhamma until he profoundly realized and understood according to the truth. He studied under Venerable Ācariya Khao Analayo of Wat Tham Klong Pen in Nong Bua Lam Phu province. In his eighth vassa, Ācariya Thoon attained arahantship at Wat Aranya Wiwek in Pa Lan village, Doi Luang district of Chiang Rai.

Venerable Ācariya Thoon Khippapañño dedicated his life to the proliferation of the Buddha's original teachings, both in Thailand and abroad. Ācariya Thoon's teachings were distinctive in that he emphasized the importance of starting Dhamma practice with right view (*sammādiṭṭhi*) and wisdom (*paññā*). His style of Dhamma practice was also unique in that it enabled laypeople to effectively practice in everyday settings and achieve a level of enlightenment, as he himself had attained the first level (*sotāpanna*) as a layperson. Ācariya Thoon also stressed the importance of developing both a comprehensive understanding and a true realization of the suffering, harmful consequences, and perils associated with each issue.

In 1975, Ācariya Thoon established Wat Pa Ban Koh in Ban Phue district, Udon Thani province. Today, the temple serves as a Buddhist landmark for devotees to honor and venerate the Buddha's teachings and holy relics housed in the majestic pagoda. The temples founded in Ācariya Thoon's name in the metropolitan cities San Francisco, New York, Hong Kong, as well as the countless Dhamma retreat centers in America and throughout Thailand that train in Ācariya Thoon's style of cultivating wisdom (pañña) continue to grow, to this day.

Over the course of his lifetime, Ācariya Thoon authored over twenty books, including his own autobiography, and produced various forms of media (mp3, VCD, DVD, etc.) so that Dhamma practitioners from any walk of life could easily access Dhamma. In 1990, the Thai Royal Princess Phra Thep Ratanarachasuda honored Ācariya Thoon with the Saema Dhammacakra award for his outstanding literary contributions to the Buddhist religion.

On November 11, 2008, Venerable Ācariya Thoon passed away at the age of seventy-three due to pneumonia and lung tumor complications. Unique to only the greatest arahants, Venerable Ācariya Thoon Khippapañño's relics formed the day of his cremation ceremony.

## **About the Translator**

Born and raised in San Francisco, California, Neecha Thian-Ngern has been a devoted student of Venerable Ācariya Thoon Khippapañño since the age of sixteen. She earned a bachelor's degree in electrical engineering from UCSD and an MBA from SFSU. After several years of working in her family's businesses, Neecha ordained as a Buddhist nun at San Fran Dhammaram Temple.

