



The Skill of Release

teachings of
Ajaan Lee Dhammadharo (Phra Suddhidhammaransi
Gambhira-medhacariya)

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The Skill of Release

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compiled and Translated by
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Foreword

During my second year as a monk, I was invited to give a Dhamma talk to the woman — whom I knew only as "Aunty" — who had raised the woman who had sponsored my ordination. Aunty had suddenly fallen ill, and her relatives were sure that she didn't have much longer to live. In her time, she had known many of the great masters of the forest tradition, so rather than give her a talk of my own, I decided to read her some by Ajaan Lee. When I finished, she asked, "Whose talks were those?"

"Ajaan Lee's," I told her.

"That's what I thought," she replied. "Nobody could give a Dhamma talk as beautifully as he."

I've often thought of her comment since then and, in particular, of what she meant by beautiful. For most Thais of her day, a beautiful talk was one that made use of formal, courtly language, with heavy literary embellishments, often saying as little as possible with a maximum number of words. That, however, was not Ajaan Lee's style. What I think Aunty meant was a different kind of beauty: a directness and clarity of expression, with imaginative similes and metaphors. Ajaan Lee was skilled at making obscure points of Dhamma clear, and more familiar teachings memorable. Although he had a poet's sense of how to play with words, the beauty of his talks was more a natural beauty of the mind than of studied verbal effects. In this book, which is drawn from Ajaan Lee's collected talks, this is the kind of beauty I have kept in mind in selecting the passages for translation.

Only in the last year of his life were any of Ajaan Lee's talks tape-recorded. We owe our records of his earlier talks to a handful of followers who took notes while he spoke: a nun, Arun Abhivanna; a monk, Phra Bunkuu Anuvaddhano; and a lay woman, Thao Satyanurak, who included some of Ajaan Lee's talks in her diary, which was published after her death. In compiling this book, I have drawn on notes made by all three. Of the three, Arun Abhivanna was by far the most prolific. For years she took notes of Ajaan Lee's talks — sometimes simply jotting down catchy phrases, other times reconstructing entire talks. Her notes — together with those by Phra Bunkuu and transcripts of the recorded talks — have more recently been collected in two large volumes. Because of their haphazard arrangement, the collections are hard to read straight through, but they are excellent companions for meditators who simply want to open to a passage at random, read enough to throw light on their problems, and then return to the practice.

Ajaan Lee was unique among the forest masters in leaving behind systematic guides to meditation and Buddhist practice in general: books like *Keeping the Breath in Mind*, *The Craft of the Heart*, *Frames of Reference*, and *Basic Themes*. Anyone who wants to understand the general outlines of his teaching should turn to those books first. His talks, though, are where he reveals something of his rough-and-ready personality, giving small asides that throw a revealing light on his more systematic teachings and making points that he makes nowhere else. I have already translated a number of the talks in *Lessons in Samadhi*, *Food for Thought*, and *Inner Strength*. Those volumes, though, consist entirely of reconstructed talks that fit around specific themes. In this volume, I have given a more general selection, including a few full talks, some short passages, and sometimes even half-thoughts, if they seemed provocative enough.

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This book is designed to be read reflectively, a little at a time. Many of the short passages, in particular, will reveal their meaning only after repeated thought. Also, some of the passages that present Ajaan Lee's personality will challenge many current ideas on how a Dhamma practitioner ought to speak. As Ajaan Lee cautioned his listeners, Dhamma teachings should not be accepted or rejected right off hand. Instead, they should be listened to with an open mind and then put to the test in experience to see if they can help uncover unwitting preconceptions. This is how I hope this book will be read.

In the course of selecting the passages that make up this book, I found that two themes in particular stood out. The first, which has provided the book with its title, is Ajaan Lee's frequent portrayal of Buddhism as a skill. This skill involves mastery not only of the techniques of meditation, but also of adroit ways of viewing the world and events in daily life so that one can gain freedom from all the burdens that the unskillful mind places on itself. This approach culminates in what he calls the skill of release, the awareness that brings about the mind's total liberation. The second theme concerns the central role that breath meditation plays in developing this skill. For Ajaan Lee, Buddhist doctrines show their true meaning only when one refers them to the practice of keeping the breath in mind. To underline this point, I have included a section on the *Wings to Awakening* — the Buddha's own list of his central teachings — to show how Ajaan Lee interprets them in terms of the breath.

Although the passages presented here have been arranged so that the book will stand on its own, they are also meant to fill in some of the gaps left by Ajaan Lee's other writings. My hope is that this will give the English-speaking world a more rounded picture of the skill of release and of the beauty with which Ajaan Lee presented it.

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By Way of Introduction

I like going different places, not just for the fun of it but also because I want to learn. To learn something of value depends on three things: seeing, listening, and thinking, i.e., using all of your senses so as to serve a purpose. Sometimes when you meet people and find that their beliefs and practices are on a level lower than yours, you can serve a purpose by teaching them to get started on the right path. But when you *see with your eyes, hear with your ears, and are convinced in your heart*, that something is really good, don't think about whether it's yours or theirs. Remember it and put it into practice yourself.

Because my heart has been set on serving the purposes of the religion, I've kept on trying to do what's good. No matter whether I'm in a high place or a lowly one, I always think only of serving a purpose. As for the question of manners — in other words, how to benefit advanced people and people not so advanced — that depends on the situation. The religion isn't the exclusive property of homes or monasteries, of this or that city or nation. The religion is something meant to benefit everyone everywhere. It belongs to the world. The further we can spread its benefits, the better.

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But even though I've meant well, practicing in line with these thoughts, I can't escape being criticized, probably because the people who criticize don't understand. Just a short while back — last April 20th — I was talking with an old nobleman, but I didn't want to come down too hard on him. His criticism, to put it briefly, was, "You spend an awful lot of time involved with lay people, so how can you practice for the sake of release?"

I answered him frankly — but first I asked him, just to make sure, "What are you getting at?"

"Teach people to reach nibbana," he said. "Don't get too involved with them."

So I said, "I like teaching people to reach nibbana, but it's hard. I like it, mind you, I like it, but if I did as you said, I'd be crazy. Suppose you plant some rice. When it's golden and ripe, can you harvest just the white grains of rice? Without taking anything else? I take everything. People may say I'm crazy, but why should I care? I take the whole plant because it has lots of uses. The straw you can keep to feed water buffaloes, or sell, or use as kindling. As for the rice husks, you can use them to feed pigs."

"You know," he said, "you're right." And that was the end of the matter.

I'm different from most other monks in that I don't like to eat only one flavor of food, i.e., the physical food we eat every day. I like the kind of food that has three flavors in every bite. It's a fine food — food for the heart, not food for the body. Its three flavors are the food of sensory contact, the food of consciousness, and the food of intentions. If you were to compare it to durian fruit, it's the type that's sweet and rich and a little bit bitter, all at once — the kind of durian that people really love to eat.

The nourishment of the food of sensory contact here means likable sights, sounds, smells, tastes, tactile sensations, and ideas. The nourishment of the food of consciousness means taking note of likable things by way of the eyes, ears, nose, tongue, body, and mind. And the nourishment of intentions means the success of the good things we aim at. Taken together, these things are called Dhamma food: three flavors in a single bite. Whoever keeps eating this kind of food regularly will have a long, happy, and healthy life.

This is the kind of food I want. To put it in simple terms, it's the sense of satisfaction I get when I see my students — monks, novices, and lay people — practicing rightly. This isn't rice food, it's people food. I'm a monster monk: I like to eat people. If anyone acts in a way to make me feel happy and satisfied, that's going to help me live longer. If anyone misbehaves, that's going to make me die faster. The reason I'm here is to help benefit the religion, to benefit the world. I'm looking for a living, hoping to make a profit. If the rice I plant produces big, fat grains and good profits, I'll hang around for a good while. If all I get are stunted grains and nothing but losses, I'll be on my way.

So if I see that staying on will serve a purpose, I'll try to breathe good and long, good and long. If I see that staying on doesn't serve a purpose any more, I'll try to breathe shorter and shorter until I go in an instant. That's when I can be at my ease, the kind of happiness that nothing else can match, with no need to sit here tormenting my body, listening to anyone's troubles any more: shining bright, all by myself, with no worries or concerns at all.

So that's the kind of food I like. As for food for the body, I eat it because I have to, that's all. It's not that I really want it, for there's no real substance to it. You eat it today and tomorrow you have to get rid of it. But with food for the heart, what you eat in one day can stay with you for ten years, 100 years. You never grow tired of it, and you stay full until you forget what it's like to be hungry.

The Affairs of the World

Turmoil comes from our own defilements, not from other people. You have to solve the problem within yourself if you want to find peace.

Whatever has anything to do with the world, no matter how good it may be, is all an affair of stress and suffering. If you have one dollar, you have one dollar's worth of suffering. If you have \$100,000, you have \$100,000's worth of suffering — because the affairs of money are heavy and weighty. As for the affairs of the Dhamma, they're light, with no need to wrap them up and carry them with you: nothing but shedding, setting aside, and letting go.

Our major loves are our major enemies. Our minor loves are our minor enemies. Whatever we don't love at all is simply neutral.

Things of the world at best are either good but not true, or true but not good. Other people's thoughts, words, and deeds are things that aren't true. They're affairs of the world. The Dhamma, though is really true and really good and really beneficial. It's an affair of the heart, something very profound.

So when we know that the affairs of the world aren't true in their goodness or good in their truth, we shouldn't latch onto them. We have to brush them aside. If people say we're good or bad, there's no truth to their words — because "good" is true only in the mouth of the person speaking, and the same is the case with "bad." So don't latch onto anything they say. Focus instead on the good and bad that are actually within you.

Don't latch onto outside words. If people say you're good or bad, or if they curse you, let them keep it for themselves. If there's a dog barking in the middle of the road, kick it off to one side.

Barking dogs don't bite. Silent dogs might, so watch out.

Ears that listen to gossip are the ears of a pitcher, not the ears of a person.

Don't believe everything you hear. If they say you're a dog, check to see for yourself if you've got a tail. If you don't, then they're wrong.

The world is taken with words, but I don't go along with that. I'd rather take hold of the truth in the heart. As for words, they're things you spit out, not things you should keep. They're not the truth. The truth lies in your heart. So whether your words are good or not, pleasing or not, make sure at least that your heart's good.

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Being easy-going and being at ease are two different things. Easy-going means that you're slow and laid back and don't finish the things you should. You spoil your work and waste your time. Being at ease means that there's a subtle comfort and coolness in the heart, with no inner stress or turmoil mixed in at all. People who can be at ease in this way are people the world really wants — and the Dhamma wants even more, because coolness is like medicine that can drive away fever and soothe burning pain.

"A person in charge of the work" means that we use concentration and discernment to get the job done. "Work in charge of the person" means that we're lacking in concentration and discernment, and think of the work even when we're lying in bed. "Work in charge of the work" means that everything is all out of control.

My motto is, "Make yourself as good as possible, and everything else will have to turn good in your wake." If you don't abandon your own inner goodness for the sake of outer goodness, things will have to go well.

"Don't cut down a tree that gives you shade." Give it fertilizer and look after it so that it will grow. Don't forget the people who have helped you. Find some way of doing good to repay them. If you can't do it with your words or actions, then at least do it with your thoughts.

If people can kill off their own goodness, there's nothing to keep them from killing off other people as well.

If what you're going to say isn't good or true, keep still. Even if it's good and true but serves no purpose, it'll still cause harm.

A stupid person can sit in a gold mine but won't have the sense to make anything of it. An intelligent person can take dirt and grass and turn them into silver and gold.

Even if a stupid person gets a huge inheritance from his parents or grandparents, he won't be able to prevent himself from creating a lot of bad kamma with it. An intelligent person, though, even if he has only an ax to his name, can use it to set himself up for life.

Most of us know so much that there are no bounds to our knowledge. When our knowledge has no bounds, it's like a forest fire that burns everything in sight. In other words, we're so smart that we outsmart ourselves. We know what's right and wrong but can't keep ourselves from doing what's wrong. This kind of knowledge serves no purpose and can only cause us harm. That's why it's like a forest fire that goes out of control and destroys everyone's orchards and fields. People like this end up a total loss. They know everything in the world except for themselves. Knowledge with no bounds can cause two sorts of harm: We ourselves are harmed by it, and other people get harmed as well.

People who are thick with ignorance see turmoil as something fun, just like a fish that sees waves in the ocean as a fun place to play.

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Greed means getting fixated and attached to things: our own things or those of others. If we get attached, it's like getting sucked into an electric current until we die. The nature of everything in the world is that it spins around with each moment, just like an electric generator. If we touch the wires without any insulation, the current will suck us in until we're fried to a crisp. We see the current as something pretty and bright, and so we want to fondle it — and it'll electrocute us. If we latch onto things, our desires will get us stuck right there.

Don't let defilements inside make contact with defilements outside. If we have defilements at the same time that other people do, the result will be trouble. For instance, if we're angry when they're angry, or we're greedy when they're greedy, or we're deluded when they're deluded, it spells ruination for everyone.

People aren't equal, but you have to make your heart equal for everyone.

If you see other people's bad side, turn your eyes around until you can see their good side as well.

A person who makes a mistake is better than a person who doesn't act at all, for mistakes can be corrected. But if you don't act, how will you know how to correct yourself? — for you don't know whether you're mistaken or not. The fact that you don't act is a mistake in and of itself.

The more you study the affairs of the world, the more they branch out. The more you study the affairs of the Dhamma, the more they narrow down and converge.

The Treasures of the Dhamma

The treasures of the world last only as long as our breathing. As soon as we die, they go to somebody else. The King of Death keeps changing our clothes — our eyes, our hair, our skin, etc. — as a way of forewarning us that we're going to be evacuated to another country. If we don't get our provisions ready, we're going to be in trouble when the evacuation order comes.

This body that we've borrowed from the world: The original owners keep coming to take it back bit by bit without our realizing it. For example, the hair on our head: They take it back one or two strands at a time, turning it gray. Our eyes they take back one at a time, making them blurry. Our ears they take back bit by bit as our hearing starts to go. Our teeth they take back one by one. A tooth will start feeling loose, then it stops for a while, and then it starts growing loose again. Eventually it whispers to the dentist to take all the teeth out. The original owners also cut away our flesh bit by bit as our muscles atrophy and our skin gets loose and wrinkled. Our spine they keep coming to pull forward until it's so bent that we can't straighten up. Some people end up having to crawl or to walk with a cane, stumbling and swaying, falling down and picking themselves back up, a sorry sight to see. Ultimately, the owners come and call for the whole thing back, in what we call "death."

If you look carefully at the body, you'll see that what you have here is the four states of deprivation, nothing wonderful at all.

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The first state of deprivation is the animal kingdom: all the worms and germs that live in our stomach and intestines, in our blood vessels, and in our pores. As long as there's food for these things to eat in there, they're always going to be with us, multiplying like crazy, making us ill. On the outside of the body there are fleas and lice. They like staying with whoever doesn't keep himself clean, making his skin red and sore. As for the animals living in the blood vessels and pores, they give us rashes and infections.

The second state of deprivation is the kingdom of hungry ghosts, i.e., the properties of earth, water, fire, and wind in the body. First they feel too cold, then too warm, then they feel ill, then they want to eat this or that. We have to keep pandering to them, running around to find things for them to eat with no chance to stop and rest. And they never have enough — like the hungry ghosts who starve after they die, with no one to feed them. These properties keep pestering you, and no matter what you do, you can never please them. First the food is too hot, so you have to put ice in it. Then it's too cold, so you have to put it back on the stove. All of this comes down to an imbalance in the properties, sometimes good, sometimes bad, never coming to a stable state of normalcy at all, making us suffer in various ways.

The third state of deprivation is the land of angry demons. Sometimes, when we get ill or lose our senses, we run around naked without a stitch of clothing, as if we were possessed by angry demons. Some people have to undergo operations, getting this removed or cutting out that or sucking out this, waving their arms and moaning in a way that's really pitiful. Some people get so poor that they have nothing to eat; they get so thin that they're all eyeballs and ribs, suffering like the angry demons who can't see the brightness of the world.

The fourth state of deprivation is purgatory. Purgatory is the home of the spirits with a lot of bad kamma who have to suffer being roasted, speared with red-hot iron spikes, and pierced with thorns. All the animals whose flesh we've eaten, after they've been killed and cooked, gather together in our stomach and then disappear into our body in huge numbers. If you were to count them, you'd have whole coops of chickens, herds of cattle, and half a sea's worth of fish. Our stomach is such a tiny thing, and yet no matter how much you eat you can never keep it full. And you have to feed it hot things, too, like the denizens of purgatory who have to live with fire and flame. If there's no fire, they can't live. So there's a big copper frying pan for them. All the various spirits we've eaten gather in the big copper frying pan of our stomach, where they're consumed by the fires of digestion, and then they haunt us: Their powers penetrate throughout our flesh and blood, giving rise to passion, aversion, and delusion, making us squirm as if we were burned by the fires of purgatory, too.

So look at the body. Whose is it? Is it really yours? Where did it come from? No matter how much you care for it, it's not going to stay with you. It'll have to go back to where it came from: the properties of earth, water, fire, and wind. The fact that it's able to stay for a while depends entirely on the breath. When there's no more breath to it, it starts to decay, and no one wants it then. You won't be able to take it with you when you go. No one can take his arms, legs, feet, or hands along with him. This is why we say that the body is not-self. It belongs to the world. As for the mind, it's the one that does good and evil, and will be reborn in line with its kamma. The mind is what doesn't die. It's the one that experiences all pleasure and pain.

So when you realize this, you should do as much good as you can for your own sake. The Buddha felt compassion for us and taught us in this way, but we don't feel much compassion for ourselves. We

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prefer to fill ourselves with suffering. When other people teach us, it's no match for our teaching ourselves, for other people will teach us only once in a while. The possibility of being a common animal, a human being, a heavenly being, or of reaching nibbana all lie within us, so we have to choose which one we want.

The good you do is what will go with you in the future. This is why the Buddha taught us to meditate, to contemplate the body to give rise to dispassion. It's inconstant, stressful, and nothing of ours. You borrow it for a while and then have to return it. The body doesn't belong to the mind, and the mind doesn't belong to the body. They're separate things that depend on each other. When we can see this, we have no more worries or attachments. We can let go of the body, and three hunks of rust — self-identity views, attachments to precepts and practices, and uncertainty in the Path — will fall from our heart. We'll see that all good and evil come from the heart. If the heart is pure, that's the highest good in the world.

§ *Someone once came to Ajaan Lee with a problem. Some of his friends had said to him, "If the body's not-self, why can't we hit you?" Ajaan Lee said to answer them by saying, "Look. It's not mine. I've borrowed it, so I have to take good care of it. I can't let anyone else mistreat it."*

The Dhamma doesn't belong to anyone. It's common property, like unsettled land: If we don't lay claim to it by developing it, it's simply vacant, uncleared land without any crops. If we want to lay claim to it, we have to develop it in line with established principles if we want it really to be ours. When difficulties arise — poverty, pain, illness, and death — we'll then have something to protect us. But if we haven't followed the established principles, then we'll put the blame on the Buddha, Dhamma, Sangha, and inner worth in general for not helping us when these things arise. And that will discourage us from developing any inner worth at all.

The mind is the most important factor in life, the most important factor in the world, for it's the basic foundation of our inner worth. If the mind is dark and defiled instead of being bright and pure, then no matter how much we practice generosity, virtue, or meditation, we won't get any results. The Buddha knew that we're all going to have to go abroad (start a new life after death), which is why he taught us to develop inner worth as a way of knowing how to get our provisions ready. We have to know how to get to where we want to go, how to dress properly, and how to speak their language. We'll also have to put money in the bank so that we'll be able to exchange it for their currency.

"Putting money in the bank" means generosity in making donations and being charitable. Learning their language means knowing how to say that we take refuge in the Buddha, Dhamma, and Sangha. Being complete in our virtue is like having fashionable clothes to wear. Yet even if we have funds to exchange, good clothes to wear, and know how to speak their language, but are basically loony — i.e., our minds are wandering all over the place, with no basis in concentration — we still won't pass inspection. This is why the Buddha wanted us to develop our minds as much as possible, making them pure and bright. When our wealth and inner merit are complete in this way, they'll spread to our children and other people around us.

All people have inner worth within them, but whoever doesn't know how to lay claim to it and develop it won't get any benefit from it at all.

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Human treasures aren't important. Thieves and fools can find them with no problem at all. But the treasure of a human rebirth is something that people without virtue can't gain.

The Buddha taught that with noble treasures (*ariya-dhana*), whoever has a lot isn't poor, whoever has even a little isn't poor. The important thing is that you give rise to them within yourself, and you'll always be wealthy. For example, if you make up your mind to donate a material object to Buddhism, it immediately turns into the noble treasure of generosity in your heart. When you abstain from evil in your words and deeds, they turn into the noble treasure of virtue. When this is the case, your treasures are within you. You haven't deposited them with anyone else. Your generosity lies within you, your virtue — the virtue of restraint of the senses — lies in your eyes, your ears, your mouth. When your treasures are with you like this, it's like keeping your money in your own pocket, without depositing it with anyone else: There are bound to be no problems. You don't have to worry that they'll swindle or cheat you. When you've got your money right in your own pocket, what is there to fear?

The Buddha teaches us not to be possessive of things. Let them go in line with their nature and take only the nourishment they have to offer. Material things are dregs and leavings; their nourishment is the joy we feel when we're willing to give them away. So don't eat the dregs. Spit them out so that they can be of use, both to others and to yourself in the sense of inner worth that comes from being generous.

We have to build up our inner worth, our perfections as quickly as possible, because our conviction in these things isn't yet sure. Some days it shrinks out of sight: That's called turtle-head conviction. Some days it stretches back out again. So if it stretches out today, act on it. Tomorrow it may shrink back in again.

Two legs, two arms, two hands, two eyes, one mouth: These are your perfections. Put them to use.

People who don't believe in goodness rarely do good, but people who don't believe in evil do evil all the time.

Evil isn't something natural that happens on its own. It happens only if we do it.

The Buddha teaches us to develop inner worth by meditating on good will, but you have to be intent on really doing it if you want to get real results. Even if it's only for a short time — the wiggle of an elephant's ears or the flicker of a snake's tongue — it can give rise to amazing power, like the power of an elephant or a snake in being able to kill off people or other animals in the twinkling of an eye. All an elephant has to do is wiggle his ears just once, and people trip all over themselves trying to run away. But if you're not really true in what you do, the power of truth won't appear in the mind, and you won't be able to use it to get any results — like the ear of a dog or a cat: It can wiggle all day long and yet it won't cause anyone any fear.

Mindfulness and alertness are the quality of the Buddha. The cool sense of happiness they give is the quality of the Dhamma. If you can maintain that coolness until it hardens into a block of ice — i.e., you make that goodness solid and strong in your heart — that's the quality of the Sangha. Once you've got a solid block of goodness like this, you can pick it up and put it to any use that you like.

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Being a slave to the Buddha, Dhamma, and Sangha is called being a slave to a noble family, the kind of people we can willingly be slaves to. But being a slave to our moods — cravings and defilements — is like being a slave to bandits and thieves. What sort of valuables are they going to have to give us? But even though it's proper to be a slave to the Buddha, Dhamma, and Sangha, it's still no match for not having to be a slave to anyone, for the word "slave" means that we're not yet free. So the Buddha teaches us to learn how to depend on ourselves — *attabi attano natbo*, the self is its own mainstay. That's when we'll be able to rise up free, released from our slavery, with no need to have anyone order us around ever again.

When we come to the monastery we come looking for peace and calm, so don't go releasing tigers, crocodiles, and rabid dogs into the monastery grounds, endangering everyone who comes here. Tigers, crocodiles, and rabid dogs stand for our very own greed, anger, and delusion. We have to chain them and cage them and lock them up tight. Make absolutely sure that they don't come escaping out your thoughts, words, and deeds in any way.

People who don't get ahead in life are the ones whose bodies are human but whose minds drop down to lower levels. In other words, they're all right in physical terms, but not in terms of their minds. For instance, when we come to the monastery, we depend on our feet to walk us here, but then when we get here if we let our minds and manners fall into lower ways, we're no different from bats that hook their feet up on high places and then let their heads hang down low.

The Dhamma is an affair of the heart. The words spoken are Dhamma, the intention in speaking is Dhamma, and you have to make your heart into Dhamma if you want to hear it as Dhamma. When these three factors come together, listening to the Dhamma can give countless rewards.

When we listen to the Dhamma it's as if the monk is giving us each a knife; it's up to us to accept it or not. When we get back home and run into problems or issues in our families, we can use the knife to cut right through them. But if we throw the knife down right here or hand it back to the monk, we won't have any weapon to use when we meet up with issues at home.

The study of the Dhamma is like reading a cookbook. The practice of the Dhamma is like fixing food. The attainment of the Dhamma is like knowing the taste of the food. If we simply read the texts without putting them into practice, it's like knowing that there are such things as peppers, onions, and garlic, but without having them for a meal.

If you study the Dhamma without practicing it, it's as if you're missing parts of your body. If you study and practice, it's like having two eyes, two hands, and two legs. You can do things a lot more easily than a person with only one eye, one hand, or one leg.

Having self-respect means that you respect your thoughts, words, and deeds. Respect for your deeds means that whatever you do, you always follow the three principles of skillful action: no killing, no stealing, no illicit sex. Respect for your words means that whatever you say, you always follow the four principles of skillful speech: no lying, no divisive tale-bearing, no harsh language, and no idle chatter. Respect for your thoughts means that whatever you think, you always follow the three principles of the skillful mind: trying to keep your views straight, with no greed or ill will.

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Having broken precepts is better than not having any precepts to break. Wearing torn clothes is better than going around naked.

Lots of dead beings have gone into your mouth — pigs, chickens, cattle, etc. — so make sure that it isn't possessed by their spirits. Before you say anything, no matter what your intention, look right and left and speak only when you're sure that it's just right for the situation. Don't give in to bad manners.

Concerning Right Livelihood: Even if our basic livelihood is honest, but we practice it dishonestly, it's considered wrong. For example, we're farmers, but we lay claim to other people's fields as our own: This is Wrong Livelihood, and the crops we grow on that land will do us harm.

There are two kinds of foulness: the kind the Buddha praised and the kind he criticized. The kind he praised is the filth and foulness of the body, for it makes us see clearly the aging and unattractiveness of compounded things so that the mind will gain a chastened sense of dispassion, grow disenchanted with its attachment to suffering, and set its sights on developing its inner worth so as to escape from that suffering. As for the foulness the Buddha criticized, that's the foulness of an evil mind, which defiles our thoughts, words, and deeds. This is something the Buddha criticized and penalized in very heavy terms. So we have to keep washing off our actions in all situations. Only when our thoughts, words, and deeds are clean will wise people praise us as being uncomplacent and good.

Restraint of the senses means that we bring the senses and their objects into proportion with one another. For instance, guarding the eyes means that we don't let our eyes get bigger than the sights they see, and we don't let the sights get bigger than the eyes. If the sights are bigger than the eyes, they get lodged there. We think about them night and day. If the eyes are bigger than the sights, that means we can't get enough of those sights and keep wanting to see them more. In either case, we give rise to greed and delusion. The fires of passion, aversion, and delusion burn our eyes and make us suffer.

One important noble treasure is meditation, keeping the mind from wandering aimlessly around in all kinds of issues. When we keep the Buddha, Dhamma, and Sangha in mind, it's as if we were soaking in their virtues. When that's the case, the mind will have to become saturated with inner worth. It's the same as if we were to take a handful of bitter herbs and soak them in syrup until the syrup saturates them. Their bitterness will disappear and be replaced with sweetness. No matter how shoddy a person's mind, if it gets constantly soaked in goodness, it will have to become more and more refined, like bitter herbs sweetened in syrup.

Whatever you do, be true in doing it if you want to meet up with the truth. If you're really true in what you do, doing just a little bit can be enough. One million in real money is better than ten million in counterfeit bills. When you speak, stay right with your speaking. Whatever you do, stay right with what you're doing. When you eat, stay with your eating; when you stand, stay with your standing; when you walk, stay with your walking; when you're sitting, stay with your sitting; when you're lying down, stay with your lying down. Don't let your mind get ahead of the truth.

The heart is like food in a serving dish. Mindfulness is like a cover over the dish. If you lack mindfulness, it's as if you left the dish uncovered: Flies (defilements) are sure to come and land on it

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and contaminate it with all sorts of germs so that the food becomes toxic and can make you sick. So you always have to be careful to keep the dish covered. Don't let flies land on it. That way your heart will be clean and pure, and will give rise to wisdom and knowledge.

A deserted house, a house where someone has died, gives you the chills. Only if there are people in the house will you feel secure. A person who is not mindful of the present is like a deserted house. When you see such a person, you don't feel secure.

Defilements are like sand bars or stumps in a river that will keep our boat from getting to shore. In other words, passion is something that snags us, anger is something that bumps into us, and delusion is something that makes us spin around and sink. There's a story they tell of two men who were hired to row a boat along the rivers and canals to sell plowshares, shovels, and hoes. If they sold all the wares in the boat, their employer would give them their full wages of one kahapana, which was equal to about four dollars, a day. The first day their employer went out with them, and they sold all their wares. After that, he didn't go out with them, so the two of them went out to sell their wares on their own. One day, as they were out rowing along, calling out, "Plowshares, shovels, and hoes!" their minds wandered and they started getting drowsy. All of a sudden they crashed smack into a stump and ran aground on a sandbar. Even after they got free they were so shaken up that instead of calling out, "Plowshares, shovels, and hoes!" they started calling out, "Sandbars and stumps! Sandbars and stumps!" all along the river, but nobody wanted to buy.

When evening came, they rowed back to their employer's house, their boat still full of plowshares, shovels, and hoes. They hadn't been able to sell a thing. So the employer gave them each only a dollar for their day's wages. One of the men took the money back to his wife, who was surprised to see that she was getting only one dollar, instead of the usual four. "Maybe he's given the rest of the money to another woman," she thought, so she gave him a piece of her mind. No matter how much he tried to explain things, she wouldn't listen. So he told her to go ask the employer. If what he said wasn't true, he'd be willing to let her hit him once on the head. The wife, impatient because she was so angry, said, "No, let me hit you first, and then I'll go ask." As she said this, she reached for a shovel handle, but all she could grab was the stick they used to drive the dog out of the house, so she used that to bash her husband three times on the head. Later, of course, she found out the truth, but by that time it was too late, for the husband had already gotten three free hits on the head.

This story shows the harm that can come from not being mindful. If you let your mind wander away from what you're doing, you can end up getting yourself into trouble.

There's danger that comes from being good. If you're not especially good, nobody gets fixated on you. The important thing is that you know how to use your goodness to your benefit. If you're a good person but don't know how to use your goodness — i.e., you use it at the wrong time or place, or in a way that gets other people upset — it won't benefit you, and will instead cause you harm. In this way your goodness turns into evil. So you have to be circumspect in how you let your goodness show.

Keep your evil intentions to yourself, and be careful with your good intentions, too. It's like handing a knife to a person: You may have good intentions, hoping that he'll put it to good use, but if he uses it to kill someone, your intentions backfire on both of you.

Goodness comes from evil, in that once you really take a good look at evil, it loses. Whatever you look at, look at it from all sides. This is why they don't let you look a long time at pretty things or beautiful women, because after a while you'll see that they aren't all that beautiful after all. So if you see something lovely, look at it long and hard until you see that it's not as lovely as you thought. If someone makes you angry, contemplate them until you feel compassion for them. The same principle holds for delusion.

If you're wise, then greed, anger, and delusion can help you. If you're wise, even desire can help you by making you want to develop your inner worth. So don't look down on these things. You're sitting here listening to a sermon. What made you come? Desire did. When people ordain as monks and novices, what gave the order? Craving. So don't look only at the drawbacks of craving and desire. If you don't have the desire to be good, you can't develop inner worth. People who develop their inner worth have to start out with the intention to do it. Ignorance is good in that when we know we're ignorant we'll do something to remedy the situation. Ignorance leads us astray, but in the end it will lead us back. Knowledge never led anyone to look for learning. Ignorance is what leads people to look for knowledge. If you already know, what's there to look for?

When we practice the Dhamma it gives three kinds of benefits: We help ourselves gain release from suffering, we help other people, and we help keep the religion alive.

Why Meditate?

Wherever there are effects, there always have to be causes. The world we experience comes from the heart as its cause. If the heart is good, the world will have to be good. If the heart is bad, the world will have to be bad.

The mind, when it's not with the body in the present, is "world." When it's with the body in the present, it's Dhamma. If it's world, it has to be as hot as fire. If it's Dhamma, it's as cool as water.

Don't be complacent. Remind yourself that we're all being chased out of the world day by day. In other words, aging rears up, illness roars, and death runs up the score. So don't be oblivious, partying around with your defilements. Associate with the qualities of the Buddha, Dhamma, and Sangha until your mind develops Right Concentration. That way you won't have anything to fear from the dangers of the world.

Believing other people is all right, but it's not really special. It's like borrowing money: We'll have to share the return on our investment with our lenders. When we don't yet know, can't yet have any real conviction in ourselves, and still have to believe what other people say, it's like being an infant who has to depend on its parents. If we don't get stronger, we'll have to keep being nursed all the way through old age. If we don't try to train the mind until it's firm and unwavering, it won't give rise to the strength of concentration and will have to keep on being a child.

When we're able to shake off all the issues in the mind, leaving just the mind in and of itself, three gems will appear in it: the Gem of the Buddha, the Gem of the Dhamma, and the Gem of the Sangha. Once these three gems appear within us, we won't have to load ourselves down by carrying around much of anything else. Simply put them under your arm if you like, or even up your nose.

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When you have this kind of wealth, your mind can be light, and noble treasures will arise within you. In other words, conviction in the qualities of the Buddha will appear within the mind. Then you practice in line with those qualities until you gain the various results they have to offer. You'll see the true Buddha, Dhamma, and Sangha in your heart. If you try to take refuge in the Buddha, Dhamma, and Sangha on the outer level, you're going to die for sure. The Buddha on the outer level entered nibbana a long time ago. The Dhamma on the outer level is just letters in books. The Sangha on the outer level is the monks with shaven heads and yellow robes that you see roaming all over the country. If you try to hold onto these things, it's like carrying a heavy hoe that won't do you any good. But if you hold onto the virtues of the Buddha, Dhamma, and Sangha within you and then put them into practice, you'll realize that what you're looking for is right here in the heart. And then what do you want? To return to the human state? To attain a heavenly state? To attain nibbana? Or go to hell? They're all possible, without your having to look for them anywhere else.

The Buddha taught that the five aggregates are a heavy burden, because they all get to the point where we can't bear carrying them around anymore and have to throw them down in the mud. If you don't keep cleansing them, they keep getting heavier and heavier. If you then try to go depending on other people, you weigh them down, and you yourself are helpless. This is because stashing things away in the heart is like taking pictures without ever developing the film. What you eat gets put on the film, what you say gets put on the film, what you hear gets put on the film, but that's as far as it gets: on the film. You've never stopped to look at what kind of pictures you have, pretty or ugly. If you want to see your pictures, you have to take the film into the darkroom, by closing your eyes and practicing concentration, attaining the first jhana, directing your thoughts to the present and evaluating it until you can see yourself clearly. If you don't go into the darkroom now, someday the King of Death is going to blindfold you, tie up your feet and hands, and drag you into *his* darkroom. In other words, when you're on the verge of death you won't be able to open your mouth or eyes. Nobody will be able to feed you. You'll want to eat but won't be able to eat. You'll want to speak but won't be able to speak. Your ears will get closed off so that you can't hear anything clearly. You won't be able to see your parents, family, children, or grandchildren. You won't be able to tell them your last wishes. That's called the darkroom of the King of Death.

The mind is the only thing that senses pleasure and pain. The body has no sense of these things at all. It's like taking a knife to murder someone: They don't hunt down the knife and punish it. They punish only the person who used it to commit murder.

If your mind isn't good, then the goodness of your actions isn't really good, and the goodness of your words isn't really good, either.

You have to develop power within yourself, like stocking up on gunpowder. If a gun has no gunpowder, it can't be used to destroy anything. People who have to be servants are the ones who lack the power to be anyone else's boss. As for the people who have that power, all they have to do is point their fingers, and other people will jump up and run. If we don't develop our own powers, we'll have to be servants — slaves to defilement — throughout time.

The body is like a knife. If you have a knife but don't keep sharpening it, it will get coated thick with rust. In the same way, if you have a body — physical elements, aggregates, and sense media — but don't train it and keep it polished, it'll get coated thick with defilements. If it were a gun, it wouldn't even kill a fly.

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Normally, the mind doesn't like to stay where it is. It keeps flowing out the eyes, ears, nose, tongue, and body — like a river that splits into five streams instead of flowing as one. In a river like that, the force of the current is weakened and can't run at full strength. In addition to flowing out the five senses, the mind also leaks out through thoughts of the past and future, instead of staying firm in the present. This is why the mind has no peace or strength, because it never gets to rest. When the mind loses strength, the body loses strength as well and won't be able to succeed at anything.

If the mind doesn't stay with the body in the present, and instead wanders around exposed to external perceptions, it's bound to get into all sorts of difficulties, just like a person who doesn't stay in his house and instead goes running around outside. He's bound to be exposed to sun and rain, and he may get run over by a car or bitten by a rabid dog. If we stay in our home, then even though there may still be some dangers, they won't be too serious, and we won't get into difficulties.

When the mind isn't quiet, it's like running around with a flaming torch. You're bound to burn yourself. Only when you stop running will you be able to cool down.

People who accumulate merit but don't develop the heart's foundation are like people who own land but don't have a deed. They might be able to sell it for money, but they're an easy mark for a swindler, because they don't have any firm basis for their claim. If you practice generosity and virtue but not meditation (the heart's foundation), it's like taking a bath on a hot day only from the waist down. If you don't bathe all the way from the head on down, you won't get totally refreshed, because the coolness doesn't go all the way to the heart.

External merit — generosity and virtue — is like the skin of a fruit. Internal merit — meditation — is like the flesh of the fruit. You can't have one without the other. If fruit doesn't have skin, its flesh won't grow. If it has skin but no flesh, you can't eat it. Each helps the other, but they differ in quality. External merit is what protects internal merit, while the internal merit nourishes merit outside.

Today I'm going to talk about how to drill a well. This is a difficult skill, not like simply digging or plowing.

We all want happiness, but we don't really know what happiness is. Real happiness is nothing other than the inner worth and skillfulness of the heart. So where are we going to find inner worth? Inner worth is like a well. The first kind of well is simply a depression in the ground for catching rain water, like a pond. We can't get too much use out of this kind of well because there are times when water buffaloes, cattle, and other animals get in the water to bathe and drink, making it muddy. If you want to use the water, you have to filter it many times. This kind of well is like generosity, which gives only shallow rewards, like the water in a shallow depression.

The second kind of well is like a deep reservoir. Cattle can't bathe or drink in it. The only animals that go into the reservoir are toads and frogs, but even so, if we want to use the water we have to filter it first. This kind of well is like the virtue of observing the precepts, which gives deeper rewards than generosity.

The third kind of well is an artesian well with a constantly running spring. No matter how much water you use, it never runs dry. This kind of well is so deep that even mosquitoes (your defilements)

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can't get down into the water. To drill this kind of well you need to use a drill with a diamond bit and a strong steel shaft if you want to reach the underground water. This kind of well is like meditation, because you have to use strong mindfulness, discernment, persistence, and endurance if you want to succeed at drilling. Mindfulness has to be like the diamond bit; and endurance, the steel shaft. When you use your persistence to drill on down, the results will arise as inner worth and skillfulness that keep flowing in, bathing the mind, like the waters of immortality that provide the mind with a constant stream of refreshment and delight.

If we don't have a safe place for our inner worth, how is it going to help us? It's like raising horses or cows but not fencing in a place for them to stay. If they go wandering off, it's your fault, not theirs. If you don't practice virtue, concentration, and discernment on your own, you're going to get taken in by the symbols of refuge, and never get to the real thing. The symbols of refuge are: Buddha images, which are just symbols of the Buddha; Buddhist texts, which are symbols of the Dhamma; and Buddhist monks and nuns, who are symbols of those who have practiced rightly and well until becoming noble disciples. If you get stuck on the outer level, you'll never meet with the real thing.

Inner worth is like money. If your pocket has a hole, it'll let your money slip right through. If you do things that give rise to inner worth but don't keep that worth in your heart, it won't stay with you. When you're about to die and you call on it to help you, what will there be to answer your call? When this is the case, you can't criticize all the good things you've done for not helping you. You have to put the blame on yourself. If you stick a dollar in your pocket but your pocket is torn, then when the time comes to buy a cup of coffee you won't have any money to buy it. In that case, what are you going to blame: the money or your pocket?

To practice meditation is like harvesting your crop of inner worth and eating it. If you don't harvest it, it'll spoil. If you eat it in time, it'll nourish your body. If you don't eat it in time, it'll go to waste. If you don't take your inner worth into your heart, you'll never feel full.

Generosity is something that poor people can't practice, but crazy people can. Virtue is something that crazy people can't practice, but poor people can. As for meditation, everyone can practice it, no matter what their age, sex, or station in life.

A mind without concentration is like a pile of wooden posts left lying on the ground for people and animals to step all over. But if we stand the posts up and plant them in the soil, we can get good use out of them. Even if they're not tall — only a meter or so — but we put them close together in a line, we can fence in our yard and prevent people and animals from coming in and traipsing all over our property. It's the same with the mind. If we take a firm stance in concentration as the heart's foundation, keeping our mindfulness and alertness close together in line, we can keep defilements from slipping into the mind and making it soiled.

The Dhamma is something constant and true. The reason we don't see the truth is because we're always on the move. If we're riding in a car, we can't clearly see the things that pass near by us on the road, such as how big the stones on the ground are, their color or shape. We look at trees and mountains, and they all seem to be on the move. If we've been in a car since birth, without stopping to get out and walk around on our own, we're sure to think that cars run, trees run, and mountains run. What we see isn't in line with the truth. The running is in us, in the car, not in the mountains and trees.

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Whoever develops concentration will end up with three eyes. In other words, your outer left eye will see good things, your outer right eye will see bad things, and they'll send them in to the inner eye, which will remain normal. You'll also have three ears: Your outer left ear will hear praise, your outer right ear will hear criticism, and they'll send them in to the inner ear, which will stay normal. This is how you can receive all the guests the world sends your way. As for the eye of the mind — intuitive insight — it will receive your defilements. Once it really understands them, it will be able to send them packing. That way you'll be able to live in the world without suffering.

If you really apply yourself, you can accomplish all kinds of things even with a single pocket knife. In the same way, if you really apply yourself to making the mind still, you can get much better results than a person who studies and memorizes hundreds and thousands of texts. Making the mind still is something we can all do. If it were beyond our powers, the Buddha wouldn't have taught us to do it.

The paths and fruitions leading to nibbana aren't the property of stupid people, and they don't belong to smart people, either. They belong to those who are true and really determined in developing goodness for themselves.

The body is like a mountain containing all kinds of minerals. There's gold, silver, and diamond ore buried here in this rock — i.e., the Unconditioned is in here. And there's also the Conditioned, which is like trees, weeds, dirt, and rocks where all sorts of people and animals — monkeys, tigers, and elephants — dwell. As for the gold and silver, they're not a dwelling place for animals at all. So if we act like monkeys, tigers, and elephants, we'll meet up with nothing but trees, weeds, dirt, and rocks. We'll never meet up with things of value like silver or gold.

To act like monkeys means that we never apply ourselves to anything. We wander everywhere, with no fixed place to eat or sleep, swinging from branch to branch as we feel like it. What this means is that our minds have no firm place to stay, no concentration. We wander here and there in the past and future in our thoughts and moods, with no time to stop and stay in place. This is what it means to act like a monkey.

As for tigers, they're violent and fierce. This stands for the anger that arises in the human heart and erupts outward, smothering whatever goodness we may have.

As for elephants, they like to hear nothing but sweet words and praise. They can't take criticism at all. This is like people who, when they do something wrong, can't stand to be told that it's wrong. If they do something right and get a little praise, they smile until their cheeks hurt. This is what it means to be like an elephant.

So we have to get rid of the monkeys, tigers, and elephants in ourselves so that we can turn into human beings. That way we can look at our mountain and realize that if we want valuable things, we'll be able to get valuable things out of it. If we want worthless things, we'll get worthless things out of it. We can then gather all kinds of treasures. We can level the dirt and turn it into fields. We can take the rocks and extract the silver and gold. As for the trees, we can cut them down and turn them into firewood or charcoal so that we can cook our food and fire our smelter, or else turn them into posts and boards so that we can build ourselves a home.

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All of these things we'll be able to get from our mountain, but we have to apply ourselves and really be persistent. If we want silver and gold, we have to set up a smelter and heat the rocks to see which elements are there in a pure form (the Unconditioned) and which ones are mixed (the Conditioned). This is how we do it: (1) We have to get a lot of fuel; (2) we have to set up a furnace; and (3) we have to start a fire. Only then will we be able to extract the ore from our rock.

Finding lots of fuel means being willing to let go of things both inside and out. As for setting up a furnace, we have to find a place with good, solid ground and a roof that doesn't leak. This stands for our persistence. Once we've got our furnace, we start a fire. This refers to the ardency of our practice. Once our practice is ardent, the various elements in our rock — the body — will melt and separate out on their own, just as when they melt down minerals, the silver, lead, and tin, etc., will separate out on their own. The same holds true with the body. When it undergoes ardent inspection by the mind, the pure ore and the various impurities will separate out of their own accord.

But most meditators nowadays want to separate things out even before they've put their rock into the smelter. They think things out on their own without a single one of the tools needed for smelting. No fuel, no furnace, no fire, a leaky roof and a piece of caved-in ground: What are they going to smelt? They say that the transcendent has to be like this, insight meditation has to be like that, stream-entry has to be like this; you have to let go like this and that in order to reach this and that stage; the stages of once-returning, non-returning, and arahantship have to be reached in this and that way; the four levels of jhana have to be done in this and that way. They try to separate things out in line with their own ideas, but no matter how much they try, they can't get things to separate, because they don't have any fuel, any fire, any furnace. Where are they going to get any results?

Results don't come from thinking. They come from the qualities we build into the mind. So don't try to separate things out in line with your own notions. Some people see a person carrying a big hunk of rock to his home and think that he's a stupid fool. First of all, the rock is heavy, and besides — what can there be of any value in a plain old rock? So they take a shovel to the mountain to dig up only the silver and gold — not too much, just some tiny, light nuggets to wrap up and carry back home in a cloth. But they end up with nothing at all, because the nuggets they want are firmly embedded in the mountain; they'll need more than a shovel to get them out.

As for the "stupid" person, as soon as he gets home he clears out a space, builds a furnace, gathers fuel, starts a fire, and throws the rock in. When the rock is subjected to strong heat, the various ores in the rock will begin to melt and to separate. The silver will come seeping out and go one way, the gold another, the tin and lead another, the diamond another, without getting mixed. This way the stupid person will be able to choose the silver, gold, and diamond as he likes.

As for the people who think they're intelligent, who know that this is this and that is that, that you have to reach this level before you can reach that level, that concentration is like this, insight meditation is like that, the transcendent is like this: In the end they have nothing to swallow but their own saliva. They gain no valuables at all.

The person who thinks he's stupid, when he encounters something, has to keep contemplating, reflecting, digging away, until he comes to an understanding. If we want happiness, we have to give rise to the causes:

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(1) Gather a lot of fuel. What this means is that we're willing to give up the sights, sounds, smells, tastes, tactile sensations, and ideas within ourselves, as well as being generous with outside things, by making donations, observing the precepts, and practicing meditation. This is how we burn away our defilements through the perfection of generosity (*caga-parami*). The perfection of generosity is excellent fuel for roasting our defilements.

(2) Set up a furnace. This stands for the effort we put into abandoning physical pleasure and sitting in meditation, thinking of the Buddha, Dhamma, and Sangha as a way of calming the mind. Then we keep pumping the breath into the body, in the same way that they pump air into a furnace for casting a bronze Buddha image. We make the heart steady and firm, with mindfulness and alertness constantly in control. This way the inner fire of our ardency will get stronger and stronger. As we keep pumping the breath in, the sense of inner light will get brighter and brighter.

Once you're able to keep this up, gather your body and mind together into one. Don't try to crack or divide them up at all, for that's the way of a fool who thinks he knows everything beforehand. As the fire of our ardency keeps getting stronger, the various elements in the body will melt and separate out of their own accord.

When you practice the Dhamma, don't worry about how it's going to go. Don't try to plan or arrange things to go this way or that. When the fire of your practice reaches full strength, all the various impurities will fall away on their own, leaving just the pure ore. The rock clinging to the ore — the various Hindrances (*nivarana*) — will fall away from the heart. But if your furnace is full of holes, the fire will flicker outside and the heat inside will dissipate. You won't be able to burn away the heart's various impurities. So you have to learn how to act like a person making charcoal.

(3) Start a fire. When people make charcoal they start their fire and then close off their furnace (i.e., we close off our senses), leaving just a tiny air vent (i.e., our nose). With the furnace entirely closed off in this way, the wood they place in the furnace won't burn up or turn into ashes. When they finally open the furnace, they'll find hard, high-quality charcoal. In the same way, once we can remember our meditation word without getting distracted, the closing off of the furnace means that we close off the various perceptions that register by way of the eyes, ears, nose, tongue, body, and intellect. We close off the Hindrances and don't let the mind flicker out after outside perceptions. Once everything is closed off in this way, the wood will keep smoldering away in the furnace. When the time comes to open it up, we'll find that there are no ashes and that we've ended up with good, hard charcoal of high quality.

The solid goodness we develop in the heart is like charcoal that we can then use to smelt our ore. This way, the elements within us will gain strength, able to separate themselves into the Conditioned and the Unconditioned. Once we give rise to the four stages of jhana, unskillful mental states — the rock — will separate out and fall away. Sensual desire will separate out, ill will, torpor & lethargy, restlessness & anxiety, and uncertainty will all separate out and fall away. The mind will be totally absorbed in jhana, with directed thought and evaluation in charge. Just this is enough for insight to arise. We'll be able to see clearly what's diamond, what's silver, and what's gold. The silver is the sense of fullness or rapture, the gold is the sense of pleasure and ease that arises within.

Once there's pleasure, no disturbances will appear in the mind, like a burning lantern when there's no wind to disturb the flame. This is the light of the Dhamma (*dhammo padipo*) or the brilliance of

discernment (*pañña-pajoto*), i.e., insight meditation, arising. We'll see the Buddha, Dhamma, and Sangha within. The heart will give rise to treasures.

This is like setting up a furnace and using charcoal to smelt ore. The various elements in the rock will separate out, leaving the Unconditioned. Insight meditation is the fire we use to heat the rock. *If we want things to separate out like this, we have to use insight meditation.* Don't try to separate things out on your own. Whatever is going to turn into light, ashes, charcoal, or smoke will do so of its own accord. This is how we get past the Conditioned. The Unconditioned will separate out to one side, the Conditioned to another. This way we'll get to see what's really true. But however things separate out, you have to keep using your discernment even further. If you get attached to good things, they can backfire on you. If you get attached to bad, you've gone wrong.

Beginning Concentration

When we practice breath meditation, we've been given methods for warding off the various Hindrances that will destroy the good results of what we're doing. We're told to focus on the in-and-out breath and to keep mindfulness in charge, together with the meditation word, *buddho, buddho*, in and out with the breath. If you want just to think *buddho*, you can, but it's too light. Your awareness won't go deep. It's the nature of shallow things that dust and dirt can blow in easily and fill them up quickly. As for deep things, dust and dirt can't easily blow in. In the same way, when the mind is deep, it isn't easily affected by preoccupations.

So when you simply focus on *buddho, buddho*, it doesn't carry much weight. It's like taking a knife and slicing away at the air. You don't feel much of anything because there's nothing for the knife to strike against. But if you take the same knife and use it to slice away at a stump or any other object, you'll feel that your hand has more weight and your arm gains strength, able to ward off any enemies that may threaten you.

This is why we're taught to focus on a single spot so that the mind will gain strength, solid and steady in a single preoccupation. Take as your target any of the meditation objects in the basic list of forty. Your mind will gain strength; your mindfulness will mature into Right Mindfulness and Right Concentration.

Buddho is the meditation word. Being mindful and alert to the in-and-out breath is the actual meditation. Once the mind is in place you can let go of your meditation word. The meditation word is like bait. For example, if we want a chicken to come our way, we scatter rice on the ground. Once the chicken comes for the rice, we don't have to scatter any more.

Being mindful, remembering to stay with the breath, is one thing. Alertness — examining the breath sensations that flow throughout the entire body, knowing whether the breath feels constricted or broad, shallow or deep, heavy or light, fast or slow — is something else. Together they form the component factors of meditation.

The in-and-out breath is like the wick of a candle or a lantern. Focusing mindfulness on the breath is like lighting the wick so that it gives off light. A single candle, if its wick is lit, can burn down an

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entire city. In the same way, mindfulness can destroy all the bad things within us: defilement, unawareness, craving, and attachment. Mindfulness is the consuming fire of the practice.

Being mindful of the breath is like casting a Buddha image inside yourself. Your body is like the furnace, mindfulness is like the mold. If mindfulness lapses, the bronze will leak out of the mold and your Buddha image will be ruined.

Letting mindfulness lapse is like getting a hole in your clothes. Letting it lapse again is like getting a second hole. If you keep letting it lapse, it's like getting a third, fourth, fifth, and sixth hole in your clothes until ultimately you can't wear them.

There are three ways in which mindfulness lapses. The first is by bringing inside things out to think about. In other words, you grab hold of any lights or visions that may appear, and in this way your path washes out. The second way is by bringing outside things in to think about, i.e., abandoning your meditation object. The third way is by losing consciousness. You sit there, but it's as if you were asleep. All of these things are called a washed-out path, like a road that washes out and is full of deep potholes.

To keep preoccupations out of the mind is to cut a path in the mind. To let outside preoccupations in is to let the path wash out. When the path washes out, there's no way that insight or discernment will arise, just as when a road washes out, no cars or trucks can run along it. When concentration gets extinguished in this way, you can't practice insight meditation. There's nothing left but thoughts about insight, thoughts about concentration, thinking, guessing, groping in line with your old preconceptions. The virtues of your heart disappear without your realizing it. If you want to go back and start all over, it's hard — like going back over a washed-out road.

The mind in concentration is like genuine silver, malleable and white because nothing else is adulterating it. We can make it into whatever we want, easily and quickly, without having to waste time placing it in a crucible and heating it to get rid of the impurities. The mind not in concentration is like imitation or adulterated silver: hard, brittle, and black, because it's mixed with copper or lead. The more the impurities, the lower its value.

A pure mind is thus like genuine silver. The various thoughts that darken the mind are like the impurities that make the silver black, brittle, and dull. So if we let thoughts get mixed up in the mind, we turn the mind into imitation silver. We won't be able to find any purity in it at all. When this is the case, the mind will have no stillness. But if we brush away the various thoughts and preoccupations adulterating the mind, it will become firmly established in concentration, in line with the factors of the path. Once the mind turns into the path, we have to watch over it carefully, in the same way that we try to keep a road from washing out. We have to survey it continually to see where it's getting rutted or forming potholes. Wherever it needs repairing, we fix it right away. If we don't fix it immediately, and let it get full of potholes or wash away, it'll be really hard to repair. Once the mind is following the path, any Hindrances that interfere are a break in the road. If we don't hurry up and repair it, the break will get wider and deeper until the road turns into an ordinary piece of ground.

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So while you're trying to develop the path, if you let yourself be forgetful — if you let your mindfulness lapse, letting distractions into the mind — the state of mind that forms the path will immediately be destroyed. Your meditation will be spoiled, your concentration will be spoiled, the mind will return to its ordinary state and won't be able to find the path to genuine goodness.

While we're sitting in concentration, if our mind doesn't stay with the body in the present, it's as if we've earned some food but don't watch over it. Dogs and cats are bound to come and eat it. The dogs and cats, here, are the five Hindrances — sensual desire, ill will, torpor & lethargy, restlessness & anxiety, and uncertainty — that we like to keep as our pets. As soon as our back is turned, they're going to sneak in and eat up our food — the happiness and inner worth that we should have received from our practice.

Being lost is better than being asleep. Being aware, even if you have defilements, is better than being absent-minded. If you know you have defilements, you can work to end them. A person who's not aware is dead.

If your mind doesn't stay in one place, it's like standing on a lawn: If you stand in ten different places, the grass will grow in all ten places, because first you stand here for a while and then go stand there for a while and then go stand over there. If you don't stay long in any one place, grass will grow everywhere. But if you really stand still in one place, how will the grass grow there? No grass will be able to grow on the spot where the soles of your feet are standing. In the same way, if your mind stands firm in one place, always mindful of the in-and-out breath, no Hindrances or defilements will be able to arise.

The path we're following is a short-cut. It's a path worn smooth. Following a smooth path means that there are no weeds growing on it, no obstacles in our way, no need to stop here and there and slow down our progress. The reason we don't yet know how to follow this path is because we don't know how to walk. We walk like people in general all over the world: going forward, turning back, looking left and right. This is why we keep running into one another all the time, falling down, and then picking ourselves back up. Sometimes, even when nobody runs into us, we stagger. Even when nobody trips us up, we fall. Sometimes we get lazy and lie down to rest. Sometimes we stop to look at things we meet along the way. This way we never get to the goal because we aren't really intent on walking. We wander here and there without following the path.

So we have to learn a new way to walk, the Buddha's way. What is the Buddha's way? The Buddha's way of walking is to walk like a soldier. Soldiers don't stagger back and forth the way we do. They walk standing up straight, staying in place, stamping their feet on the ground. This way they don't get tired, because they don't have to go far. If we were to walk in place for three hours, the grass beneath our feet would be flattened out. Any grass that tried to grow in its place wouldn't be able to get above ground level.

It's the same with the work we're doing right now, being mindful to focus on the breath. If we're really intent on it, focusing our attention solely on the breath without letting it wander off and disappear, all the various Hindrances — thoughts of past and future, good and bad — won't be able to reach in to touch us. All the Hindrances, which are like grass, will have to be flattened out. No evil, unskillful thoughts will be able to appear in the heart. When this is the case, the mind won't

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have to follow the paths to deprivation, and instead will keep following the path that goes higher and higher. This is called following the path worn smooth, in line with the Buddha's way.

Practicing meditation is like digging a diamond mine. The body is like a big rock; mindfulness is like a shovel. If you don't really dig — i.e., if you dig little shallow holes here and there, instead of digging away at one place — you can dig for a month and yet get no deeper than your knees. But if you're really intent on digging away at one place, the hole you dig will keep getting deeper and deeper until you get down to the rock. Now, when stupid people hit the rock, they throw down their shovels and run away. (This stands for people who practice meditation but can't endure feelings of pain.) As for intelligent people, when they meet up with the rock, they keep chipping away at it until they get past it, and that's when they find the valuable diamond that lies on the underside of the rock. If it's a diamond seam, they won't have to work again for the rest of their lives.

Gems and diamonds that are really valuable lie deep, so we'll have to dig deep if we want to find things of value. If we don't go far beneath the surface, we'll end up with dirt and sand that sells for only five cents a bushel.

When we're true in what we do — when we don't stop or grow lax or give up — the results, even if they show up slowly, are bound to be great. The fact that they are all growing at once is what makes them slow. It's like a tree with lots of branches to protect itself and give lots of shade. It's bound to grow more slowly than a banana tree, which has only one stem and gives good fruit, but is exposed to lots of dangers. Some people get results quickly; others more slowly. The slower people shouldn't compare themselves or compete with the quick ones. The quick ones shouldn't compete with the slow ones. It's like polishing boards and mirrors. Polishing a mirror so that you can see your reflection in it doesn't take all that much talent, because the nature of the mirror is already reflective. But to polish a board so that you can see your reflection in it, even though it may take a long time, is a sign of real expertise.

In keeping the mind pure, we have to cut away perceptions so that they don't stick in the heart. It's like looking after a white sheet that we spread on our bed. We have to watch out for the dust or insects that blow in on the wind and land on the sheet. If we see any dust, we have to take the sheet and shake it out. Wherever there are any stains, we have to launder it immediately. Don't let them stay long on the sheet or else they'll be hard to wash out. If there are any insects, we have to remove them, for they may bite us and give us a rash or keep us from sleeping soundly. When we keep looking after our sheet in this way, it will have to stay clean and white and be a comfortable place for us to sleep.

The dust and insects here are the Hindrances that are the enemies of the heart. We have to look after our heart in just the same way that we look after our bedding. We can't let any outside perceptions come in and stick to the heart or nibble at it. We have to brush them all away. That way the mind will become calm, free from distractions.

Once you cut off thoughts of past and future, you don't have to worry about the Hindrances.

When you think about things outside, you have to choose carefully what you're going to think about. Think only about good things and not about things that will cause harm. When you think

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about things inside, though, you can think about anything: good or bad, old or new. In other words, mindfulness and alertness can handle whatever comes their way. It's as if we have our curry in a pot that's tightly covered, where no flies can get to it. Whether it's bland or salty, it's all safe to eat.

"Thinking about" is long. "Thinking of" is short. You have to focus them both into one when you're making the mind still. "Thinking of" means that you focus on a single preoccupation. "Thinking about" means that you examine and evaluate, to see that when you arrange the causes a certain way, what results do you get: good or bad?

If you look with both of your eyes you won't be able to see your target clearly. If you want to see it clearly you have to look with one eye, in the same way that when people shoot a rifle or an arrow, they use only one eye to aim. If you make your mind one with its object, you'll be able to see things clearly within yourself in just the same way.

You have to practice concentration in all four postures. When the body sits, the mind sits with it. When the body stands, the mind stands with it. When the body walks, the mind walks with it. When the body lies down, the mind lies down with it. If the body sits but the mind stands, or if the body walks and the mind sits or lies down, that's no good at all.

The six elements in the body are earth, water, fire, wind, space, and consciousness. You have to keep familiarizing yourself with them until they become your friends. They'll then tell you their secrets and won't put you in chains or throw you in prison.

The mind is like a child. Mindfulness is like an adult. The adult is responsible for looking after the child and taking good care of it. Only then will the child eat and sleep properly, without crying and making a fuss. You have to give the child good food to eat, by focusing the mind on the qualities of the Buddha, Dhamma, and Sangha. Then you have to give it four big dolls to play with: the properties of earth, water, fire, and wind in the body. When the child is well-fed and has dolls to play with, it won't run outside and get into mischief. If you let it go wandering outside, all kinds of dangers can happen. But if it stays in the house, even though there are some dangers, they're not all that serious. You have to teach the mind how to play around in the elements of this body: a cubit wide, a span thick, a fathom long. That way it won't get into trouble. Once the child gets tired of playing, it will lie in its crib. In other words, the mind will settle down in jhana, the resting place of sages. That way the mind will gather into oneness.

The Basics of Breathing

When the body is still, you gain knowledge from the body. When the mind is still, you gain knowledge from the mind. When the breath is still, you gain knowledge from the breath.

Ordinary, everyday breathing doesn't do anything special for you except keep you from dying. The breathing on which your awareness is intent can give rise to all kinds of good things.

Ordinary breathing is the breath of suffering and stress. In other words, when it comes in it reaches a point of discomfort, so it has to go back out. When it goes out it runs into discomfort again, so it

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comes back in. This kind of breathing isn't called meditation. Meditation means gathering all your awareness into the mind.

The present aspect of the body is the breath. The present aspect of the mind is mindfulness and alertness. So bring the present of the mind together with the present of the body.

The breath is like water. Mindfulness is like soap. The mind is like clothing. If you don't keep washing the mind, it'll get dirty. When your clothing isn't white and clean, it doesn't feel comfortable to wear.

Don't put pressure on the breath, force it, or hold it. Let the breath flow easily and comfortably, as when you put a fresh egg in cotton batting. If you don't throw it or push it down, the egg won't get dented or cracked. This way your meditation will progress smoothly.

If the mind isn't yet still, just watch the in-and-out breath without trying to notice whether it's comfortable or not. Otherwise, the mind will start to stray. It's like a farmer planting an orchard: If he mows down too much grass all at once, he won't be able to plant all his trees in time and the grass will start growing again. He has to mow down just the area that he can plant in one day. That's how he'll get the results he wants.

Whether or not the breath is even, you have to keep your mindfulness even.

The breath is like waves. Mindfulness is like a boat. The mind is like a person sitting in the boat. If the waves of the breath aren't still, the boat will tip or overturn, and the person in the boat will drown or at the least get into difficulties. You have to make your mind still like a boat that has cast anchor in the middle of the sea when there's no wind or waves. The boat won't tip, and the person in the boat will be still and at peace. This is the point where the mind enters the noble path: It's a free mind with full power, released from the sway of the Hindrances.

The breath in the body isn't limited just to the breath that flows in and out the nose. The breath in the body spreads out to every pore, like the vapor that gets exhaled from an ice cube. It's much more refined than the air outside. When the internal breath goes out the pores, it gets reflected back into the body. This breath is called the supporting breath. It helps keep the body and mind cool and still. So when you breathe in, let the breath fill the inside of your body; when you breathe out, let it spread in all directions.

When you breathe in, you have to feel the effects of the inner breath in three parts of the body: (1) the lungs & heart; (2) the liver, stomach, & intestines; and (3) the rib cage & spine. If the breath doesn't have an effect all over the body, you're not getting the full results of concentration.

Hot breathing is destructive. It gives rise to pain and makes the body age. Cool breathing is constructive. Warm breathing is like medicine.

The common breath is like an emetic. The refined breathed is like a curative. The intermediate breath is like a food supplement.

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The common breath is long and slow. The refined breath is short and light. It can penetrate into every blood vessel. It's a breath of extremely high quality.

If the breath is heavy, you can keep it in a narrow range. When it's light, you have to make it broad. If it's so light that it's very refined, you don't have to breathe through the nose. You can be aware of the breath coming in and out through every pore all over the body.

Wherever there's pain in the body, focus on making the breath go past it if you want to get results. Suppose you have a pain in your knee: You have to focus on breathing all the way down to the ends of your toes. If you have a pain in your shoulder, focus the breath past it to your arm.

Breath subdues pain. Mindfulness subdues the Hindrances.

When we meditate it's as if we were milling the rice grains in our granary so that they'll be ready to cook. The mind is like grains of rice. The Hindrances are like the husks. We have to crack the husks and then polish away the dirty red skin underneath. That's when we'll end up with good, white rice. The way to polish is to use directed thought and evaluation. Directed thought is when we focus the mind on being aware of the in-and-out breath, which is like taking a handful of rice and putting it in the teeth of our mill. We have to make sure that the teeth of the mill are in good shape. If we're aware of just the in-breath and then get distracted with the out-breath, it's as if the teeth of our mill were broken. When this happens, we have to fix them immediately. In other words, we reestablish mindfulness on the breath and brush away all other perceptions.

Evaluation is being observant, taking careful note of the breath as we breathe in, to see what it's like, to see whether it's comfortable, easy, and free-flowing. We then let the good breaths spread throughout the body to chase out the bad breath sensations. All the properties of the body will become pure; the mind will become bright. The body will feel cool and at ease. We have to look after the breath in this way, in the same way that we catch baby chicks to put in the coop. If we hold them too tight, they die. If we hold them too loosely, they run away. We have to gather them in our hands in a way that's just right. That way they'll all end up safely in the coop.

When we use directed thought and evaluation, it's as if we polish away the dirty red skin from our rice grains. We'll end up with nice, white rice (rapture, pleasure, and singleness of preoccupation). If we take the rice to market, it'll fetch a good price. If we cook it, it will taste good and nourish the body. This is why we should all be intent on polishing the rice in our granary so that we'll end up with Grade A rice.

The factors of jhana — directed thought, evaluation, rapture, and pleasure — all have to be gathered at the breath if you want to reach singleness of preoccupation. Directed thought is like laying claim to a piece of land. Evaluation is like planting it with seed. When the seed bears fruit, that's rapture and pleasure.

Keeping awareness with the breath is *directed thought*. Knowing the characteristics of the breath is *evaluation*. Spreading the breath so that it permeates and fills the entire body is *rapture*. The sense of serenity and well-being in body and mind is *pleasure*. When the mind is freed from the Hindrances so

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that it's one with the breath, that's *singleness of preoccupation*. All of these factors of jhana turn mindfulness into a factor of Awakening.

Spreading the breath, letting all the breath sensations spread throughout all the elements and parts of the body — the blood vessels, the tendons, etc. — is like cutting a system of connecting roads through the wilderness. Any country with a good system of roads is bound to develop, because communication is easy.

If we constantly adjust and improve the breath in the various parts of the body, it's like cutting away the dead parts of a plant so that it can begin to grow again.

Directed thought, focusing on the breath, is like putting food in your mouth. Evaluation — adjusting, spreading, and improving the breath — is like chewing your food. If you chew it carefully before swallowing, the food will digest easily and give full benefits to your body. The digesting is the duty of the body, but if you want to get good results you have to help with the chewing. The more refined you can make the breath, the better the results you'll get.

There are two kinds of evaluation when we meditate on the breath. The first is to evaluate the in-and-out breath. The second is to evaluate the inner breath sensations in the body until you can spread them out through all the properties of the body to the point where you forget all distractions. If both the body and mind are full, there's a sense of rapture and ease that results from our directed thought and evaluation. This is Right Action in the mind.

One of the benefits from working with the breath is that the properties of the body become friendly and harmonious with one another. We spread the breath all over the body, and then when it grows still it gives you a sense of physical seclusion. This is one of the physical benefits. As for the mental benefits, mindfulness becomes enlarged. When mindfulness is enlarged, awareness is enlarged. The mind becomes an adult and doesn't go sneaking off like an ordinary mind. If you want it to think, it thinks. If you want it to stop, it stops. If you want it to go, it goes. When the mind is well-trained it gains knowledge, like an educated adult. When you converse with it, you understand each other. The mind of a person who hasn't trained it is like a child. This kind of mind doesn't understand what you say and likes to slip off to roam around — and it goes without saying good-bye. You have no idea what it takes with it when it goes, or what it brings back when it returns.

When the breath, mindfulness, and awareness are all enlarged, they all become adults. They don't get into spats with one another: the body doesn't quarrel with the mind, mindfulness doesn't quarrel with the mind. That's when we can be at our ease.

When you spread the breath as you evaluate it, mindfulness runs throughout the body like an electric wire. Making yourself mindful is like letting the current run along the wire. Alertness is like the energy that wakes the body up. When the body is awake, pains can't overcome it. In other words, it wakes up the properties of earth, water, fire, and wind so that they get to work. When the properties are balanced and full, they put the body at ease. When the body is nourished with breath and mindfulness like this, it grows into an adult. When the properties are at peace, they all become adults: the great frame of reference (*mahasatipatthana*). This is called threshold concentration, or evaluation.

When the mind is broad, wandering after outside perceptions, it loses the strength it needs to deal with its various affairs. Whatever it thinks of doing will succeed only with difficulty. It's like a gun with a broad-gauged barrel. If you put tiny bullets into it, they rattle around inside and don't come out with much force. The narrower the gauge of the barrel, the more force the bullets will have when you shoot them. It's the same with the breath: The more you refine your focus, the more refined the breath will become, until eventually you can breathe through your pores. The mind at this stage has more strength than an atomic bomb.

Making the mind snug with mindfulness and the breath is like weaving cloth. If the weave is so fine that water won't pass through, the cloth will fetch a high price. If you use it to sift flour, you'll get very fine flour. If the weave is coarse, the cloth won't be worth much. If you use it to sift flour, the flour will come out all lumpy. In the same way, the more refined you can make your awareness, the more refined and valuable the results you'll get.

When the breath fills the body, awareness gets more refined. The breath that used to be fast will slow down. If it used to be strong, it will become more gentle. If it used to be heavy, it will grow light — to the point where you don't have to breathe, because the body is full of breath, with no empty spaces. It's like water we pour into a vessel until it's full. That's the point of enough; you don't have to add any more. This sense of fullness gives rise to a feeling of coolness and clarity.

There are five levels to the breath. The first level is the most blatant one: the breath that we breathe in and out. The second level is the breath that goes past the lungs and connects with the various properties of the body, giving rise to a sense of comfort or discomfort. The third level is the breath that stays in place throughout the body. It doesn't flow here or there. The breath sensations that used to flow up and down the body stop flowing. The sensations that used to run to the front or the back stop running. Everything stops and is still. The fourth level is the breath that gives rise to a sense of coolness and light. The fifth level is the really refined breath, so refined that it's like atoms. It can penetrate the entire world. Its power is very fast and strong.

The most refined level of awareness, which is like atoms, has the same sort of power as an atomic bomb buried underground that can explode people and animals to smithereens. When the refined mind is buried in the breath, it can explode people and animals to smithereens, too. What this means is that when the mind reaches this level of refinement, its sense of "self" and "other" disappears without a trace. It lets go of its attachments to body and self, "people" and "beings." This is why we say that it's like an atomic bomb that can explode people and animals to smithereens.

The Skills of Jhana

Momentary concentration is like a house roofed with thatch; its posts are made out of softwood. Momentary concentration isn't jhana. Threshold concentration is like a house made out of hardwood with a tile roof. Fixed penetration is like an immovable concrete building. This is where we become "one" in a single preoccupation on the single or direct path (*ekayana-magga*). It's like sitting alone in a chair or lying alone on a bed, without anyone trying to come and take up our space, or like being alone in a room without anyone else coming in to disturb us. When we're alone in a room, we can be at our ease. We can even take off our clothes if we like. We can behave with good manners or bad, and no one will complain. This is why a mind with jhana as its dwelling can be at its ease. It has a deep well so that it can get plenty of water — to the point where it can drop directed thought and

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evaluation, leaving nothing but pleasure: This is where feeling becomes your frame of reference (*vedananupassana-satipatthana*). The body feels full. All four properties — earth, water, fire, and wind — feel full. When the mind feels full in this way, nothing is lacking. That's rapture. You don't want any more of the four properties. When the mind soaks for a long time in this sense of rapture, it's like something you've soaked in water for a long time: The water is bound to permeate it to a point of saturation. This sense of rapture is the second jhana. When the sense of rapture begins to move, you don't feel at ease, in the same way as when a boat begins to sway you want to get back on land. So once rapture fills the body, you let go of it, leaving nothing but pleasure and singleness of preoccupation. When the mind has soaked itself in pleasure to a point of saturation, it lets go, leaving an empty sense of equanimity. When the mind is really empty, it feels spacious and light. The more it soaks in equanimity, the more still it gets, giving rise to an inner sense of light. When the light is really intense you arrive at Right Mindfulness.

Directed thought — focusing on the breath without getting distracted — is like planting a tree. Evaluation is like loosening the soil around the roots, giving it fertilizer, and watering it from the roots to the topmost branches. The body, which can be compared to the soil, will soften, allowing the fertilizer and water to penetrate down to the roots. Rapture is like the tree's being fresh and green and bursting into bloom. (There are five kinds of rapture: (1) an unusual sense of heaviness or lightness in the body; (2) a sense of the body floating; (3) a sense of coolness or heat; (4) a sense of thrill passing over the surface of the body; (5) the body beginning to sway.) Pleasure means stillness of body and mind, free from Hindrances. Singleness of preoccupation means being neutral toward other things, perfectly still in a single preoccupation. This is what the Buddha was referring to when he said that concentration matured with virtue is of great benefit, great rewards.

Directed thought is like standing and looking out a window. Whoever walks past, we know, but we don't call out to them or turn to look after them as they walk down the road. We simply stand perfectly still at the window.

Directed thought and evaluation applied to the breath are like car mechanics. The mind is like the head mechanic. When we drive our car, we have to be observant and keep checking all the mechanical parts — such as the steering wheel, the springs, the tires, the gas line — to see if anything is wearing out or not working properly. If we find that anything is not working properly, we have to fix it immediately. That way the car will take us safely to our destination. When you practice concentration, you have to be observant, checking your breath to see whether or not it's coming in smoothly, and adjusting it to make it comfortable. Your concentration will then progress step by step and ultimately take you to the transcendent.

When people criticize you, saying that you're in a blind state of jhana, it's still better than having no jhana to be in. And if they say that you're like a baby chick that hasn't come out of its egg, that's okay, too. When a baby chick is still in the egg, no hawk can swoop down on it and catch it. When it comes out of the egg is when it becomes prey.

They may say that you're sitting in "stump" concentration, but don't pay them any mind, because stumps can have their uses. Sometimes they grow new branches, with tender leaves you can eat. But if the stump catches fire and burns to a crisp, that's no good at all.

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As we keep training the mind, it keeps getting more and more mature, more tempered and sharp, able to cut right through anything at all. Like a knife that we always keep sharpening: There's no way it can *not* become sharp. So we should keep at the practice in the same way that we sharpen a knife. If any part of the body or mind isn't in good shape, we keep adjusting it until we get good results. When good results arise, we'll be in a state of Right Concentration. The mind will be firmly established in the present, in a state of singleness of preoccupation. We'll gain power both in body and mind. Power in body means that wherever there are pains, we can adjust the properties of earth, water, fire, and wind to give rise to a sense of comfort, in the same way that we trim a tree. If any branches are broken or rotten, we cut them away and graft on new branches. If the new ones break, we graft on more new ones. We keep on doing this until the tree is healthy and strong.

Making the mind still is good for two things: suppressing and cutting. If we can't yet cut, we can still suppress. "Suppressing" means that there are defilements in the mind but we don't let them flare up into action. We keep them in line. "Cutting" means that we don't even let them arise.

In putting the mind in shape we have to be observant to see what things need correcting, what things need fostering, what things need letting go. If you do nothing but correcting, it won't work. The same holds true for just letting go. We do whatever the practice requires.

When the mind is in concentration, it doesn't get distracted by any thoughts that come passing by. It's like a person entirely focused on his work: If anyone walks by and tries to strike up a conversation, he doesn't want to respond or even look up from his work. In the same way, when the mind has really cut away its outside preoccupations, it's bound to stay entirely in the object of its meditation.

The mind full of defilements is like salt water in the ocean. You have to use a lot of directed thought and evaluation to filter and distill the mind to the point where the salt water turns into rain water.

People in the world are like people floating in boats in the middle of the sea when it's filled with waves and monsoon winds. Some people are so far out that they can't even see land. Some are bobbing up and down, sometimes able to see land and sometimes not. This stands for people who are meditating "*buddho*." Others are beginning to come into harbor, where they can see fish traps, sailboats, and the green trees on the coast. Some have swum in so far that they're almost ashore but not quite. As for the Buddha, he's like someone who has reached the shore and is standing on the land, free from every kind of danger. He sees all the perils that human beings are subject to, and so he feels compassion for us, trying to help us reach the shore and escape from the dangers at sea. This is why he teaches us to develop generosity, virtue, and meditation, which are things that are going to pull us safely to solid ground.

When we develop the qualities of the Buddha, Dhamma, and Sangha within ourselves, we won't have to suffer. We make the mind into Dhamma, and the various defilements that spoil it will disappear. This is how we can escape from the sea.

Once we get on land we can have lots of fun, because there are a lot of things we never saw at sea. It's like when we come into the mouth of the Chao Phraya River, where there are marsh trees and fresh green plants. We become enchanted and keep walking further inland to Sukhumvit Road.

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There we see bicycles and trucks and jeeps and pretty automobiles of different colors. This gets us even more excited, and some of us get smitten with what we see on land. In other words, we fall for the visions and signs that come in meditation. For instance, we may begin to remember previous lifetimes. If we remember bad things, we become sad. If we remember good things, we get happy. This turns into craving, the desire to be this or that, and some people get really deluded, thinking that they actually are the things they see.

If our discernment isn't strong enough, then whatever we see will turn into the corruptions of insight (*-vipassanupakkilesa*) — like people who get all excited the first time they see a car. They go running to the car, wanting to ride in it, wanting to drive it, but without looking right or left or stopping to take note of anything. They run right out into the middle of the road, get run over, and either die or break an arm or a leg. After all the trouble they went to in order to get out of the sea, they get deluded and put themselves in danger all over again.

But if our discernment is strong enough, whatever we see will turn into noble treasures (*ariya-dhana*). If we see a forest of marsh trees, we can put them to use. We can cut them into firewood to use ourselves or sell in the market. If the land is a tangle of weeds, we can clear it and turn it into fields. If we don't let it lie fallow, it's sure to yield crops.

Falling for visions is also called "skewed perception." The right way to act when you see a vision is to remember to evaluate it and then let it go in line with its true nature. Don't latch onto what you see, because all things are inconstant. If you're born poor, you suffer from your desire to be rich. If you're born rich, you suffer in looking after your possessions, afraid that they'll wear out, afraid that you'll get cheated out of them, afraid that thieves will break in and steal them. There's nothing certain or dependable at all. The same holds true with visions. So whatever you see, you have to let it go in line with its nature. Leave the trees in the forest, the grass in the meadows, and the rice in the fields. If you can do this, you can be at your ease, because you know what it's like on land, what it's like in the water, when to get in and when to get out. Once you're skilled, you can travel on water or land, at your ease in every way. You can go forward or back without any obstacles. This is called *lokavidu*, knowing the world. You can stay with what you know, but you're not stuck on it. You can live in the ocean without drowning. You can live in the world without getting sunk in the world — like a lotus leaf in the water: the water doesn't seep into the leaf at all.

When you're true in what you do, your work will succeed in every way. For instance, if you're true in observing the precepts, your precepts will get results. If you're true in practicing concentration, your concentration will get results. If you're true in developing discernment, your discernment will get results. The reason we don't see results is because we're not true in what we do. Only five precepts, and yet we can't catch them by the head or the tail. And when this is the case, how can we ever hope to make a living at anything? Only four concentrations — the four stages of jhana — and yet we keep groping around and can't find them. There are people who can manage farms covering hundreds and thousands of acres, and yet we can't even manage just four concentrations. Isn't that embarrassing?

If we aren't true to the Buddha's teachings in our thoughts and actions, the results of our not being true will keep pushing us further and further away from the Dhamma. We'll have to be hungry and suffer in various ways. For this reason, the Buddha taught us to be true in whatever we do. When we're true in this way, then even though we live in the world, we can be at our ease. We know how to flush the suffering out of our heart, to the point where the body feels comfortable in every part.

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Peace and calm depend on the heart's having enough and being full. If the heart is full, external fires won't be able to seep into it. When the body is filled with mindfulness, then where will there be anything lacking in the heart?

This is why, if we want to be full, we have to make an effort at developing our meditation as much as possible. Rapture will then arise. When rapture arises, we're not stuck on it because we realize that it's undependable. It eventually has to fade away. So we let go of the rapture. When we let go of the rapture, the mind is at ease in a sense of pleasure. This sense of pleasure and ease is much more refined and profound than rapture, with none of its active symptoms. Rapture is like a person who's pleased by something and so shows it by smiling or laughing. As for pleasure, it doesn't have any external signs. It's hidden in the heart, as when a person is very rich but doesn't show his wealth in any way that people would catch on. This pleasure is what calms the mind. If it were to show itself externally, it wouldn't serve any purpose. Pleasure of this sort can cool the heart and give it respite, and this is what leads to stillness and peace. When the mind is at peace, it grows bright and clear, just like a sea without any waves: You can see the boats ten miles away. Whatever comes from the north, south, east, or west, you can see it clearly without having to use a spyglass. Our vision goes out further than normal. This is how we give rise to vipassana, or the insight that allows us to know and see the truths of the world.

If we have a coconut, crack it open, and eat the flesh, it fills us up only once. If we forego eating it and plant it in the ground until it grows into a tree with more coconuts, then take those coconuts and plant them, eventually we'll become coconut plantation millionaires.

If we get money and simply stash it away, it won't serve any purpose, and the day will come when it's no longer safe. So we have to find the right place to put it, by making donations to the religion. That's when it will give rise to further results.

If the mind goes no further than concentration, it simply gets a sense of ease. We have to invest that stillness in giving rise to discernment. That's when we'll meet with the highest happiness.

If the mind has a sense of inner fullness, then when we associate with other people they'll pick up on that sense of fullness as well. If we're miserable, then when we associate with other people we'll make them miserable, too.

If we can develop the power of the mind, we can send thoughts of good will to help lessen the sufferings of other people. But if we don't straighten ourselves out first, we can't really help anyone else, in the same way that a crazy person can't help another crazy person become sane. If we're on fire and other people are on fire, how can we help them? We have to put out our own fires first before we can help them cool down. We have to "have" before we can "give."

Wings to Awakening

When you keep the breath in mind, you get all four frames of reference in one. The breath is "body," feelings lie in the body, the mind lies in the body, mental qualities lie in the mind.

The four frames of reference when we sit in meditation: The breath is "body," comfort and discomfort are "feeling," purity and clarity are states of "mind," and steadiness of mind is "mental quality."

When practicing concentration, we have to imbue it with the four paths to success.

Chanda (desire): Have a friendly interest in the breath, keeping track of it to see, when we breathe in, what we breathe in with it. If we don't breathe out, we'll have to die. If we breathe out but don't breathe back in, we'll have to die as well. We keep focused on this, without focusing the mind on anything else.

Viriya (persistence): Be diligent in all affairs related to the breath. You have to be intent that "Now I'm going to breathe in, now I'm going to breathe out; I'm going to make it long, short, heavy, light, cool, warm, etc." You have to be in charge of the breath.

Citta (attention): Focus intently on the breath. Be observant of how the external breath comes in and connects with the internal breath in the upper, middle, and lower parts of the body; in the chest — the lungs, the heart, the ribs, the backbone; in the abdomen — stomach, liver, kidneys, intestines; the breath that goes out the ends of the fingers and toes and out every pore.

Vimansa (discrimination): Contemplate and evaluate the breath that comes in to nourish the body to see whether it fills the body, to see whether it feels easy and natural, to see if there are any parts where you still have to adjust it. Notice the characteristics of how the external breath strikes the internal breath, to see if they connect everywhere or not, to see how the effects of the breath on the properties of earth, water, and fire arise, remain, and pass away.

All of this comes under meditation on physical events, and qualifies as the great frame of reference (*mahasatipatthana*) as well. When the mind has fully developed the four paths to success, complete with mindfulness and alertness, the results in terms of the body are the stilling of pain. In terms of the mind, they can lead all the way to the transcendent: the stages of stream-entry, once-returning, non-returning, and arahantship.

If you really develop concentration, it will result in the five kinds of strength: (1) conviction; when you gain conviction in the results you see coming from your efforts, then (2) persistence arises without anyone having to force you. From there, (3) mindfulness becomes more comprehensive in what you are doing, (4) concentration becomes firmly established in what you are doing, giving rise to (5) discernment of all things right and wrong. Altogether these are called the five strengths.

Tranquillity meditation (*samatha*) is a mind snug in a single preoccupation. It doesn't establish contact with anything else; it keeps itself cleansed of outside preoccupations. Insight meditation (*vipassana*) is when the mind lets go of all preoccupations in a state of all-around mindfulness and

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alertness. When tranquillity imbued with insight arises in the mind, five faculties arise and become dominant all at once: (1) *Saddhindriya*: Your conviction becomes solid and strong. Whatever anyone else may say, good or bad, your mind isn't affected. (2) *Viriya*: Your persistence becomes resilient. Whether anyone teaches you the path or not, you keep at it constantly without flagging or getting discouraged. (3) *Satindriya*: Mindfulness becomes dominant, enlarged in the great frame of reference. You don't have to force it. It spreads all over the body, in the same way that the branches of a large tree protect the entire trunk, without anyone having to pull them down or shake them up. Awareness becomes entirely radiant in every posture: sitting, standing, walking, and lying down. It knows on its own without your having to think. This all-around awareness is what is meant by the great frame of reference. (4) *Samadhindriya*: Your concentration becomes dominant, too. Whatever you're doing, the mind doesn't waver or stray. Even if you're talking to the point where your mouth opens a meter wide, the mind is still at normalcy. If the body wants to eat, lie down, sit, stand, walk, run, think, whatever, that's its business. Or if any part of it gets weary or pained, again, that's its business, but the mind remains straight and set still in a single preoccupation, without straying off into anything else. (5) *Paññindriya*: Discernment becomes dominant within you as well, to the point where you can make the mind attain stream-entry, once-returning, non-returning, or even arahantship.

In order to divest our hearts of sights, sounds, smells, tastes, etc., we have to develop concentration, which is composed of seven basic qualities —

1. Mindfulness as a factor of Awakening (*sati-sambojjhanga*): The mind is centered firmly on the breath, aware of the body, feelings, mind, and mental qualities.
2. Analysis of present qualities as a factor of Awakening (*dbamma-vicaya-sambojjhanga*): We let the breath spread throughout the body, making an enlarged frame of reference. We know how to adjust, improve, choose, and use our breaths so that they give us comfort. We throw out whichever breaths are harmful and foster whichever ones are beneficial.
3. Persistence as a factor of Awakening (*viriya-sambojjhanga*): We don't abandon or forget the breath. We stick with it, and it sticks with us as we keep warding the Hindrances from the heart. We don't fasten on or become involved with distracting perceptions. We keep trying to make our stillness of mind stronger and stronger.
4. Rapture as a factor of Awakening (*piti-sambojjhanga*): When the mind is quiet, the breath is full and refreshing. We're free from the Hindrances and from every sort of restlessness, like a white cloth that's spotlessly clean. When the mind is clear in this way, it feels nothing but comfort and fullness, which gives rise to a sense of satisfaction, termed rapture.
5. Serenity as a factor of Awakening (*passaddhi-sambojjhanga*): The breath is solid throughout the body. The elements are at peace, and so is the mind. Nothing feels troublesome or aroused.
6. Concentration as a factor of Awakening (*samadhi-sambojjhanga*): The breath is firm, steady, and unwavering. The mind takes a firm stance in a single preoccupation.

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7. Equanimity as a factor of Awakening (*upekkha-sambojjhanga*): When body, feelings, mind, and mental qualities are fully snug with one another in these two types of breath — when the mind stays with these aspects of the breath — it doesn't have to fashion anything at all. It doesn't latch onto any manifestation of good or bad. Neutral and unperturbed, it doesn't approve or disapprove of anything.

1. Make a resolution, intending to keep mindfulness and alertness firmly focused. Keep continual watch over the mind to keep it with the breath in line with your original intention. Keep warding off the Hindrances, the various distractions that will come to spoil the energy of your concentration. This is *mindfulness* as a factor of Awakening.

2. Once the breath is well cleansed and purified, let this purified breath spread to care for the body throughout its various parts. Once the body is nourished with this purified breath, it becomes purified as well. Our words and thoughts become purified, too. What we experience now is pleasure and ease. Or, if you want to use the breath to care for any particular part of the body — a great deal or a little, heavily or lightly, blatantly or subtly — you can do so as you like. This is *analysis of present qualities* as a factor of Awakening.

3. Tend to the breath, keeping watch over the mind, not letting it stray off in search of other preoccupations that would break your original resolution. Don't grow discouraged in the face of weariness or difficulties for body or mind. Be resolved on cutting away obstacles, whatever direction they may come from, even if you have to put your life on the line. (The breath is solid.) This is *persistence* as a factor of Awakening.

4. When these first three qualities are fully developed and pure, they give rise to a feeling of brightness, fullness, and satisfaction. The breath is full. This is the breath of cognitive skill (*vijja*). In other words, the breath lies under the direction of mindfulness. This is *rapture* as a factor of Awakening.

5. When the mind stays with the full breath, it doesn't waver or loosen its grip in the wake of any passing distractions, as when sounds strike the ear and so forth. Feelings are still experienced as they are felt, but at this point they don't give rise to craving, attachment, states of being, or birth. Awareness is simply aware. This is *serenity* as a factor of Awakening.

6. When awareness is solid and sure, radiant and full in every way, knowledge arises. We both know and see what our present condition comes from and where it will go. We see this so clearly that we will perceive kamma and its results, both in ourselves and other people. This is *concentration* as a factor of Awakening.

7. Once the mind has followed these steps from the first to the sixth and then lets go to be still with a spacious sense of relaxation, not fastening onto any sign, preoccupation, or anything at all, that's *equanimity* as a factor of Awakening.

When we understand all seven of these qualities and can develop them in full measure within the heart, they all come together at a single point in a single moment.

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The reason we're taught to develop these seven qualities in our breathing is so that we can still the feelings within us — because feelings lie at the essence of the Hindrances. The Hindrances are the breath impregnated with ignorance and darkness. When this happens, we're like a person standing in the darkness who can't see himself or anyone else, because we lie fermenting in our defilements, full of conditions. This is the ordinary breath, untended and undirected. It's full all right, but full of darkness. This state is the important one that cuts and closes off our path. Only when we get rid of these Hindrances will the mind be radiant and bright, seeing the Dhamma clearly in terms of both cause and effect.

When mindfulness saturates the body the way flame saturates every thread in the mantle of a Coleman lantern, the elements throughout the body work together like a group of people working together on a job: Each person helps a little here and there, and in no time at all — almost effortlessly — the job is done. Just as the mantle of a Coleman lantern whose every thread is soaked in flame becomes light, white, and dazzling, so if you soak your mind in mindfulness until it's aware of the entire body, both the body and mind become buoyant. When you think using the power of mindfulness, your sense of the body will immediately become thoroughly bright, helping to develop both body and mind. You'll be able to sit or stand for long periods of time without getting tired, to walk for great distances without getting fatigued, to go for unusually long periods of time on just a little food without getting hungry, or to go without food and sleep altogether for several days running without losing energy.

As for the heart, it will become pure, open, and free from blemish. The mind will become bright, energetic, and strong. *Saddha-balam*: Your conviction will run like a car running without stop along the road. *Viriya-balam*: Your persistence will accelerate and advance. *Sati-balam*: Your mindfulness will be robust and vigorous. *Samadhi-balam*: Your concentration will become unwavering and resilient. No activity will be able to kill it. In other words, no matter what you're doing — sitting, standing, walking, talking, whatever — as soon as you think of practicing concentration, your mind will immediately be centered. Whenever you want it, just think of it and you have it. When your concentration is this powerful, insight meditation is no problem. *Pañña-balam*: Your discernment will be like a double-edged sword: Your discernment of what's outside will be sharp. Your discernment of what's inside will be sharp.

When these five strengths appear in the heart, the heart will be fully mature. Your conviction, persistence, mindfulness, concentration, and discernment will all be mature and pre-eminent in their own spheres. It's the nature of mature adults that they cooperate. When they work together on a job, they finish it. So it is when you have these five adults working together for you: You'll be able to complete any task. Your mind will have the power to demolish every defilement in the heart, just as a nuclear bomb can demolish anything anywhere in the world.

When your concentration has strength, it gives rise to discernment: the ability to see stress, its cause, its disbanding, and the Path to its disbanding, all clearly within the breath. We can explain this as follows: The in-and-out breath is stress — the in-breath the stress of arising, the out-breath the stress of passing away. Not being aware of the breath as it goes in and out, not knowing the characteristics of the breath: This is the cause of stress. Knowing when the breath is coming in, knowing when it's going out, knowing its characteristics clearly — i.e., keeping your views in line with the truth of the breath: This is Right View, part of the Noble Path. Knowing which ways of breathing are uncomfortable, knowing how to vary the breath; knowing, "That way of breathing is uncomfortable; we'll have to breathe like this in order to feel at ease": This is Right Consideration.

The mental factors that think about and properly evaluate all aspects of the breath are Right Speech. Knowing various ways of improving the breath; breathing, for example, in long and out long, in short and out short, in short and out long, in long and out short, until you come across the breath that's most comfortable for you: This is Right Action. Knowing how to use the breath to purify the blood, how to let this purified blood nourish the heart muscles, how to adjust the breath so that it eases the body and soothes the mind, how to breathe so that you feel full and refreshed in body and mind: This is Right Livelihood. Trying to adjust the breath so that it comforts the body and mind, and to keep trying as long as you aren't fully at ease: This is Right Effort. Being mindful of the in-and-out breath at all times, knowing the various aspects of the breath — the up-flowing breath, the down-flowing breath, the breath in the stomach, the breath in the intestines, the breath flowing along the muscles and out to every pore — keeping track of these things with every in-and-out breath: This is Right Mindfulness. A mind intent only on matters of the breath, not pulling any other objects in to interfere, until the breath is refined, giving rise to fixed absorption and then liberating insight: This is Right Concentration.

When all of these aspects of the Noble Path — virtue, concentration, and discernment — are brought together fully mature within the heart, you gain insight into all aspects of the breath, knowing that "Breathing this way gives rise to good mental states; breathing that way gives rise to bad mental states." You let go of the factors — i.e., the breath in all its aspects — that fashion the body, the factors that fashion speech, the factors that fashion the mind, whether good or bad, letting them be as they truly are, in line with their own inherent nature: This is the disbanding of stress.

Monastic Life

Why did the Buddha grow weary of the world? Because he asked himself, "When we're born in the world, what does the world have to offer that's really satisfying? Parents? Relatives? Servants? Friends? Wealth? There's nothing really satisfying about any of these things at all. When this is the case, why should we put up with staying in the world?" This is why he went out into the homeless life, so that he could find the way to keep us from having to come back and be reborn in the world.

When we ordain, we have to practice in line with the training rules the Buddha laid down if we want to live up to our name as Sons of the Sakyan. The Buddha's true children are the four groups of Noble Disciples: stream-winners, once-returners, non-returners, and arahants, those who have released their hearts step by step from defilements and mental fermentations in line with their strength of mind. These are the religion's true relatives, the Buddha's children who deserve to receive his inheritance without a doubt. This kind of ordination anyone can undergo — women, men, novices, anyone. It's internal ordination. As for the monks who shave their heads and wear the ochre robe, that's external ordination. Whoever can undergo both internal and external ordination, so much the better.

Whenever you find pleasure, you should transform it so that it won't spoil on you. This is like the women who sell fruit in the market. When they see that their mangoes are getting overripe and they won't be able to eat them, keep them overnight, or sell them before they spoil, they take them, peel them, cut them up, and make them into jam. This way they can keep them for a long time. The jam tastes good and it can fetch a good price. This is called having the intelligence to keep ripe things from spoiling. In the same way, when we gain pleasure we shouldn't get complacent. We should take that pleasure and pulverize it into pain so that we can uncover the kind of inner pleasure and well-being that doesn't change, that's solid, long-lasting, and valuable.

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For example, there are monks and novices who find themselves well-provided with the necessities of life that other people have given them, without having to work hard the way lay people do — carrying loads and responsibilities, taming the wilderness, exposed to the sun and rain. All they have to do is "harvest cooked rice" and they can eat their fill. This is the kind of pleasure that comes with the renunciate life. But if monks like this get stuck on their material possessions — robes, almsfood, lodgings, and medicine — without behaving themselves properly in line with the sacrifices that other people have made for their sake, then they're not really contemplatives. They're simply taking advantage of their donors.

So when you find that your needs are being taken care of, you should take that sense of ease and pleasure and pulverize it into pain, by putting effort into the practice, sacrificing the pleasure you're receiving by taking on the *dbutanga* practices in line with the Buddha's example. This way you'll come to comprehend the pain and stress that are an inherent part of having a body.

You should contemplate the pleasure you receive from others to realize that there's nothing of any lasting essence to it. The pleasure with a lasting essence has to be the type that you give rise to yourself. What this means is that you have to practice patience and endurance, contending with the stress and pain that come from the body. When you can do this, the mind will become steady and solid, so strong that it rises step by step to higher levels. Eventually you'll come to realize the true pleasure and well-being that the Buddha called the highest form of happiness.

Wherever you live, you should take care of it as your home. Wherever you sleep, you should take care of it as your home. Wherever you eat, you should take care of it as your home. This way you can find happiness wherever you stay and wherever you go.

Open your ears and eyes wide, so that you can do a thorough job of helping to look after the monastery. Each of us should have big, big eyes. When you stay here in the monastery, your eyes have to be as big as the monastery, and so do your ears.

People who have a good opinion of themselves but aren't good in their behavior are burdensome and heavy, causing cracks wherever they stay. This is why wise people are said to be light, like cat's paws: soft and furry, with safe places to keep the claws until they're really needed. If they walk on a floor they don't make sound or leave any footprints.

As for fools, people who don't know how to behave themselves, they're said to be like dog's paws. They're heavy. If they walk on a floor, their claws make a noise, and their paws leave prints.

When we live together in a group like this, there are bound to be all kinds of sounds when we come into contact with one another. If you were to make a comparison, we're no different from an orchestra, which has to include the sound of the oboes, the sound of the gong, the sound of the xylophones, high sounds, low sounds, treble, and bass. If all the instruments had the same sound, there would be no fun in listening to the orchestra, for a one-sound orchestra wouldn't sound good at all. In the same way, when lots of people live together, there are bound to be good and bad sounds arising in the group. So each of us has to look after his or her own heart. Don't let yourself feel anger or dislike for the bad sounds, because when there's a lot of disliking it's bound to turn to anger.

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When there's a lot of anger, it's bound to turn to ill will. When there's ill will, it's bound to lead to quarrels and disturbances.

For this reason we should spread thoughts of good will to people above us, below us, and on the same level. When people below us show disagreeable attitudes in their words or actions, we should forgive them. When we can do this, we'll be contributing to the peace and calm of the group.

Don't hang around with the group more than you have to, or you'll waste your time for meditating. The dangers of associating are (1) if your behavior isn't on the same level, it gives rise to irritation. (2) If your views aren't in line with one another, you're going to argue, which will give rise to defilements. It's just like water where the land is on two different levels. The water on the higher level will flow down to the lower level and make a big roar. If water is flowing along a piece of level ground, the flow of the water hardly makes a sound at all.

Hanging around with the group is like curry ladled onto a plate of rice: It spoils quickly, and you can't keep it for long. If the rice and the curry are kept in two separate dishes, they don't spoil as quickly. When people keep to themselves, they rarely have issues.

To be a monk who ordains without spending time in the wilds is like knowing the taste of rice but not curry. Monks who go looking for seclusion in the forest are bound to know the taste of the Dhamma, like a person who eats rice with curry. The taste is sure to be very different. Take roosters, for instance. Wild roosters are very different from domesticated roosters. Their eyes are quick, their tail-feathers short, their call short, their wings strong. They have to be this way because they always need to keep up their guard. As for domesticated roosters, their tail feathers are long, their eyes slow, their wings weak, and their call long. When they're this way they're bound to become the prey of leopards. This goes to show that the taste of living in the forest and the taste of living in a settled area are bound to be different.

There have been times when I've been criticized for going out into the forest, but I just smile to myself. They say I'm a coward, that I can't contend with people, and so run off and hide. So I keep quiet and laugh to myself until I have to speak up and say, "Living in town is good, all right, but it doesn't require any special talents. Why? I've never seen town people last any length of time in the forest, but in towns — to say nothing of monks — there are dogs and chickens all over the place."

Teaching & Learning

People with thick defilements are easier to teach than people with thin defilements. They've got a thick shell, so it's easy to crack open. If their skin is thin, it's hard to peel. (This stands for people who think they're already good and so aren't willing to let go of whatever defilements they still have.)

People come in all types. Some make themselves into pigs, some make themselves into chickens, some make themselves into water buffaloes, and some make themselves into people. Only when people are like people can you feed them rice — and even people like people come on many levels. Some eat the best rice, others eat second best, and others take what's left.

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Someone once came to me and said, "Unawareness and ignorance are what cause people to think, so actually they're something positive — because if people don't think, how are they going to become intelligent? But here you are, teaching people to sit still with their minds quiet and not thinking. What good can it accomplish?"

So I answered him: "There's no need to talk about subtle things like unawareness. Let's talk about simple things. When you were small and learning how to read, they started out by having you put letters together — s plus o is so, n plus o is no, g plus o is go, and so on — until you *knew* that g plus o is go. Now you're in Bangkok. Suppose you put your learning aside and go to Chantaburi. If you meet a sign that says "go," you can tell immediately that it says "go," without having to think — right? — because you already know. If someone really knows, why does he have to think? The person who has to think is the one who doesn't really know."

Sometimes, if you want to serve a purpose, you have to take their own words and pour them back down their throats. It makes them sit up and take notice.

When I'm in Bangkok, everyone who comes to my quarters sits still and meditates — not because I tell them to, but because that's what I'm doing myself. That in and of itself is enough to teach them. I sit with my eyes closed; when they see me sitting with my eyes closed, they sit with their eyes closed as well and don't dare say anything. If I were to get involved in their issues, they'd get involved in mine.

When your eyes are blurry, you have to learn how to put eyedrops in them yourself. If you go around trying to get other people to put them in for you, you're weighing them down. What this means is that you have to take note of things. For example, they may be speaking to you or not, but if you notice something about what they say, you take note of it: "When this person does this, what is he after? When she acts in this way, what does she want?" Just this is enough for you to begin to understand things.

This is what it means to put drops in our own eyes. With some people you have to pry their eyelids open with a rod, and even then they don't want to open up. That's when they're impossible to teach. If your eyes aren't too blurry, you don't have to watch things too often. If you see something once, it's enough for you to take as a guide for a long time to come, with no need for too many examples. Like expert shoe-makers: All they need is one model and they can set themselves up in business, making hundreds and thousands of shoes.

What it means to be a person with good ears: Your teacher may say something only once, but you can put it to use the rest of your life.

Birth, Aging, Illness, & Death

Whatever appears and takes shape is bound to give rise to stress.

If we lay claim to unstable things as our own, our lives will have to be unstable too.

When pain arises, stay right there with the pain. When pleasure arises, stay right there with the pleasure. Get to know them. Get to know what arises when. When you stay with them, really focus on being observant, to see them all the way through. Ultimately, they'll fade away, in the same way as when we place a rock on a lawn, the grass underneath it gradually dies on its own.

When pain arises, you can focus your attention on something or somebody else in order to forget the pain, all right, but that's just mindfulness, not alertness. Your awareness has to be right at what's happening within you if you want to have both mindfulness and alertness together.

Aging, illness, and death are treasures for those who understand them. They're Noble Truths, Noble Treasures. If they were people, I'd bow down to their feet every day. It's because of illness that I've been able to stay a monk as long as I have.

Eating just a little food is very useful in the practice. When I want to make a careful survey of my breath, I eat as little as possible. When the body is hungry, I can see right where all the painful breath sensations arise. If the body is well-fed, it's hard to observe these things, because nothing usually happens in the body in its normal state. So from my point of view, when I'm hungry or sick it's good for the practice. When I'm really in pain, so much the better. I can close the door and don't have to get involved with anyone else.

The body is "death." The mind is "birth." If we can separate them from each other, we'll gain release from birth and death.

If the mind is endowed with defilements and mental fermentations, it will have to experience birth, aging, illness, and death as a matter of course. It's like grains of rice covered by their outer coating and kept in a granary. As soon as the conditions are right in terms of the soil, moisture, sunlight, and air, the grains are bound to sprout and grow into rice plants resulting in even more grains of rice, without end. But if we scrape off the covering and roast the grains in a pan, they won't be able to sprout. In the same way, if we use the effort of the practice to burn away the defilements that arise in the mind — by practicing concentration and constantly contemplating the qualities of the mind in line with the four frames of reference (body, feelings, mind, and mental qualities) — the defilements will pop out of the mind in the same way that roasted rice will pop out of the pan. When we reach this point, we reach the mind that doesn't die, that gains release from death. When we see the aspect of the body that doesn't die and the aspect of the mind that doesn't die, that's when we reach the truth.

Wise people see that death is like stripping off old ragged clothes and throwing them away. The mind is like a body; the body is like ragged clothing. There's nothing of any real essence to the rags, but they have us scared. As soon as we see that there's the tiniest hole in our clothes, we rush to find something to patch them up. The more patches we put on our clothes, the thicker they get. The

thicker they get, the warmer they feel. The warmer they feel, the more we get attached to them. The more we get attached to them, the more deluded we become. As a result, we'll never get away.

Wise people, though, see that the issue of whether we live or die is not as important as the issue of whether we can serve a purpose. If living on will serve a purpose for themselves or other people, then even if their clothes are nothing but rags, they'll put up with wearing them. But if they see that living on will serve no purpose at all, then when the time comes to take off their clothes, they immediately let them go.

Practicing concentration is like gathering vegetable seeds and storing them until they're mature. As soon as they get moistened, they're going to sprout into plants with branches and leaves and flowers. In the same way, our concentration will sprout into discernment, giving us all-around insight into the affairs of the world and the affairs of the Dhamma. We'll come to know what the elements, aggregates, and the sense media in the body are — to the point where we see that there's no reason to fear aging, illness, and death. It's just like when we grow up, and our childishness disappears.

Don't make an issue out of whether or not you're going to die. Don't even think of it. Just purify your mind, and that will take care of everything.

All-around Discernment

The Dhamma is in everyone. Whether or not you realize it, it's there. Whether or not you study it, it's there. It's simply a matter of whether you know how to decipher it. Once you know the labels formulated by the Buddha, you can decipher yourself, in the same way that you learn how to read a book. Take a baby who doesn't know anything: As soon as it's born, it cries, "Wae!" That's feeling. If it's eating and comes across something it doesn't like, it throws it away and goes for something better: That's thought-formation. When it gets older, it can begin to remember things: That's perception. So the Dhamma is in everyone.

So why do we study? We study to learn the names for things, and then we eventually have to get rid of all perceptions, old, new, past, and future. That's when we'll reach nibbana. *Policemen who don't take off their uniforms and go around as plainclothesmen will have trouble uncovering the secrets of criminals.* This is why we have to practice virtue, concentration, and discernment so that we can get on familiar terms with the five aggregates. That's what's meant by insight meditation.

Concentration is something you do. Insight meditation is letting go. You can't "do" insight meditation. It's a result. When virtue is the cause, concentration is the result. When concentration is the cause, discernment is the result. When discernment is the cause, release is the result.

The skills of insight are things that can't be taught. At most, you can teach people to do the meditation, but you can't teach them to be insightful.

You have to "do" before you can "know." You have to know before you can let go. You have to give rise to the causes, and then the results will come on their own.

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When people out in the sun keep running around, they don't realize how hot the sun really is. If you want to know how hot it is, you have to sit out in the middle of a field when the sun is really strong for about five minutes. That's when you'll know what real heat is like. It's the same with stress and pain. If the mind goes running around without stopping, it doesn't really see stress and pain. It has to be still if it wants to see.

Concentration is like a mirror for seeing ourselves clearly. Discernment is like a telescope, so that small things will appear large, and distant things near.

You have to stop searching — in other words, the mind has to be still — before you can give rise to discernment. Searching is ignorance, or *avijja*.

The understanding you gain from listening and reading (*sutamaya-pañña*) is like a person who has woken up but hasn't yet opened his eyes. He doesn't see any light, and so has to grope around uncertain, sometimes laying hold of the right things and sometimes laying hold of the wrong. The understanding you gain from thinking (*cintamaya-pañña*) is like a person who has woken up but hasn't yet left the mosquito net and hasn't yet washed the sleep out of his eyes. His vision is blurry and unclear. As for the understanding you gain from meditation (*bhavanamaya-pañña*), that's like getting out of the mosquito net and washing your face so that you're able to see things clearly. This is the highest kind of understanding. Try to develop it.

To get full results from our meditation, the mind has to give the orders. Mindfulness is what does the work and assists in the progress of all our activities, while alertness is what observes the results of what we've done. To speak in terms of the frames of reference, these qualities are called mindfulness and alertness. To speak in terms of jhana, they're called directed thought and evaluation. They're the qualities that give rise to discernment.

Discernment comes from observing causes and effects. If we know effects without knowing causes, that doesn't qualify as discernment. If we know causes without knowing effects, that doesn't qualify, either. We have to know both of them together with our mindfulness and alertness. This is what qualifies as all-around knowing in the full sense of the term.

The all-around knowing that arises within us comes from causes and effects, not from what we read in books, hear other people tell us, or conjecture on our own. Suppose we have some silver coins in our pocket. If all we know is that other people say it's money, we don't know its qualities. But if we experiment with it and put it in a smelter to see what it's made of and to see how it can be made into other things, that's when we'll know its true qualities. This is the kind of knowledge that comes from our own actions. This knowledge, when we meditate, comes in five forms. We find within ourselves that some things are caused by the properties of the body, some are caused by the mind, some causes come from the mind but have an effect on the body, some causes come from the body but have an effect on the mind, some causes come from the body and mind acting together. This kind of knowledge is discernment. So we have to learn from virtue, concentration, and discernment by giving rise to them. If we don't, we'll suffer from unawareness and delusion.

Mindfulness is what brings light to the mind, like a candle. If we take a candle into a room at night, close the windows and doors, and fill in all the cracks in the walls, no wind from outside will be able

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to slip in and make the flame waver. The flame will give off even more light, and we'll be able to see everything in the room clearly. Closing the windows and doors and filling in the cracks means exercising restraint over our eyes, ears, nose, tongue, body, and mind, so that our attention doesn't go straying out after outside perceptions and preoccupations. This is called restraint through mindfulness. Our mindfulness will gather into one. When mindfulness is strong, the results are immediate: a sense of ease and mental well-being. When mindfulness is solid and unflagging, our concentration will become stronger. The mind will be still and upright. Light will arise in one of two ways: from within oneself or from what's reflected off the walls. This is why mindfulness is the cause, the supporting factor, that keeps our concentration progressing.

For this reason, we shouldn't forget to appreciate this mental quality. When we know that certain causes give rise to happiness and well-being, we should look after those causes. It's like when other people share food with us. We shouldn't forget their kindness. Or when our parents raise us and care for us from when we were small: When we grow up and can establish ourselves in the world, we shouldn't forget their kindness. We have to show our gratitude and take care of them at all times to repay their kindness. Only then will we be able to progress in life without backsliding.

So mindfulness is like our parents. We have to look after it always, for it's the mother of all skillful qualities. The reason we gain any happiness in life is because of mindfulness. For this reason, mindfulness is what brings peace to the mind.

Sitting here and bringing the mind to stillness is not really all that hard to do. The reason it seems hard is because we misunderstand things. Our views are wrong, and so are our presuppositions. If we study so as to understand this point, we'll know the truth. For example, when we think that the mind goes here or there, that's not the truth. It's just a preconceived notion. Actually, the mind stays with the body at all times. What goes is just the light, as with a flashlight. The bulb stays in the flashlight; it's simply the light that goes flashing out. The bulb and the light are two different things. The bulb has light, but the light outside of the flashlight doesn't have a bulb. The mind — awareness itself — stays with the body with each in-and-out breath. The knowledge that goes flashing out isn't the real thing. You can't take the light and put it back in the flashlight, just as when a person tries to catch a light beam it doesn't stick in his hands.

So if the mind is always in the present, why do we practice concentration? We practice concentration because there are two kinds of fire or electricity in the mind: hot fire, the fires of passion, aversion, & delusion; and cool fire, the fire of jhana, or mental absorption. If we understand how to train the mind, we'll meet with the cool fire. Hot fire is bad for the nerves of our eyes, ears, nose, tongue, and body. Our sense organs are like light bulbs. The nerves of the senses are like the filaments in the bulbs. If we hook them up to the wrong kind of current, they'll explode immediately. If we hook them up to the right current but never turn them off, they'll wear out. So we practice concentration because we want cool electricity, the cool fire of jhana. Cool electricity does no damage to our senses and enables us to use our senses to see the truth, to understand everything we see, hear, smell, taste, touch, and think about. This way the mind can be cool and at peace.

This is the skill of insight meditation. When sights strike against the eye, perceptions arise right at the contact, and we can see them with discernment. When sounds strike the ear, when smells strike the nose, when flavors strike the tongue, when tactile sensations strike the body, or ideas strike the mind, discernment gets right there in between them. This way sights don't stick to the eye, and the

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eye doesn't stick to sights; sounds don't stick to the ears, the ears don't stick to sounds, and so forth. This is intuitive insight, or six-factored equanimity, which can let go both of the senses and of their objects. The true mind stays cool and at peace, like the cool fire that lasts and poses a danger to no one.

When people don't train their minds, they have to live with hot fire, which wears down different parts of their minds, such as the nerves of their eyes, ears, nose, tongue, and body. When these nerves wear down, they become ignorant. Their eyesight is darkened. When they see sights, they don't know the truth of those sights. This is called unawareness. Their ears go deaf: When they hear sounds, they don't know the truth of those sounds. The same holds for their nose, tongue, body, and mind. Whatever they sense, they don't know the truth of those things. This is called unawareness. It gives rise to craving and defilement, and leads to suffering. This is what it means to be ignorant of the truth.

People ignorant of the truth are like the blind. They have trouble everywhere they walk, thinking that high things are low and low things are high — as when a blind person walks along level ground, lifting his feet up high because he's afraid he might trip over something. In the same way, people who don't know the truth think that deep Dhamma is shallow, shallow Dhamma is deep; high Dhamma is low, low Dhamma is high. That's Wrong View. When your views are wrong, your practice is wrong; your release is wrong — like lifting your feet to walk up a set of stairs that doesn't have any steps. There are people who want to put themselves on a high level but without the proper basis. Their minds don't have any concentration. They keep walking, thinking, imagining about high-level Dhamma, but they end up back where they started. They're like a blind person trying to climb a staircase whose bottom step is missing. He'll just keep stomping on the same spot of ground. In the same way, people on a low level who think they're on a high level end up sinking further and further into the ground. The more they try to climb up, the deeper they go. Like an elephant fallen into the mud: The more she struggles, the deeper she sinks.

The steps of the stairs are virtue, concentration, and discernment. If we follow the steps, we'll get to where we want to go — like a person with good eyesight climbing stairs that actually have steps. People who practice concentration can know things whether their eyes are opened or closed, because they have brightness within them.

"Sankhara" means fashioning. Sankharas are things that we have to study in order to know them clearly for what they are. And we have to be wise to them, too. There are two kinds. World sankharas are things like gain, status, praise, and pleasure. These things arise and then pass away. Dhamma sankharas are our own physical and mental phenomena: aggregates, elements, and sense media. These things also arise and pass away in just the same way. So as long as we have them, we should put them to a good use. Otherwise they'll turn around and kill us. If we don't work at training them, they simply stay at the level of plain phenomena. But if we train them, we get more and more worth out of them. Like clay: If we're intelligent enough, we can make it into a pot to cook our food. Higher than that, we can make it into tiles to cover our roof. If we put a glaze on the tiles, they become even more valuable. It all depends on how much discernment we have in understanding how to work with things so as to increase their value.

The breath is the bodily sankhara, i.e., the factor that fashions the body.

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Verbal sankharas are the thoughts that you put into words so that you have them ready to say, but without speaking out loud.

Mental sankharas are thoughts that aren't involved with speaking. You simply think and then know what the thought is about.

Verbal and mental sankharas are very similar. In training the mind, the important point is to make an effort to prevent verbal sankharas from arising. Whether they deal with past or future perceptions, you have to brush them all away.

Bodily sankharas are the present aspect of the body, i.e., the breath. Mental sankharas are the present aspect of the mind, i.e., the awareness that forms the basis for thinking.

Mental sankharas form the essence of suffering. Sankharas are the valuables of stupid people. You have to get rid of the smoke if you want to see the flame. You have to get rid of the sankharas in the mind if you want to see the Unfashioned.

Taking pleasure in sights, sounds, smells, tastes, etc., is sensual craving. The mental state that wanders out in search of an object but hasn't yet found anything that pleases it, is craving for becoming. The mental state that wavers or leans in its present preoccupation is craving for no becoming. Not knowing these aspects of the mind is unawareness (*avijja*).

Labels of the past and future are the "world." The present is the Dhamma. Don't let yourself get taken in by even the slightest labeling. Even if you get only slightly involved, that's a state of becoming, and you'll have to suffer more birth, aging, illness, and death.

The skill of release is when "past" is simply a movement, "future" is simply a movement, and "present" is simply a movement, but there's no kamma. You can think of the past, but the mind doesn't taste any results from the thinking. For the mind to attain dispassion, you need to have the skill to determine what's detrimental in the present so that you can spit out any passion immediately. The past isn't for real, the future isn't for real. If they were for real, they would have to stay for good. If you're intelligent, you won't take the things that you've already spit out and put them back in your mouth again.

Passion and craving are like eating and swallowing, or gathering in. Dispassion is like spitting out or throwing away. If you grasp after things that have gotten away from you or haven't reached you yet, that's craving and passion. Dispassion is like when food touches your tongue, you notice it immediately and spit it out before it gets swallowed.

When the Buddha was still a lay person, he tried to track down the source of true happiness. He asked himself, "Does happiness come from being wealthy?" But when he looked at wealth, he saw that it had its drawbacks. So he turned to learning, but learning also had its drawbacks. He turned to power, but he saw that power involved killing and war. So he contemplated things back and forth like

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this, asking himself what he could do to find true happiness. Finally he realized that happiness comes from pain, pain comes from happiness. The world has to keep spinning around like this. And when something spins around, it has to have an axle — otherwise, how could it spin? So when there's something that spins, there also has to be something that doesn't spin. He kept contemplating this until he found the source of all spinning and not spinning, which lies right here in the heart.

There are two kinds of knowing: true knowing and imitation knowing. True knowing is what stays right here and now, without going anywhere else. You know when you're standing, you know when you're lying down, speaking, thinking, etc. As for imitation knowing, that's the knowledge that goes after labels and perceptions. Labels are an act of knowing, but they're not the knowing itself. They're like the shadow of knowing. True knowing is being mindful of the present, seeing causes and effects. This is discernment.

Knowing in line with labels, in line with books or with what people say, is imitation knowing, not the real thing. It's like the shadow of knowing. Real knowing is the knowing that arises within yourself. It's *paccattam*, i.e., entirely personal. It's the kind of knowing that can't be taught and can't be told. It has to arise within you. Only then will you know what's inconstant, stressful, and not-self; and what's constant, easeful, and self. Change-of-lineage knowledge (*gotarabbu-ñāna*) sees both sides and lets go of both. The truth of the Dhamma is *Dhammathiti*, the aspect of mind that stays in place without changing. The movements and characteristics of the mind are simply shadows or imitations of knowing. In practicing the Dhamma, you want true knowing. If you don't really practice, you'll meet up only with the shadows of the Dhamma. For this reason we should practice so that true knowing will appear within us.

§ *Dhammathiti* is something that by its nature stays in place. It doesn't change or waver, rise or fall in line with the mental objects that come into contact. It's the mind released from suffering and stress, the mind that stays in line with its true nature. Even though there may be thinking or talking or acting in all kinds of ways, the mind simply is aware. It doesn't show any symptoms of changing from its primal nature. Say, for example, that we place a glass here, without anyone or anything touching it or moving it. It will stay right there for ten years, one hundred years, without breaking. The mind that's *Dhammathiti* is just like that. Or you can say that it's like writing the number 1 without changing it into anything else. It will have to stay the same 1 it was in the first place. This is called *Dhammathiti*.

Always contemplate things in terms of inconstancy, stress, and not-self — but you also have to look at them in terms of constancy, ease, and self as well. You have to look at things from both sides, and not just at their shortcomings. You have to look at their uses, too, but you can't let yourself get attached to either side. Otherwise you'll be like a person with one eye: Constancy, ease, and self will be able to sneak up and hit you over the head without your realizing it.

Insight has two sides: the side that sees in line with what we're taught and the side that sees in the other direction. Seeing in line with what people say can turn into a corruption of insight. Seeing in the other direction means seeing in line with things they don't say. Wherever they say there's inconstancy, that's where there's constancy. Wherever they say there's stress, that's where there's ease. Wherever they say there's not-self, that's where there's self. This is intuitive insight.

The still calm of discernment is not something the Buddha wanted, because it's not really calm, not really still. The ultimate happiness is something even higher than discernment.

Those who have attained the transcendent — stream-winners, once-returners, non-returners, and arahants: These terms apply, not to people, but to the mind.

Letting Go

"We" are like a tree. "Attachment" is like vines. If we feel desire for sights, they'll wind around our eyes. If we feel desire for sounds, they'll wind around our ears, and so forth. When we're all tangled up like this, we'll have to die. Some people don't let themselves die naturally. They take their attachments and tie up their own throats.

The world is like red ants that crawl along vines. If we cut away the vines that entangle our tree, the ants won't be able to get to it.

We have to cut away whatever we can. If the mind is long, make it short. If it's short, make it round. If it's round, make it smooth. If it's smooth, make it shine. That way it can roll around without getting stuck on anything, and can gain release from all suffering and stress.

Suffering comes from "having." This is why people in the world are suffering so. If they have five, they want to increase it to ten. Once they have ten they think they'll be able to relax. But when they actually get ten, they then increase it to 100. And then they have to keep looking for more all the time, for fear that they'll lose what they have. Only when they stop breathing will they stop looking for more. This is why we're taught that having is suffering. And this is why the Buddha arranged not to have anything at all. He said, "Physical form, feeling, perception, thought-formations, and consciousness are not mine. The senses of sight, hearing, smell, taste, feeling, and ideation are not mine." When nothing was his, how could anyone take anything away from him? Who could come and oppress him? If people give us things, we say that we "get," that we "have." If they take them away, we say that we "lose." But when there's nothing to own, there's no having or losing. And when that's the case, where will there be any suffering?

Nibbana is the end of all having and lacking.

If we don't know how to let go, we're going to suffer. Suppose that we're carrying something in our hand. If we don't let it go and put it down, we won't be able to take hold of anything better than what we've got. This is why the Buddha taught us to let go. For one thing, our hand won't get sweaty from carrying things around. Secondly, we can take what we've put down, turn it over, and look at it from every side to see what it really is. Say that we're holding a knife tight in our fist. We can't look at it to see what kind of knife it is. But if we open our fist and put the knife down, we can then look at it carefully to see whether it's made from steel, wood, horn, or ivory, whether it's well-made or not, and what uses it's good for.

To hold onto the body is to hold onto old kamma. To let go of the body is to let go of old kamma. And when we can let go in this way, there will be no more kamma in the body. It's the same as with a piece of property. If we take possession of it, with a deed and the boundary staked out, there tend to

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be problems with trespassing, swindling, boundary disputes, and cases in court. But if we don't take possession of it, and simply let it be public property, there will be no troubles or quarrels. This way the heart can be at its ease.

If the heart gets caught up on anything, it's got to be bad. If you can see being born and not being born as equal, being sick and not being sick as equal, dying and not dying as equal, as having the same price, then the mind can relax and not be caught up on anything at all.

In the first stage we let go of evil and start doing good. In the second stage we let go of evil and some forms of good. In the third stage we let go of everything good and evil, because everything is fashioned by nature and thus undependable. We do good but we're not attached to it. When you let go, you have to do it intelligently, and not in a ruinous way — i.e., by not doing good. You can't hold on even to your opinions, much less to material things. When you do good, you do it for the sake of the living beings of the world, for your children and grandchildren. You do everything in the best way possible, but you're not attached to it, because you know that all things fashioned are inconstant. This way your heart can be clear and bright like a jewel. If you get caught up on praise or blame, you're foolish. It's like drinking other people's saliva. When you act rightly, there are people who will say that you're right and those who will say that you're wrong. When you act wrong, there are people who will say that you're wrong and those who will say that you're right. There's nothing constant about good or evil, right or wrong.

Evil comes from good, and good from evil. For example, when we eat rice we say it's delicious, but then as it goes down through the body it turns into something just the opposite. Thieves come from rich people. If people didn't have possessions and treasures, where would there be any thieves to steal from them? The Buddha saw that evil isn't something you can depend upon. Good isn't something you can depend upon. That's why he let go of both good and evil by not connecting their wires into his heart. He gained release from all good and evil and so transcended all the affairs of the world (*loka-dhamma*). That was how he entered the highest happiness.

The power of good and evil is like a magnet that pulls the mind to do good or evil and then be born in good or evil places in line with its pull. If we do good or evil, it's as if we leave magnets behind in the world. Those magnets will pull our minds to their level. People who aren't intelligent enough to know how to avoid or extract themselves from the power of good and evil are sure to be pulled along by the force field of these magnets. They'll have to keep swimming around in the world of rebirth. This is why wise people try to find a way to cut the force field so that they can escape its power and float free. In other words, they do good and cut the force field. They do things that may not be good, and they cut the force field. They don't let these things connect. In other words, they don't get attached to the things they've done. They don't keep fondling them. This is what it means to be discerning: knowing how to cut the force fields of the world.

The mind is neither good nor evil, but it's what knows good and knows evil. It's what does good and does evil. And it's what lets go of good and lets go of evil.

It's not the case that things will progress if we cling to them, or deteriorate if we let them go.

The Skill of Release

Attachment is like a bridge. If there's no bridge, who's going to walk across it? There's just this side of the river and the other side. The eye exists, so it can see both sides, but there's no connection. The mind that isn't caught up on its preoccupations is like a lotus leaf in the water. The water can't seep into the leaf. It simply rolls around as a bead across the surface. There's awareness, but no attachment.

Awareness without attachment is like electricity without a wire. There's just brightness. When there's no wire, no one can get electrocuted. Or you could say that it's like a flame that doesn't need a lamp. No wick gets used up, no oil gets consumed, and yet there's light.

If we separate the body and the mind from each other, our ordinary awareness disappears, but that doesn't mean that awareness is annihilated. It's still there, but it's a special awareness that doesn't have to depend on the body or mind. It's the same as when we separate the wax of a candle from its wick: The flame disappears, but the fire potential isn't annihilated. Whether or not there's fuel, it exists in the world by its very nature. This is the awareness of nibbana.

Arahants can speak and act, but they don't speak or act the way ordinary people do. They know how to separate things. Like a person speaking over the radio: Even though we may hit the radio, it doesn't reach the person speaking.

The experience of release has no sense of "before" or "after," or even any "present."

When the heart is empty, it feels light and free, with no preoccupations at all. Like a bird: Even though it has feet, it doesn't leave any tracks in the air. In the same way, when the mind is empty, even if people criticize you there's no writing in the air. Nothing gets stuck in the heart.

Tranquillity meditation means to keep the mind quiet in craving. Insight meditation means knowing both the mind with craving and the mind without craving. Knowing perceptions of past and future for what they are is intuitive knowledge. This kind of knowledge isn't stuck on any perceptions at all. This is called the skill of release. It's not stuck on the mind with craving or the mind without craving. It's like writing letters in the air. The air doesn't get used up, the writing doesn't require any effort, and you can't read what it says at all. Whether you write good or bad things, you can't read what they say. The air is there, but as for shapes in the air, there are none.

Glossary

Ajaan: Teacher; mentor.

Arahant: A Worthy one or Pure one. A person whose heart no longer has any defilements and is thus not destined for further rebirth. A title for the Buddha and the highest level of his Noble Disciples.

Ariyadhana: Noble Wealth; qualities that serve as 'capital' in the quest for liberation: conviction, virtue, conscience, fear of evil, erudition, generosity, and discernment.

Avijja: Unawareness; ignorance. The basic cause of suffering and stress.

Buddho: Awake. An epithet of the Buddha.

Dhamma (dharma): Event; phenomenon; the way things are in and of themselves; their inherent qualities; the basic principles underlying their behavior. Also, principles of behavior that human beings should follow so as to fit in with the right natural order of things; qualities of mind they should develop so as to realize the inherent quality of the mind in and of itself. By extension, "dhamma" is used also to refer to any doctrine that teaches such things. Thus the Dhamma of the Buddha refers both to his teachings and to the direct experience of the quality of nibbana at which those teachings are aimed.

Dhutanga: Voluntary ascetic practices that monks and other meditators may undertake to strengthen their practice — such things as eating only one meal a day, staying in the forest, or not lying down for a set period of time.

Gotarabhūñāna: Change-of-lineage knowledge. The stage of insight that changes one from an ordinary, run-of-the-mill person to a member of the Noble Sangha (see below).

Jhana: Absorption in a single object or preoccupation, either a physical sensation or a mental notion.

Kamma (karma): Acts of intention that result in states of becoming and birth.

Lokadhamma: Affairs of the world. The standard list gives eight: wealth, loss of wealth, status, loss of status, praise, criticism, pleasure, and pain.

Lokavidu: Knower of the cosmos. An epithet of the Buddha.

Mahasatipatthana: The great frame of reference. Ajaan Lee's term for the sense of the body as a basis for mindfulness practice when the mind is in jhana.

Nibbana (nirvana): The "unbinding" of the mind from sensations and mental acts, preoccupations and suppositions. As this term is also used to refer to the extinguishing of a fire, it carries the connotations of stilling, cooling, and peace. (According to the physics taught at the time of the

The Skill of Release

Buddha, the property of fire exists in a latent state to a greater or lesser degree in all objects. When activated, it clings and is bound to its fuel. As long as it remains latent or is extinguished, it is "unbound.")

Nivarana: Hindrances; mental qualities that hinder the mind from attaining concentration and discernment: sensual desire, ill will, torpor & lethargy, restlessness & anxiety, and uncertainty.

Sangha: The community of the Buddha's disciples. On the noble or ideal level, this refers to all those, whether lay or ordained, who have attained at least their first glimpse of Awakening. On the conventional level, it refers to the Buddhist monastic orders.

Sankhara: Formation, compound, fashioning — the forces and factors that fashion things (physical or mental), the process of fashioning, and the fashioned things that result.

Vipassana: Insight meditation. Seeing events as they actually present themselves to the awareness in terms of the three characteristics of inconstancy, stress, and "not-selfness."

Vipassanupakkilesa: Corruption of insight; intense experiences that can happen in the course of meditation and can lead one to believe that one has completed the path. The standard list includes ten: light, psychic knowledge, rapture, serenity, pleasure, extreme conviction, excessive effort, obsession, indifference, and contentment.