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DEVOTED HEART

Forever Until the End of The World

By

Venerable Ācariya Thoon Khippapañño

Translated by

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Copyright Information

Original Sermon

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Udon Thani, Thailand

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First printed, 2013

ISBN: 978-1-935207-11-5

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Editor's Preface

Throughout his nearly fifty years as a monk, *Venerable Ācariya Thoon Khippapañño* gave more than five hundred sermons. Out of those, we have hand selected sixteen sermons, to be transcribed and printed as books, in hopes that they may be of the utmost benefit.

The reader may notice that the subject matter and tone of each book in this series differs. This is because *Venerable Ācariya Thoon Khippapañño* adapted his teachings to fit the situation and audience. A sermon given at a funeral, a celebration, for a group of monks and novices, a group of professionals, or those who desire enlightenment are each unique in and of themselves.

This ten book collection entitled, "The Heart Series," is comprised of sermons given to monks and novices during rains retreats between the years 1994 and 2000. Some may be slightly puzzled by the uncommon name given to this *dhmma*

series. We invite those readers to take a look inside and discover the meaningful connection. We believe these books may provide a benefit not only to those in saffron or white robes, but also to those who desire simple happiness as well as those who seek enlightenment. The doubts that we encounter during each of our journeys can be dispelled with the wisdom contained in this series.

Though *Venerable Ācariya Thoon Khippanyo* is no longer with us, he has bequeathed unto us countless tricks and techniques that can be applied in our *dhmma* practice. As such, his disciples and followers have been able to continue and advance their practice, even in his absence.

I would like to thank those involved with this series:

Organization: Phra Nut Taesombut, PhD

Concept & cover designs: Tanawat Pisanuwongse

Illustrations: Nattawat Naovaratpong

Printing logistics: Soratya Suriyamorn, MD

May all those involved, whether expressly named here or not, achieve their aspirations as they contribute to the auspicious merit of realizing *Venerable Ācariya Thoon Khippapañño's* intention of providing the Buddha's *dhamma* to the world's citizens. May you achieve that which you desire, may your *dhamma* progress accordingly, may you be self-reliant, may the path to enlightenment be illuminated for you, and may you achieve final enlightenment in this lifetime.

Mae Chee Yo
Chief Editor

Translator's Preface

Some believe *dhamma* teachings are complex enough. A translator must not only understand the language, but also the *dhamma* concepts presented in the teaching.

There are many words in Pali and Thai that have multiple connotations. When they are translated into English, often only one of those connotations comes through. For instance, the term *kilesa* is commonly translated in *dhamma* texts as “defilements,” “fetters,” “cankers,” or “impurities.” But what *kilesa* means is the embodiment of our desires, the objects that tempt us, or the tangible things that lure us into becoming attached. Though the physical representation of our desires are not necessarily corrupt, evil, or impure, the term “defilements” is used to represent them in this text for the sake of consistency.

Another term commonly found in *dhamma* texts is *sammuti*, which literally translates to “pretend.”

However, “pretend” doesn’t fully encapsulate the scope of *sammuti*. It also means the conventional terms that we use to describe and label things or the generally accepted norms used to provide us with common ground. It is the arbitrary definition that we have now come to believe is real. *Sammuti* is a supposed form, it is not real.

Yet another complicated translation is the term *lohng*, which means “lost” in its traditional translation. In *dhamma* texts, it means our infatuation with the world and the mistaken belief that supposed forms are real. *Lohng* refers to being so enchanted or obsessed with something that you are blind to the truth. In this text, many different words are used to represent *lohng* in order to give the reader a feel of the extent of our being misguided by worldly desires.

Luang Por Thoon’s sermons and books often mention *krasae*, which means current. In *dhamma* books, there is mention of two kinds of currents or streams. There is the stream of *dhamma*, which people enter when they have achieved a stage of enlightenment. Then there is the strong, worldly

tide that *Luang Por* teaches us to resist. The world's *krasae* refers to the pull of the world – the trends and norms of the societies we live in. It is these worldly tendencies that we find nearly impossible to resist, especially while everyone else gives in to them so readily.

Finally, what does the term *dhamma* mean? It literally translates to “truth,” and can denote something that is just or righteous. When we refer to “*dhamma* practice” we are referring to the journey of discovering the truth. It is the practice of realizing and understanding the objective, universal truth.

Not only is the language a challenge to translate, but the subject matter itself can also prove difficult. With many of the *dhamma* concepts presented here, I had to stop and consider which of the various meanings *Venerable Ācariya Thoon Khippapañño* intended. For that, I am grateful to have had Mae Yo as my mentor and editor.

To have been a pupil of *Venerable Ācariya Thoon Khippapañño* since the age of 16, and to be tasked

with translating his works for the English-speaking public is a honor and responsibility I take very seriously.

For those seeking answers, rest assured that the Buddha has provided us with a path that will lead us there. And our great teacher, the enlightened *Venerable Ācariya Thoon Khippapañño*, has illuminated that path for us during a time in which many of us have lost our way. May the ten books in this series be the shoes you will need as you journey towards your goal.

I would also like to express my gratitude to those who contributed their ideas and helped to edit these sermons.

Neecha Thian-Ngern

Introduction

If you knew better, you wouldn't ask for forever. Instead, ask to be devoted to realizing the truth of the world. The devoted heart knows right from wrong, and doesn't repeat the same mistakes.

If you want to discover true love, follow *Luang Por Thoon*.

May 18, 1997
Wat Pa Ban Koh
Udon Thani, Thailand

Forever
Until the End of the World



A Single Verse

If there are elements from tonight or yesterday's sermons that are unclear to you, write them down and ask me. Or even if there are teachings that you have heard from others that are confusing to you, ask me and I can explain the details of that topic to you. I can expand on the teachings so that they are clear and can be applied to your practice.

It really is not feasible to practice *dhamma* according to guides and manuals. When your results prove to be inconclusive, you will become doubtful of whether or not you are on the right track. For the most part, practitioners trust that their practice is on target. What's more, they often attempt to classify the level of practice they have allegedly achieved.

The way people practice today is quite unlike what the Buddha taught while he was alive. People in

those days did not read *dhamma* texts, nor did they know of or practice any *dhamma* topics. They simply heard a verse or sentence from the Buddha or noble individuals (one who has achieved a stage of enlightenment), committed them to memory, and applied them according to their individual competence. They did not classify the topic or check with manuals before applying the teachings like people in this day and age.

Practitioners during the Buddha's time would take the verse they had heard and analyze and reflect on it in a personally relevant manner. They would achieve a rational realization of that topic. Then they would develop an understanding of this realization accordingly. Once this understanding based on logic, rationality, and experience was formed, they would penetrate the truth and become noble individuals. It wasn't a big ordeal back then. They become noble individuals on accord of their own wisdom.



Not at That Level Yet

Was meditation used in addition to wisdom? Yes. They used alert and focused meditation to support their wisdom. During the Buddha's time, people attained stages of enlightenment without ever reaching a serene state in meditation. Commit this to memory. Out of the hundreds of thousands of noble individuals, practically none ever used meditative phrases to lull their minds into a serene state. For the most part, they were entirely unfamiliar with the concept. If you were to ask a noble individual from the Buddha's time, they would not be able to describe to you how a meditative mantra can be used to tranquilize the mind.

This concept is treated differently in contemporary times. Back then, although they used meditation, it was in the form of alert and focused concentration. This focused concentration

was used as both a foundation and support for wisdom development. It did not involve repeating meditative phrases, nor did it call for tranquility. Rather, it involved thinking in a logical manner. The state of alert and focused meditation came about when the mind was focused in insightful and rational contemplations. It did not occur as a result of repeating a meditative phrase.

That is why so many people achieved stages of enlightenment in those days. While they reflected on various things, they did not wonder about which topic or chapter in the manuals their contemplations would be filed under. All they were concerned with was whether or not they had a rational and complete understanding of that topic.

That is what it was like in the Buddha's time. So why is meditation such a prominent topic in this day and age? It is only ideal for a certain group of people; it is for people who have had meditation engrained in their minds over the course of countless lifetimes of living as ascetics and hermits. They cultivated meditative powers,

attained high level absorptions, and their dedication to that style of practice yielded many rebirths in the *Brahma* (formless sphere) realm.

These people do not know how to dive into a wisdom-based practice. To bait these people into contemplating and cultivating wisdom, they must be allowed to meditate first. Once they've achieved a serene state, they will then be able to practice wisdom contemplations. Now, very few people like this exist. Even in the Buddha's time, there were very few people with these character traits. In contemporary times, people who use tranquil meditation as a precursor for practice are really taking after a small minority. They are using the exception as the rule.



Follow Along

So what about the people who cultivated a wisdom-based personality during their past lives? People of the wisdom-based character will be unable to lead off with meditation. They will be unable to achieve tranquility. During the Buddha's time, the number of noble individuals who were of the wisdom-based character was many times that of concentration-based character.

Today, people do not understand how to practice. They have not referred to historic records to form an understanding of how people in the Buddha's time attained various stages of enlightenment. That is why so many people today misguidedly adhere to practices that are only suitable for a small group.

Most of the noble individuals in the Buddha's time were of the wisdom type. For instance, *King*

Bimbisāra announced to his 120,000 subjects that they were invited to come and pay their respects and listen to the Buddha's *dhamma*. When the whole 120,000 of them showed up, what did they do?

Some did not know how to pay respects by bowing, nor did they know to say "*namo*" three times in veneration of the Buddha. These people had no background in the Buddhist religion. Could they request the five precepts? No. Would they even know what the five precepts were? No. Could these people be taught to meditate? No, because they had no prior history with meditation. They would be entirely unable to relate to any tranquil state of meditation described to them.

As these people lacked this background, how did the Buddha teach them? This is what should be noted. The Buddha taught right view. These people had long held wrong views, just like people in this day and age. The Buddha taught them about good and evil, the positive and negative consequences of action, generosity, morality, and how to cultivate their practice. He spoke of the allure

of one whose demeanor emanates generosity, morality, and good *dhamma* practice.

After the Buddha explained these concepts, how is it that these people were wise enough to follow along and understand? They possessed individual wisdom. While they listened, they used their wisdom to weave their individual experiences into the concepts. What's more, the teachings were personified in their minds. They would not have reaped any benefits had they solely followed along.

It is imperative to listen to the teaching, form an understanding of it, and see its application in a personal way. Realizing and understanding the truth of the teaching are both important. While the Buddha was giving an example, the listeners had to follow along and see the personal relevance of it. In that way, they formed a rational and comprehensive understanding of the topic that is aligned with reality. They understood the topic according to each and every point in the Buddha's explanation and according to their own reasoning.

The Buddha's audience listened to the sermon not only to gain knowledge, but also to gain a true realization. Cultivating a true realization is a very important aspect of *dhamma* practice. After listening to the Buddha, 110,000 people were able to attain a stage of enlightenment. They became noble individuals without previously knowing the five precepts or how to say "*namo*." They applied their wisdom while they listened to the sermon. They did not discuss tranquil meditation because they had no knowledge of it.



Selecting the Right Leader

Nowadays people use their meditation practice to compete with others. They believe meditation will be the vehicle to transport them to enlightenment. From where did they get this idea? Who taught them this? This confusion is the result of misunderstanding the principles of practice during the Buddha's time.

Once I explain this, people tend to think, "That's weird. Why doesn't *Luang Por Thoon* teach like the others?" They compare my teachings to that of other monks. Of course, the discrepancies are glaringly obvious. Why not be decisive and choose a leader to follow. As I have already stated, the methods are strikingly different.

For a group of oxen in search of a leader, there are many candidates to choose from. Who is the candidate you have the most confidence in? Which

ox possesses strength, ability, and other desirable features and will be able to lead your group across the river? This choice is critical. If you select the right leader, you will have a chance. If you can't make it across in this lifetime, at least you will have started to float in the right direction. Having begun to drift along on your way, you will eventually make it to the other bank just like your friends who have completed the journey before you. This may be the choice for one group of oxen.

As for another group of oxen, they may pick a leader that pleases them. Between choosing the leader that is pleasing to you and the leader that knows the right way, which is preferable? If that ox looks lively and promising, you may think it is the strong leader needed to bring your group across the river. That is solely perception. The truth is that ox has never made it across the river before. If you mistakenly believe that he has, then the truth and your judgment are at odds.

Once you follow the ox that has never completed the journey across the river, he will lead you in circles and get caught in whirlpools. Both the

leader and the group of oxen will be pulled out to the ocean to drown. Who will you blame for this? The leader of the oxen will be coated in blame. But who should you really blame? Yourself. You are to blame for being unable to select the right leader from the start. You are to blame for not using wisdom during the decision making process.



Double-Edged Sword

There are many differences between how things are now compared to when the Buddha was alive. Nowadays, teachings and models of practice come from all sorts of different angles and techniques. Back then, people who listened to sermons from any number of enlightened individuals could be sure that all sermons would be the same. As thousands of laypeople and followers listened to thousands of enlightened people speak, there never had to be a debate over the teachings. Whether it was *Venerable Mahā Moggallāna*, *Venerable Sāriputta*, *Venerable Ānanda*, or *Venerable Mahā Kasspa* who gave a sermon, the message was the same. The models and topics of *dhamma* were identical, so people never had to discuss the discrepancies. There were none.

But today, great differences abound. One monk's sermons differ from another monk's. Different *dhamma* centers subscribe to different practices. This causes doubt to arise, as people wonder why these teachings differ. At one point, you will look around and wonder who you should choose as your teacher. Which *dhamma* topics will be suitable for you to hold onto as your foundation?

You may hold your teacher in high esteem, wholeheartedly trusting in his teachings despite his inability to progress or personify the manuals from which he preaches. You continue to believe and worship your master despite the huge discrepancy between the manuals and the truth you see before you. Your complete trust and allegiance to this teacher will lead you astray. It is a double-edged sword.

On the other hand, if your teacher is skilled and able, has actually gone through the steps he is teaching you, and you trust in him completely, then positive results can emerge in your practice. It will be just as if the group of oxen has selected the right leader. Choosing a good leader is such

an important point. Yet, these days, decisions are made based on feelings and relative truths instead of undisputable truths.



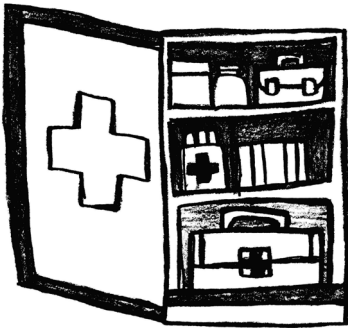
Resisting the World's Pull

Things have changed significantly since the Buddha's time. I have observed this. I tell people that the main goal is final enlightenment. Don't concern yourself with whether you will reach your goal in this life or the next. It could happen in a number of ways. What is important is whether you know how to resist the world's pull. Can you go against the world's current at the right places and in the right way? Make sure your practice accurately corresponds to the Buddha's teachings.

This is how right view (*sammā-diṭṭhi*) is put into practice. True, it may be as people say, that a pure heart is needed in order to understand *dhamma*. It is a desire that is both possible and impossible at the same time. But it is more important to lay down solid roots first. Otherwise, you will unknowingly lose your way and circle the same spot.

In the Buddha's time, the principles of *dhamma* practice were not so complex. Today's scholars have combined all the *dhamma* examples from people who attained stages of enlightenment during the Buddha's time. They have lumped together beginner, intermediate, advanced, and final stages of enlightenment (*sotāpanna*, *sakadāgāmī*, *anāgāmī*, *arahant*, relatively) and repackaged them into a single model. There is no separation of beginner-level from final-level, as their manuals present one amalgamated approach. Consequently, upon reading these texts we cannot discern the unique characteristics of the paths that pertain to each level.

In reality, the principles practiced by the noble individuals back in the Buddha's time weren't that intricate. For some, a single word or simple phrase from the Buddha could be contemplated on and result in the unlocking of a stage of enlightenment. Nowadays manuals point to a single, combined model of practice, resulting in people approaching themes from each of the four levels all at once. It is a mess.



The Right Medicine

Imagine a person who is ill and ingests every pill in sight. This action is characteristic of those who are sick yet unable to recognize their own illness. If they were to go into a pharmacy, they will purchase and consume all drugs labeled “medicine.” They stand a slim chance of being cured because the medicine doesn’t correspond to the illness. What’s worse, they may suffer allergic reactions to some of the medications.

On the other hand, if the sick person knows their illness, the results will differ. If they know they are suffering from a common cold, they can go out and buy the appropriate cold medicine. They don’t have to take a lot of medicine, yet they can be completely cured. In fact, this is the purpose of buying medicine. It is not to go out and buy all the medicine being sold at the store.

The same goes for *dhamma* practice. The purpose is not to cover all the topics of *dhamma*. You should only contemplate on the topics that are relevant to you. Leave the other topics be. Don't fill your mind with unnecessary information. Necessary topics are those that are relevant to your personality type.

Suppose you purchase an assortment of medicine to store at home. Your medicine closet is filled with many brands and cures for all kinds of illnesses. Before selecting your medication, you must first diagnose your sickness. If you have a cold, you should not take laxatives. Why would you take laxatives to treat a cold? They're unrelated. If you take cold medicine, you can be easily cured.

Similarly, if you have a stomachache you should not take cold medicine. You should take digestion-related medication. You should only consume medicine that corresponds to your specific illness. If you do this, you will not waste your time taking unnecessary medication. You will be restored to health in a swifter and better manner. If a sick person doesn't recognize what particular ailment

they suffer from and takes all the medicine in sight, they may even end up dying.



Food That You Like

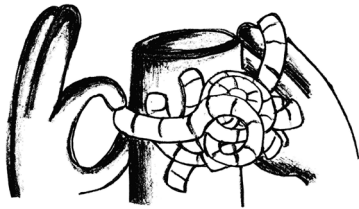
Similarly, *dhamma* is applied for the purpose of solving each of our individual issues. Yet, instructors combine topics and present them all together. It is like a restaurant with an enormous selection. All menu items, including entrees and a large assortment of fruit, are laid out on the buffet tables. Restaurant patrons need only lift the tray covers in order to see what food is inside. Then they would only pick the food that they like. They would not go in and scoop up all of the hundreds of different menu items. They would only take the food they like.

Imagine an American who travels to Bangkok. He opens one pot and discovers white rice. He opens another and uncovers a spicy stir-fry. Another is a chicken stir-fry. Whichever ones that he does not like, he should simply close the lid on the pot. It is not necessary for him to eat it. He should move

on to the next pot until he finds the food that he enjoys. It is silly for him to grab exotic regional foods that he has never eaten before. He won't be able to eat it. It is a waste of food and time.

Dhamma is the same way. You must be able to select the right model of *dhamma* for yourself. After listening to many *dhamma* sermons, you must discern which models are relevant and beneficial to you. Select only the necessary and pertinent topics to apply. Let the other topics alone. Put them away for now.

As a layperson practicing *dhamma*, you must select the topic that will enable you to achieve a stage of enlightenment. If the topic is too advanced for you, your efforts will be in vain. Would a PhD level text be appropriate for a grade school student? The material is beyond the child's abilities. What kind of books should a kindergartener read? Those appropriate to his age group. To present advanced texts to a child is a ridiculous waste of time. We must learn by taking gradual steps.



Undoing Your Conditions

As a layperson, how will you progress and ultimately graduate to a level of enlightenment? You must look within yourself and discover the issues that block your path to enlightenment. You must know the route you are to travel. *Dhamma* practice is about removing roadblocks and solving problems. The same issues have been maintained and preserved not only in this lifetime, but for countless lifetimes. These issues have been piled on top of each other, ultimately forming the personality that we exhibit in this lifetime.

Thus we are blind. We've allowed our problems to accumulate and melt into each other such that we can no longer recognize or solve each problem. We are so completely blind that we are unable to select a single problem to even begin to address. *Avijjā*, the blindness of the heart, results from

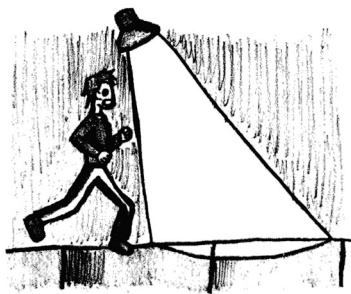
the festering of this heap of problems over an incalculable span of time.

Now, the problems that exist in our hearts cannot be wiped out in one mighty stroke. They must be addressed gradually, one point at a time. Pay attention to the issues that arise in your mind. What are you concerned with? What are you attached to? We can gradually and regularly tackle each of these problems. Each issue must be separately addressed, just as a sick person cannot take one pill to simultaneously cure all their ailments.

As lay practitioners, how must we embark on our path? The path the Buddha left us did not instruct us to start by eliminating defilements and cankers. Don't reach so impossibly high at the get go. Those are advanced topics that you aren't skilled enough to tackle. Now, if we cannot eliminate the embodiments of our desire, what can we strive to eliminate? Our perceptions.

This is because perception is a major ocean. We have formed this surging ocean from aeons of

accumulating tiny water-drops of wrong views. This ocean cannot be wiped out within an instant. We cannot fix these festering problems with meditation. That concept is off the mark. Where in the world are problems eradicated by sitting in meditation?



As Clear as Black and White

What causes these problems? We must determine the source. All of our problems arise from our thoughts. More precisely, problems arise from wrong thoughts, wrong views, and wrong understandings. This is where we should focus. We have already created these problems. If we are to untangle them, we must trace back to how they got tangled in the first place. Meaning, you have to fix a problem at the point in which it became a problem.

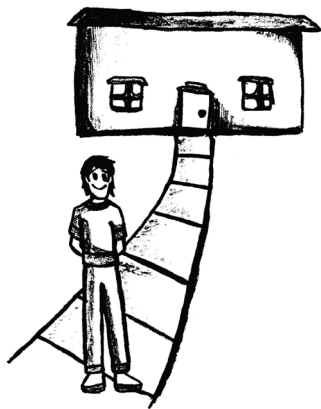
When faced with a problem that stems from thought or perception, you should address the perception that caused it. You should not attempt to meditate your way out of the problem. Meditation is a technique used for other purposes, and it is an ineffective cure for wrong perceptions. People believe meditation is the way to fix problems, and wind up having to revisit square one to try and

diagnose why the problems still persist. Wrong views like these course through our veins. That is why we are unable to eradicate our wrong perceptions right at this moment.

To solve wrong views, you must first understand the meaning of wrong. Wrong is the opposite of right. If you don't know what constitutes right, you will be unable to fix your problem. How do right and wrong differ? You need to fully identify both the scope of right and the scope of wrong. Then you need to compare right and wrong in order to completely understand how they differ. For instance, suppose you want something to be white. Before you can know what white is, you need to know what black is, and how it differs from white. If you were going to dye a cloth a particular color, you would first need to know the characteristics of that color. In this way, the cloth will have a chance at turning out that desired color.

Suppose you wanted to dye a particular cloth yellow. Yet you picked up white or black dye, and after applying it the cloth turned an undesired

color. You must remedy the problem that you have created. Likewise, you must consider what consequences will occur as a result of a wrong viewpoint. If the consequences are not understood, the viewpoint will be difficult to fix.



My House

Take, for instance, the perception that you actually own something. Look around your home: what do you consider to be yours? Is this ownership absolute? This analysis can be used to fix problems, because our issues arise from this sense of self and ownership. If we do not hone in on the right target as we attempt to fix our issues, we will encounter difficulties. The main points don't stray from our sense of self and our sense of ownership. That's all there is to our problems.

Once our sense of self has been created, the next step is the creation of self belongings. They work together and exist as a pair. How did this sense of self come about? It arises from a perception. Is it truly our self? Think about it, question it. You may see that there is no true sense of self. It is merely a conventional definition. What we are is a combination of the four elements: earth, wind,

water, and fire. Is it this tangible form that we call the self?

Once the physical form has been created, the intangible soul complements it, representing the intangible aspect of the self. There are two senses of self that exist in a single person. One is the tangible aspect, comprised of the four elements. The other is an intangible aspect, comprised of volition, memory, imagination, and feeling. These four aggregates are the intangible characteristics of the soul. The soul works in four ways, by way of volition, memory, imagination, and feeling.



What Did You Expect

Where did our tangible self come from? The intangible self, or the soul, built the tangible self. It created the physical form only to subsequently become enchanted by it. The soul is delusional. If the soul saw things clearly, why would it create the tangible self? It is precisely because of its delusion that the soul has constructed the physical form.

The creation of tangible form is the creation of lifetimes. What is the perception we hold that makes these countless lifetimes desirable? Why are we born? What did you expect to gain from being reborn this time? Walk through your life from start to finish. What is your intention for being here? Shouldn't you know what your goal is before losing yourself in this world? If you cannot discern your purpose, you will not know what other desires will take shape in your future. And

that is why we continue to lose our way as time goes by.

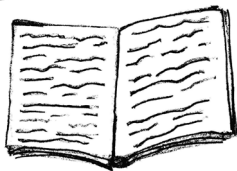
That is why we must figure out what we expect to get out of this world. We must examine ourselves as well as others. What are the similarities in personality and goals that have caused us to be born together in these clusters? By taking a look at our lives from birth up to the present, can we identify our life's purpose? What is causing us to be reborn so often?

Those who aim to break free of this world analyze the world in its entirety. They ask themselves, what is so appealing about this world that people are willing to be reborn so frequently? What is the delightful flavor that exists in this world, that animals and humans alike desire to taste? We must examine ourselves and others in order to discover our true hopes and ambitions, to discover the reason we are born.

Dhamma practice is to study the world, to discover the purpose for our being born. We are born into this world and live here, but we do not even know

this world. We don't even know what is so great about it. We are so lost. We have wasted many lifetimes being reborn. From the incalculable past lifetimes to the incalculable future, we will continue to be reborn into this world.

This cycle of rebirth in the Three Realms (*kāmaloka*: desire realm, *rūpaloka*: form-based realm, *arūpaloka*: formless realm), how does it happen and what is its cause? Practitioners must exercise wisdom in this essential contemplation. Those with feeble wisdom cannot possibly discover or understand these answers. Even if I were to explain *dhamma* to them for three days, it would be useless. They would have no idea. How could they ever understand? They're blind. If I were to physically point to a certain item, a blind person would never be able to see what I am referring to. It is not that the item doesn't exist; the blind just can't see it.



The Same Verse

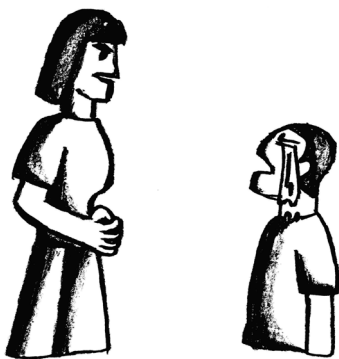
D*hamma* practice is about fixing our problems. Problems arise because our soul truly believes in the existence of our tangible self as its own. It believes in the self as defined by the tangible self through the four elements and the intangible self through the four characteristics of the soul. At the core of the intangible soul are the four aggregates: volition, memory, imagination, and feeling. This very soul is what creates our lifetimes and existences.

Our problems can be solved by training our wisdom. How do you know whether you possess wisdom? Everyone has it. We just haven't honed and sharpened our skills. People often say that wisdom arises from meditation. Let's strike down that false belief and reassess what it truly means for wisdom to arise. When wisdom arises, razor-sharp intelligence emerges and comprehensive

understanding is generated. These things do not result from meditation. Wisdom results from regular thought, investigation, and analysis. Our understanding accumulates and develops from frequent contemplations and examinations.

When it comes to chanting prayers, who can read all the verses and commit them to memory after just one read through? The verses must be repeated, read over and over again. Even then, it is impossible to memorize all of the content. To be able to recite verses by heart, they need to be chanted frequently. Eventually, the verse will be committed to memory and the prayer book can be put away. It takes time. It cannot be accomplished in a single attempt.

Our wisdom works in the same way. We all have wisdom, whether we are female, male, Buddhist, non-Buddhist, or don't even subscribe to any religion at all. Everyone has wisdom. Everyone has their own style of thinking. Wisdom is not generated from meditation. It is an innate part of human nature. In every era, whether organized religion exists or not, wisdom exists.



Reform

Let us train this wisdom that we have, to think and understand in a rational manner. You must train this wisdom of yours. If you don't exercise your thought muscles often, your wisdom will remain stagnant. Have you ever noticed that our wisdom will correspond to whichever purpose for which we have it trained? Or that our thoughts tend to travel down well-worn paths? Yet, it is also ready to divert from its regular training at any time.

Sitting here just now were a group of Thai kids. Suppose we sent each of these Thai kids to a completely foreign land, like America, Japan, and Vietnam. The kids will become accustomed to that foreign country, and while immersed in that culture they will learn the language of that land. When they regroup the kids will speak different languages because they have been trained

differently. They will not understand each other's tongues. This is how practice and training works. We can adapt this concept to how training works a *dhamma* sense. Can you train your mind to think in *dhamma*-mode? Yes. Which direction does our mind typically tend towards? When it comes to worldly matters, we are already highly skilled in this field because we have been doing it for centuries. We've been inclined in the worldly manner of thinking for countless lifetimes, and it has persisted up to the present.

Nothing has changed in our thoughts and perception. Our personality hasn't changed. Once born into this world, the same personality and characteristics we possessed in the past will follow the world's tendencies, just as before. Our thoughts will continue to be subject to the world's influence, just as it was in our past. Our hearts will continue on the course they are accustomed to. We are still delusional, unable to pierce through the world's veil.

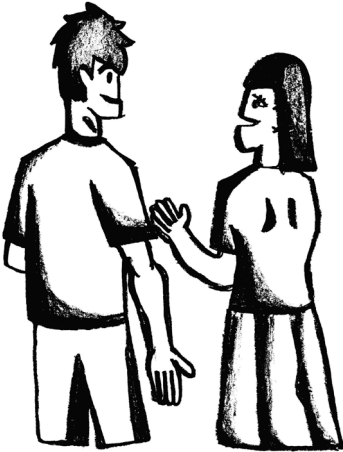
In our present era, Buddhism has already arisen in the world. There are teachers who can teach

us. The intent of practice is to pull back, to return us to the other side. We must practice taking our worldly thoughts and pulling them to the side of *dhamma*.

Suppose you had a disobedient son, who often went out and returned home late at night, if at all. How would you teach your child to come home, be responsible, and get serious about work? If you haven't thought about it or come up with a technique to tell the kid, will he realize on his own that he is doing something wrong? No. You must teach your child to distinguish right from wrong. His thoughts must go through reform in order for him to change. He might believe, like other immature people do, that drugs are good. People who think like this don't know any better. You are the adult. You must teach your child about the harmful consequences and effects of drugs. Use reason as you teach him, so that he understands. That is how he will reform himself and become a good kid.

Similarly, our minds often and easily divert to a lower state. For countless centuries of rebirths we

have continued to allow our thoughts to give in to the world's sway. How will we teach our mind to want to reform itself and steer itself back towards *dhamma*? We must teach our minds. Training our wisdom is the first step. If our wisdom is not strong, we will not be able to train our minds. Other than mindful wisdom, there is nothing else that can teach our minds. What about meditation? No way. You will die dumb going down that route. Instead of teaching your mind the truth as it exists in the world, you will waste your time sitting in meditation, day after day, night after night.



Original Owner

If we have not trained the wisdom that we inherently possess, we will be unable to employ it in the reprogramming of our mind. Only when the lessons are steeped in reason will our minds accept them. This is because our minds have a nemesis, an ancient master who reigns supreme: defilements and desire.

Defilements and desire have enjoyed their reign over our minds in the past. With each day and night, defilements and desires convince our minds to swing their way. All the sensual pleasures, embodied in the tangible form, aromas, sounds, flavors, and visible objects all appear to be perfect. With this constant persuasion, the mind does not have a chance at escaping the clutches of its nemesis. Our minds have always given in to defilements and desire. Defilements and desire are so incredibly skilled that they can convince

living creatures in this world to feel content to remain here. Once we have realized the extent of the craftiness of defilements and desires, how will we ever convince ourselves to escape?

Suppose there was a skilled debater, who could take a false statement and argue until it seemed undeniably true. How would you present an argument that beats this skilled debater? Take, for instance, the debate over dogs and humans. Which is the superior species?

Skilled debaters can win while arguing that dogs are superior to humans. They will make a clear and convincing argument that their audience will easily believe. Likewise, if the humans' representative was a skilled speaker, he would also be able to convince the listeners of his stance.

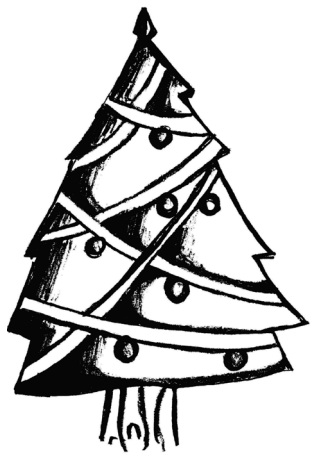
Venerable Luang Bu Thue once argued that there are many qualities that make dogs better than people. He stated that dogs are more skilled. They can run into the woods without shoes on and be just fine. Dogs aren't afraid of stepping on thorns. Humans can't step on thorns without experiencing

pain. They must bring along a knife in order to strike down the weeds and thorns. Humans don't even come close on this issue. Dogs win.

When it comes to sleep, dogs don't need blankets or pillows. Dogs are easy sleepers; all they have to do is put their head down and they can fall asleep. Humans are much more difficult. They need to procure a blanket and pillow before sleeping. Dogs don't care about the conditions of sleep. All they care about is actually sleeping. Dogs win again.

Dogs don't need water when they eat. Humans need water to accompany their food. In the case where dogs and humans race to finish eating, a dog would finish its meal much faster. Humans have to wash their hands and drink a beverage before they can be done. Whereas, a dog wouldn't have to wash its paws or drink any water at all. And most of all, according to *Luang Bu Thue*, dogs can eat human feces, but can humans eat dog feces? That means humans lose. Humans are no match for dogs. To argue that dogs are superior

is easy. With enough wisdom, however, you can argue for any side and win.



All Dressed Up

With wisdom that isn't skilled enough, you will never be able to snatch your heart back from the iron clutches of defilements and desire. Train your wisdom so that it truly sees things as you've taught it to believe. Teach it to actually realize and become the theory. Teach it to think, to analyze evidence rationally in order to understand the truth.

With well-trained wisdom, you may have a chance at winning debates against the embodiments of our desires. How have these defilements been incredibly skilled at taking something false and fooling our minds into believing it is undoubtedly true?

Defilements and desires are smooth and highly adaptable. They can spin our thoughts so that we believe things to exist that actually don't exist.

They can make us believe the irrelevant is, in fact, highly relevant. They can dress up the mundane to captivate our attention. There is nothing that compares to the suave nature of defilements and desires.

To fix this problem, we must have sufficient wisdom. To combat defilements and desires, our thoughts and cleverness must be at least on par with that of our opponent. With comparable or equal skills, you can at least tie with your nemesis. With well-trained, focused wisdom, you can come up with evidence to extinguish the power that defilements and desires hold over you. In order to see past your adversary's lies and realize the truth, you must have wisdom that is superior. To challenge your opponent, you must be able to take the same object or topic and ask yourself whether or not the truth about it is as you've been told. You must analyze the degree of truth and reality of what you've come to believe.

All this time, we have listened to only one debater, to one side of the argument. We have never listened to what wisdom has to say on the matter.

And this is where the problem lies. Throughout countless rebirths, we've been fully convinced of the claims that defilements and desires have whispered in our ears. They've persuaded us to believe that the tangible form, aromas, sounds, flavors, and visible objects are marvelous. Even now, we still haven't reformed ourselves because we don't possess enough wisdom on our own. What's more, no one has provided the light that our minds need in order to break through this cloud of darkness.



Championship Battle

Suppose you have an ex-boyfriend named Desire. Desire had been your heart's mate for an incalculable period of time. But you've been with your new boyfriend, Wisdom, ever since the Buddha introduced you two over 2540 years ago. Your ex-boyfriend, Desire, still makes your heart flutter. Your present boyfriend, who is here to put Desire to shame, is Wisdom.

Let's see if Wisdom will be able to win over your heart. How will he pull you from Desire and back to him? In the past, while you were under the influence of Desire, your mind was inclined towards wrong views (*micchā-diṭṭhi*). Now, how will Wisdom help you channel your own focused intelligence in order to bring you back to the right view (*sammā-diṭṭhi*)?

First off, you must figure out how Desire swayed you towards wrong views. What techniques did Desire use to persuade you day in and day out? Once you have recognized those techniques, you will be able to channel your focused wisdom to break free of Desire's influence over you.

Similarly, before a boxer steps into the championship ring, he must study video footage of his opponent in order to learn his fighting style. This way, he can figure out how to cancel out his opponent's offense. If his opponent habitually ducks to his left, what can he do to use that information to knock him out?

Our opponents must be studied if we are to stand a chance at defeating them. If defilements and desire are our opponents, then we must study them well. What are their typical arguments, how do they think? What can you do to prove to your heart that it has all been a con? If you want to have a chance at winning, you must know your opponent. If you have trained your wisdom well enough, you can go on the stand and argue to the

point where there is an unequivocal victor and the truth is undisputable.

Suppose Miss Universe sits at a table with two men who are desperately vying for her attention. Each man will present his best argument on why she should choose him. The man who successfully employs reason and truth to convince Miss Universe of his deservedness. Who will have the stronger argument? Will Mr. Wisdom's argument be more persuasive and airtight when compared to his opponent's? The strength of the argument is where someone wins or loses.



Who is Better

It doesn't take many points to prove a stance. There are so many topics that can be used in arguments. Let's just start with one. When it comes to the topic of physical form, what do the two opponents have to say for their argument? If defilements and desires go first, the details will all point to how great and desirable the physical form is. The physical form is appealing and is something we want to be near and embrace. There will be no mention of its filthy stench. These arguments are enough to sway a listener.

Next up is the wisdom-based argument. This argument launches into the impermanence of the human form. It changes in various ways throughout its lifespan, starting at its origin as a sperm and egg, at 7 days, 14 days, and one month. From a clump of blood to the sprouting of appendages, to the development of the eyes, ears, and mouth,

there are many transformations that take place before the tangible human form can exist.

How is it possible that the intangible part of the human soul can take these bodily fluids and cook up an actual, tangible human body? How is it that the sperm and egg change into a blood mass? And how does a blood mass eventually become a baby growing in its mother's belly? These are all impermanent stages of its life-cycle. And there's more. Once the baby has been born, the transformations don't stop there. A baby in a crib can eventually morph into a human child walking along the street. All of these changes are impermanent. The development of the tangible human form is a process that continues on from the child to a teenager, to an adult, to an elderly person. These are the truths that the wisdom-based argument presents.

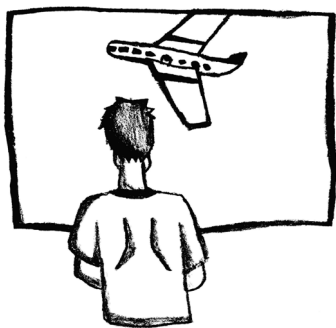
At one point, the human form dies. This is the death of the tangible part of the soul, the combination of the four elements. Once the soul departs from its old, tangible vessel, what are the characteristics of that abandoned vessel at

day one, day two, day three? There is a certain appearance and stench, and flies that buzz around the corpse. This is the contemplation of the unattractive, or filth (*asubha*) of the tangible form. It is used to counter the argument of the appealing nature of the human body.

There is a conflict between what the desire-based argument has claimed and what the wisdom-based argument has proved. When there is a conflict, which argument will emerge as undeniably more persuasive? Once the human body has died, it has ceased to exist. This state of complete change from how it once existed in a particular form is called non-self, or *anatta*.

If Miss Universe heard arguments from both men, who would she pick? Following the heated debate, who will she believe? What argument will your heart side with? The wisdom-based argument has been entirely truthful in its description of the various changes the human form is subject to. It has accurately described the impermanence of the human form, in each and all of its transitions. It has expended much time and energy explaining

the consequences of the human form's changes and the unattractive, decaying state that follows the demise of the human form. With enough reason, the spell will be broken and our minds will be swayed towards the wisdom-based argument. In our hearts, we will finally realize that we have been under the control of desire and defilements for all this time. We will instantly switch sides. We use our thoughts to prove who is better between defilements and wisdom.



Return

In order to use wisdom to solve our problems, we must train our minds to be impenetrable, smart, and sharp. We must constantly point to the facts and explain them to our hearts for us to realize and understand the truth. Once our minds have channeled its wisdom to realize the truth, it will recall precisely how lost it has been in its long journey in this world. This realization will cause our hearts to return to the arms of wisdom.

If we can use our wisdom to see that our minds have now diverted back to the true path, don't stop there. Pick up another topic, like sound. Consider what defilements and desires had to say about sound, scents, flavors, and tangible forms, and override that information with wisdom's take. Use wisdom to climb up the steep slope that defilements and desire were so accustomed to sliding down.

Wisdom tells a story completely opposite to that of defilements and desires. Once you realize that defilements have been conning you this entire time, you will have no trouble leaving them behind you. You don't have to force yourself to end your relationship with defilements. Once you wise up, you will end things on your own.

It will happen when you are intelligent, possess a depth of comprehensive knowledge that is aligned with reality, and the eyes to your heart are wide open. In other words, when your wisdom is ready, you will recognize the immense suffering, harmful consequences, and impending perils that defilements have brought you.

In the past, you may have been captive to desire for eternities on end. But alas, now your heart can see that you have been fooled. Defilements and desires have deceived you. You've believed them and have paid the price by suffering, being reborn, aging, and dying on this very earth, over and over again. It is desire and defilements that are the cause of our being lost in this world.

Eventually, you will feel disenchantment, or a lack of passion as the pervasive suffering attached to the objects of your desires becomes undeniably evident to you. You will become immune to the lure of defilements. They can try to come at you from any angle, but you will be able to see right through them. They can try to tell you that the human body is beautiful, or that sounds are marvelous, but you will see right through the lies. You will be impervious to the pull of defilements and desires. You know the truth and will never turn back.

This is the break up. First you will forsake your relationship with your long-time mate. Then, once you realize the suffering, harmful consequences, and perils that are attached to the lies that defilements have spun, your mind will disown them on its own. This is how practitioners shed defilements and mental intoxications. Our hearts must first see the suffering and negative consequences of the objects of our desire before being able to renounce them. You must know the problem before you can fix it.



Foolish Parenting

Practitioners in this day and age pretty much do the same old thing: have a seat somewhere, repeat a meditative phrase, and enter a tranquil state. How often have we all done this? People claim that this is how we train our minds, but it doesn't actually work. No one can use silent meditation to mend their hearts. The only thing it does is enhance your stupidity. Intelligence does not result from tranquil meditation. Intelligence results from thought. It comes from investigation and the application of rational analysis to counter wrong perceptions.

When it comes to meditating to tranquility, you should really ask yourself if you've ever been successful. It is very difficult to attain a serene state while meditating. If you have never been an ascetic in your past lives or if you don't possess that kind of personality, you will never stand a

chance at achieving that tranquil state. You can try to meditate and be serene, but you will die trying. If you aren't the ascetic-type, you will not progress in your meditative efforts. You are pouring your efforts into a task that is counter to your true personality.

If you are the alert, thinking type, you will not be able to meditate. After a few minutes of repeating meditative mantras, your mind will start to drift off and be consumed by other thoughts. Your mind doesn't need serenity. You need to think. That is because you are the type to achieve deliverance through wisdom (*paññāvimutti*).

If you knew how to practice *dhamma*, the process would be much easier. It would be easy to train your mind and heart. But, instead, once your mind starts to shift its focus towards something else, you forbid it. You stop thinking and pull your focus back to the meditative mantra: *Buddho, Buddho*. Your mind wants to think, but you won't allow it. All day and night, you're occupied with pulling your thoughts back. It is such a waste of time.

This is how fools practice *dhamma*. It certainly is not how the wise do it.

If you were a parent, you'd be a prime example of foolish parenting. If your kids wanted to rest and get some sleep, why would you drag them out of bed to play? Is that a dumb or smart move? If your kids wanted to play and have fun with their friends, why would you force your kids to sleep? That is also foolish. It is poor parenting.

Similarly, when it comes to *dhamma* practice, why would you pull your focus back to meditative mantras when all your mind wants to do is think and analyze something? It's foolish. It is what foolish practitioners do.

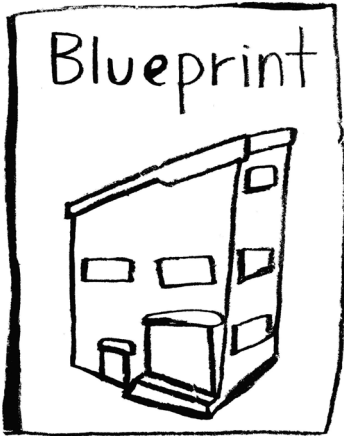
If someone were intelligent, they would have to ask themselves, of the two methods of *dhamma* practice, which should I use first? Which is best for me at this particular moment? Do not make sweeping, unconditional statements like, everyone must always use wisdom first. That is not true. Or a statement like, you always have to start by repeating a meditative mantra. That also is not true.

Evaluate your current status for a minute and you will know which of the two methods you need to employ first. If you need a moment of quiet, then try the meditative mantra and see if you become sidetracked by outside thoughts. If you do not get distracted, then go ahead and let yourself slip into a tranquil state.

Alternatively, when you are busy thinking and have gained momentum in your contemplations, you should not attempt to veer off course with a meditative mantra. You have to be smart in your practice. You need to consider the current state of your mind. At this point, you don't even know your mind. In *dhamma* practice, you must properly assess the needs of your mind.

People these days are well-read in a lot of random, wrong techniques. You often hear people say that once your mind is tranquil, wisdom emerges. But this is incorrect. Toss out this foolish notion. The Buddha never taught this. Wisdom results from thought, from contemplations, and analysis. Wisdom does not emerge from meditation. Intelligence does not emerge from meditation.

Realization and understanding the truth about reality does not emerge from meditation. Rather, they all result from wisdom.



**Preparation Before
the Build**

We must train our wisdom. We all innately possess wisdom, but it is untrained. Today, let us start to train our wisdom to be smart enough to go up against defilements. As wisdom debates with defilements, the winner is the one with the strongest argument. Use thought to combat thought. Thoughts backed by wisdom will cancel out thoughts backed by desire. The reasoning has to be clear. If your mind has doubts and cannot pick a clear winner, you need to find more evidence.

What are you drawn to on this earth? What's so desirable about this world? Open up your mind and take a look inside. You need to recognize whatever it is that your heart believes. Extract it and evaluate its validity. It has to be clear cut. Do not leave behind any residue of doubt.

The perceived benefits of the tangible form also need to be extracted and analyzed. You need to cut open your heart and extract all the defilements and desires that are hiding in there. You must do this in order to discover all the lies they have been pumping into you. That is the only way for you to see the truth.

This is the process of finding a method to follow in your *dhamma* practice. If you select the right method from the beginning, you will enjoy a swift journey. If you start off with the wrong method, your efforts will never amount to anything. Know that you won't be able to shed all defilements and desires from the get go. You must prepare yourself for battle first. Once your wisdom is intelligent, skilled, and mature enough, you will be qualified to counter and strike down the arguments that desires and defilements present.

Beforehand, our minds subscribed to the wrong view (*micchā-diṭṭhi*). Now, our minds must employ focused wisdom to counter wrong views and steer us back on track to right views (*sammā-diṭṭhi*). But, how will you do this? Once you understand

how to replace wrong views with right ones, you will always know how to do it. Right view is the gateway that leads to insight development (*vipassanā-ñāṇa*). Right view opens up the path to enlightenment (*nibbāna*). It all begins with right view.

If you are already practicing *dhamma* and you haven't laid down a foundation of right view, don't try to build on top of what you have. You must first prepare to build a sturdy foundation. If you were to build a house but didn't have enough money to do it, you wouldn't just start building. The house costs fifty million dollars and you only have one dollar in your pocket. To jump into the construction project is futile. You might not even have enough money to purchase a single bag of concrete mix. You may think you should buy first and save later. But don't set your hopes too high. The concrete mix has its life expectancy, and can harden while you are saving up your money. To go and buy one bag of concrete mix from the start is a waste.

It is wiser to save up money to use in procuring supplies and throughout the project itself. Once you have accumulated enough funds to finish the project, you should move forward with the construction. In that way, you will realize the biggest benefit, as opposed to using your one dollar to buy the small amount of concrete mix that you can. One year, three years, even ten years can fly by and your concrete mix will still be sitting there, degrading in quality and going to waste. Then, what are you going to do with it?

Similarly, you don't have enough wisdom. At this point, you don't even know if you have wrong views or right views. You can't be sure whether you are crazy or sane. You don't know anything about yourself. You don't even know if your practice is on the right path. If this sounds familiar, don't plunge into a method of *dhamma* practice. Take the time to get ready; take the time to understand what you are about to do.

When you are about to drive to a destination, you have to know where you are going. Are you traveling north, west, south, or east? Where in

that particular town are you headed? You need to consult a map, first. If you don't know the direction in which you are headed, then don't start driving just yet. Don't presume that you already know just to get lost on your way.

Likewise, if you do not truly understand how to practice *dhamma*, then don't practice quite yet. Begin by mapping out a path that is likely to bring you to your desired destination, so that you will not waste time when you actually head out. You have to be sure of your method. Do not assume and do not guess. You will make mistakes and end up unaware of the fact that you've lost your way.

So, what is the starting point for this method of practice that I have laid out? How can you cultivate the right perception in this very lifetime? Pay no mind to the millions of defilements and desires for now. Let's just focus on the process in which you erase wrong views from your heart and inscribe right views in its place. This is how you lift up one foot from the wrong path and take your first step on the right path, the path that leads to enlightenment.

That path of right views is the path that noble individuals (*ariya-puggala*: those established in one of the four stages to enlightenment) take. With just one foot on the right path, you are already headed in the direction of a level of enlightenment, and ultimately full enlightenment (*nibbāna*). Meanwhile, your other foot remains in the world, where you are a regular layperson. If both feet are planted on the path of right view, you will be streamlines to a level of enlightenment, or ultimate enlightenment as an *arahant*. There will be no diverting from ultimate enlightenment when both feet are firmly established on the path of right view.

A person who is one hundred percent on the path to enlightenment is someone who is no longer subject to the charms of the world. Those who have entered the stream of *dhamma* and are on their way to enlightenment possess right views. Without right views, you are immeasurably far from enlightenment. So let us eliminate wrong views from our hearts. Or at the least, recognize what constitutes a wrong view.

Like I mentioned earlier, we must realize that we are consumed with the sensual pleasures of this world: tangible form, aromas, sounds, flavors, and visible objects. You must teach yourself to recognize how these sensual pleasures have deceived you and chained you to this world.



Working with Good Vision

I have given you many topics and angles from which to contemplate *dhamma*. Of the many people sitting here listening to my teachings, there may be some who are confused. These people may each misinterpret my teachings in their own ways. I am leaving you with many methods to consider. For me, meditation is not a big deal. It is easy to teach and to do. But the ultimate goal is not to be meditatively serene. Rather, it is for people to become smart, to cultivate wisdom. With strong wisdom, anything can be accomplished and anything can be learned.

If your vision is good and you work with individuals who possess good vision, the work will run smoothly. You can point things out and your peers will easily see what you are referring to. They will all see the same thing, in the same way. You can say, hey this is an elephant and this is a tiger, and

everyone will see what you see. It is as if you can point anywhere and they will all see what you are pointing to. If you have good vision, it is easy to point things out to other people with good vision. But, if you have good vision and try to point something out to a blind man, there really is no point. Practicing *dhamma* is the same way. If you explain the truth to someone, yet that someone is not intelligent enough to understand what you are saying, they have only heard your speak. Your words go in one ear, and out the other. They have no idea what you are saying; they do not understand. They don't have sufficient wisdom to make connections from what you are saying.

That is why we need to train our wisdom. While untrained, we are useless. When it comes to work, we are lousy without training. Every type of job requires training in order to improve. You must train before becoming a nurse, a police officer, or a teacher. Just as you have to train in worldly skills, you must also train in *dhamma* skills. But you must train in the right way, namely, be sure that your aim and your path are actually aligned. I have given you many rational explanations here.

If anyone has questions on how to start their practice, I will go into more depth during my evening sermon. Write down your questions and submit them to me. If you have questions about the sermons of other teachers, write them down. In the evening, I will explain all of this again. For today, I have provided you with examples, methods, and food for thought. It should be sufficient for this time. May all of you go and contemplate this individually. Use your own wisdom to think about what I've said, to train your own wisdom.