



The Dhamma
OF

Ajaan Paññāvadḍho

Teachings for the Monks

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Transcriptions of Talks given by

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The Benefits of Sangha

When a monk first ordains, he should live in a Sangha community because there is a lot that he must learn. By learning about the Sangha and his own place in it, he learns to see its true value. He also learns the basis of the meditation practice from a skilled teacher.

If a monk goes off on his own too quickly, he is likely to find disappointment. Disappointment arises because he has not taken enough account of his own *kilesas*. The *kilesas* that he had as a layperson, before he put on the yellow robe, are still there. They don't simply fly away when one puts on the yellow robe. Because they are inside, wherever he goes he takes his *kilesas* with him. Because of that, it is necessary to receive a first grounding in a community with other monks who can keep him straight, and where he can test yourself against other people. In that way, a monk can get rid of quite a number of the grosser *kilesas* in his character.

When he has studied enough in the community to learn what is necessary, he can then go off on his own into the forest to deepen his practice. Many monks gain great value from practicing alone in the forest; but not all monks do. Some monks find that when they go off to the forest their minds are just wandering. Because they cannot keep their minds still, they can't get down to the practice as they did before. Those monks are probably not suited to go to the forest alone, certainly not to begin with.

For those monks who go off to the forest, the advantages are that they can practice their own meditation without social hindrances: without having to do lots of chores and duties, and without having to refer to anyone else. These are quite valuable advantages for a monk practicing meditation. But if he is not careful, he can go the wrong way. He can start getting upset, even angry, at the difficulties and hardships of living in the forest. But if he has the right attitude, such difficulties are a very good teacher. In fact, they are one of the best teachers. If he comes face to face with a dangerous wild animal, like a tiger, which might attack them at any moment, the only defense that he has to protect himself is Dhamma. If he brings up the Dhamma, he'll be okay. But he must make the effort to bring up the Dhamma, and not just give away to fear.

Many people give way to fear, and that has bad consequences. The tiger might not eat him, but it still sets up within him something that might cause a lot of trouble should he give away to it. When fear comes up strong and unbidden, catching one off balance, one doesn't know what to do. That fear then takes over and assumes control of one's mind and body. A person can just stand there quivering. And if he doesn't get back to Dhamma, by bringing up the idea of Dhamma in his mind, he may go mad. It can cause a lot of damage. But if he is strong enough, if he has done enough practice for the Dhamma to come up in his mind, that experience can be very valuable. Overcoming fear is very important. Fear is an enemy that comes up in the guise of a friend. It makes out that it is a friend warning you of danger, but in fact it makes you do all the wrong things. Because of that, fear must be overcome.

Going to the forest can be of great advantage. No doubt about it. But a monk shouldn't be too eager to go to the forest. He must realize that he may have difficult problems and questions coming up. Mostly, those practicing in the forest, who have problems they can't solve on their own, go back to the teacher and ask him, maybe just a visit for half an hour or an hour, and then return to the forest again. It's important that he keep in touch with the teacher. The other difficulty to watch out for practicing in the forest, particularly for Western monks, is the affect of food. The alms food monks receive in the villages is often quite insufficient and of poor quality, so they may experience stomach trouble. In fact, many do. Putting up with stomach trouble is also a beneficial practice, but the benefits of good health should not be overlooked. A monk should not blindly think that can neglect his health indefinitely; that's not the way of Dhamma. The way of the Dhamma teaches that we should not unnecessarily put ourselves in difficulties. If a monk does that, he is being careless. And carelessness is a mental defilement that should be overcome, not promoted. A monk should always be careful and watchful, both of which strengthen his mindfulness.

Are the kilesas in the five khandhas or in the citta? And what is the citta? Is it a sixth khandha on top of the other five?

No. First take the five *khandhas*. The first *khandha* is the body, which is part of the physical world. The human body is made up of the substance of the world, and relies on the world to survive. It is completely geared to the world. Most of

the things we use in the world depend on the body. That building, for instance: why is it that shape and that size? Because of the shape and size of the human body. Why is each step on the stairs just so high? Because that's the height we can step. Why do we have the lights on? Because eyes need light to see things. If we didn't have eyes, we wouldn't need light. Looking around you, you will find countless things whose functions are determined by the human body. So the body is part and parcel of the world.

The other four *khandhas* — feeling, memory, thought, and consciousness — depend on the body. When the body dies, they break up and disappear. Without the body, there is no support for the other *khandhas*. It only requires the doctor to inject you with some anesthesia for the whole lot to disappear. The body goes on functioning, but the other *khandhas*, as far as we know, all cease temporarily. Then when you come to, the mental *khandhas* start working again. Because they depend upon the body, there is nothing absolute about the mental *khandhas*. Like the body, they are not *kilesas* either. They are neutral.

Fundamentally, the *khandhas* are not an integral part of us. They are there for our use. I use the simile of a computer. The body is like the hardware, which forms the material basis. The four mental *khandhas* are like the software, which render the hardware useful. And the *citta* is like the person who uses it. The person using the computer can make it do whatever he wants it to do — good things or bad things or stupid things. In a similar way the *citta* is the one who plays with our *khandhas* and pushes them about. It's the master of them. The *khandhas* are used for the sake of the *citta*, for the promotion of what it wants. If the *citta* were pure, it wouldn't matter. But it's not. It has *kilesas* inside it. It's the *citta* with *kilesas* that causes all the trouble. If the *kilesas* were in the body, when the body died, the *kilesas* would all disappear. But in fact the *kilesas* are in the *citta*, which doesn't die, so they carry on to the next life. Because of that, we are reborn again and again.

In meditation practice it is important to see that the *kilesas* are in the *citta*, not in the *khandhas*. But the *khandhas* take on those aspects of the *kilesas* which the *citta* makes them take on. For instance, anger. Anger starts off in the *citta* and immediately infiltrates the mental *khandhas*. First of all, consciousness becomes aware of it, followed by the memory associated with whatever cause produces the angry reaction. Thinking angry thoughts increases the anger, which brings up

unpleasant feeling, causing a further negative reaction. And pretty soon the anger comes out in speech and action. In this way, the *kilesas* are pushing us around all the time.

The whole purpose of Buddha-Dhamma, and the whole purpose of developing the meditation practice, is to get rid of those defiling *kilesas*. That is the primary goal. Other objectives may be achieved as well — some people may develop psychic powers, allowing them to see the future and the past — but these are merely byproducts of the practice. They are not the main aim. The main aim is to get rid of those *kilesas*. In fact, byproducts such as the psychic powers can be a definite disadvantage, because they can very easily lead one astray. So people who discover they have psychic powers should be very cautious and not get caught in them. If you play with them, they become very sticky. After a while you become addicted to them, always hankering after knowledge of an external nature. You easily get caught in the habit of playing with psychic phenomena. This can be a big trap, so you should strongly resist it. After all, we have enough powers at our disposal already. If you want to know what's happening on the other side of the world, you can quite easily use radio, television, telephone and so on. You don't need psychic powers.

What is the relationship between the citta and Nibbāna?

The pure *citta* is Nibbāna. The *citta* that we experience is the *citta* that has been usurped by the *kilesas*. And because of that usurpation by the *kilesas*, the *citta* is constantly changing. In the ultimate sense, we can say that Nibbāna is always there, and that even the functioning of the *kilesas* is part of the situation. But that is an ultimate way of looking at it. And it doesn't mean that we mustn't work to counteract the *kilesas*. The relationship of the *citta* to Nibbāna is difficult to describe. The *citta* that we experience — we call it the *citta*, but we don't really know what it is — is so involved with *kilesas* that we cannot distinguish it. The *citta* is not an object of awareness; it's more like a function of awareness. It is difficult to put into words, because everything we know in this world is impermanent, constantly changing. So we know the *citta* only in its changingness, in the way it changes all the time. When it comes to the pure *citta*, it is impossible to know it in the way we know the nature of change, because the pure *citta* has no duality. When there is no duality, we have no

means by which we can know it, except for the knowing nature of the *citta* itself. That goes rather high.

Can you say something about the relationship between citta and consciousness?

When consciousness arises, the *citta* is the one that empowers it. If I want to make this microphone give a sound out there, it must be empowered by the sound of my voice. It cannot do it on its own. In the same way, *viññāṇa* cannot function on its own. *Viññāṇa* functions only because the *citta* makes it function. My own interpretation is that *viññāṇa* is the *citta* turning into dualism, as though splitting into two. When the *citta* splits into two, it is back in the world straightaway. So you get the duality of the *citta* on the one hand, and what it knows on the other – and that's *viññāṇa*. The *citta* coupled with what it knows is *viññāṇa*. So there must be the object and the subject in *viññāṇa*. It must be dual.

So the citta is pure knowing without an object?

Yes, you can say that. But only if it is the pure *citta*, because the *kilesa-citta* always has an object. Due to the way the *kilesa-citta* functions, delusion is always present. Greed or aversion may or may not be present, but delusion always is. I look on greed and aversion as being the two arms of delusion. They come out of delusion, so without delusion there would be no greed or aversion. Avijjā, or fundamental ignorance, is the factor that creates and perpetuates delusion, insuring that it is always there in our minds. Delusion is inherent in the functioning duality of our minds, which is really a distortion of the *citta*'s knowing. So duality means delusion.

But because we have learnt to view the world in a certain way without questioning that view, we cannot see what's wrong. For example, when we were young children, we learnt things from our dad and our mom, from teachers and so on. But we were too young to question, so we just accepted them. The perception of the world that we learnt at that age went in very deep and has stuck there. When we became adults, we still retained that childhood view. In other words, the child is still there. And that child comes out quite often, mostly in an emotional mode. The child tends to come up in the emotions. When you observe your own behavior, or the behavior of others, you can see the child at work. And all the attitudes, ideas, ways of thinking, beliefs and so on coming from childhood are riddled with delusion.

The emotional residue left over from many people's childhood is guilt. Do you have any recommendations for people who suffer from guilt?

The surest way to deal with guilt is to first accept it. Most people instinctively try to resist their guilt, saying: "I'm not guilty, I'm perfectly alright!" If you turn and say: "Alright, I accept the guilt. I am guilty! Now what am I guilty of?" You probably won't even know what you are guilty of. So you say: "Alright, I'm guilty! What do I do now?" And you may find that the whole sequence starts to break up. You might have to do it many times, but it will break up. The important point is to accept it. You know that the guilt is there because you can feel it. It's a valid emotion. But it is the 'I' that's guilty, the 'self'. And that is a delusion to start with. So by accepting the guilt, you help to diminish that 'I' a bit, but you don't lose anything of value. All you lose is a bit more delusion. Many people feel guilt; it is a very common experience. And that guilt is always built up from the past.

Regarding your own practice, could you share some of your breakthrough experiences and what actions or efforts appeared to support them?

By practicing and developing in meditation, one gains a sense of certainty, a sense of knowing, knowing where one's going although one hasn't actually got there. But it is a sense of knowing that you just can't describe. You've just got to do it, that's all.

It's no good talking to people about the really important things that happen in our practice, because it wouldn't mean anything to someone who has not had the same experience. For instance, Ajaan Mahā Boowa says he does not like talking about *jhāna* to somebody who has not experienced the true nature of *jhāna*. There is a lot of talk about *jhāna* from people who have developed the concept of what *jhāna* is, but mostly their ideas are quite wrong. Ajaan Mahā Boowa has said that those who have the tendency to *jhāna* inherently in their character, meaning that it's in their *kamma*, must go that way. Other people should not try it. So if it is not inherently in your character, you shouldn't attempt to develop *jhāna*. It is enough for you to develop *samādhi*. But Ajaan Mahā Boowa did not state the difference between *jhāna* and *samādhi*. He simply said that they are different. But he stressed that if you do not know what the difference is, then you should keep to *samādhi*.

How essential is it for those developing samādhi to have a parikamma object they can always bring their mind back to throughout the day?

It's quite essential. Ajaan Mahā Boowa said that when he first started practicing meditation, he used the *parikamma* of *Buddho*, continually repeating the sound *Buddho* internally. As he practiced in that way over a period of months and years, his practice progressed for a while and then deteriorated, only to progress again and then deteriorate once more. In the end, he became so fed up with the constant fluctuations that he decided to repeat *Buddho* relentlessly day and night, not stopping his internal repetition for anything except sleep. After a time the results came: he attained a firm basis in *samādhi*. That is the value of the *parikamma*. Your mind must have something to hold on to; otherwise, it just jumps to other things. Once you choose a *parikamma*, it is best to stick with that preparatory object for as long as possible in order to see the benefits. It's not good to jump from one *parikamma* to another too quickly if one doesn't seem to work for you. You may find that the *parikamma* progresses up to a certain point where you get a blockage and you can't go further. If you then quickly change to a different *parikamma*, nearly always you will find that you encounter the same blockage hindering your progress as you did with the first one. You must overcome that blockage within yourself before you can go further. The way to do that is to just keep relentlessly focusing on the one *parikamma* until you break through. You shouldn't be changing *parikammās* often. If you feel after a reasonable amount of time that you cannot make progress with your first choice of *parikamma*, it's alright to change. But don't change just because it becomes a bit difficult.

The *parikamma* is important, very important. If you really want to get in to the *samādhi* practice, the best way to do it is to keep it going the whole time. No matter what you are doing, keep your awareness focused on the breath. After all, whatever you do, the breathing is always going to be there anyway. So just be aware of it. Being aware of the breath does not mean trying to be very one-pointed or very concentrated on it, but just being mindful of it. After all, it is called *ānāpāna-sati*. *Sati* means mindfulness, so it's the mindfulness of breathing, which means you maintain the awareness of the breath all the time, even though you are doing other things.

That is the way of *kammaṭṭhāna*. *Kammaṭṭhāna* is a combination of the Pāli word *kamma*, which means action, and *ṭhāna*, which means a basis. So *kammaṭṭhāna* is a basis for action, or a basis for meditation practice. It refers not only to the practice of meditation, but also the practice of training oneself in the monastic discipline. It can refer to the training one does based on the Vinaya, and the training one does in learning to get along with other people, called *sāmaggī* in Pāli. It means getting together with other people, and doing things with them, without always just wanting to do everything on one's own. All these sorts of things are very helpful. These external practices, as well as the meditation practice, are all a great help in mental development. In fact one can overcome many gross *kilesas* by following the external trainings. If somebody says to you: "Go do that!" the tendency is to say: "Why the hell do you pick on me?" But the person who is training himself recognizes the dissension arising within him and decides to do it anyway as part of his practice to overcome the defilements in his mind. Many gross defilements can be overcome in that way.

In the wisdom develops samādhi practice, would one still keep up the parikamma during the day?

Yes, you can use a wisdom *parikamma*, there are such meditation objects. But the practice of gaining *samādhi* from wisdom is for those people whose minds are very interested in thinking about things and seeing how they work. For instance, you think about the bits and pieces that make up your physical body and investigate how they work. When done properly, that can lead to *samādhi*. What happens is this: the interest in the thinking starts to concentrate the mind, and as it concentrates the mind you get the factors of *pīti* and *sukha* coming up, so the mind goes into *samādhi*. If you keep working intently at something for a long time, eventually it becomes interesting. Once your interest is aroused, it becomes intriguing. Because of that, you want to keep on doing it, and that continuity of attention can lead to *samādhi*. But if you find that thinking leads to too much mental distraction, not allowing the mind to stick on the object for long, then you must use the basic *samādhi* practice, and develop wisdom from that.

Is possible to have profound realization and not be aware of it?

No. It is possible to have profound realization and not to know what it is. For example, you see bright lights coming up and you feel good inside, then you

reflect on it, thinking: “I know there were bright lights, I know what I felt inside, but I don’t know what it was.” That is quite possible. Should you call it *samādhī*? Should call it *jhāna*? Should you call it stream-entry? You don’t know. Because it’s something new that you have never experienced before, you don’t know what words to put to it. The ideas and concepts you have about meditation practice are like a map, whereas the experiences you encounter resemble actually walking the road. Often you cannot recognize the road from looking at the symbols on the map. And putting labels on your experiences in meditation can be dangerous. You can easily misrepresent the importance of your experiences, which can become a hindrance to going further in the practice. It can also develop conceit. So whatever happens, just keep on with the practice and resist labeling your experiences as this or that state of attainment.

Can you speak a little bit more about the arising of conceit when there is success in meditation?

Conceit is a factor of greed. Conceit is the promotion of self, always making out that ‘self is good’, or ‘self is better than other people’, or ‘self is very pure and straight’. If you build up self higher and higher, when it comes down, as it surely will, it hurts. It’s analogous to the fall of the twin towers in America. Everyone looked on them as invincible symbols of prosperity, and then bang! That’s the way conceit works: it’s built on grand assumptions about oneself. Conceit comes about by thought, so thoughts with conceit are ones that you must look at often to realize their nature. When you have conceited thoughts, the best remedy is to quickly turn around and find the opposite in yourself to deflate the ego a little bit. Notice where you still have a lot of *kilesas*. In that way, you bring your mind more into balance.

When one investigates the thoughts, how much attention should one give to the content of the thinking?

The content of thinking is important, because thought content changes your attitudes. When you think of something, you take up the emotional attitude associated to do that thought. This is why, when you repeat a *parikamma*, you use the word *Buddho*, which has a very positive connotation. Thought content has quite a significant impact on the mind. So you must be mindful and watchful. If bad thoughts come up on their own, even though you don’t want them, let them come up, but look at them carefully and see them for what they

are. You mustn't try to suppress unwanted thoughts, because that can have a bad effect. But it has a bad effect only if they are strong thoughts that come up very forcefully. I read a funny story once. An old Scotchman who was a patient at a mental hospital kept yelling at the psychiatrists all the time: "Get away from me you filthy people, get away! Don't tell me what to do! I don't want to hear it!" He was swearing all day long in very crude language. So the doctors consulted together and decided they better give him a lobotomy to quiet him down, which they did. Afterwards, the old man kept yelling at the top of his voice: "Speak up! Speak up! I can't hear you! Where are you? I can't hear you!" Satisfied, the doctors all agreed that this was quite an improvement. But obviously the cause of his problem was still there, it was just channeled in a different direction.

You should never underrate the potential of the mind to produce strange phenomena. Anybody who has read about the phenomena occurring in schizophrenia, or about psychic phenomena, will realize that the mind can produce almost anything with great strength. So you should be very cautious when strange sounds arise in meditation, especially people talking to you, because the *citta* with *kilesas* is quite capable of creating that affect. If you do experience voices coming up in meditation, don't do what they say unless it's absolutely reasonable — it must conform to reason. You must consider it carefully and decide whether it's reasonable or not. If it's reasonable, it doesn't matter. But if it's something bizarre, never do it.

It is said that when a thought arises you should not grasp the sign or the content of it. What does that mean?

I interpret not grasping the sign of any object that comes up in the mind to mean not grasping the memory associated with it. In other words, thoughts trigger off memory, which is the sign. The content of thought will depend on what the medium is. Presumably the content is something that has meaning like audible speech or visible written words or something with a symbolic content. So you merely notice that object without grabbing hold on it. When you grasp at the object, it immediately takes the mind away. For instance, when you start doing the meditation practice — whether it's breathing practice or *Buddho* or whatever — you get memories coming up, which bring up thoughts and other mental phenomena. When memories come up, your natural tendency is to be

interested. So you grasp them, which is *tañhā*: you want to know. It's craving. The correct thing to do in that situation is to have mindfulness, to be aware of what's happening and to realize the danger of being pulled away from the meditation practice. And then make the determination: "I'm not interested in that thought pattern. That is not what I'm doing. I don't want to follow these thoughts. I'm not going to think about that now." But to do that usually requires some training, where you reflect time after time each time you give away or forget. Gradually you can reach a point where a warning comes up almost immediately. It's like a red flag coming up inside, warning: This is dangerous!

Does the Arahant have a natural sense restraint that requires no effort?

When a person attains Arahant, the *citta* — the internal aspect — goes still. It's unmoving. But the five *khandhas* — the personality aspect — are still there and they are going to act much in the way they did before, except that there won't be any fire left. Because the *kilesas* have gone, the fire will be extinguished.

In the state of the Arahant, the five *khandhas* still remain, but the *kilesas* have disappeared. There are no *kilesas* left. Because there are no *kilesas* left, the five *khandhas* do not act in wrong ways, and at the same time there is no *kamma* produced. Actions done by the Arahant are called *kriya*, which means mere action. Those actions do not make *kamma*. In more technical terms, this is my understanding: in the ordinary person there is the *bhavanga citta*. The conscious moments of *bhavanga* link one with another, because of which the idea of time and continuity arise. With the Arahants, that continuity is broken. The continuity is no longer inherently present. Because of that, the tendency is for any action to be just that action. It does not follow on into a train of actions like it does with most people.

Why is the appreciation and the acceptance of everything in the practice not enough?

The appreciation of everything is also putting an attitude onto everything. And the tendency there would be for the mind to wander far and wide. So you must ask yourself: "Who or what is doing the appreciating?" When you look at the *khandhas* you will find that the appreciation will basically be thinking, probably about the world. And although the thoughts may not be particularly harmful, they are still not the way. You can have appreciation, certainly; there is nothing wrong with that. But it's not enough on its own.

It's difficult to understand what is necessary. We are trying to reach Nibbāna. Ultimately, to reach Nibbāna we must give up everything, everything without exception. Anything that's left will pull us back. In other words, Nibbāna is the state of non-dualism. It's a complete purity. It is emptiness, meaning empty of the world. Now if we hold on to anything at all, that will keep us back and prevent us getting there. It's like the person who has done a lot of practice and finds everything is empty, everything is gone, and they still cannot get there. So he goes to the teacher and asks what's wrong, why hasn't he reached Nibbāna? And the teacher says: "Because *you* are still there! While you're still there, you won't make it!" When the self gets out of the way — there it is. In that case, you can say the self wants Nibbāna. As long as the self wants Nibbāna, it can't get to Nibbāna. When it stops searching and gives up, there it is, as it should be. As it always was. Don't think Nibbāna is far away. It's not. Nibbāna is there within you, always. Ajaan Mahā Boowa once described it this way: Nibbāna is there within you, but it's wrapped up by a lot of rubbish. Our job in meditation is to pull away to all those wrappings. Once we pull off the wrappings, there it is. But the wrappings are on pretty tight, so they are not easy to pull away.

How does the Sotāpanna's understanding of emptiness differs from the Arahant's understanding of emptiness?

In neither case is there an understanding; there can't be. It's an experience. The experience of emptiness, if it is complete, must be always the same. You cannot get differences on that score. Because of that, whether it is an Arahant, or anyone else, if they experience emptiness, that's it. But that experience cannot be accurately described.

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The Tornado of Self

What is real and what is unreal?

Everything that is impermanent is unreal. Because it's changing all the time, it never has any time to be real. If you say it is a 'thing', then the thing immediately disappears. So there is a lack of reality there. But because everything is moving, we can experience things. We can experience movement and see things, and so on. But we never actually get to things, since we are always separate from them.

When you come to Nibbāna — the pure *citta* — that is real. Because it's real, it's permanent as well. There's no change in it. Because of that, we can say: "What is impermanent exists, but it is unreal; whereas what is permanent does not exist, but it is real!" But that 'real', although it is not existence — because existence means the experience of sensation — it is the reality. This is a paradox which is difficult to understand. The *citta*, being in that state of emptiness, can take on any characteristics. It is free and unlimited. And, in fact, it does take on some of the characteristics of the *kilesas*. When the *citta* takes on the characteristics of the *kilesas* it manifests an apparent movement, but its underlying reality is not affected. It's difficult to fathom. You need a mind a bit like a corkscrew to understand the principles involved here.

We cannot say that we have no 'self' because we create it by referring to it. That very reference creates it. The self perspective is there all the time, but it is a constantly changing perspective created by the *kilesas*, and that's all. I visualize it like one of those tornadoes you get in Texas. It comes buzzing across the plains, whirling around and damaging everything in its path. But when you examine it, it is only air! Nothing else. And when it stops whirling, where is it? You can't find it! In another words, there's no substance in it. There is no entity there. Its existence is simply that whirling — that constant dynamic movement. The 'self' is very much like that. It's just whirling about all over the place, driven by the *kilesas* in the *citta*. The *citta* empowers the *kilesas*. It's the one that gives them strength. The *kilesas* are rooted in the *citta*, so it always tends to go in the direction of the *kilesas*. And it acts like a tornado then. But it is not right to say there is no self. Certainly there is no entity of self, no permanent self. But there

is an impermanent self-perspective which is constantly changing from moment to moment.

Is there the quality of awareness in the pure citta of the Arahant?

The quality of awareness may be or may not be there, because the Arahant does not need such faculties. The Arahant doesn't need to be mindful. Those faculties are all factors of the training to become an Arahant. You can see in the *suttas* where it says that the Buddha set up mindfulness before him. Now, if he was always mindful, why was it necessary for him to set up mindfulness? It means he was not always mindful, because there was no need to be. The Arahant has completed the job, so he can sit back and relax. He had can put his feet up and take it easy.

What is the pure citta? Is it the same as Nibbāna?

The nature of Nibbāna is emptiness. When our consciousness is rooted in this world, we cannot become aware of emptiness. So we cannot know what it is. Because we are always aware of things — feelings, sensations and so on. And everything we know is apparently separate from us. In other words, there is duality: there is the one who knows and there is the thing that's known, or perceived. And because of that apparent separation between the two, we never really get into contact with the things we perceive at all. For that reason, we are always in the sort of half-state where we want things but we can never really get them. For example, somebody wants a motorcar so they buy it and then they say "I've got it now!" In what way has it changed? Nothing has changed! All that's changed is the idea in the person's mind. The car is just the same. To say "it's mine" is just a way of speaking, a social convention, that's all. Because of that, we really have no possessions. It's only that we think we do. We really do not have a body either. Our bodies do not belong to us. They belong to the world. They come from the world, are supported by the world and go back to the world. This thing we call a body belongs entirely to the world.

How can one reflect skillfully on self?

To reflect unskillfully on self and not-self is when people try to convince everybody that they don't have a self. But what doesn't have a self? They say 'I', implying self-identity, and then they say that that 'I' has no self. What is it that has no self? In their conversations, some of these people try to avoid using the

personal pronoun ‘I’, as if that is going to change their deep-rooted self perspective. That is the way of being unskillful. Many Buddhists have a belief in not-self, but beliefs are just views. And their belief in not-self doesn’t go deeply inward at all. Having no depth to it, it’s just a superficial view. The truth is that everything they do comes from a deep-seated self-identity. On a deep level, the self is something very real to them.

When you look in Buddhist publications, many of them use the term ‘no-self’, and claim that *anattā* means there is no self at all. This indicates that they have not understood *anattā* properly. It is true that there is no permanent self, no fixed entity that you can call a self. But that doesn’t mean there is not a whirlwind of changing phenomena that you can call a self.

The nature of Nibbāna is emptiness, empty of what?

Empty of this world. Empty of *saṃsāra*. Because what we think of as being full or being something is always *saṃsāra*, always dualistic and relative. Because of that, where those things are lacking, the world says it is empty. But that emptiness is not a nothingness; it’s a reality. That reality is quite incomprehensible to us because we have to think about it in relative terms. Our thinking minds can only understand in relative terms. What we are is built up around the thinking mind, so we try to comprehend emptiness in relative terms, but we can’t. What we call a thing is itself merely a conventional reality, a product of our minds, but we don’t realize it.

A good example is the way the senses work. When seeing an object, the object seen affects the eyes, and from there sensory data goes inward to the brain where it is processed somehow. From that visual process an image arises inside of us. That internal image is what we see. Because of that, all our seeing is composed of internal images. It’s quite simple to work out. Even though what contacts the eye is a very small and inverted on the retina, yet we see huge mountains and trees. And we don’t realize that it happened only because of a very, very small stimulation we got on the retina. So we see sights internally, not externally. For that reason, the whole world of seeing is within us — it’s not outside. In fact, we do not know what’s outside.

The same is true of the hearing. Out there are only vibrations that contact the ear and excite the auditory nerves, which in turn send sensory data to the brain.

In some mysterious way the brain processes that data and we experience those strange sounds that we hear. Really speaking, all sounds are within us, not outside. It's same with the other senses. Smelling and tasting are just chemicals, but they become smell and taste when they get into us. Feeling is just contact or variations of temperature, which turn into feeling when they get into us. Because of that, our view of the world is a very personal view. We can only view the world from ourselves; we cannot view it from anywhere else. Even if we try to put ourselves into the position of someone else, it still remains our view of someone else. So we see the world entirely from our own viewpoint. And that viewpoint is always internal. The whole of it is quite empty of any real substance as well.

The problem is that we have a fixed idea of our own reality. With this fixed to a idea of our own reality, we cannot see the relativity of the world. We can't see how relative we are, and how changeable. And the *kilesas* don't like that change and uncertainty, so they bring up the notion of 'self' and make it appear very important and real. Then we cling to this self-identity out of fear that there is nothing else outside that. So there is a dislike of letting go.

What are good methods for bringing up effort?

You must gain some positive experience in meditation, even if only a little. Then you can recollect those good results and strive to experience them again in the future. This can help to bring up effort. Until you have gained some good experience in the practice, meditation can seem like hard work, which makes it difficult to keep putting forth the effort. Because you are resisting the *kilesas*, it is not easy to develop determination when you are trying to do meditation practice. In worldly pursuits is easier to become determine. For example, when playing football you can be absolutely determined to get the ball into the goal and win. But there are *kilesas* behind that. When it's something bad, it's very easy to be determined. But for good things it is not so easy. A cat looking at a mouse is almost in *samādhi*, but it's not right *samādhi*. It's wrong *samādhi*. But it's easy. It is easy to think about bad things, but good things are difficult because the *kilesas* don't like them. When you think of bad things the *kilesas* will help you, they won't interfere. They let you do it, because it's going their way. But when you come to do something that is right in the way of Dhamma, the *kilesas* don't like that at all, so they kicked up and cause trouble.

It's worth reflecting on how important it is for you to generate the effort to overcome the *kilesas*. You mustn't think the *kilesas* are small things that don't matter. They do matter! All the human trouble in the world comes from *kilesas*. After all, guns don't shoot themselves, bombs don't drop themselves, and people don't torture themselves (not mostly, anyway!). These actions are the products of the *kilesas* in people's minds. That is the way the *kilesas* work, so they are not small. And the most important of the *kilesas* is, of course, *rāga-taṇhā*, or sexual craving. It's extremely important. And it comes up in all sorts of ways. In the male it comes up as aggression, and in the female comes up as enticement. There is a strong push and pull between the two. These defiling tendencies easily spread out into all our activities. Aggression comes up in business, in sports and in war, for instance. These tendencies stemming from *rāga-taṇhā* are very prominent in human beings. In fact, *rāga-taṇhā* is probably the most important group of *kilesas* in the human being. If you can overcome *rāga-taṇhā*, then you are safe from further birth in the human realm. That is the state of Anāgāmi.

Does rāga-taṇhā include all the sense spheres?

You cannot fix any definite boundary. When you investigate *rāga-taṇhā*, you find all sorts of things you never realized before come from sexual desire. The way the human mind thinks is symbolic, it uses symbols all the time. And sexual symbols are everywhere. People use them without even realizing it. Somebody who had developed wisdom can observe people and the way they talk and the images they create and see that most of the symbols they use are sex symbols. But most people don't realize that. And that is because they don't understand the way their minds work.

Is that why the body investigation is emphasized?

Yes, body contemplation and the *asubha* practices. The *asubha* contemplations are the best ones to deal with sexual craving. When *rāga-taṇhā* comes up, the *asubha* contemplations are the antidote. They are very effective.

When an Arahant smokes cigarettes or chews betel nut, both of which can be addictive, is that not a form of desire?

Firstly, you must realize what the Arahant is and is not. The Arahant is the pure *citta*. The Arahant is not the body, and not the mind. The *citta* is pure because

all the *kilesas* have gone. So if the Arahant happens to find that chewing betel nut helps to sharpen the mind a bit, he uses it for that purpose. Betel nut is a stimulant that is used to sharpen the mind if one wants to give a talk, for example. It can quite useful in that way. As to desire, it's not desire. But there is nothing to stop an Arahant getting pleasure out of something. If chewing betel nut brings some pleasures, why not? He's done his work and passed beyond. Chewing betel nut doesn't have any effect on the *citta*. It affects only the body and mind, that's all. The *citta* remains pure. In another words, the Arahant does not need to do any more training. He does not need to cut out those things that people think are bad or immoral, simply because he knows that those actions do not bring him any more contentment.

And the Arahant has the *brahmavihāras* present as well. So the Arahant will maintain the monastic rules, attend recitations of the *Pāṭimokkha* and continue to go on almsround every day even though those practices are no longer necessary for his development in Dhamma. It is not for his own sake that he keeps them up, it is for the sake of other people. Although these practices do not matter to his development, they do matter to other people because they set a good example. If the Arahant does not follow those practices, nobody else will. So as teachers they must be careful to set the right example. There was the case of one Arahant who did not go to the *Pāṭimokkha*, and the Buddha asked: "Why don't you go?" And he said: "Well, I've got no need to!" And the Buddha said: "If *you* don't go, who will? You are known to be an Arahant, but you don't go so everybody else will assume that they don't need to go either. So you must go."

What is the argument against smoking?

Because for people with *kilesas*, there probably is *taṇhā* there. I know. About 33-34 years ago, I was living at a monastery in Lopburi province. I was smoking at the time. So one night, sitting in a hut on the top of the hill, I thought to myself: "Why do I smoke?" After reflecting on it for awhile, I realized that it was probably because of *taṇhā*, because of my attachment to tobacco. I knew that the Buddha taught that *taṇhā* brings *dukkha*, so I immediately decided that I must stop. I did, and I haven't smoked since. I'm not saying that it's logically as easy to give up smoking as that. But I had thought many times about giving up smoking, as many smokers do. But that time, I stop. In giving up smoking, it is not enough to just stop smoking cigarettes. You must also give up the very *idea*

of smoking. Because of that, anyone giving up smoking should refrain from even *thinking* about smoking. If thoughts of cigarettes come into the mind, turn away from them quickly! By that means, you quit smoking both externally and internally. That is the way to do it.

Shouldn't an Arahant set a good example for others by not smoking cigarettes?

Perhaps. But traditionally in the northeast region of Thailand condemnation of cigarette smoking has never been very strong. It is considered normal for men to smoke. There has never been a debate over the advantages and disadvantages of smoking. Local Thais don't take the attitude, which is very prevalent in the West, that anything that is experienced as pleasant must be bad for you, or even evil. The Calvinist attitude that all pleasures are in some way evil, so we mustn't enjoy pleasure, is quite prevalent in Western society. But activities like smoking are not particularly evil, and don't have any damaging effects on the mind, even if they do on the body.

Such questions are given an exaggerated importance in the West. Another one is: Why do monks eat meat? — as though there is something fundamentally immoral about eating meat. But Buddhist precepts never say you must not eat meat; they say you must not kill. Taking life and eating meat are two very different actions. The killing of an animal requires very definite type of volition that is completely absent when a person eats meat. Meat is not an animal. As monks we do not kill animals, and if we know, hear or suspect that an animal has been deliberately killed to feed us, we are not allowed to accept that meat. That is one of the monastic rules. But if the meat is simply bought in the market, there is no prohibition because we have no direct connection to the act of killing. In other words, it's not *kamma*. There may be an indirect cause and effect in it, but there is no *kamma* involved. So eating meat does not prevent one from becoming an Arahant, which is our whole purpose.

Do the Mahayana teachings have Right View in terms of the Noble Eightfold Path?

There is not much wrong view in the Madyamika School or the Viññānavadha School. The fundamentals of those two schools can be found in Theravāda as well, although the emphasis is somewhat different. I am suspicious about a few of their teachings, but on the whole the teachings are not really wrong. But when it comes to the Bodhisattva ideal, I don't see the point. Is it right to

restrict yourself from attaining Nibbāna so that you can return to the world to teach people? What brings you back, after all, is *kilesas*! *Kilesas* are the cause of rebirth. Is it wise to promote *kilesas* so you can come back again? The reasoning seems all wrong to me.

Is the Arahant not the same as the Bodhisattva?

No, because the Bodhisattva makes a vow that he will keep being reborn until all beings are enlightened. Now, there is a get out in that vow. Because when you have attained enlightenment, the only “all beings” you know are the ones in your own mind. So by becoming enlightened, you have enlightened all beings. It seems to me to be a teaching that arose because Mahayana went more towards teaching lay people than teaching the *bhikkhu* Sangha. The Bodhisattva vows are a kind of lay teaching.

As *bhikkhus*, I think the obvious approach is to say: “I’ve got *kilesas*. These *kilesas* are the real problem, so I must get rid of them.” What is the point of bothering to make resolves to come back again until you have got rid of the *kilesas*? After you get rid of the *kilesas*, you are in the excellent position to know what to do. You will be free then, and you will know what you should do. If there is any coming back to do, you will know about it and arrange it accordingly. But it is important to keep in mind that our primary task is to try get rid of those *kilesas*. That’s what the whole of Buddha’s teaching is about.

What faculties do we need to develop to overcome the kilesas?

The most important faculty used to overcome the *kilesas* is mindfulness. There is little doubt about that. Mindfulness is the best tool you have. Mindfulness automatically tends to show you where the *kilesas* are and how they operate. When you are always watchful, keeping an eye on them, the *kilesas* cannot easily get a grip on you.

To overcome the *kilesas*, you must go directly at *taṇhā*, craving. The craving is the trouble. By overcoming craving, you overcome attachments. But you cannot deal with the attachments directly. Trying to overcome attachments by will power or by sheer determination does not work. To get rid of the attachments you must first get rid of their cause. The cause of attachments is *taṇhā*, craving. You see it in the *Paṭiccasamuppada*. *Taṇhā* is the condition for the arising of attachment. When you get rid of the *taṇhā*, the attachment cannot arise. And if

you want to get rid of the *tañhā*, you have to watch the feeling, because feeling is the condition for *tañhā*. That is a very important point, because exactly at that point you can put a barrier between the feeling and *tañhā*. The feeling is just feeling; it's the result of past *kamma*. Whereas *tañhā* is new *kamma*, the *kamma* created in the present. If you can turn away and stop that new *kamma* from coming up, then the situation gradually gets better. But the *Paṭiccasamuppada* does not explain how to do this. It merely explains what happens, but it does not show the way to deal with it. The way to deal with it is to find that feeling and examine it to see how that feeling gives rise to *tañhā*.

To give an example: Say you hear something you don't like, which causes an unpleasant feeling to arise. We tend to think of that unpleasant feeling as a feeling of aversion or a feeling of hatred. But the feeling of hatred is not itself hatred. There is no hate in the feeling. It only becomes hatred when you start thinking and criticizing and blaming. That's where the troubles come, in the thinking. The feeling of aversion is an unpleasant feeling. It usually occurs down near the solar plexus. To deal with it, you must learn to turn inwards and look at that feeling. That's very important. By turning inward and looking at it, you prevent it from escaping and turning into bad thoughts. In that way, you can defeat it, because no more *kamma* is created by the *kilesas*. To begin with, you can only defeat it a little bit in that particular situation. To get rid of that particular hatred completely, you will have to do it many times. As you do, that hatred will gradually fade away.

So try to learn to look inside and find out where the feelings are located and what types of feelings arise. Think back and reflect on the last time you felt hatred. What happened? What did you say? How did you act? Realize that in order to avoid unpleasant consequences you must not let those feelings turn into thoughts. Because of that, you should think about the feeling, not about the other person. In other words, if you keep it internally there is no problem, and no harm is done. If you let it escape out into thoughts, speech and actions, that's where the trouble comes, because that's where the *kamma* is created.

The human being is divided into emotions and intellect. The emotional side is very important. In the West, the intellect is pushed as being very important. Of course, intellect is important; but it's a menace if it gets out of balance with the emotions. The two must be in proper balance. If the balance tilts to the side of

the emotions, so the emotions are strong and the intellect is weak, that is not actually dangerous. Although, it can lead to some pretty bizarre actions. If, on the other hand, the intellect is excessive and the emotion are not develop enough, that's dangerous. It's this sort of mentality that leads people to insanity and suicide. So you must get to know your emotional side. The right way to develop the emotions is the way of *samādhi*. *Samādhi* practice is the way to achieve a proper balance. The intellect is, basically, the way of wisdom. But *samādhi* first, intellect second!

Should we strive to gain deep samādhi first, before doing much work on vipassanā?

I would say yes. *Samādhi* is a training that restrains the mind and prevents wild or wayward thoughts by developing strong mindfulness. It's best to develop *samādhi* for quite some time until you at least have some experience in it before gently turning the mind to *vipassanā*. It's also best to keep your practice more on the *samādhi* side of it, and from time to time turn and carefully investigate the body.

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Freedom Through Discipline

What is the purpose of the Vinaya rules?

The Vinaya rules discipline the actions of a monk and show him how to behave in the Sangha. Generally speaking, when you follow the Vinaya rules you needn't have doubts about your actions because your actions won't be wrong. They are a very valuable set of rules that, as far as I know, go right back to the Buddha. There's quite a lot of evidence for that. There are several Vinayas and they are all very much the same. There is very little difference between them, particularly in the major rules. The Vinaya is a very ancient set of rules, so some of them don't necessarily apply to the conditions we find nowadays. Some of the rules refer to conditions that existed in India at the time of the Buddha, but most of them are still very relevant to us today. So we should practice them faithfully, because by practicing the Vinaya rules we can be sure that we are on the right track. There is no reason to doubt that our actions are right and proper, and that we are going the right way. Many people from the West tend to think, "Oh, it's a burden having a lot of rules!" In fact, the rules are really for your own benefit. They are not there to try to make your life difficult. They are undertaken for your own benefit, and for the benefit of the Sangha and society as a whole. So these rules should be strictly followed by *bhikkhus*. Those people who have the intention to ordain as *bhikkhus* should also realize the value of the Vinaya. As far as I know, no other religious system has such a complete set of disciplinary rules.

You all know the divisions of the rules into different categories. The major ones, of course, you must be very careful not to break. The lesser rules should be practiced as training. If you don't like practicing them, then overcoming that dislike is also part of the training. You should keep the rules until you do them automatically. When you do them automatically, you don't even need to think about them, you habitually do things as the rules describe. In that way, your behavior will be fully acceptable in practically any society. So get to know the Vinaya rules, and be diligent in practicing them.

Consider how the Vinaya rules were conceived. The Buddha didn't just sit down and say, "We will have these rules". He waited until a *bhikkhu* did something

wrong, then admonished him and made the rule, saying, “That should not be done”. All the rules developed in response to the wrong or stupid actions that *bhikkhus* did. The Buddha also said that, like him, all the previous Buddhas also had a Vinaya, but the length and the type of the Vinaya depended on the type of society that they lived in. The Ovāda Pāṭimokkha is the Vinaya in brief that Buddha Kassapa gave to the *bhikkhus* of that time. Gautama Buddha said he could do that because the standard of the *bhikkhus* and the standard of the society was much higher then, so there was no reason for any more rules than the Ovāda Pāṭimokkha. Due to a decline in moral standards over a vast stretch of time, our Buddha’s Pāṭimokkha is much more extensive, containing 227 rules in all.

Do you have any reflections on the relationship between Dhamma and Vinaya, how they go together in the practice?

The Vinaya guards a monk's behavior. When his behavior is well guarded, the question of whether his external actions are right or wrong does not arise. When a monk is practicing the Vinaya correctly, he can say straightaway, “I have no problem with the world.” In other words, the Vinaya keeps him free of guilt and remorse where the world is concerned. And that freedom acts as the *sīla* basis in *sīla*, *samādhi* and *paññā*. So, when you know and practice the rules you already have the groundwork laid. Because of that groundwork, you can practice *samādhi* without any troubling doubts. By that I mean, if you have doubts about your conduct, those doubts are quite likely to come up and cause trouble in the practice for *samādhi*. Otherwise, you might be doubtful, thinking, “Was what I did really right?” Then your practice becomes all messed up. If you practice the Vinaya properly, you can say, “Alright, my actions are above reproach, so no need to think about it.” You can say that with assurance because you know that the way you practice the Vinaya is suitable to every situation. With that knowledge you know that the basis for meditation is right. Some monks try to sidestep the Vinaya rules when they do the practice and consequently never get them right. It is almost certain that they will experience doubts coming up, or they will end up going the wrong way. That has happened in quite a number of cases.

The more refined levels of the *sīla* can come up only when the mind is more refined, which happens as the *samādhi* develops. We can say that there are levels

of *sīla* which are above, or more subtle than, the Pāṭimokkha. But they are not necessary for putting oneself right with the world. They become something which is right for the *samādhi* practice at that level. It's interesting to look at the position of *sīla* in a general way. *Sīla* is a relative thing, which corresponds to a person's spiritual level. The person whose *sīla* is pretty low is automatically more restricted: he's more restricted in his views, his behavior, his activities and his environment. For example, when people do immoral actions, they are quite likely to end up in jail. Being locked away in a cell, they're restricted. This is symbolically the right action. It is natural that people whose minds have become restricted will tend to act unlawfully, with the consequence that their bodies become restricted also. On the other hand, when people practice right *sīla* and maintain it wholeheartedly, they become less restricted and much more open and free. The two directions are not the same. And the *sīla* of people who have developed their minds to a high level will be much more subtle than the *sīla* of less developed people. The less developed person may be a good person and quite honest and straightforward, but still there are things in his behavior which are not as subtle as the person who is more developed. *Sīla* is relative, in other words. But for the bhikkhu, his level of behavior is the Vinaya rules laid down by the Buddha. It should not go below that level.

Is sīla also involved in ways of behavior in general? Or is it understood only in terms of morality?

Sīla has various levels. Morality in its simplest form is the five precepts, followed by the eight and ten precepts. Those are the most basic forms of *sīla*, which we might call moral *sīla*. There is also behavioral *sīla*, which covers people's conduct and the manner in which they do things. A contrast can then be made between the manners of people in the world and the manners of the *devas*. Once Ajaan Maha Boowa was with Ajaan Chob, and he said to Ajaan Chob, "You should teach your pupils how to behave like the *devas*!" Ajaan Chob said, "Oh, don't say that! Don't say that! You can't teach that to ordinary people! You can't teach that to people in this world! That is way beyond them! Don't even suggest it!" In other words, the *sīla* at the *deva* level is very high and includes not only moral *sīla*, but also behavioral *sīla* and social *sīla* as well.

The same distinction can be made in the Vinaya. The Vinaya rules are divided into different categories, and only some of them are moral rules. Others are

behavioral rules concerning a monk's conduct in the community of the Sangha; for example, the way a monk should behave towards his fellow monks, both of those who are senior to him and those who are junior to him. Although the Pāṭimokkha contains 227 rules, in fact the entire set of Vinaya rules goes way beyond that. There are probably 2000 or more rules, some very high number, because there are a lot of permutations to the rules. But the basis of the monastic code is the Pāṭimokkha.

Sometimes doubts about the practice of Vinaya arise because of differing translations and interpretations of the Vinaya instructions. Not all monasteries will practice the same rules in the same way. Monasteries in the West may interpret the rules somewhat differently from those in Thailand. How can we resolve these doubts?

First of all, a monk should be thoroughly acquainted with the Vinaya and the rules it lays down. If a monk is well-versed in the Vinaya, then he knows fundamentally how he must behave. If there are local rules and customs which are not actually in the texts, then you should follow those customs where they are practiced, as long as they do not violate the spirit of the Vinaya. But that doesn't mean to say that you have to follow them in other places. There are all sorts of customs in Thailand which are not strictly Vinaya at all. Since those rules do not violate the spirit of the Vinaya, it is best to follow them as long as you are living in Thailand. Quite simply, it makes for good relations. But when Thai monks go to the West, then really speaking they should be flexible as well.

Naturally there are bound to be differences. But the Vinaya is not meant to act like a judicial system. It's meant to be a set of rules in which each rule has an area. It's as though each rule covers a certain territory. For instance, the rule prohibiting a monk from watching shows and entertainment is extended to cover watching television as well. Television is a relatively modern development, but the principle is the same. In the old days they actually had people giving live performances on stage; whereas with television, you see the same things on the screen. But the rule covers that automatically because it comes within the rule's territory. One mustn't think of the rules as exact formulas which you can define precisely. Each rule has the story on how it came to be, and one has to take that into account as well. Why was that rule made? What was the main principle behind the decision? So you look to find out what

the story was, why it was made? That will give you some clues as to how to apply it.

What advice do you have for monks who have doubts about the Vinaya practice? They may suspect that they have committed a Pārājika offense or a Sanghādisesa offense, but are not sure. What advice do you have for those monks?

In order to know the practical meaning of those rules, they must find out exactly what the Vinaya says about the rules in question. For example, if a monk claims that he's an Arahant, and he really believes that he is an Arahant, then that is not an offense. But if the monks knows what he says is false, then it is an offense. It's a *Pārājika*. So, one must know exactly what the meaning of each rule is.

It is said that offering something to an Arahant yields the highest benefits. Is it possible to explain why that is so?

When you invest your money in a small undertaking, you are likely to get back only small amounts. The larger the undertaking you invest in, the more you can expect to get back. When you invest with the Arahant, the reward is beyond limit. In other words, you get it exceptionally large return on your investment. When you give *dāna* to the average bhikkhu or to an ordinary person, the spiritual level of that person reflects it back, and that determines the results. But the spiritual level of the Arahant is pure emptiness, so the results of that act of generosity just go on and on indefinitely. It's difficult to explain, so the best thing is to try it.

What if we live in the time of the Buddha and make an offering to him?

This is going to be very hard to understand. The thing is the teaching of the Buddha is fundamentally for attaining enlightenment, that's the whole purpose of it. The Buddha said that. There are many things beyond that, though, which we find very difficult to understand. The Buddha was in the forest once where he picked up some leaves and said to his disciples, "Which are more, the leaves in my hand or leaves in the forest?" And his disciples said, "Oh, the leaves in your hand are very few. Forest has many!" He said, "Yes! What I've taught you is like the leaves in my hand; compared to what I know, which is like the leaves in the forest here. Why don't I tell you about those other things? Because they

don't lead to enlightenment. They don't lead to Nibbāna. But these do. What I've taught you leads to Nibbāna."

In other words, there are quite a lot of things which we don't understand and are not capable of understanding. The people who can understand them are the Arahants, because they've reached Nibbāna and they know what it means. Our situation, not only in this world but in any of the realms, is a situation which is always ruled by the fundamental ignorance of *avijjā*. *Avijjā* is a basic lack of understanding, a sort of ignorance in which we think we actually do understand. We think we know things, but really speaking we don't. It's a sort of blind ignorance, which prevents us from seeing the true nature of things. Our ignorance makes us think that, "There is nothing outside what our senses can perceive. There's nothing else but the world." In truth, there's great deal more. For example, the level of the Buddha and the level of the Arahants, which are said to be different in subtle ways. Although both have attained Nibbāna, it's always said that if you can make merit with a Buddha, it reaps enormous benefits; with an Arahant, big benefits; with a Sotāpanna, much less; and with an ordinary person, just ordinary merit.

What is the meaning of puñña?

Puñña, or merit, is the result you get from actions that are meritorious, that are good. The definition of a meritorious action is that it brings beneficial results. In other words, it's good *kamma*. *Kamma* of *puñña* is good, so it will help you in the future as good results. The nature of good merit and its results is really a relative thing. We have ideas of what is good, what is pleasant and what is desirable, ideas which we project onto other people, thinking, "If I help this person, he's going to get a good situation or receive some benefit from what I do." That's the nature of *puñña*. Whether in fact it is good for the other person, that's not always certain. For instance, many of the missionaries who originally went out to convert Africa to Christianity did things which were really quite bad, although they thought they were good. They looked on their proselytizing efforts as somehow being good. They were trying to make Africans into Christians. But they upset the societies there and cost all sorts of trouble, trouble that hasn't finished yet. It may be that in themselves, as missionaries, they believed they were doing good and taught doctrines which they thought were right, but what the karmic results of their actions was, I don't know. Would they be good or

bad? I'm not sure. Certainly the results to the people in African were not very good. Mostly we can say that ideas of good and bad are relative. We have no absolute scale of good, just as we have no absolute scale of bad. They are merely two directions. So morality is a relative thing.

If one has a standard of morals which one practices until one's behavior becomes more refined, the tendency will be that one's mind becomes a bit more subtle as well. It will appreciate subtle things more. When it becomes more subtle, then one sees that what one thought was good before is not quite so good as one thought. So one changes one's ideas about morality and progress up to a higher level. One's moral standard goes on changing like that until one finally reaches some level which is quite high. So all these things are relative. There are no fixed standards.

Before one reaches the level of Magga and Phala, is it possible to reach a level of mind where one's mental state can no longer decline?

Yes, certainly one can reach that level. But it's important to realize that Magga and Phala are going away from the world. When you go away from the world, the nature of relativity breaks down. Attaining the stage of Sotāpanna ensures that the mind will no longer deteriorate below a certain level. We can say, as far as mental development goes, that when the mind attains any of the paths, it has known Nibbāna for a moment. It would seem that what happens is that the mind knows Nibbāna temporarily, but the *kilesas* are too strong for it to stay there, so it is pulled away again. But that knowledge is there and it will never deteriorate below that point. It is as though the mind goes into an emptiness, an emptiness of all this that we know. It goes to a reality which is called Nibbāna, but that's just a name. And this reality is of such a nature that it has no relative characteristics associated with it. Because there is nothing like it in the relative, conventional world, you cannot say anything about it. When you reach that level, then that's where you are meant to be, that's all one can say. I would say that Nibbāna is where we all should be. It's as though the fundamental ignorance we have in us makes us go in the way of the world and become attached to worldly things, which causes us to do all sorts of peculiar things. That is the wrong way. That attachment pulls us away and prevents us going in the direction of Nibbāna. If we could just drop everything, BANG, we'd be there.

But the nature of our delusion is such that our attachments are very sticky, and very well disguised.

In the suttas it says that giving to the Sangha is the highest merit. Is that true? Can you explain how giving to the Sangha is better? Does that mean any bhikkhu in the Sangha, even ordinary unenlightened bhikkhus?

No, it almost certainly means Sāvaka-Sangha. The Sāvaka-Sangha includes those who have attained Sotāpanna and above. They are on the Path, in other words. The Sāvaka-Sangha is described as a field of merit for the world, so giving to that Sangha definitely reaps exceptional benefits. As to the ordinary Bhikkhu Sangha, it depends on their level of practice, really. If they're practicing well and keeping the Vinaya strictly, they are also a the field of merit, although not as exalted as the Sāvaka-Sangha. Often in the Pāli Canon the word Sangha means Sāvaka-Sangha, the Sangha of the Noble Ones. So, Sotāpanna and beyond is the Sāvaka-Sangha. It includes the Path and Fruition of the Sotāpanna, of Sakadāgāmī, of Ānāgāmī and of Arahant. These are the eight pairs of individuals that define the Sāvaka-Sangha.

You must understand that the Path is not merely the way of training, but more importantly it is the Path on which the goal has been experienced or contacted. It's a case where the goal is known, but not necessarily realized. In other words, the person on the Path may know that the goal is there, and know the general direction to take to reach it, but there's nothing he can point to, no visible object he can see up ahead which is the goal. Really speaking, the goal is not something we reach by striving to go higher and higher. It's not like that. In truth, the goal is there all the time. And what we must do is get rid of things; not gain something, but get rid of everything. So we must get rid of all our wanting, all our attachments and all our wrong views. In order to do that, we must develop the factors of the Eightfold Path. Developing the Path factors eventually gets rid of all attachment to the things connected with this world. When we do that until we can drop everything, the goal is there. Then there is nothing left to do. Buddhism is not a path of gaining so much as a path of getting rid of.

I'd say that Nibbāna is already there in everybody and everybody knows it, but they don't recognize it. Intuitively we know that there is something better than this world here, but we don't know what it is. So we search for it. Because we

have an array of senses to work with, we tend to focus out in the direction of the senses looking for true happiness. Of course, that's the wrong direction. When we go out in the direction of the senses, we become attached to the sensory experience and build up all sorts of attachments in the world. They refer to it as world “development”, but development in the world means deterioration in the mind, because people’s mind are out in the world all the time and not in themselves. The way of Dhamma is just the opposite: it’s getting rid of all those attachments, and so getting rid of our concerns about the world. When we practice in that way, the way of Dhamma will steadily lead us to more and more freedom, until eventually we can arrive at the end goal. But it’s not easy, because those attachments are very sticky.

Can you explain what is meant by the mind dropping into a bhavaṅga state?

This is my understanding of the *bhavaṅga* state. In *bhavaṅga* the *citta* is constantly re-linking; it’s linking back to the past *citta*. This linking back provides the sense of continuity that gives us the idea of self-identity. In the *citta* of the Arahant all of that linkage breaks up, so there is no continuity left. In other words, the Arahant lives only in the present moment, where each point of *bhavaṅga* is separate. This is what I’ve heard.

When the mind is trying to get calm, there’s a tendency for it to go into a sort of blank, empty state.

If you scrutinize the mind carefully, you’ll find that there is always something taking place underneath — like images or shadows on a screen, constantly going on. You may feel that the mind is blank, but in fact there’s always something happening there. This is one of the fundamental characteristics of all mental phenomena — *anicca* — the impermanence of it. It’s going on all the time. It never stops.

When we do meditation we tend to be motivated by personal goals. We want to purify our minds and attain Nibbāna. Is that an obstacle to practice?

One can think like that, certainly. And to some extent it is an obstacle if you practice purely for selfish motives. But the more you go on practicing, the less you will think of self. And when there is less of self, the idea that ‘I’ will become pure starts dropping away. Self can never really become pure. Self definitely does exist, but it’s not a fixed thing. It’s always moving and changing. When a

person says, “I will become pure”, you wonder exactly what is it that will become pure. People think of the self as being ‘me’, which is always a fixed and unchanging entity. But it’s not like that. The self is a very changeable thing. It’s jumping this way and that way all the time. The Buddha said the self can be body, the self can be feeling, the self can be memory, the self can be thought and the self can be consciousness. It can jump between any of these aggregates of personality. It is constantly moving about. For example, if I say “I’m going to Ubon”, that means this body is seen as self. While if I say “I feel hungry”, that’s feeling. If I say “I can remember what I did when I was young”, that’s memory. If I say “I think it should be like this” or “I think it should be like that”, that’s thought and imagination. If I say “I can see this” or “I can see that”, that’s consciousness. So, the notion of self attaches to one of the five aggregates. It can be any one of them, or it can be jumping about between them. Even when it fixes on one of them, it’s still moving, still unsettled. Because of that, when one talks about ‘the self becoming pure’, what is it that becomes pure? There is nothing there to become pure! It’s just like a lot of bits and pieces changing all the time.

When we try to make the right choices, how does the process of making choices actually work?

It’s a very complex process because it involves the *khandhas*, and it involves the *citta* as well. Although the process is complex, as far as I can see the only choices we really have are to do something or not to do it. In other words, it’s done or it’s not done. If you integrate many of those points of decision together, you get the appearance of making a choice, and you can see all the reasons for it as well. We can make an analogy with the binary way that a computer works, with two bits — one bit on and one bit off. When millions of them alternate like that they can build up incredible picture. Choice is much the same, I’d say.

Choices can be made by either the Dhamma or by the *kilesas*. Dhamma always makes the right choices, but the *kilesas* are pulling in the opposite direction. So even though one wants to make the right choice, the *kilesas* drag one to the wrong choice. *Kilesas* are always pulling in the wrong direction. To give you an example: the emotional side is down in the area around the solar plexus and the heart, while the intellectual side is up in the head. The intellect may say “It’s good for me to go in this direction”, but the emotional side says “No, I don’t

want that!" In another words, we're not a unified whole, we're a complex mixture. We got bits in us that go in this direction and some that go in that direction. What we call self is there as the operative principal, but it's not fixed, it is just operating. It changes here, changes there; it goes here, goes there all the time. It's like with a child: you tell a child "It's good to do this!" but the child says "I don't want to!" Where does the "I don't want to" come from? It comes from down in the emotions, not from up in the head. The mechanism may be up in the brain, but the experience is down at the emotional level.

I reckon it's a good practice for people to try to look and see what happens down in the heart and solar plexus region. It's a very important area to investigate. That is the level where the child lives. In most people, that's the child we used to be when we were young. And that child is still there, perhaps not completely, but in parts it's still there. And you look at the way the child behaves: it wants, it dislikes, it's full of delusion. The intellect is an active thing, like a pair of hands. It works, it does computation, it allows us to use reason; but the boss is down in the heart.

In the Theravāda tradition it is said that after the Buddha's Parinibbāna there is no connection between the Buddha and the world, that the Buddha has totally disappeared. Is that correct?

No, that's wrong! It's not like that at all. The Buddha, when he attains *Parinibbāna*, does not just disappear. First you must be very clear about what constitutes the Buddha. The Buddha is not that body which was known as Gotama. The Buddha is not the five *khandhas* of Venerable Gotama. The true Buddha is the pure *citta*. That is the one that just dissolves into *Nibbāna*, or becomes *Nibbāna*. But when the *citta* becomes *Nibbāna*, it has disappeared only as far as the world is concerned. And because we in the world think in the way of the world, we cannot understand what happened. To see the Buddha as having disappeared is wrong. And to say that the Buddha, meaning Gotama, can come back is also wrong. In fact, anything you say about the Buddha after *Parinibbāna* is wrong! We simply don't know or understand what the situation is there. We don't understand because our minds are obscured by the fundamental delusion of *avijjā*, which blinds us to the realization of *Nibbāna*. When we contemplate *Nibbāna* and try to understand its nature, we think about it in worldly terms because that's all we know. But our thinking can never fit the

reality. So, you cannot say that the Buddha is or the Buddha is not, neither means anything.

The Buddha gave the best description of what happens. You begin with all the individual streams and rivers flowing towards the ocean. When they finally empty into the ocean, the streams and rivers are still there, but you can't say where they are or what they are. You cannot distinguish them at all. Nibbāna is similar. And I think it is also important for people to realize that Nibbāna must be one's true nature. I say this because if Nibbāna is something which is not impermanent — in other words, it's not changing like things in *samsāra* — then because it's not changing, it can't be attained because it requires a change to take place to attain it, and with Nibbāna there is no way for that to happen. So the only alternative is it must be there with us all the time. Because it's with us, what we've got to do is learn to open our eyes in some way and see it, not our physical eyes, of course, but the internal ones. Really the only way to do that is to get rid of all that stuff which obscures our vision and points us in the wrong direction.

What do you think of the Zen approach that says we are enlightened already just sitting and realizing the Buddha nature?

It is true to some extent. But to say that we are enlightened is not quite true, when you consider the definition of the word “enlightened”. It is not really true because we still have *kilesas*. But the way of Zen is quite a genuine one; there is no doubt about it. Ajaan Mahā Boowa says that it's a wisdom teaching that is suitable for people who have a lot of intuitive wisdom. If they haven't, it's not very useful.

Ajaan Mun was asked once, “How would you say a system is Buddhist?” and he said “If it teaches the Four Noble Truths, it's Buddhist.” And with Mahayāna, it's difficult to say because there are so many different types of Mahayāna, so many teachings in it. But generally speaking you can say that they probably do teach the Four Noble Truths. Although it may be a bit hidden, it's there.

Could you say what one quality you find is the most significant in your bhikkhu life, and one you'd recommend be developed by young bhikkhus?

Wisdom. Definitely. And it can be developed by questioning. Question things and keep your mind active: looking, searching and questioning. And when you

do that you gradually find some answers. When you want to know something you must think about it and question it. Also you must never be caught by the idea that something is somehow above questioning. With the belief in God, you hear, “Oh, we mustn’t question God, he might come and clobber us!” You must chuck out all such notions. You’ve got to be prepared to take all sides and look at and question everything. I think that’s the main thing, really. But never be put off by thoughts that ‘Oh, that’s too holy!’, ‘Oh, that’s too loathsome even to think about!’ You’ve got to be able to contemplate everything.

Should that questioning attitude apply to the monastic rules as well?

You can certainly question the monastic rules if you like. But practically speaking, you are required to follow the rules as practiced by the social order you live in. Whether you question them or not does not alter that necessity. Questioning the rules with wisdom does not mean simply chucking them out or refusing to obey them. It is imperative that you strictly follow the monastic rules as they are practiced by the monks that you live with, in the Sangha where you are ordained. Also, by keeping the rules you show your respect to the Buddha for what he accomplished, and for being the path-finder showing us the way. But that doesn’t mean say you shouldn’t think about the rules and question them, there is nothing wrong with that. You can question the rules if you like, but don’t break them.

How can people cut doubt?

The only effective way to cut doubt is by using wisdom, by looking at cause and effect. But when one attains *samādhi*, the doubts will probably begin to fade away because *samādhi* brings happiness and contentment. When one experiences that contentment, one’s true inner worth becomes more apparent. The doubt will still remain, but it will probably be weakened by the *samādhi* experience. In other words, to get rid of doubt one has to stop thinking altogether first, so that one can train the mind to think in the right way. Mostly it means stopping all thoughts to begin with and then training one’s mind in the way of wisdom.

Some people question the authenticity of Abhidhamma. What is your opinion about this?

The Abhidhamma is certainly not wrong. It is very definitely dealing with the Buddha's teaching. On the question: What is the *citta*? the Dhammasaṅgī, the first book of the Abhidhamma, lists the different *cittas* and explains the factors that make them up. It defines the different *cittas* very precisely. And from that you can get an idea what the terms describing those various mental states mean. I would say that the Abhidhamma is quite a good system for defining what the words mean. It gives you a definite feel. But it is not necessarily very valuable to you in meditation practice. Most meditators do not need to go to the Abhidhamma in order to practice. The Abhidhamma teaching places a higher emphasis on the intellect, so it is suitable only for those who can progress in that way. Somebody who is brought up as a villager ploughing the fields with buffalos cannot be expected to plough easily into the Abhidhamma. It is sufficient that such a person focuses on the *parikamma* until he gets good results. When he experiences the right results, the understanding will arise. Some people, using a simple *parikamma*, can understand Dhamma in the way that others cannot understand it. In other words, their understanding is purely intuitive. Other people, however, require a much more intellectual understanding. But as far as Nibbāna goes, both types can get there if they practice rightly. So the Abhidhamma is something to be respected.

What's the right way to watch feeling?

When some object is presented to you, through any of the senses, which you either like or dislike, you should try to notice the accompanying feeling — the feeling of like or dislike — and how the tendency is to react with either greed or aversion. It is the reaction that's important. The feeling arises down in the heart region, and the reaction arises down there too. But the reaction is often supported by a lot of thinking, which is up in the head. The reason for this is that the feeling brings up *kamma* from the past which is either pleasant or unpleasant, good or bad. When pleasant *kamma* comes up, it brings a feeling of 'I want that!' and 'I want to promote it!', and that is immediately greed. If hate comes up, 'I don't want this feeling, I want to reject it, block it!' When you want to block the feeling, you may think, 'Oh, it was that person's fault, he did it, he caused this unpleasantness'. So you make excuses and think critical and angry

thoughts. Those angry thoughts are the reaction to the feeling. When the angry thoughts come up, they are a form of present *kamma* that tends to bring up the same feeling in the future when something triggers it. So when watching feeling it is important to pay close attention to the reaction that feeling brings about when something sets it up. That's where we can easily go astray. For example, feeling may be set up through the senses: you hear a sound or you see or smell something, and that will set up the situation as it's been in the past. That past situation comes up as a feeling similar to the one in the past, and then one reacts to that in the same way one did then and so one makes the same type of *kamma* which set it up previously. So the wheel goes rolling on, round and round.

What role does memory play in that reaction?

The feeling is the thing that actually produces the trouble. The memory is the thing that will usually set up the feeling. Suppose you have a history of trouble with a certain person. Later you encounter that person on the road and memory brings up the old situation and then feeling arises. When that feeling arises, it's the same feeling as was there when you had the trouble with that person before. When that feeling comes, you don't like it. It's painful, so you want to get rid of it. You try to do that by blaming the person, criticizing or reacting angrily. All of those reactions produce *kamma* that sets up the potential for the same situation to arise again in the future.

So, you should focus on the feeling to short-circuit the reaction to it. Look at the feeling to see what it really is. Often what we call a feeling of anger is not actually anger. The feeling of anger is preliminary; it's the subsequent reaction that's the bad thing. The feeling of anger is unpleasant, it's *dukkha*. When that *dukkha* comes up, one wants to correct it, one wants to stop it. So, one goes into the mode of blaming or criticizing whatever appears to be the cause of that unpleasant feeling.

The only way to catch up with and overcome those reactions to feeling is by using mindfulness. By being mindful and watching what happens, you find out yourself how that process works. You must look into yourself and question what's happening. You can question yourself using incidents you remember in the past too; there is no reason why you shouldn't do that. In the past there

were times when you became angry, what happened? What made you angry? How did it work inside? You have to look into yourself to find the answer.

The feeling of anger doesn't matter; the reaction to that feeling is what matters. To learn about feelings of anger, you can let the angry feeling stay there and examine it. It's very important to learn about your feelings. By examining them, you can see something of what happens. When you understand what's happening, you will know what to do. This is why it's important to develop the way of wisdom and learn these things for yourself.

You may experience different reactions, sometimes pleasant sometimes unpleasant, to the same feeling in the context of different situations. That's quite possible. Take the smell of food, for example. When you are hungry, food can smell very inviting; when you are full, it doesn't, and it can even smell unpleasant. This is one way in which conditions determine the reaction. When the conditions determine that it's a nice smell, wanting arises with a tendency to search for the food that is producing the smell.

In what way is it possible to discern the contact, as distinguished from the feeling?

Usually the contact and the feeling arise so quickly that one has great difficulty in distinguishing them. Contact giving rise to feeling takes place so fast that it is almost impossible to separate them. So it's difficult to see that distinction. But the feeling is the important factor to look at. You know that the feeling has come from that contact, but normally the contact is automatic. It takes place without any deliberation. Following that contact, feeling arises. It's a resultant process that is caused by consequences of actions done in the past coming up in the present. When that happens, mindfulness should be focused on watching the feeling to make sure that a negative reaction does not take place. In other words, when it's an unpleasant feeling, you tell yourself: "This unpleasantness is my own fault; it's a result of my own *kamma*. I've got to put up with it." You must always avoid blaming someone else.

Emotional feelings usually arise in the heart area, because the emotions are very much concentrated in that area. It's quite extraordinary what you can find there too. Physiologically there is not much in that area. Perhaps there is a nervous plexus there that highlights emotional feelings, although the physical side of it

may not be so important at all. In any case, emotionally it's a very important area.

In watching the feeling, when one starts thinking in that pattern of like and dislike, what's the middle way to deal with those reactions?

Be detached. Keep free of it. Look at it and be mindful. If you're mindful, it's as though you are standing back and watching it, without interfering. If you do that, nothing much happens.

So, we must put all our effort into not reacting?

No, not into not reacting, but rather into being mindful. Because when you are mindful, not reacting will be automatic. Mindfulness is a kind of a monitor that checks what's going on without interfering with it. With mindfulness you sometimes feel as though you are standing back and watching the mind, as though from a back seat inside somewhere. Observing from that back seat, you can see clearly what's happening in the mind, but you don't interfere in any way. Mental events are just happening, and that's all. It's that sort of attention that is required.

Feelings are resultant. Feelings are results of *kamma*. They are not active. Feeling is also the thing which tests and shows you whether you like something or not. In another words, feeling is either pleasant or unpleasant, although it can sometimes be neutral. When the feeling is pleasant, then wanting arises. When the feeling is unpleasant, then not wanting arises. This is the tendency. Say you see an unpleasant sight which you don't like to look at. The "don't like" there has to go into memory first, and then it goes to feeling. It's the feeling that determines its nature. But the feeling you get — just the feeling alone — that feeling is either pleasant or unpleasant, it displays that quite clearly. And the wanting or not wanting is separate. It doesn't have to take place. So the person who is being mindful will probably just note the feelings, and the wanting and the not wanting will tend to gradually diminish until it is altogether eliminated.

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The Delusion of Self

There's a distinction made between the living Arahant, who gains Nibbāna before he dies, as compared to the Arahant's state of Nibbāna after death. But, fundamentally, there is no difference. The state of Nibbāna is just the state of Nibbāna. The only difference is that, from the worldly viewpoint, the physical body was attached to that person who was an Arahant. It's not attached after death, but it was before. In the one case, the body is actually alive; in the other case, it's dead and has gone completely away.

You can't have two states of Nibbāna, two Nibbānas, it's not like that. When a person attains Arahant, he has attained what the Buddha attained. You have to use the teaching of the Buddha to get there, do what he had done, and he taught us the way, he taught it basically. He even taught it, we still have to work it out for ourselves because there is only so much you can tell people in words. Words are things which deceive, but they also communicate. We have to use them, because we haven't got any other way.

How do the Mahayana Bodhisattva and the Arahant differ?

From what I've read and what I've seen, I think that what the Mahayanists call Arahant is what we call Anāgāmi. But the thing is the very definite distinction between the Buddha and the ordinary person, or the person who attains Arahant; because the Buddha has amazing powers and is the pathfinder as well, whereas one who follows the Buddha is not. As far as Nibbāna is concerned you can't get any distinction. You cannot have Nibbāna of this sort of Nibbāna or that sort. It's not like that. It's like saying that there are differences in the quality space, but space is just space. You can say there's a difference in space. You can say what's in space, the objects, but the existence of objects doesn't mean that space has disappeared. It's rather like that. In one place the object may be a great palace; in another place, a slum. But the space is not different.

The Arahant has gone home, gotten back home – back to his true nature. Beyond this sort of stage in which we exist, you get Nibbāna. But to understand the full meaning of that, one has to be there to know. In one sense you can say, it's one's own personal experience of returning to what one should be, with the

rider that one has given up the attitude of the human being. We talk about one doing it, but actually one's self no longer exists. It's a very difficult state to talk about. It is impossible to have distinctions in Nibbāna, because distinctions mean phenomena straight away. And from what I can see all of the signs point to Nibbāna as being an absolute; as being emptiness -- as far as we're concerned anyway, that is, empty of the world; as being the true nature of each person. But when that person attains Nibbāna, it's like a river that flows into the ocean, where you cannot distinguish the water of the river from the water of the ocean. They become one, and there's no distinction.

What happened when the Buddha and the Arahants came to visit Ajaan Mun?

My interpretation is this: The influence of Buddha, or the Arahant, came to Ajaan Mun, and he instinctively saw that influence as a human being. When he saw the Buddha, the Buddha appeared as it naturally occurs to that person to think of the Buddha, or an Arahant for that matter. We know only our senses. Our senses tell us things. When we see an Arahant floating down from the sky coming to talk with us, this could very well be one's own way of interpreting that experience. What really comes is the influence of the Arahant on that person. But we don't actually know what this influence is. It's possible that it represents the purity of mind of the person to whom the Buddha comes. That may be the influencing factor. These things are difficult to interpret, and quite mysterious. We can find interpretations, but we cannot be sure if they are true or not.

How can the self be used to get rid of self?

The way the mind works, things are coming and going very fast. When the *citta* tends to have a particular kind of *kilesa*, because the *citta* is changing quickly, it can also bring up other things which are against that. In truth, the first *citta* has already disappeared. But it is the memory of it that comes up. Memory functions to bring up the idea of the first *citta* and then the mind realizes it is bad, and must be corrected. But underlying that is also the idea that "I" must correct this. So, there's also delusion there, delusion of self doing the action. When we say "I must correct my *kilesas*", we use the idea of 'I' to do it. But what actually happens is quite different. By using the word 'I', we bring up some idea, or way of thinking, and then we put that into practice. Now that may be effective in

overcoming the previous *kilesas*, but we are interpreting what takes place as ‘I’ am overcoming *kilesas*. In other words, the ‘I’ am overcoming the *kilesas* can also be a delusion. But there’s no reason why one shouldn’t use it. It’s important to see *anattā* correctly, because many people misunderstand what *anattā* is. He says, when one practices *sīla* and *Samādhi*, one should think in terms of self, and self development. When it comes to wisdom, one should see everything as being *anattā*. In other words, the idea of *anattā* is used to overcome the view of *attā*. And he also says, if one breaks through and finally realizes what the state is, one throws out both *attā* and *anattā*, both are chucked out. In other words, it’s a fundamentally wrong idea. It’s not so much that there is or there is not a self, the whole idea of self is just wrong, just false.

When practicing *sīla* and *samādhi*, you have to use the idea of self. And when you are practicing them, you must think about correcting the bad things, and promoting what is good. When you go beyond that to the stage developing wisdom, then you must try to see the delusion and work through it. It’s like sharpening an axe to cut down a tree. When the axe is blunt, the tree is difficult to cut down. So you sharpen it up. When it’s sharp, you can cut the tree down easily. Similarly, when the mind is disturbed and restless, you can’t start developing wisdom. But once you’ve developed *Samādhi*, you can turn to wisdom and work to cut down the delusion. But there’s no harm in looking before that, and try to realize where you have delusion. In the end, you have to look everywhere. You must overturn all stones to see what’s underneath. People always want some firm basis which they can say that is real. Something they can measure against. For instance, some people say that God is their firm basis. But fundamentally there is no firm basis, because everything is relative. We can’t use Nibbāna as a firm basis because we don’t know it, and we can’t really compare things with it. When we see that there is no firm basis, that doesn’t mean to say that we shouldn’t have a refuge. A refuge is a practical thing. When the *samādhi* is developed, that’ll bring a refuge within. Wisdom, the seeing and realizing of things, can be a refuge also. That can bring a lot more *sukkhā* than the *samādhi*, because the *sukkhā* of *samādhi* lasts while the *samādhi* lasts. But when you withdraw from *samādhi*, it doesn’t last for long. It’s not fixed there. But the *sukkhā* of wisdom is the clearing away of *kilesas*, and that does last.

Q: *What about Samādhi practice?*

When we practice *samādhi*, the *kilesas* become weaker, which means the Dhamma is getting stronger. So the *kilesas* submit. They don't make themselves felt so much because they are afraid and that frees the citta to work on Dhamma much more. But the *kilesas* they're very sticky, and they don't go easily. Just because one has quelled the *kilesas* doesn't mean they are not there. Because they're quelled, and one gets into a very, very quiet and calm state, it doesn't mean that the state one gets into is Nibbāna. But it's a good state all the same, because when the *kilesas* are weak it allows one to do the practice properly. It allows one to realize the nature of things.

Samādhi brings a state of calm. When you do that often, the calm penetrates and gets into one and becomes part of one's nature. When it reaches that level, one tends to be calm the whole time. Then the *kilesas* are not coming up easily, and they are seen for what they are. So one does not like behavior that's full of *kilesas*, or even be associated with it. And that calm state is always there, as something firm and reliable inside. When it is like that, it's the time one should start investigating. Some people who are very skilled at *samādhi* might then go on to explore the different stages of *jhāna* up to *nirodha-samāpatti*. For most people, and that means nearly everybody, it's no use trying for *nirodha*. They must do it by the way of wisdom. And someone who can get *nirodha*, like Anuruddha, who knew where the Buddha was when he was entering *Parinibbāna*, he knew what state the Buddha was in, he knew when the Buddha passed away. That's the type of *citta* that can get to Nibbāna, absolutely clear.

Q: *How do I know my practice is progressing?*

By the results, the results of the practice. You find that in yourself you feel better, that you feel more confident in yourself. You feel more calm? Your mind is clearer? You find the *kilesas* like greed and hate don't come up so much. All of these are indications. What actually happens in the practice will bring calm to your mind. It's the results that tell you how your meditation is progressing. If after some time you feel that you haven't got the proper results, you want to review the results and see why; what's wrong? At the same time you shouldn't be looking for results, you should do the practice with the idea of just doing the

practice and whatever results come, then you can review them afterwards. When you are looking for results and trying to attain results, then you are looking at the effects and not looking at the causes. In other words, you must do the causes, the right things to get there. If you reflect on some experience you had and think, ‘I must get to that experience again’. But when you are thinking about that all the time, then you don’t get there because the mind is not doing the right thing. Instead, it has to do the things it did previously to get there.

Q: *How to overcome sexual desire?*

The direct way is the *asuba* practice. See the loathsomeness of bodies, dead bodies. This is the best way. You must not underrate sexual desire, it’s very strong. And it’s one of the major *kilesas*, if not the major *kilesa*. It’s very hard to overcome. But one who overcomes it attains Anāgāmī; and an Anāgāmī doesn’t come back, because it’s the sexual desire that brings one back to the world all of the time – the wanting of bodies, the liking of bodies, the attachment to them – this is what brings one back. So attaining Anāgāmī is what prevents one from coming back, because the wanting dies away. This is where the body practice becomes very valuable. You see the nature of the body and when you have seen it properly, the wanting of bodies won’t be there.

Q: *How does samādhi differ from wisdom?*

When you practice *samādhi*, then you gain *samādhi*, but you do not directly gain wisdom. *Samādhi* is the basis for wisdom, but you have to deliberately turn your attention to the practice of wisdom. In other words, instead of practicing *samādhi*, you practice wisdom. And you have to train yourself in wisdom, just as you had to trained yourself in *samādhi*. You may use a *parikamma* as a preparatory object. For example, the arising of phenomena, and the falling and dying away of phenomena. In other words, dealing with *anicca*, or impermanence. This example is given quite often in the Visuddhimagga. The other example, of course, is contemplating the body. These are wisdom practices. When the *samādhi* is strong, then one can turn and use these wisdom practices. But the *samādhi* itself will not bring wisdom. There is slight danger when one practices *samādhi* until one gets very calm that one will become addicted to the calm. In other words, some people want to stay in the calm of

samādhi all the time. They don't want to do any work. Whereas the practice of wisdom is doing the work, the work of getting rid of the *kilesas*. But one mustn't think that *samādhi* alone will get rid of the *kilesas*. In fact, other religions have practices for developing *samādhi*, but what they lack is training in wisdom. The practice of *samādhi* brings about a state of calm, in other words, the stopping the thought. Whereas wisdom requires thinking. To gain wisdom, you've got to think.

Q: How does one get started on Body Contemplation?

Consider: The skin, is it pleasant? How long will it last? Is it you? What happens if you take the skin off? What's it like underneath? Thinking like that. Thinking all the time: What is this body? Where did it come from? It came from the world. It belongs to the world, so it will go back to the world. Why then should you think the body is yours? Keep thinking about that, and after some time you will start seeing it that way. You begin to realize that the body is not who you are. When the wisdom is well developed, then wherever you look you see wisdom.

The *samādhi* is used really to stop or restrict restless thinking. Once you've stopped that then you can turn and develop thinking to be one-pointed, which means thinking in the right way. The mind then becomes flexible and adaptable. It's no longer rigid; it's no longer fickle and jumping about. Ajaan Mahā Boowa says that when he was practicing, he developed *samādhi* first. Then Ajaan Mun told him he must practice wisdom. At first, he thought Ajaan Mun was wrong, but when the wisdom developed, he realized how right Ajaan Mun was. *Samādhi* alone is not the way; it's the preliminary attainment that will help to develop wisdom.

Q: What was so unique about the Buddha's search for Enlightenment?

One of the remarkable things about the Buddha is: He went through all sorts of trainings and he reached the pinnacle of them; but when he reviewed them, he found that they were not the goal he was searching for. He realized that he was on the wrong path. And that's difficult, because normally when a person reaches the top level of a meditation technique, he tends to become a teacher in the field of his expertise. But the Buddha didn't do that. He could see that he

wasn't there. He knew that instinctively. Which means that the idea of Nibbāna as an ultimate goal is inherently there in people. It's something they all want, but they don't recognize it. We also have a feeling in us that there should be something better than the state of mind we have at present. And it's for that reason that we have craving coming up, always wanting, wanting. We think that maybe when we make enough money we will be contented. Then we find that making money doesn't make us happy, so we don't know what to do then. Unlike the Buddha, who when he succeeded at something and found it didn't work, he tried another way. And to have that realization when you don't have the path to follow, or the teaching to guide you, takes a very developed mind. We have it easy because we have all of the Buddha's teaching already. The Buddha didn't have that.

Q: How many hours a day should we practice?

It is very difficult to say. It depends very much on each person's *kamma*. In general, you must develop the practice until it's there all of the time. I remember going to Ajaan Waen's wat in Chang Mai. And someone asked Ajaan Waen how much time one should spend doing meditation. Ajaan Waen looked a bit puzzled and he said: "the whole time, of course." When you can do it the whole time, that's when the results come.

Q: How necessary is faith in Buddhism?

Faith or *saddhā* is very important. Many Westerners who come to Buddhism feel they don't want to do all the chanting and devotional exercises, and they go too far. Usually they don't appreciate it because they equate it with Christianity, and they have just turned away from Christianity. But they throw the baby out with the bath water. Instead of developing a proper basis of faith, they go in the wrong direction. Fundamentally, they've got to develop things like *saddhā*, and often the chanting and devotional exercises can help. Chanting is quite valuable as a preliminary to meditation practice. It clears the mind of a lot of worldly activity. It's particularly very valuable for lay people who have just finished work and want to get into meditation practice. When they do chanting, the chanting takes the mind completely off the work they have been doing. And then they are more fit to do the meditation practice.

Most people who make a lot of gains in meditation have strong *saddhā*, by that I mean faith the Buddha and what the Buddha taught. *Saddhā* must be there. Many Westerners think they can do it without *saddhā* , but they can't just chuck out faith all together. The practice of *Buddhānusati*, the contemplation of the Buddha, is quite a good practice for developing *saddhā*.

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Mental Imagery

Should I continue focusing on the breath when doing walking meditation?

You can keep your attention on the breath, but if you find it interferes with the rhythm of walking, you may prefer to switch your focus to something else. For example, you can focus on the action of walking instead. You can pay attention to the way the legs move, or the way the feet move. But if you prefer, you can continue with the breathing practice as you walk. So there are two possible ways of approaching it: either you change to another mental focus while walking, or else you stick with the breath the whole time. If you want to stick with the breathing practice the whole time, it's better to use it when you are walking too. When walking meditation, I suggest you try walking at a fairly normal pace. It can be a bit faster than normal, or a bit slower; but don't do the very slow walking. The reason being, you want to develop the walking practice until it becomes a habit, so that whenever you are walking, the mind drops into that mode. If you learn to do it very slowly, you can't suddenly drop into that mode of practice when you're walking down the street. If you did, it would look very peculiar.

What is Right Speech?

Right speech is quite complex, because speech is complex. And right speech is often not speaking at all. When you must speak you should be mindful and careful of what you say. You should try to see the other person's viewpoint, see what effect your speech is going to have on the other person. Practicing right speech is an aid in being mindful. So be careful, and think before you speak.

How should one handle nimittas?

When you are training for *samādhi* with the *parikamma*, it's best not to take any notice of *nimittas*. Look on everything except the *parikamma* as being a distraction. If *nimittas* arise, so be it. But don't become caught up in them. When you have enough experience, you might be able to use them, but don't try too early.

When you are doing the breathing practice, for instance, you should be focusing only on the breath. Any other object of focus will take your attention away from that. So whatever come up to take your attention away from the breath should be seen as an obstacle. Whether it's a thought, or a *nimitta*, it's a distraction pulling the mind away. When *nimittas* come up, it's easy to become interested and get caught in them. You might think they will lead you to psychic powers, or the winning lottery number. For that reason, people easily become interested in them. When they become interested, they easily get pulled away from the meditation practice. So you must see them as being distractions. Generally, when the *kilesas* realize that your practice is going well, they will throw up a *nimitta*. They will push up whatever they can to distract the mind.

In the broadest sense, *nimitta* means any sensory object that arises in consciousness. It has a clarity that goes far beyond dream images. Most *nimittas* are very clear visual images that look just like the real thing. But you can also get sound *nimittas*, like voices telling you to do things. You can get smell, taste, and feeling in *nimittas*. And all of them can be distractions to meditation. *Nimittas* arise for various reasons, and it's usually very difficult to find what the causes of them are. Sometimes a visual *nimitta* arises in the mind, and you have no idea what it is. Say you get the image of a broken piece of porcelain coming up viewed from a certain angle, and you have no idea where it came from or what it signifies. In fact, it's probably just something you've seen in the past coming up. *Nimittas* tend to arise very clearly when a person reaches the level of *upacāra samādhi*, or access concentration. All sorts of images can come up in *upacāra samādhi*, which can be dangerous, because something very frightening can come up. Say, the image of a man brandishing a sharp sword coming towards you threatening to cut your head off. If fear then arises, that immediately makes the image appear larger because you are concentrating on it more. Concentration makes it larger, as though it's coming closer. This increases the fear, which can cause some people to go mad. In fact, the image seen is no more than something projected on a cinema screen. Like on the cinema screen, that's all, there's nothing in it to be afraid of. It's the fear that's the real danger. Because of that, it's generally best to avoid mental states where a lot of *nimittas* arise. It's far better to go deeper into *samādhi*, to the *appanā* level of full absorption.

What are the primary factors of samādhi?

In both *samādhi* and *jhāna* you have the five factors of *vitakka*, *vicāra*, *pīti*, *sukha* and *ekaggatā*. These are the five factors which arise progressively into both *samādhi* and *jhāna*. Because they arise in both, if it's a person's character to drop into *jhāna*, then the meditation will drop into *jhāna* automatically. But most people shouldn't aim to get into *jhāna*, they should aim for *samādhi*. Practicing for *samādhi* means that one does a practice like breath meditation, and keeps at it for quite a long time until the mind becomes really calm. That calm state is not especially deep, but when the mind withdraws from that calm state, it's in good shape. *Jhāna*, on the other hand, can go very deep and very far. So much so that people who attain it don't like to talk about it much, because most other people can't understand it. People without that experience can't understand what *jhāna* is. All we can say is that it is separate state which suits the character of some people. If those people do the practice in the normal way, they will tend to go in the direction of *jhāna* automatically. Most people, however, will naturally develop *samādhi*. *Samādhi* is a state of calm and concentration. When there is calm and concentration, a state of joy and happiness arises. This is a very good state of mind, but it's not nearly as deep as the *jhāna* state.

Please explain the Noble Eight-fold Path.

There's a lot of misunderstanding about the Noble Eight-fold Path. In the *suttas*, when the Buddha gives a discourse concerning the Noble Eight-fold Path, he always mentions it at the end of the discourse. After talking to people until he gets them into the right frame of mind, he talks about the Noble Eight-fold Path. Whereas, mostly when people learn about Buddhism, they start with Noble Eight-fold Path. But it's not the right way around. One must understand that the Noble Eight-fold Path is not a path that one practices a little each day. The Noble Eight-fold Path means that all its factors are "Right": Right Speech, Right Livelihood, Right Effort, Right Mindfulness, Right *Samādhi*. They are all Right, and that Right means they are perfect. And being perfect, they provide a path which is capable of taking the *citta* to the final goal. In other words, it's the Path moment, the moment of Sotāpanna, Sakadāgmī, and so on. This is the

true way of the Noble Eight-fold Path. Of course, one must steadily practice the factors of the Noble Eight-fold Path, that's necessary. But simply practicing the Noble Eight-fold Path a little bit here and a little bit there won't get you to the goal. Today we'll do this, tomorrow we'll do that and so on like that. It is in effect the path to Nibbāna. Which means that it's something very deep within. It's not a simple thing. So its fruition requires a practice of meditation that has gone very deep, to the point where all these factors coalesce together. Only when the time and conditions are right does the path take place. So the Noble Eight-fold Path is not something simple and easy. This is something which has been misunderstood.

How is samādhi associated with the Noble Eight-fold Path?

Right *Samādhi* is a *samādhi* that is absolutely perfect. That means that it is perfect with regards to the state and the object. And that *samādhi* must be associated with Right Wisdom. In other words, Right Understanding and Right Attitude. Those factors must be associated with that *samādhi*. In fact, all the factors of the Noble Eight-fold Path are associated with Right *Samādhi*.

What is a true state of calm?

A true state of calm is completely satisfactory. If you want to modify that state in any way, then that means it's not really satisfactory. If you feel it's not the state that you want, then it's not a state of true calm. If you trying maintain it, then the trying is wrong. It should be automatic, not something you say: I'm going to do it. The "I'm going to do it" breaks up the calm straight away. It must be something that arises when the proper conditions have been prepared. In other words, the practice sets up the right conditions for a state of calm to arise. When they're right, the mind drops into that calm, still state. At first, you don't realize what has happened; you are just in a state of calm where no special feelings or thoughts arise. Then you come out of it, and you say, "Oh, where have I been." It's rather like that.

What is upekkhā?

Upekkhā in meditation is a very higher state, a state of complete equanimity. It means that one is not disturbed no matter what occurs. There is no disturbance at all inside the mind. In ordinary life, it's almost as though one withdraws from the affairs of ordinary life.

What does Right Livelihood mean?

Right Livelihood means Right Livelihood in association with one's social position. For a lay person, whose working in the world, means one avoids any work involving killing, stealing or dishonesty; one avoids selling things that are harmful to others, like poisons or weapons.

When it comes to the *bhikkhu*, Right Livelihood means he gets his food by collecting alms food, for example. His purpose for becoming a *bhikkhu* is the practice of Dhamma, and that practice is Right Livelihood. Teaching the Dhamma is also Right Livelihood. But one mustn't mix Right Livelihood of a lay person with that of a *bhikkhu*, they are different standards.

How can we let go of self?

The only way to let go of self is to get rid of craving, because craving and wanting cause attachment, and we're attached to a self. But it's not much use trying to let go of self until you have trained yourself thoroughly in meditation. Letting go of self is a very big step.

How can we deal with anger?

When anger arises, you must realize that the cause of that is feeling, emotional feeling. Because that feeling is unpleasant, you want to correct it, so angry thoughts come up. Your thoughts are then about anger, and those angry thoughts are directed at other people. For instance, if you sit on a lump of sticky rice, you may feel angry that someone put a lump of sticky rice there and then blame that person. And that blaming is the real problem. The feeling is a result of your past *kamma*, but that feeling then gives rise to a present reaction. That reaction is anger, angry thoughts. So you should try to develop your mindfulness

so that you can see when that feeling comes up. And when it comes up, just accept it. Realize that the unpleasant feeling is your own fault. In that way, if you realize that you yourself are to blame, and not anyone else, you are to some extent getting rid of your own self-importance.

How can I find joy in my daily life?

You must realize that the joy you want arises inside yourself. Most people try to find that joy in the world, but it does not exist in the world. The place to look for it is in yourself. You can't find joy in the world, because joy arises inside, in the heart. And since it arises in the heart, it's no good trying to manipulate the world to get it, it won't come. Plenty of people are making millions of money, because they think it will make them happy. They try to squeeze joy out of the money, but joy isn't in the money. In fact, it often leads the opposite way. If you want joy you must look and see where joy arises and what causes it to arise. You must search for the true causes of it. When you do the right causes, you will get the joyous results. If you don't do the right causes, you can try forever, but you won't get it. People all over the world are searching for happiness and contentment. But because they look outside in the world, they are looking for it in all the wrong places. One must realize that the development in the world, in a general sense, means deterioration in people. This is because when they are developing the world, people's minds are out in the world, and not in themselves. So they develop the world and forget themselves, and then wonder why they are unhappy.

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The Kilesas are the Enemy

Do monks have different obstacles to overcome than laypeople do?

The only concrete obstacles that monks have are those acts that are not permitted by the monastic rules. Those rules are the restraints required of a Buddhist monk. Laypeople, on the other hand, do not live under the same restraints. Otherwise, there is very little difference between the two when it comes to mind development. After all, every monk was a lay person before he ordained, and any mental obstacles he had are not suddenly removed by the mere act of becoming a monk. When a person becomes a monk, he puts on the robes and goes through an ordination ceremony; but the *kilesas* remain just the same. They are still there in his mind, and they are the real obstacles. The monk then observes a set of rules, which he must use to train himself to overcome the *kilesas* that are obstructing his progress in meditation. The monastic rules are incumbent upon a monk, but there is really no reason why a lay person cannot practice those same rules. They can if they want to, but that is up to them. There is nothing special about becoming a monk that automatically removes mental obstructions.

The main reason for becoming a monk is that it's a mode of life accepted by society where the monk can live and work on his own mental development in a Sangha of like-minded individuals without having to bother about making money, and without having to get himself involved in the mess of the worldly life. In other words, he has sufficient freedom to practice and train himself. How well he actually uses that opportunity is up to him, and possibly his teacher as well. But life in the Sangha itself does not create an obstacle.

Can we simply focus of our attention on the thinking process?

You can, provided that you are mindful of your thoughts and watchful of their direction. But you must remain constantly aware of them. If you can calmly watch your mind when it is full of whirling thoughts, that is quite valuable. The main trouble is that one tends to get caught up in them. If you get caught up in those thoughts, you become involved in them. Once you are involved in them, the thoughts take over. They take you over, so you are no longer just watching them. When that happens, it's not good. When you simply watch your thoughts, you remain separate from them. Mindfulness is present, constantly observing, allowing you to learn a great deal about the nature of thought. If you can maintain that attention, it will probably quell the thoughts too.

Another thing you can do when thoughts arise is to question: Where do they come from? From where do they arise? Look inside and see what is giving rise to those thoughts. The old saying has it that Rome was not built in a day. In the same way, the practice of mindfulness is something that one has to do steadily and gradually. If one does that, the right results will come. It may take some time. But the amount of time it takes will depend on the amount of effort, and on the nature of one's *kilesas*. But you should never think: "I am no good at practice. I should just give up", because those thoughts come from the *kilesas* also. One must start to examine what the *kilesas* are, and how they arise. The *kilesas* are very important. They are the enemy.

Are kilesa and sankhāra the same thing?

No, they are not the same. They are quite different. *Sankhāra* has two basic meanings. *Sankhāra* in the external sense means the parts that make up something, or the bits and pieces that comprise something. Everything is made up of *sankhāras*. The other meaning of *sankhāra* is the thinking process. It means the development of thought, starting from one theme and then building up into all sorts of related ideas and concepts. The first meaning is more external, like the *sankhāras* that make up the human body. Whereas *sankhāra khandha* means the mental process of thinking, and the way it proliferates all the time. As far as the *kilesas* are concerned, in their essence the *kilesas* mean ignorance which has given rise to greed, hate, and delusion. That is the basis of them. But they proliferate out into a whole lot of other things, like envy, jealousy, stinginess, worry, conceit, arrogance and so on. These are all variations of the basic *kilesas*. The *kilesas* are not located in the *khandhas*, the groups that make up body and mind. Fundamentally, the *kilesas* are in what we call the *citta*. The *citta* is the true essence of oneself — one's true nature.

The *kilesas* are the operative factors in the arising of greed and aversion. The *kilesas* come up mainly due to the primary *kilesa* of self. When a feeling of loss of self arises, there is a scramble to reestablish the self's prominent position. It's as though the idol of self-importance has been knocked down a bit, so we must work hard to build it up again. We do that by blaming and criticizing everyone else in order to boost our own self-importance. And that's the wrong way to act. The right way to act is to accept that unpleasant feeling when it arises, and realize that it is one's own fault. It is actually the consequence of one's own *kamma*. This is the way that *kamma* works. If it is bad *kamma* one must simply accept it. By accepting it fully, one clears the balance sheet of that past action.

Can we talk about individual cittas, or is it all one citta?

Individual or many cease to have any meaning at that level. It's gone beyond speech, beyond concepts. We can only call it emptiness. Empty of everything we know in this world. But it is reality. We come to the odd proposition that existence equals impermanence. Because it is constantly changing, everything in existence is impermanent. For that reason, what exists is unreal, because reality means permanence. On the other hand, reality does not exist. So existence is unreal, and reality does not exist. Try to work that out.

What is your general view of the Mahayana tradition?

The Mahayana tradition is a mish-mash of all sorts of things, some very good, some not so good. The Buddha's teaching is there in some of the schools of Mahayana. After all, Mahayana is not just one teaching, it covers a whole range of teachings. And in those there are very good teachings, like the mind-only theory. That's perfectly valid. That's a reasonable doctrine, and it is there in Theravada too. The Madyamika ideas are certainly interesting. But they try to deal with everything, making out that everything is empty, and that even the emptiness is empty. In the end you feel, why the hell are they even talking about it? But certainly there are very good teachings in the Mahayana.

Does everything exist?

Yes, we can say that everything exists; but what does "everything exists" mean? It means that the five senses exist, or the sixth including the mind. For instance, you see a tree and you say they it exists. But that type of existence is illusionary simply because the things that you see Are changing all the time. It may appear the same as it was yesterday, but what you really mean is, what you see now conforms to what you remember of what you saw yesterday. So you rely on memory to fix your idea of existence in place, when in fact everything is changing all the time. Because of that, you can say that all existence is unreal. You cannot find any permanent entity in it at all. So anything that is real must be permanent; that is, unchanging. But because there is no change, it cannot exist, nor can it be known. How can you know space, for example? You can't chop space into lumps and say here's a bit of space. You can only relate space to objects. So we define space by the objects within space. Pure space is unknowable.

I've heard it said that dukkha is caused by the attraction and repulsion of atoms.

You must realize that atoms and things of that sort are the explanations of science, which attempt to explain how things in the world work. But all of these explanations are simply a scientist's mental constructs that are then tested to prove their validity. In other words, a scientist has some idea of how this gives rise to that. So he tests it and finds a certain correlation there. From that he proposes a theory about how atoms interact, for instance. Later it is discovered that the theory does not work in certain situations, so the theory is modified a bit to fit the new circumstances. Later they find that the theory doesn't cover other circumstances, so it is modified again. Eventually the theory is discredited, so they have to chuck it out and construct a new one. That's the way science works. It's an evolving method which tries to understand the world outside in terms of the human mind. But, in fact, it is impossible to really understand the world outside because there is no way for our senses to contact it directly. After all, what is the world outside? It's just seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting, and touching, all of which are experienced internally. We assume that physical matter is made up of atoms because that theory seems to work well. But we don't really know for sure what is there.

What is the relationship of the citta to body and mind?

The body and mind are simply mechanisms. The *citta* is the force that pushes them about. The *citta* is the one that has power. The *citta* initiates volition and intention. Because it has volition and intention, it creates *kamma*. Only the *citta* can create *kamma*. Without the *citta*, the body and mind cannot create *kamma*. When the *citta* has *kilesas* in it, the *kamma* it creates depends on the nature of those defilements. The *kilesas* are in control of the *citta*'s power, so they can make body and mind act in ways that promote greed, hatred and delusion. The real power of the *citta* is neutral, but the *kilesas* are biased, so they pull the strength of the *citta* in their direction. The *kilesas* want this and want that. All the time they are grasping after something. And they push the *citta* about to make the body and mind strive to attain those things. But the *kilesas* don't care who receives the results of the actions they initiate. In the end, the *citta* will reap the results of those actions, which is why there is so much pain and suffering. But the *kilesas* don't care about that.

The *citta* is best described as "the one who knows". When it knows something external, like objects in the world, then it becomes *viññāṇa*. The *viññāṇa* is a form of the *citta*. It takes on the special function of knowing things in the world. It also has the function, or the capacity, of volition. In other words, it acts with intention. The intention can be good or bad depending on the *kilesas*. For that reason, we make good and bad *kamma*, depending on the *kilesas* we have. But

once the *citta* gets free from the *kilesas*, those defilements no longer control the actions of body and mind, so those *khandhas* are free to go their own way. That is the state of the Arahant.

When a person becomes Arahant, the *citta* attains freedom from the *khandhas*. The *citta* has gone free from the world; it has gone to a completely still state. But the *khandhas* will continue operating much in the way they operated before. Since the *kilesas* are gone from the *citta*, there are no evil influences to cause the *khandhas* to do bad or harmful actions. The *khandhas* of the Arahant keep on functioning, and the character of the person who attained that state will remain much the same as it was before. If he was easygoing and mild in the past, then he will be mild and easygoing when he becomes Arahant. If he was angry and irascible before he was enlightened, then he will be irascible and angry after he becomes enlightened. But he will use those character traits as a means to teach people. In other words, he does not use them in wrong ways. Because of that, it is extremely difficult to know who is an Arahant, since the characters of Arahants differ so much.

Can two Arahant's teach the practice of Dhamma differently?

Yes. They might have different ideas. That's quite possible. But each one will have a good reason for teaching in that way. And both of them will be right in their own sphere of practice. In other words, one Arahant may stress the practice of seeing the body as the four elements. He may say that this is an excellent method because he had very good success with it. Another Arahant, however, might emphasize the breathing practice instead. In fact, each is teaching a method that he found to be very effective. They are not saying that one method is the only way; but rather, those are the methods they know best. But Arahants can make mistakes. There is no doubt about that. They do not make mistakes about Dhamma; but as far as the practice is concerned, there is a possibility for them to make mistakes. But their mistakes will not have any bad intentions behind them. They will be mistakes due to not knowing. After all, the Arahants are not strange people, they are just people. They are the only sane people, too.

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Developing the Path Factors

You must first develop the factors in the Noble Eightfold Path individually. When those factors are well developed, then your practice will be strong. When it is strong enough, the factors can come together to act as a bridge to cross to the other side — to the path moment of Sotāpanna. It is necessary to develop the factors of the path individually; but you mustn't think that those factors are the path. The path arises only when all the factors are perfect. That is why they are called: Right View, Right Attitude, Right Speech, Right Action, Right Livelihood, Right Effort, Right Mindfulness, and Right *Samādhi*. They are all right, which in effect means they are perfect. Once they are perfect, the path moment takes place. But the developing of those factors must be done bit by bit; and only when they are fully developed can the path arise. The way to develop the path factors, of course, is *sīla*, *samādhi*, and *paññā*. When the path arises it becomes *vimutti* and *vimuttiñāṇadassana* — freedom and the seeing of freedom. When they are fully developed, the attainment of the Noble Eightfold Path should be automatic. When *samādhi* has been developed enough to attain the path, the state of mind will be sufficient to support all the other factors. Any questions?

Can we focus on moments of sense consciousness as objects of meditation in our daily practice?

Yes, but it's a very difficult practice. You must get into the right state of mind for that. It's rather like you have a piece of rubber always pulling you back to the ordinary way of seeing, so you must continually pull against it. And easily slips back. It can be done, and there's no harm in trying. But if you do it, you must carefully analyze the way you see things; in other words, get it fixed in the intellect first, then maybe you can do it. The advantage of that practice is that it cuts down *taṇhā*, the wanting and craving. When you see sights as being like a picture post card, the wanting just dies away — you don't want it. You see wonderful mountains and you think: So what, it's just light and color. In the Theravāda tradition, the senses are not given as a regular meditation subject, but there is no reason why you shouldn't do it. The senses are a wisdom practice. It's a good practice if you can focus on it without restless thoughts interfering. It's certainly not a harmful practice, and it allows you to realize the nature of the senses and see that they are merely images inside you.

By surrendering to every situation, and just accepting it, can we overcome our kilesas?

When you practice the right kind of acceptance, there won't be any *kilesas* there. But surrender and acceptance can easily become careless indifference, which is itself a product of the *kilesas*. If you accept because you just don't care, that's a wrong mental state. Such careless indifference goes directly against the Buddha's teaching. The Buddha taught that we should always be careful and alert. When you always practice mindful and alert, that state of careless indifference will not arise. The Buddha said that we must always be careful, watchful and be aware of what we are doing, which means mindfulness. When we're in the world, it's very easy to make bad *kamma*. In order to prevent making bad *kamma*, and we have to remain diligent. So although we may accept things, we except them with due thought and reflection, not merely out of carelessness. In other words, you have to be thoughtful and question things, question whether you should do this or that: Is it right? Does it go against moral principles? and so on. The nature of the acceptance is quite important. You accept because you see the nature of something and realize that it is quite separate from you, and because of that it's something which maybe you shouldn't be interested in. So you just leave it alone. It depends on what the situation is. Some situations make one very careful. If you meet a tiger out in the jungle, you're not careless. Carefulness is there quite automatically. Meeting a wild tiger is certainly a dangerous situation, but making bad *kamma* maybe more dangerous than meeting a tiger. The tiger is an obvious danger, whereas the danger inherent in bad behavior is not so obvious. It's like the old joke: A man says: If I made a tiger in the forest I pick up some shit and throw it at it. The other man says: How did you know there would be shit there? Because it would be right behind me.

What causes volition to arise?

When circumstances external and internal bring about the experience of something lacking and then there's the wanting and volition arises. So volition tends to arise because we feel we lack something and the lacking something comes down to *dukkha*. So volition tends to arise because of discontent. On the whole, discontent is nearly always the cause. If, when crossing the road, you suddenly see a bus veering down on you, discontent arises because you feel you might be run over by the bus. So the volition to jump is very strong. When a smoker reaches for another cigarette, be volition that causes his hands to go into action is brought about by a fundamental discontent, due to a feeling that there is something lacking. It's the same with eating: one reaches for some nice tasty food because one is trying to overcome discontent through the pleasure of eating. Volition is practically always motivated by discontent. Discontent is coupled with the wanting of contentment, and wanting to overcome the feeling that something is lacking. It's very strong and very prevalent. Discontent is like

water. If there is a hole anywhere, it flows out. The hole could be big or small, but the waters of discontent keep flowing out.

Does volition end when craving ceases?

When craving ceases, volition must cease as well. That means that one has attained Nibbāna. When one reaches Nibbāna, it then ceases to be volition in the same way; it ceases to be *kamma*. No *kamma* is created by the Arahant. Actions are done, but they do not make *kamma*.

Even in good actions done by ordinary people, volition is still caused by a lack of something. In good things, things we should do because they are right, there is the wanting to do them because we feel we are going to gain something because we feel we are lacking that. It's still volition, it's still a lack that makes us go on acting. Fundamentally, Nibbāna is there all the time, and in an unconscious way we all know it, and we're always wanting it. We yearn for that state which is pure satisfaction, and because of that we're always looking for it. Looking in all sorts of way and we don't find it so we are always discontented. The discontent can only stop when we attain Nibbāna.

Medical symbolism is something you should investigate. In the way we think, we're always making up symbols and using them to define our world. For example, when we talk about America: What is America? We can't look at the whole of America, it's too vast and too complex. So we create a symbolic representation and say "that's America for me". We pick out some aspect of America and turn you into a symbol. So for us that symbol represents America. Our minds are and are doing this all the time. Any object of consciousness is made up of bits and pieces — *sankhāras* — but we see it as a distinct object separate from other objects. But the objects that we distinguish in this way are, in fact, just symbols to represent the complexity of all the bits and pieces that make it up. We use the symbols all the time; our minds are absolutely riddled with them. They are part of the fundamental way we think. We have to use symbols when thinking because the complexity of phenomena is so vast that the mind just isn't capable of holding it all at once. So we focus on certain prominent aspects of every experience and turn those into symbols representing the whole.

We should look at the symbols in our minds and see what their true nature is. Being mere symbols, they do not represent the truth. Therefore, they are in a sense, false. By investigating the symbols we have within us, we realize that we have views about those symbols which we are very attached to. That can easily

lead to arguments about whose symbols are better, or correct. But since all symbols are essentially false, such arguments are meaningless. It's like arguing about the nature of air: there's nothing solid in it. The argument is about two sets of symbols. But the symbols themselves are not the reality.

Symbolism is very important and very widespread, so it's worth looking at. You can observe how the symbols in your mind tend to get old and die away. But as soon as they start to disappear, up comes your self-identity saying: I mustn't let go of that one. So you think about it, strengthen it and re-support it. In other words, we often refresh our symbols. We refresh our minds by thinking, and quite a lot of our discursive thought is directed toward that aim. Thinking about people and events in the past is a way of refreshing our minds. We do this because we don't want to let go of them, because we have a lot of attachment to them. I'm getting old now and my memory is not as good as it used to be. I find there are some advantages in this because the past seems to be rather vague, so I don't think about it much. Because of that, the attachments are dropping away. Having a poor memory is a disadvantage in some ways; but it also has its advantages.

We all have memories. Some of them may be good memories and some of them bad memories, that's only natural. But instead of getting caught up in the content of memory, we should look at what the nature of memory really is. In fact, memory is just thinking, ideas and symbols coming up all the time. It can be quite beneficial when we think of the good things, and we should not dwell on the bad things. But at the same time, the real results come not in the thinking but in oneself, in the lightness that comes from the practice. That's where the real results come, not from the thinking. We need enough memory to do what is necessary and act in a normal way. The person with Alzheimer's goes completely dull and dead. When memory goes in that way, there's no hope. But for the normal person, memory is not as essential as we usually think it is. It is not necessary to remember the past, dwells on the past and think about past events all the time. We must deal his memory as an aide sometimes, but fundamentally the results of meditation practice are what matter. Those good results bring lightness, buoyancy, a feeling of certainty.

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The Way to True Freedom

In what sense is samādhi “right”?

A cat watching a mouse can have *samādhi*, but its not right *samādhi*. *Samādhi* can turn into wrong *samādhi* quite easily. A burglar concentrating intently on cracking a safe can have *samādhi*, but it is not right *samādhi*. The difference between right *samādhi* and wrong *samādhi* is very pronounced. Right *samādhi* brings happiness, while wrong *samādhi* brings suffering. The other religions can attain right *samādhi*, too, in the sense it’s not morally tainted. But because it does not involve the Noble Eightfold Path, it is not Right *Samādhi* in the Buddhist sense. *Samādhi* is fundamentally a state of getting the mind completely concentrated and absorbed in an object, to the point where the mind forgets all other things. So *samādhi* is something that is not strictly Buddhist at all. And it is never claimed to be strictly Buddhist. It’s obvious that when the Buddha went to his first two teachers, he learned to master the highest *jhānas*, which are allied to *samādhi*. But he knew perfectly well that he had not reached the ultimate goal. Although *samādhi* was very useful, it was not what he was after, so he left those teachers. The difference between Buddhism and other religions lies is not so much in *sīla* and *samādhi*, but in the practice of *paññā*, or wisdom. That’s where the real difference starts.

Is it possible to have Sammā Samādhi without having Sammā Sīla?

No, you cannot attain *Sammā Samādhi* without *sīla* being right. When the *sīla* is wrong, that will almost certainly come up and cause trouble to the mind. It is important to realize that, to succeed, the Noble Eightfold Path must to be right in all its factors. When all the factors are right, they come together to act like a bridge leading one from the ordinary mundane state to the state of Nibbāna. At first, the realization of Nibbāna takes place momentarily. The pull of the *kilesas* is too strong for the mind to remain there, so it comes back to mundane consciousness again, where it must do more work. But you should realize that the Noble Eightfold Path is not a pathway where you start learning about morality, then *samādhi* and finally wisdom in progressive stages. It’s not that sort of path at all. It is the path where all the factors drop together internally, in the meditation practice. When they all coalesce together into one, that experience manifests the path that enables you to go over to the realization of Nibbāna. Talk about “realizing” Nibbāna is in some ways to miss the point. You must understand that Nibbāna is *always* there within you. It is your true nature. Nibbāna is always there in everybody. Everybody knows Nibbāna, but they don’t

realize it. They do not recognize it. The reason they don't recognize it is because of their strong attachment to mundane existence. That attachment pulls their minds out into the world. When we have attachment to anything, we cannot attain Nibbāna. We must give up everything for that to happen.

Couldn't an immoral person develop deep states of samadhi and then use that samadhi to investigate arising in passing away until the true nature of anicca is realized?

No, not at all. The reason being, if they ever did break through to realize the true meaning of *anicca*, that experience would probably drive them mad.

You must have *sīla* as the basis. If you try to jump too high before you have that basis, you'll fall down and have a lot of trouble. I divide the human being into two fundamental areas of mental activity. One area is up in the brain. That's the intellect. The intellect is like a pair of hands, which is very useful for doing work. The intellect is valuable; in fact, it's essential for learning and developing Dhamma. But the boss of the intellect is located in the heart region. That's the one that orders the intellect about. It's the one that wants things, the one that craves existence. It's the area where the *kilesas* are located as well. The *kilesas* are not actually located in the intellect at all. So it's down in the heart region where we must develop the practice. But some people are top heavy; in other words, they push the intellect very hard and don't develop the emotions. Their emotions are still those of a child. That top-heaviness then causes them endless difficulty. Their intellects are involved in a variety of different things, but underneath they're just children.

The right way to develop your mind is to develop your emotions first. The proper basis for the emotions is found in *sīla* and *samādhi*. When the *samādhi* is there, then the *samādhi* helps to develop those factors that are correct for the wisdom practice. Such factors as concentration of mind, flexibility of mind, adaptability, and uprightness. These qualities are just right for the wisdom practice. When you develop *samādhi* up to the level where those factors arise, you can easily investigate with wisdom and gain real and profound insight.

There are people who can one-pointedly develop contemplation of the body without distraction until they become absorbed in it. That concentrated effort in wisdom practice will help them to develop *samādhi* as well, until *samādhi* arises almost automatically. But most people cannot develop *samādhi* in that way. When they try, in no time the mind becomes distracted. That type person must work on the *samādhi* practice first.

Those people who tend to get angry very easily must be careful when doing body contemplation. Contemplating the physical body as it is doesn't pose a problem, but *asubha* practice can easily stir up the anger. If one realizes what is happening and controls the anger, it won't matter; but most people will give way to it. And that isn't good. If you find that happening, then you shouldn't do the *asubha* practice. You should do a practice that is more soothing, one that helps to overcome the anger.

How can we focus our practice on the emotional side of our personality?

When you focus on the breathing practice, for instance, you first place your attention where you feel the breath the strongest. But in no time memories begin to come up. And memories arise from the heart. You must develop the mindfulness to recognize that, and when the memories come up you have to learn, not only to recognize them, but to turn away from those memories and back to the breathing practice. You realize that memories are trying to intrude, but you don't give them any attention. You are focusing solely on the breath — that is the thing that matters. The memories are just a distraction. If you can maintain that attitude, then you will succeed in meditation.

But mostly what happens is a memory comes up and grabs your attention, and whoop — the mind becomes unstable and immediately loses its focus. Often it takes a long time to bring it back to the breath. So mindfulness training, focused on the breath, is a training to stabilize the mind. And this stability occurs in the heart center, where the memories arise. Actually, *samādhi* is not really an intellectual training at all. It's an emotional one. The reason why *samādhi* is so valuable is that it corrects the emotions and it makes them strong in the right way. And when they're strong in a right way, if you see anything that is really quite horrific when you are investigating with wisdom, you can withstand it easily because strong *samādhi* brings a state of great calm. When a state of great calm is present, the mind is happy and content, so the *kilesas* have no reason to come up and cause trouble. As long as the *kilesas* don't come up, the mind is free to turn and do some meaningful investigation. And it can do so without fear of harmful effects.

But you must be careful when investigating without the proper development of *samādhi* to stabilize the mind. For instance, when contemplating the significance of *anicca*, if you see the truth of *anicca* very profoundly, the experience can be quite devastating. You find that everything is moving, everything is on the go. Nothing is stationary, there is nothing firm to hold on to, and nowhere can you

rest. This experience can be quite devastating to a person. When that is the case, the development of *samādhi* is very important.

If we are investigating anicca and some devastating experience happens, should we back off or continue investigating?

It depends on your character. If you are strong enough to bash through regardless, then it's all right to continue. But you must be very careful of your emotions. When the emotions are very strong, that means the *kilesas* are very strong, and you mustn't underrate their power to create havoc. To push ahead like that, you have to be very confident of your ability to succeed. If you are the least doubtful, you shouldn't continue.

What do you mean by memory as a distraction to meditation?

I'm not talking about the content of memory. The *kilesas* will bring up some memory, it could be anything, trying pull you away from the meditation practice. Such memories can arise in association with the sound of a bird or the sound of a car backfiring, for example. Those memories then act like tags, which the *citta* grasps hold of. That grasping is *tanhā*. Those associations are taken up by *sankhāra*, which produces thoughts and imaginations. Building up gradually, step by step, eventually those thoughts end up going all the way around the world and back.

What kind of object is best for daily meditation?

The object should be an internal one, something you can use to overcome distraction. You shouldn't use external objects for that purpose. Generally, you are safe when you keep your focus inside. Sending it out is dangerous. The *āsavas* are talked about quite a lot in the *suttas*. The *āsavas* represent a flowing out of the mind. And it flows out like this: when a memory arises, that memory arouses feeling. Feeling tends to give rise to a reaction, either attraction or repulsion. If one gives way to that reaction, the mind will arouse either greed or hatred based on that feeling. Greed will tend to promote pleasant feeling, while aversion will try to squash unpleasant feeling. An adverse reaction to unpleasant feeling is an attempt to correct the situation. When that happens, the mind immediately flows out with thoughts of blame, criticism and revenge. A grasping, greedy reaction seeks for satisfaction in external causes. In both cases the mind is flowing out into the world. And the mind's tendency to flow out into the world is the main cause of chronic discontent. So we must strive to keep it inside.

How do we keep mindfulness during a very active and busy schedule?

Firstly, when training for mindfulness, one tries to be aware of what one is doing and of the things one is dealing with. But that is only the training for mindfulness, it's not the real thing. The real mindfulness is almost automatic. It is mindful awareness at the *mano dvāra*, the door of the mind. Everything enters the mind through that door, so if your mindfulness is focused there, then whatever comes in, you know it. There is no effort involved, it is simply automatic. But automatic mindfulness depends on the prior sustained effort you made to practice mindfulness in all of your daily activities. Having reached the stage when mindfulness is automatic, you begin to realize that the whole world exists inside the mind, that it is actually internal the whole time. Everything comes in through the mind-door, so there is no need to send the mind out to them.

What is the nature of anicca?

The nature of *anicca* is very broad. *Anicca* arises not only inside oneself, but everywhere in the world of existence. You can say that the essence of existence is constant change. Without change, there is no existence. Just look at the nature of change within yourself. Look at the body and see how it is changing all the time. Look at the blood flowing around all over the place. The nerve endings are firing all the time. Digestion is taking place constantly. Endless processes in the body are taking place and changing all the time. Nothing is ever static. When you look outside yourself at the world around you, you see that everything is in constant motion. Nothing remains still.

In fact, the only reason we can sense things is because they are changing. Our senses all work based upon change. Without change, we couldn't see things, for instance. Light moves, it travels. In traveling, it strikes the retina of the eye. That sets up further changes. It flashes signals back to the brain, setting up a chain reaction. Images appear. Those images undergo change, then break up and disappear. Thoughts and concepts follow, arising and ceasing in an endless continuum. Both outside and inside, everything is changing. There's nothing fixed at all. The only fixed one, only really reliable one, is Nibbāna. Nibbāna is outside of what is changing.

The nature of existence can be expressed as a paradox. We can say that anything that changes is not real, because it does not last. So what exists is not real and what is real does not exist. Thus reality and existence are two opposites. The world of our sensual experiences is an aspect of existence because nothing

remains the same from one moment to the next. Nothing we experience is fixed and immutable; all is flowing and changing. Nibbāna is the one that is not changing. And Nibbāna is there within each one of us. It's our true nature. Really speaking, we should all be in the state of Nibbāna. Arahants are the only people who are normal. Because we have *kilesas*, all the rest of us are a bit peculiar. When we get rid of the *kilesas*, there is nothing to disturb the *citta*. When the *citta* is completely undisturbed, it automatically goes to Nibbāna. Nibbāna is the *citta*'s true nature. Because of that, enlightenment is possible at any moment. Without the *kilesas*, the *citta* goes naturally to the state that it should be in. So really speaking, Nibbāna means going back home.

What is the most effective way to get rid of attachment?

You cannot use volition alone to get rid of attachment. Only by getting rid of wanting, or *tañhā*, can you get rid of attachment. This connection is stated very clearly in *Paṭiccasamuppada*. Feeling is the condition for the arising of *tañhā*. *Tañhā* is the condition for attachment. So in order to get rid of attachment, you must first get rid of the *tañhā*. That means that you must not react to feelings with *tañhā*. You can erect a barrier between the feeling and the wanting so as to stop it from going any further. You can train yourself in that way.

Is Nibbāna accessible only to the ariya puggala?

Nibbāna is accessible to everybody. But the *ariya puggala* has already realized it, if only momentarily. That momentary realization is such that it leaves no trace in normal memory. The *ariya puggala* cannot remember what happened because there is nothing in the experience of Nibbāna for memory to latch hold of. Because of that, when Nibbāna is known for a moment, a situation is setup where the goal is known, but it is not known in any concrete way. You know with certainty that the goal is in that direction. When you know that, you understand how the other practices like worship and ritual are all nonsense. Those practices do not lead directly to Nibbāna. It becomes absolutely clear that the way to Nibbāna is the way that the Buddha taught, the Noble Eightfold Path. The texts say that the path of Sotāpanna is the path of finding out. In other words, wisdom arises. The other three paths are the paths of effort. In other words, once the right direction has been found, then effort must be put into getting rid of the *kilesas* in order to go the rest of the way.

Are there Arahants from the Buddha's time still alive today?

When you talk of an Arahant being alive, you must think it possible for the Arahant to be dead, as well. But this isn't the case. Nibbāna is not in the realm of life and death. The Arahant is not the five *khandhas*, which are subject to birth and decay. The Arahant is a pure *citta*, and the pure *citta* never dies. So, in that sense, we can say that the Arahants are all there all the time. But we cannot sense them in any way. That doesn't mean that they cannot help us, maybe they can. But we cannot understand that type of help they give because it is not the same type of help one person gives to another.

Could you give an example?

It's the type of help needed when a person is doing meditation and he comes up against a major obstacle, perhaps even demons and devils. But those demons and devils are never outside, they are inside the person's mind. In fact, we can say that all the realms of existence are inside the mind. Everything. The devils, the demons, the hell regions, the human region, the *devas*, the *brahmas*, they are all inside. They're not outside. So it does no good to pray to an outside entity for help. If the Arahant can help that it is because the Arahant is also within the mind. But, because everything is inside the mind, the distinction between the Arahant and the ordinary person begins to disappear. As the Buddha once said, people are like streams and rivers flowing down toward the ocean. When the streams and rivers reach the ocean and merge together, what happens to each individual? How can you identify them? At that point it is all simply the ocean, so there is no way to identify the waters of individual streams and rivers. But, at the same time, you cannot say that they are not there.

How can we develop a sense of urgency in our meditation?

You must do something to stir yourself up. One way of doing it is to look at the world and think, supposing I died now where would I be reborn? You have no way of knowing. Perhaps you would be born in places of chronic war and starvation. You don't know what direction your *kamma* is going to take you. So you feel a sense of urgency to develop your meditation to a point where you will not fall helplessly into an unfavorable birth.

You must realize that the whole the Buddha's teaching is a method. The Buddha never voiced an absolute truth, because absolute truth cannot be spoken. What the Buddha did was to use a method to point the way to that truth. The Buddha said that he taught only two things: *dukkha* and the cessation of *dukkha*. Only those two. Similarly, the Buddha once picked up a handful of leaves from the forests and asked his disciples which were the greater, the leaves in his hand or

those in the forest. His disciples said that the leaves in his hand were few, while the leaves in the forest were many. The Buddha said that what he taught was like leaves in his hand, compared to all of what he knew, which was like leaves in the forest. And, he asked, why don't I teach you all these other things? Because they do not lead to the cessation of *dukkha*, they do not lead to Nibbāna. In other words, what the Buddha was saying is: I am giving you the method by which you should train and practice and develop yourself. When you follow that method correctly you will come to Nibbāna. Then you will see the truth for yourself, and all questions will be answered.

How does a Sotāpanna experiences his attainment?

Someone who has attained *Sotāpanna* will know that something profound has happened. He will know changes took place, but he won't be able say clearly whether that experience was *Sotāpanna* or not. We've read about *Sotāpanna* in the books, but what does it mean? It is said that a *Sotāpanna* gets rid of doubt, attachment to ritualism, and the idea that body is self. But how do we know that these specific changes have taken place within our minds? Was it *Sotāpanna* or was it merely *jhāna*? We can't be sure that point. But, in fact, it doesn't matter what we call it; what matters is that we know that experience first-hand. That's enough. Terms like *Sotāpanna*, *Sakādagāmi* and *Anāgāmi* can be dangerous because people pick them up and begin to question: "Am I a *Sotāpanna*? Am I a *Sakādagāmi*? Have I got there?" And then they become concerned about whether they've reached this attainment or that attainment. But the thing is, they know what happened. And that's all they need to know. And if it was something good that happened, then why not try to do it again?

How would you recommend investigating the senses?

You can investigate them in terms of both *anicca* and *anattā*. But contemplating the senses is a bit difficult. The trouble is, we are very strongly conditioned to seeing the world as being outside ourselves, and as having a reality of its own. When you start investigating the senses, intellectually you can see that the outside reality is an illusion; that actually everything is internal. That understanding is still at the level of *suttamaya-paññā*; in other words, at the level of working it out intellectually. And that understanding is quite valid. But then you must go beyond that intellectual understanding and actually see it and realize it for yourself. You must realize with total certainty that the realm of the senses is something existing in your own mind. And that is difficult to do.

You must realize what it means. You can investigate seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting, and feeling, the external senses. But the difficult one is the mind, the internal sense. That's difficult to investigate because it's very difficult to get hold of. And the mind operates extremely rapidly; it is not like the external senses, which you can pin on an object.

You can see how the senses work. With sight, you have the lens of the eye, and radiation coming into it. There is an image projected on the lens and the excitation of the nerve endings in the retina, followed by a transmission back to the brain. After that, the computer in the brain gets going and throws up an internal image. That image is interpreted by us as light and color. But light and color do not exist out there in the world; all that exists out there is radiation. There is no light and no color in the world. We refer to light and color, but those are just analogies used to explain our experiences. But in reality, light and color are internal phenomena, not external ones. The value of being able to realize that is a lessening of attachment to external things. Because when you understand with insight the true nature of your visual experiences, you will realize that everything you see in the world actually arises internally. If those visual images arise internally, then they are actually a part of you, so why should you want to possess them? That kind of seeing begins to break down your attachment to external things.

What are some of your skepticisms about Tibetan Buddhism?

I can't help feeling a bit skeptical about the concept of the tulkas? A tulka is said to be the recurring human rebirth of a highly spiritual being. And although some highly spiritual beings *are* reborn in the human realm, the Tibetans seem to have made it into a doctrine. It's as though they believe that if some great tulka dies he must be reborn forthwith as a human being. No allowance is made for the fact that he may have been reborn in the *deva* realms or the *brahma* realms, for instance. The Tibetans simply go out looking for him in the human realm as if it is a foregone conclusion that he will be there. I'm pretty doubtful about that. They say that the tulka makes a solemn resolve to be reborn as a human being. But what is it that brings one back to the human realm? The only way one can return as a human being is to act in ways that involve the *kilesas*. And why would a highly developed spiritual being want to do that? Why wouldn't he want to get rid of those *kilesas* instead?

Is it advisable to make a solemn vow to attain Nibbāna?

Only if you are certain that you can fulfill that vow. If you can, and the vow is strong enough, then you may succeed. The Buddha is a good example of this. When he sat down at the Bodhi tree, he made a solemn vow that he would not get up from his seat until he had attained enlightenment. And he succeeded. Had he not succeeded, he was prepared to die there and let the flesh fall off of his bones. That was the Buddha's solemn vow. But he made that vow only after he had trained with the top meditation teachers of his day and had practiced many extreme austerities. Only after years of intensive training did the Buddha sit down under the Bodhi tree and make his solemn vow to attain Nibbāna. If we then compare that with our own efforts, most of us look pretty miserable.

How does one know if the austerities one is practicing are beneficial?

If you have doubts about certain austerities, those austerities probably are not right for you. You must have the attitude that the austerities you are practicing are essential, and that you are doing them for some real purpose. You should not practice austerities just because you think they will give you a boost, like some sort of tonic. You should practice austerities for the purpose of overcoming certain kinds of *kilesas*. And you should be quite clear about your purpose. If you look at the *dhutangas*, nearly all of them are designed to overcome greed. I don't think that any of them are designed to overcome hatred. Probably because at the time of the Buddha greed was much more prevalent than hate. Nowadays it's hatred that is strong, not greed.

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Knowing One's Character

Nowadays, generally the teachers in the Thai Forest Tradition do not teach *mettā* much. They say that if you do the breathing practice or the *buddho* practice, *mettā* will come automatically. It will come because when one feels happy one doesn't feel any animosity to people, so one feels *mettā*. Being happy will naturally bring *mettā*. If you practice *mettā*, it acts like a magnet. It attracts people. Before long you have people coming all the time. And that can be quite a nuisance to a meditator.

Can the dhutanga practices help lessen feelings of aversion?

That depends very much on one's character. For a true *dosa* character, mostly the *dhutanga* practices will just increase anger.

What practices do you recommend for dosa characters?

Breathing practice is very good. Breathing practice and *buddho* are very good. They bring *mettā* as well. But one must be careful of the body contemplations, and particularly *asubha* practice. Those practices can easily work in the mind in such a way that you practice at night and the next day you get up full of anger. Everyone is saying what has gone wrong with him. That happens because of the *asubha* practice. The practice has just stirred up the inherent anger that was there in the person, which means he's doing the wrong practice. He should never practice the contemplations or the *dhutangas* until he has managed to develop *samādhi*. If you attain *samādhi*, then you can do more rigorous practices because *samādhi* will hold the emotions. *Samādhi* brings with it a sense of happiness and calm. And when that's present the *kilesas*, particularly the *kilesa* of anger, have no reason to come up. So for a strong *dosa* character to straightaway do the more rigorous and ascetic practices without having any *samādhi* can cause trouble. But for *lobha* characters it doesn't matter, it won't harm them.

Should one have a good foundation in samadhi before contemplating pain?

It's definitely good to contemplate pain, but you have to know your own character too. There is nothing wrong with having a go at some of these practices as long as you have enough mindfulness to see what the results are. If you can see that the results may you feel very angry and upset, then you should stop doing that practice. Unless you have a teacher who can actually say that

you must do this, or you mustn't do that, you must test for yourself. But in testing for yourself, you must be very careful to watch and see what results come out of it.

What do you think about the practice of meditating all night without sleep?

It may be a bit too much for most people. There's never harm in staying up somewhat later than you normally would. I'd say it is probably too much otherwise. The more fundamental way of looking at it is to realize that down inside oneself there's a child — the child that one was when one was young. And it's good to look at that child and see the common factors that are still there. And really what one has got to do is bring that child up. And in bringing up children, you don't make it too rough for them but you don't make it too easy for them either.

What got you started on Buddhism?

Before I became a monk I was working in England. I knew while I was working there that I would not be doing that all my life. I knew it was something I was doing temporarily. I didn't know what I would be doing later on, but I knew it wouldn't be that. I was an electrical engineer. That was my work. I was not particularly discontent, but I had a nagging feeling that I didn't understand what the situation was. I use to bike to work and I'd push the bike back, walking. While I was walking, I use to think of things. One of the problems I had was: Here I am and here is the world about me in a particular state. Looking back, everything must come together to be in this present state; otherwise they would not be in this state now. It seemed to me that everything in the world was operating in a certain manner at a certain moment. Because of a chain of previous events and states that all led up to this moment. And I thought, what is the determining factor there? Ultimately, the answer to that is that all the states are actually illusory. There's no reality in them. But I didn't understand that at the time.

When did you begin to understand?

The basis of it came when I read a book by Raj Krishna, his history of Indian philosophy. I never finished that book. But in it I saw the philosophy of how all of our sensations are internal. And that struck home right away. I thought: Oh, that's true, why didn't I see it before? I didn't bother with that book afterward, it wasn't enough. I got a fair knowledge of Indian philosophy, but so much Indian philosophy has come from Buddhism anyway, so the best thing was to go

straight to Buddhism. The Indian philosophers virtually picked the bones off Buddhism. You see, the Aviatā teaching is practically Buddhist. And that comes from Gotapāda, who said that he worshiped the Buddha. It's there in the Mandukiya Upanishad.

Gotapāda, he was the teacher of Shankara. Shankara was a big mouth who just talked a lot without understanding. Gotapāda was the real one. The Mandukiya Upanishad is very short. It's no more than two pages. It is difficult to know how much of the Sankhya teaching came from Buddhism; or if the Buddha used that and saw the real meaning behind it. Because, either that could be the basis of *Paṭiccasamuppāda* or the *Paṭiccasamuppāda* was the basis of Sankhya teaching. But the Sankhya teaching is not the same as *Paṭiccasamuppāda*. There are some very big differences in it. For instance, say that the *purusha* is like the soul. It's separate all the time from the rest of the functions.

In some ways the way Ajaan Mahā Boowa speaks about the citta sounds to some people to be similar to Indian philosophy. If you have a citta outside the five khandhas which is unchangeable, how is that different from a soul?

The *citta* is outside the five *khandhas* because it is the nature of Nibbāna. The *citta* does not die, but the *citta* has within it *kilesas* and Dhamma, and it depends on circumstances which one arises. Often a battle goes on between the two. When sensations arise in the *khandhas*, the *citta* turns into *viññāṇa* by becoming dual. Duality is subject and object. When duality is present, it forms the situation for the world to arise. The duality of the world is a changeable thing. When one moment of duality ceases and dies away, the *citta* reverts to its true nature, which is emptiness.

If you have a citta that doesn't die and doesn't experience dukkha, can you call that a soul?

If there is no *dukkha*, then it must be Nibbāna. Because, for there to be no *dukkha*, all *kilesas* must have been completely overcome.

How is that different from the eternalist view that there is some immutable entity that lasts forever?

The eternalist view is wrong because there is no entity. The *citta* is not an entity. Immutable entity is the background to the idea of self, the idea that the self is a fixed entity. There is self, everybody has a self-identity, but the self is a changing thing that whorls about all over the place, changing into this and changing into

that. It's not that self isn't there, but that it's a changing thing, and therefore quite dynamic. So you cannot pin the self down and say it is this or it is that, because as soon as you pin it down it immediately changes. Because of that, the eternalist view is quite wrong. If something is entirely unchangeable, in effect that must be Nibbāna. Nibbāna is certainly not an entity. Where you have entities, you have comparisons between different entities. When you have comparisons between entities, then those entities must be impermanent in order to exist.

What word would you use to describe that which continues after the body drops away? That essence which is reborn or moves on to the next birth, what would you call that?

First of all, it's not rebirth. Rebirth just a convenient way of speaking, but it is not actually correct. No re-birth takes place because there is nothing there to be re-born. To give an example: if you have a roll of candles and light the first one, and then using the flame from the first candle you light second one and blowout the first. Is the second flame part of the first one or not? Does the second flame come from the first? You can't say that, because the first one has been blown out and disappeared completely. On the other hand, you cannot say that they are completely separate, because the existence of the second flame depends upon the flame from the first one. What happens is this: we make *kamma*, both good *kamma* and bad *kamma*. One of the important parts of the *kamma* we make is craving for life, the craving for existence. When we die, that craving remains. It is that *kamma* that passes the flame from one life to the next. That *kamma* of craving existence creates *paṭisandhi viññāṇa*, in other words, the *citta* with the addition of *kamma* from the past become the *viññāṇa*. When that happens, the *citta* becomes something almost like an entity, or something subject to material change. But that transformation need last only a moment for the *kamma* to enter into that new mental state. Once the *kamma* is attached to that state, then the *kamma* keeps the ball rolling. The *kamma* is the important one. The *citta* is always there, but it is something that you cannot pin down at all. You can say that it is vast and enormous, or that it is a mere point; both amount to the same thing.

Sometimes the citta is referred to as "the one who knows".

One must be careful of "the one who knows" because that which knows does not always know rightly. The *citta* has the quality of knowing; it is the knowing essence of mind. But in relation to the *khandhas*, the *citta* becomes *viññāṇa*, which picks up sensations and knows them. But it can't do anything with that knowledge until it goes through *saññā*, or memory, which identifies it. Once it is

identified it will then go to feeling (do I like it or not), then on to *sankhāra* where one starts thinking about it, bringing other things from memory to add on to it.

Does one know that by being aware of the present moment?

As far as I can make out, under normal circumstances we cannot be aware of the present moment. We can only be aware of the moment that has just passed. Since our knowing is impermanent, our awareness of what we know is constantly changing. Because of that, the present moment must, so to speak, look back on the past moment. Knowing in the present can only take place when the knowing has no object. It is pure and simple knowing. Because there is nothing there to know, then it can be non-dual.

Can one discern that bare knowing?

One cannot realize it because there is nothing there to fix on. You must have two things for realization to take place. There must be “this” realizing “that”. Really speaking, we are always in the present, we cannot be anywhere else. When we function, we must go back to the past, but the past is gone so we can only bring up the remains of the past from memory. What we get is just the memory of the past coming up in the present. The two together give rise to the phenomena of knowing something. It’s extremely complex. It’s a bit like electronics. The speed at which the mind works is a bit like electronics as well.

What is the meaning of sense restraint?

What sense restraint really means is not letting the *citta* go out with the senses into the world. If you keep your attention internally you have sense restraint automatically. For example, when a certain feeling arises, there is an emotional response causing the mind to go out in the world to think about it. If you keep your attention at the level of feeling, and thus keep the *citta* inside, then the emotional response will die away of itself. If you find that there is a tendency to react with greed or hatred when a certain feeling arises, you should look at that feeling and keep your mind on it, because that is the place where trouble begins. Observe the feeling and realize that that feeling comes from your own past *kamma*. You created it, so in a very real sense it is your own fault. You must put up with it until it goes away, which it will like everything else that is *anicca*. This is where mindfulness plays a very important role. You must observe your mind and realize that that feeling is the core of the trouble, because when that feeling arises, there is a strong tendency to react with greed or hatred.

How does good mindfulness work?

It's like when you're watching over a child: unless it's necessary, you don't interfere with its movements. Only if you see it doing something potentially harmful, something that it shouldn't do, do you intervene to stop it. Mindful observation is like a monitor in the background; it doesn't interfere unless it is essential, unless something must be done. In that sense, mindfulness becomes almost automatic. It is not something that you are trying to do, but rather the result of the development of mindfulness through constant practice. That automatic mindfulness is the true mindfulness. When you first begin developing mindfulness, the results will be rather haphazard. Rather like playing golf for the first time: on your first swing, you hit the ball just fine and think that playing golf must be easy. On your second swing, you can't even hit the ball at all. Initially, mindfulness is like that, sometimes good, sometimes bad. Eventually, you learn by constant practice how to keep your mind fully focused on each object as it arises and ceases. As with any other activity, the more you practice the more you learn.

In the end, you should try to be mindful at all times in all places. Then you will look on mindfulness as bringing great value to the mind, and clearly understand the damage done by restless thoughts. Restless thoughts, constantly whirling around in the mind, are very harmful. They waste a lot of time and a lot of mental energy. Continuous mindfulness keeps those thoughts under control. You see what the thinking mind is up to and you don't let it take you over. Most people's minds are wandering about all over the place. Because of that, they forget themselves most of the time. Their thoughts go out to something miles away and think it would be nice to be over there, so their minds are there and they have forgotten themselves here. The idea of mindfulness is to just keep your mind at home base. The more you do it, the more valuable you will find it. It's a value that you can see for yourself.

From the beginning, mindfulness is a way of training the mind. Eventually the mindfulness becomes automatic, but the way of training itself is usually a struggle. It is comparable to scrambling up a mountain, where there are no clear paths and no nice, ready-made steps and handholds. So you must just grasp hold of whatever is available — roots, branches, whatever — to pull yourself up. This is the way of training. You have to recognize the *kilesas* when they come up and battle against them. Sometimes you win, sometimes you may lose, but you can always look back and learn from those experiences. Always try hard to be mindful, but don't worry too much if you slip often. You are bound to,

considering how long the mind has been going in the way of the world. You cannot suddenly stopped that worldly momentum and turn it into Dhamma. You must train yourself gradually.

Using an object of Dhamma to focus your mind helps greatly to develop mindfulness. Try to remain focused on an object all of the time. Don't let go of it. Still, you'll find that the *kilesas* will come up to draw your attention away. When that occurs, you must recognize what's happening. When you fight against the *kilesas*, they, like any enemy, will come up in force to defend their position. That is the time when you have to try extra hard to overcome them. It is very important that the *kilesas* be overcome, and when they come up that presents an opportunity to get at them. It's very difficult to get at them when nothing rouses them up. Where are they? You can't find them. When something arouses them, however, you can see them straightaway. If done with effort, the practice of developing mindfulness will definitely bring them up.

How important has it been to you to live with Ajaan Mahā Boowa.

It has been very valuable indeed. It is not only the excellent answers I get to my questions, but there is a strong feeling of someone being fully in charge of the monastery, the students and the entire meditative atmosphere at Wat Pa Baan Taad. So if you can find a good teacher, it's very valuable. But if you cannot find a good teacher, then it is best to strive to be your own refuge. The Buddha also recommended that.

Suppose you find a way of practice that suits you and you don't run into any difficulties, would it be okay to practice on in this way if you don't have the guidance of a teacher?

The answer depends mainly on one's character. By not running into any difficulties, you may get the impression that the practice is going smoothly and easily. Sometimes when you find the practice is very easy, it means that not much of real significance is happening, or not much resistance is being stirred up. When no resistance is aroused, it means that the *kilesas* are not being aroused. In which case, the practice may appear to be very easy. On the other hand, if the *kilesas* become too aroused, the practice might become harmful to you. It's really an individual thing.

But you shouldn't expect results to come quickly. A few people do get quick results, but most people attain results more slowly. And it is often better that way because the internal changes take place gradually and so do not stir up the

kilesas so much. If one stirs up a lot of *kilesas* in oneself, one must be a really strong character to deal with them. The difficulty that most people have is that they don't really know what they are aiming for. The goal one is aiming for is Nibbāna, of course, but attaining it has to be done in the right way. And the right way is an individual thing, to some extent, because it will depend what an individual's major faults and problems are. Although we can truly say that Nibbāna is our true nature, you must not think that it is easy to get there. It's very difficult.

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We Create Ourselves

At the beginning of your monastic life, what challenges did you face?

I think the main challenge was just maintaining my focus on the meditation practice. I did the practice and my mind went into distraction time after time and I just had to keep constantly pulling it back. I'd say that was the main challenge I faced. As far as the external things were concerned, I returned from Thailand to England shortly after I ordained as a monk. And that was a bit of a challenge because the monks I ordained with all gave up the robe, so I was left holding the baby. And the baby was the English Sangha Trust, which was a big responsibility. But I knew perfectly well at that time that I'd have to find a teacher who I could rely on for guidance. Fortunately, I met a Thai person who was returning to Thailand and I asked him to help me locate a suitable teacher there. He was a mining engineer whose job required him to travel to the Mekong River area searching for minerals. When he was working in the area he liked to spend the night in a nearby monastery. And he'd ask people about the teachers, the Ajaans, in the area. In that way, he learned about the Ajaans who came from the Ajaan Mun forest tradition. And when I came to Thailand he said, "Oh, there are many excellent Ajaans who could give you good guidance." One day he came to me and said, "There is a well-known Ajaan staying in Wat Bowornives now." I went to Wat Bowornives and met Ajaan Mahā Boowa. I liked him, and I liked the way he spoke and behaved. So I asked him if I could stay with him at his forest monastery. And he agreed. So I went, and I've more or less been there ever since.

In the beginning, what was your main problem in meditation?

Distraction. Lots of distracted thinking. The problem lasted a long time too. Distraction is one of the main problems people have because the mind tends to go into distraction automatically. And I once questioned: What is the purpose of this tendency, the practical purpose for human life? It seems that it is quite likely to be a method of refreshing memory. At least that's one of the functions it performs. By constantly rethinking and rehashing our experiences, we refresh our memory of them.

What are relationships like in monastic life?

Monastic relationships are more of psychic rather than a physical nature. In any case, relationships are often a result of past *kamma*. In that respect, *kamma* can

be very strange. It can put you into a situation where you have an uncanny feeling that you recognize the people that you're living with. Sometimes in a good way, sometimes in a bad way. And it is quite likely that you will instinctively drop into a mode of relationship that you had with that person in the past. This is how *kamma* works. It pitches one into a situation that one has already created for oneself in the past.

Kamma, in fact, is very important. *Kamma* means action, action done by body, speech, or mind. And the actions of *kamma* bring results. The results occur in due course when the conditions are right; which means to say that the conditions, just by chance, happen to be in a suitable mode for that particular *kamma* to come to fruition. That begs the question: can we control our *kamma* and its fruition? The answer is that we can partially control it because, for instance, if we deliberately put ourselves into dangerous situations we are chancing our *kamma*. There may be *kamma* waiting to bear fruit that may cause us to have an accident in that situation. Because of that, the Buddha and the Ajaans all say that people should avoid dangers that they don't have to go into. If you know a situation is potentially dangerous, and you deliberately put yourself in that situation, that may be giving the chance for some *kamma* to bear fruit. If it's a good result, that doesn't matter; but if it is bad *kamma*, you must be cautious.

Really speaking, we create ourselves. *Kamma* means that what we do, we become. And we become that because we have acted in a certain way. So we create our own future. If we want our futures to be good, we must look very carefully at the *kamma* we make. And be very cautious. This is where mindfulness comes in — the awareness of what is right and what is wrong, what is good and what is bad. By practicing in the right way and doing the right actions, you can develop a pretty good future for yourself. But if you go the other way, it may be very bad. So *kamma* is very important. When there is *kamma*, there must be rebirth. We call it rebirth, but actually it is future birth dependent on preceding conditions. When birth takes place again, we pitch ourselves into a situation that originates from something we have done in the past, which means our *kamma*. If our *kamma* is good, we can enjoy a good birth. If bad *kamma* prevails, it could be quite disastrous. It is worthwhile taking a look at the world and questioning: where would be a good place to be reborn? You will probably find that there are not many favorable places. The world is a pretty rough place nowadays. The lesson of that is that we should try to transcend this world altogether, or at least attain a state where we have more certainty about the future. If you want something to motivate you in your practice, something that

gives you a good reason why you should practice diligently, think of *kamma* and its results and the way of future birth. It's a very important contemplation.

Sometimes monks living in the forest have to face dangerous situations.

If a monk is going into the mountains or the forests for the purpose developing his meditation practice, that is quite a reasonable thing to do, even though there are dangers present. But that type of danger is worth the risk because of the value it brings to meditation. The dangers experienced there are usually not life-threatening; and even though they may entail a lot of hardship, they are usually not physically harmful. If, on the other hand, you start trying to scale cliffs you may unnecessarily be putting yourself and your life at risk. You should be very cautious about such activities. Buddha said that this human life is valuable, and that one should always be careful.

What are the relative values of actions done by body, speech, and mind?

The grossest actions, which are bodily actions, bring the grossest kammic results. Speech is midway. The mind is the most subtle. So the *kamma* comes up in different ways depending on where it is created. If you give way to thoughts of anger, those thoughts are *kamma*, backed by *taṇhā*, or craving. The *taṇhā* is the wanting to get rid of unpleasant feelings, which can bring about anger. And one tries to get rid of those unpleasant feelings by blaming or criticizing something or other. Those critical thoughts are a type of mental *kamma* that will come back on one in terms of more unwholesome thoughts. The *taṇhā* creates a situation of attachment. In the case of anger, it is attachment to this situation that caused the angry reaction. Because that attachment is still there, the anger can easily arise again. When the trigger goes for that sort of situation to occur again (maybe you see the guy somewhere on the street, and suddenly it all comes up), then you have the same problem coming again — and the tendency to make more *kamma*.

To effectively get rid of the tendency to anger, you must get rid of it not only in speech and action, but in mind as well. The mind is very important. Probably the best way to do that is to realize that the angry mental state that comes up is a danger to you. Look on it as being something dangerous and unhealthy. Use mindfulness to catch it and to turn and look at the cause of it, which is the feeling. Then you should be able to catch it and hold it. But you must beware, because when you do capture it and hold it, you may relax and begin to feel quite satisfied with yourself. Then a short while later the feeling comes up again, catching you unaware. So you must keep at it constantly until the anger really

does disappear. It is one of the primary methods of training you should try develop.

Can one suppress anger?

If you have a tendency towards anger and you allow the anger to come up as thought, the thought is still *kamma*. If he you suppress it totally, that is to say physically, verbally, and mentally, then there is nothing to come up. So the anger must die away. That doesn't mean to say that the situation won't be remembered and later bring it all up again. That may happen. Which means that you must deal with it each time it comes up. And each time you deal with it, it gets weaker. But suppressing the speech and action, but not suppressing thought, can cause quite a lot of trouble. For example, smokers who want to quit smoking may throw away their cigarettes and stop smoking, but in their minds they are still thinking about and craving for a cigarette. So in essence they really haven't stopped, they've only paused. Their minds are still bound to the old habit. If the mind is bound like that, all the conditions are there to start again. If they give up the thoughts, if they turn away from the thoughts whenever they arise, then the problem will die away properly.

When one finds faults and criticizes a lot, that's the root of anger coming up. You must learn that fault finding, criticizing, and anything of that sort is completely wrong. It's the opposite of what you should be doing. You should take no interest in whether things are right or wrong, or whether they are good or bad. It is quite harmful to have a tendency to criticize and find fault with people all the time. This doesn't mean that if it is your job to search for faults in things, that you shouldn't find faults in that sense. Like if you have an inspection job and you have to find what's wrong and correct it. But if it's a mental habit of fault-finding, that's bad. You should try to overcome that tendency. The way to overcome it is to put in mind the idea that whatever other people do is none of your business. It is up to other people what they do. If they do it wrong, they do it wrong, that's all.

What is the purpose of mindfulness in meditation practice?

Mindfulness is what gives one data to do the practice. For you to be properly aware of anything, you must have your attention focused on that object. If you're doing one thing and your mind is focused on something else, you are merely performing an automatic action. And you can't learn from that. Sometimes that unmindful action might be harmful. Something wrong might happen, and being unmindful you are unprepared for it. Then you don't know

how to act, or you act wrongly. This can easily happen if you do not have mindfulness.

In order to learn the way of Dhamma, you must learn by experience. Mindfulness is very important here because it points things out as they happen in the present. Otherwise, you must rely on memory, and memory can become quite distorted. But if you have mindfulness, the mindfulness will fix your experience quite well. And one learns from that. It's like when you are walking without mindfulness: you can trip or slip up pretty easily and get into trouble. But when you are mindful, your mind is watching in the present, and it's aware of what is happening. So you don't get the same tendency to trip up or have trouble. Mindfulness is one of the most important teachings. Wisdom is another one. But if you don't have mindfulness, the wisdom has got very little to work on. When mindfulness is present overseeing the task, the wisdom can pick up data and understand what is happening all the time.

What is the way to get the best balance of effort in meditation practice?

It depends very much on the strength of the *kilesas*. If the *kilesas* are coming up strongly, then you have to use a lot of effort to overcome their defiling influence. But if the *kilesas* are weak, you don't have to use as much effort to overcome them. It's like an enemy attacking you. If they're attacking you in force, then you have to repel them in force. If they're attacking weakly, it's quite easy to repel them. In that case, you don't want to bring the whole army out to deal with them. So how much effort you should use will depend very much on the *kilesas*. If the *kilesas* are strong, you really have to get down to it and work hard. This is suggested in a *sutta* in the *Majjhimā Nikāya*, where the Buddha explained how to combat the *kilesas* when they come up in strength. First, you reflect on the Buddha and what the Buddha did. If that doesn't work, you should consider what the results will be if you don't do the practice. Where will you end up? You might go to the hell region or some bad destination. If all else fails, you must simply put your tongue on the top of your mouth, grit your teeth, and deal with the *kilesas* by force. In other words, your defense against a *kilesas* must be equal to force of the attack.

Should we put ourselves in unfamiliar situations to promote mindfulness?

The best thing is to try it. Ajaan Khao use to do just that. He would go and sit in practice at night at a certain place in the forest, or on a mountain, and stay there until he began to feel familiar with the place. Then he'd get up in the middle of the night and go to another place and sit down there to practice. After

some time he'd go to another place. All the places were located near the area where he was living. He'd shift from place to place at night because when he started getting familiar with a place, he started losing the strength of mindfulness. When he lost the strength of mindfulness, he felt he could let go and relax a little. So, in order to stop that laxness, he'd move to a new location.

That was Ajaan Khao's mode of practice. But each person has to find the mode practice that is most suitable. Moving from place to place to do your meditation has value because when you are in one place for a longtime, a lot of what you do becomes automatic. You soon learn where everything is and exactly what's needed, and you know have to think about things very much. When you move somewhere else you suddenly have to think about everything. For some people that's good, and for other people it's not so good. If being forced to think about things just sends your mind into a whirl, it doesn't do much good. But if it breaks up the tendency to be habitual, it can be excellent training. If that suits you, I'd say do it. It's quite interesting how many of the Ajaans used to go out at night in the forest without a light. They walked meditation in the dark without a light. But I'm not suggesting people should try that until they have developed enough *samādhi*.

Can you give an example of a kilesa that was really strong and what you did to combat it?

The mental distraction was always a big problem. In that case, you must constantly pull it back to the task of keeping the mind on the *parikamma*, for example, the breathing practice or the repetition of *buddho*. One has to pull it back to that task every time it goes away. And you must keep on relentlessly until the *kilesas* give way. If you persist in going against the *kilesas*, they usually get weaker and weaker as time goes by. The *kilesas* cannot withstand persistence. With dogged persistence, you can eventually break through. But you must not give up until you succeed. It's like what Napoleon said: he said other people were just as clever as he was, he simply persisted when others gave way.

How to develop right samādhi?

Right *Samādhi* basically has two meanings. One is *samādhi* that has the right purpose and object. In other words, you are practicing *samādhi* for the right purpose, for the developing of Dhamma. And the object you use is an object of Dhamma, like the breathing or *buddho* or body contemplation. Practicing like that, the *samādhi* is right because it is going in the way of Dhamma. On another

level, there is the Right *Samādhi* of the Noble Eightfold Path. That is a different aspect, because that comes up only after all the other path factors are right. When the Eightfold Path factors are all right, including the factor of *samādhi*, that can become a path moment when one breaks through and, in a way of speaking, catches a glimpse of Nibbāna. But the Noble Eightfold Path isn't just the training in developing the path factors, though that certainly is necessary. But the Noble Eightfold Path is not attained simply by practicing the eight factors. That happens only when all of the factors come together and coalesce in a state that is absolutely right and correct. When that happens, then the jump can take place. It's like a bridge leading it over to the other side.

Please explain what moderation in eating means.

Moderation in eating starts off with eating only that amount of food that doesn't make you fat. That's a simple way of putting it. But moderation in eating also means that you don't look for the choice bits of food, but you take the food as it comes. In the end, moderation in eating means that you try to eat those things that help the meditation practice. The Indians have an interesting way of putting it. They say that there are three types of food: *tamas*, *rajas*, and *setva*. The *tamas* food makes you feel heavy and thick. The *rajas* food, the moderate type, and makes you hot and it can increase sensuality. The *setva* food makes you light and buoyant and doesn't require a lot of digestion. In general, one will probably need a combination of all three. But don't take too much of the first two types of food because they can have a big effect on the practice. They can dull your mind, because when you eat food, blood has to go to the stomach for digestion. When the blood goes to the stomach, it doesn't go to the head, to the brain. Because of that, you feel sleepy and have difficulty maintaining mindfulness. On the other hand, if you were to eat only the light *setva* food you might get malnutrition, so you must be a bit cautious.

What should you do in meditation when a nimitta arises?

Look on the *nimitta* as a distraction. Don't have anything to do with it. Don't try to get rid of it, and don't try to make it persist. Just lose interest in it. A *nimitta* comes up much in the same way as a memory does. If you grasp at a memory when it comes up, the mind follows it, which means you have gone away from the practice. So it's a distraction. If a *nimitta* comes up, it is a distraction in the same way. So you don't want to be bothered about *nimittas* when you doing the meditation practice for the purpose of calm and concentration. But there are other times when a *nimitta* arising from the practice can help a great deal. If you get a *nimitta* arising of yourself as a corpse lying dead in front of you, that can be

quite beneficial. If you can retain it and bring it to mind often, it can prevent the *kilesas* grabbing hold of you. Or an *asubha nimitta* can be quite important too. If it suits your character, the mental image of a human body gradually decaying and decomposing can have a profound impact on meditation.

How should you not pay attention to the nimitta?

Your *viññāṇa*, or consciousness, is the one that knows the *nimitta*. As long as *viññāṇa* is concentrating on the *nimitta*, you can't get rid of it because it's the central focus of concentration. But if you intentionally make your concentration go back to the breath, and you force it to stay there, then the *nimitta* will disappear. When the *viññāṇa* turns from the image and goes to the breathing, the *nimitta* loses all its power. It's like this: suppose you are driving a car and talking to a person in the car and you come to a busy intersection where cars are going all over the place and the person is still talking but you don't know what he is saying because your mind has turned from that person to concentrate on what's happening in front of you. When you turn your attention from one thing to another, that other thing just disappears. As far as you are concerned, it's just not there. You can do the same thing with *nimittas*. When you turn away from the *nimitta* and focus on something else, the *nimitta* no longer has any power over your attention.

If the image that arises in meditation takes the form of brightness of mind, should we focus on that brightness or not?

The brightness of mind means the perception of light, which is there whether your eyes are open or closed. Everything seems bright. It can be visible light, and it can become very strong too. More than anything else, brightness of mind is an indication of the state of the *citta*. When the state of the *citta* is good, you may get light coming up. But not everybody does. In people who have a tendency toward wisdom, the wisdom may block the brightness. The reason for that seems to be that when that person has light coming up, the wisdom jumps on it and begins to question it, and that stops it. But you shouldn't go searching for brightness or light in your meditation. If it comes up, okay. If not, it doesn't matter. Light is not the major thing that matters in meditation, but it is a good indication that the mind is concentrated.

The brightness of mind is a bit like a speedometer indicating the state of mind. But the brightness is not something you should focus on or worry about; it's just giving an indication of your mental state. Brightness is something that easily attracts attention, and because of that attraction it can also distract a person

from the meditation practice. So the best thing to do is to go on with practice regardless of the brightness, which will probably make it grow even brighter.

Ajaan Mahā Boowa said he experienced an amazing brightness of mind just before he attained enlightenment. He could see that there was a focal point to the brightness and he questioned what that focal point was. He eventually realized that the focal point was the essence of repeated birth and death, the very nucleus of existence in *samsāra*. As soon as he chucked out the brightness and its focal point he attained enlightenment straightaway. In other words, that brightness was preventing him from going beyond. After that, he described the former brightness of mind as being like buffalo shit compared to the state of the enlightened mind.

What should you do when the breath disappears in meditation?

If, when doing the meditation on breathing, the breath becomes very, very fine until you can no longer find it, then you should keep your attention on that point where you were watching the breath before it faded away. When watching the breath, you should be focusing on it at one point, that point where it is felt most strongly. As the feeling of the breath passing that point becomes finer and finer, you must keep on that point as the main thing to hold the attention. If the breath disappears from your awareness, stay with that point and it will come back again. If the breathing should stop entirely because it's gone so calm that there is no breath left, don't panic, it will eventually come back again. Most people panic when that happens and quickly start breathing again, which breaks up the calm and concentration. The cessation of the breath is quite valuable. It's not something you should break up.

Do you have any recommendations on how to handle anxiety?

You can do it by taking in a breath in and pushing it down deep and low in the stomach, and then letting it come out very, very slowly. Do that no more than three times. If you do it too much it's bad for you; but if you do it just once or twice it's alright. And it can help quite a lot because the breath and mind are very close, so they affect each other. If you can overcome anxiety in the way of breathing, that then also helps to overcome it in the mind. The two will affect each other.

Can one spontaneously attain meditative absorption as a result of kamma or some other condition?

You certainly can attain it from *kamma*, and other conditions as well, but the conditions have to be the right ones. If you have practiced meditation in the past, it can come up through that. You can get a boost in the practice from past *kamma*, from what you have done in the past. If you have attained *samādhī* in the past, that can lead to spontaneous meditative absorption arising in the present. Meditative absorption is another word for *samādhī*. The aim of the practice is to attain that absorption of mind, because with that absorption the mind becomes calm. When the mind is calm, it's happy. It's happy because the *kilesas* are not bothering it.

What advice do you have for people who find it difficult to attain samādhī because their minds cannot stop thinking?

You must search and question why it is so difficult for you to attain *samādhī*. It's a general axiom in Buddhism that all conditions arise because of the surrounding circumstances, so you must examine those circumstances to find out what conditions are stopping it. You must look around in your current circumstances and discover where the problem lies. Circumstances can be varied; for example, it may be the food you eat, or the weather, or the actions you have done, or speaking too much or too little; it can be internal bodily conditions, it can be the people you associate with, it can be one of many different things. So you must search and try to find the key to your problem. The conditions can even stretch back into past *kamma*. If any of those factors are wrong, then the conditions may not be right for the attainment of *samādhī*. So you have to look at those conditions and find out where the fault lies. Quite often, it's simply too much thinking. The mind is whirling around all the time. In that case, you must learn how to stop thinking. Developing *samādhī* means the stopping of thought. That doesn't mean to say you stop it all the time, of course, but when you are practicing *samādhī* you should stop it. In other words, you learn how to control thought.

Why is it that some people never seem to find the right teacher?

Some people truly search to find the right teacher, but they ended up searching in vain. But it can also happen that a person, even though he meets good teachers, avoids putting himself under a teacher because he doesn't want to be disciplined. I know quite a lot of people in the West are like that. They go from one teacher to another, but they can never find any teacher that really satisfies them. It may be because once the teacher starts telling them what they should really do, up come their *kilesas* to resist the teaching, and they think: "This teacher is no good." A Zen Master once said: "When you find a good teacher,

hang up your sandals and stay there.” There’s another story from the Zen tradition. A monk went to see a teacher and when he entered the teacher’s room and paid his respects the teacher immediately asked him on which side of the door he had placed his walking stick. The monk could not remember and realized that the teacher had caught him being unmindful. So he thought, “This is a good teacher for me”, and he stayed.

Do you find valuable lessons in the stories of the Christian monastics?

There are valuable lessons. The value is in the qualities of the people involved. Some of them had remarkably good qualities. One monk, a Russian orthodox, went to a quiet place in the forest to live, and after a time people came and found him. Before long they started to build a monastery there. That’s when he realized he should go to another place. So he went to another quiet place, and eventually the same thing happened again. So he moved again. In other words, the world was trying to catch him all the time. But he refused to be caught by it. It’s reminiscent of the simile of the log. Buddha saw a log of wood floating down the Ganges and he told his disciples that the log would eventually reach the ocean, provided it didn’t get snagged up by roots and weeds, provided it didn’t get caught on a sand bank, provided it didn’t go rotten and sink, and provided it wasn’t taken by gods or men for use. If none of those things befell it, in the end it would float out to the ocean. The simile means that provided a monk doesn’t give way to all the attachments of the world, then he will eventually float out to Nibbāna. The Russian monk was not a Buddhist, of course, but his way of practice was good. In Christianity they had many people who were very enthusiastic and very zealous, but they were saddled with a lousy doctrine.

Do you think that people who believe in God can have right view?

I would say that belief in God is not right view, but it can lead to right understanding in the end. If the person searches for God and doesn’t give up, goes on and on and on searching for God, and he’s never satisfied, he’s bound in the end to realize that God is a figment of his own mind. And that can bring him to right view. The ordinary meaning that people have of God is almost an impossible condition. It’s a complete mixture. People say, “It’s God’s doing” or “It’s God’s will”, but they have never thought out the implications of what that means. The actions they ascribe to God may be completely immoral, but they never consider the moral dilemma that such contradictions create.

So the answer can depend on what one means by God, and on the level of the person who believes. For the ordinary person pushing a plow around the field, it

probably doesn't matter that much. A belief in God may help him cope in some ways. But people who really want to develop spiritually have to question what is meant by God. When considering God, you have to ask some questions. First of all, there are the gods of the *brahma* worlds. A lot of the gods we hear about would seem to equate to that level because they are a part of the world of *saṃsāra* just like we are. For a person to contact a god and be affected by a god, that god must be impermanent, since we are not affected by things that are not impermanent. The only thing that can affect us in that way is Nibbāna, because Nibbāna is part of us anyway, and not something separate.

Some people say that God is the same as Dhamma.

That is just semantics. When you say that God is Dhamma, you are just giving it another name. It depends on what your fundamental idea of Dhamma is, and what your fundamental idea of God is. To put it like that is very misleading. It is not right to say that the God of Buddhism is called Dhamma. It's not like that; it's not correct. People who come to Buddhism, they should learn a bit about semantics; that is, the meaning of words. The meaning of a word depends on the person who uses it. Often a person can change its meaning to suit his own purposes. When the person uses the words and another person picks up the word, there's no way to tell if the person who picked up the word picked up the same meaning as the person who spoke it. Words are symbols, and those symbols can have whatever meaning you want to give them. If a person gives a wrong meaning, they get the wrong end of the stick. The speaker and the listener are at cross-purposes all the time. You should be very cautious with words; it's very easy to get muddled with them.

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Renouncing the World

The five *khandhas* are part of the world. The physical body comes from the world, and when it dies it goes back to the world. The physical body acts as a base for the other four *khandhas*: feeling, memory, thought, and consciousness. Those four depend on the body; without the body they cannot function. When a person dies, the mental *khandhas* die along with the body and disappear. But the *citta* — the knowing essence of mind — does not die. The *citta* is the essence of Buddhism. The *citta* is the boss; it's the thing that really matters the whole time. The *citta* is the commander, the one that controls the *khandhas* and makes them act. When the *citta* is ruled by the fundamental ignorance of *avijjā* and tainted by *kilesas*, it pushes the *khandhas* to do unwholesome actions of body, speech and mind. When Dhamma is in control, wholesome actions occur. When a person attains Arahant, the bad side disappears, and only Dhamma comes up. The Dhamma then uses the *khandhas* to teach and to help people, as we find the *ajāns* doing. This is the Dhamma coming out in the *khandhas* of the living Arahant. When the Arahant passes away, the *khandhas* disappear in the same way that they do with the ordinary person. But unlike the ordinary person, the Arahant's *citta* also disappears from the world when it becomes Nibbāna.

The true nature of the *citta* is emptiness. The *citta* resembles nothing else in the world. Nothing is comparable. And no analogy really fits it. The *citta* is the one that knows Nibbāna. It is Nibbāna. But it has been usurped by *avijjā*, the fundamental ignorance of not knowing. Because of not knowing, the *citta* has been pushed into doing worldly things. And when it acts in the world, it gets caught up in the ways of the world. It becomes so trapped in its own delusion that it can't see anything else *but* the world. In order to accomplish this, the *citta* with *avijjā* builds up the five senses in people and animals. When the five senses are in place, those senses experience nothing but the world. People then get caught up in a craving for the world through sensual contact. When that happens, there is absolutely no hope of reaching Nibbāna until one can learn to overcome the wanting that arises in those states. When the wanting is overcome, then the attachments are overcome. Once the attachments drop away, there is nothing to stop the *citta* from going in the direction of Nibbāna. But it requires dropping *all* attachments, not just some.

But it's so difficult to overcome those attachments.

Yes, that's true. It is difficult. But you must first learn to look at things correctly. If you look at them in the right way, you'll understand the nature of the world

more clearly. When you see what the world is really like, something inside you will turn against it. And when you foster an attitude of renunciation and develop it, that will tend to overcome the craving to go back to the world. Going back to the world means that you are giving way to the *kilesa* of craving. Say you crave to have a good time, to go to a pub and have a beer, or something like that. You want to do it because you feel it will bring you happiness. But when you look carefully, you'll find that the results you get are just *dukkha*, discontent. As you grow older searching for happiness in that way, the feelings of discontent will pile on. That causes fear to arise, as you become older, more unwell and closer to death. You're in a mess because you no longer know where to turn to find that elusive happiness. So the discontent becomes stronger with each passing day.

No matter how difficult it seems, you must find a way to counteract craving. When you find the practice very difficult, try thinking about what it means if you don't do meditation. What will the rest of your life be like if you decide to give up and follow the way of the world? And when you die, how will you handle the moment of death? Where are you going to reborn? You don't know. In this life, most of us have a reasonably good rebirth, but we cannot be sure it will always be like. We simply don't know what our past *kamma* is. A lot of it may be good, but there will be some bad patches, too. What happens if that comes up? Use that kind of reasoning to spur you in your efforts to overcome the *kilesas*, and *dukkha*.

Should one set aside specific times for meditation?

Usually, when you have specific times during the day when you always do the meditation practice, the mind will tend to take on an attitude of meditation at those times. Because your habit is to have the mind in a state of meditation at those times, meditation will come much more easily then. So, in order to help your practice, you can choose suitable times when you always do the practice. You may do it at other times also, but you always do it at those special times. Once it becomes a habit, it can help you a lot. Also, once you gain some success in *samādhi*, you realize that it brings peace and happiness, which is a very powerful incentive to do more meditation.

How is consciousness related to the citta?

Consciousness arises when the *citta* associates with an object of awareness. At the moment of awareness, three factors come together: the object, the sense organ, and consciousness. Consciousness is the *citta* coming together with the

object. Consciousness is *viññāṇa*. The word *viññāṇa* is very suggestive. *Ñāṇa* means intuitive knowing. The prefix *vi* means to divide. So *viññāṇa* is divided knowing — divided in terms of subject and object. But this knowing is impermanent; so, having arisen, it immediately ceases. If the object is still there, another consciousness will arise, and then another. Consciousness comes and goes like that. When consciousness ceases, it reverts to being the *citta*. When the *citta* again becomes associated with an object, it is called consciousness. The *citta* is performing the duty of consciousness at that time. It's acting in connection with the *khandhas*. In other words, the *citta* vitalizes the *khandhas*.

When the *citta* is associated with the *khandhas*, it is bound up with the world of constant change. The *citta* changes because it must change. Because the *khandhas* are part of the world, they are inherently impermanent; so the *citta* cannot remain fixed in that situation. The *citta* is the one who knows. For example, when a person gets Alzheimer's disease, his memory fades. But he still *knows*. Knowing and consciousness are still present, but without memory he can't make sense of anything.

Is our sense of self related to the citta?

The *citta* is the one that gives the idea of self. And the idea of self is not incorrect, as long as one realizes that the self is not a permanent entity. The self is always changing. The Buddha never said that there is no self. He said that there is no entity of self which is permanent. Actually, there's bound to be a self — that's what we all experience. But when we examine it, we'll see that our self-identity doesn't remain the same for two consecutive moments. It is changing all the time.

How do you define paññā, wisdom?

There are three types of *paññā*. Firstly, there is *suttamāya-paññā*, which is either reading about Dhamma or hearing it from a teacher. At the second level, which is *cintamāya-paññā*, one thinks about the Dhamma and examines it. One understands the reasoning behind the teaching, and searches to discover how it applies to one's own experience. In other words, one uses the intellect to reach a basic understanding. The third level is *bhāvanāmāya-paññā*, which is the actual realization that takes place through meditation.

When practicing wisdom, you must be careful to do things in the right order. Most people need to first develop *samādhi* as the basis for investigation. If you go into wisdom too quickly, you might not have a good enough foundation. Then

wisdom won't work very well, and can even be dangerous. When your *samādhī* is solid, you can do the practice of wisdom without any harmful effects.

How should we cultivate humility?

Look at the body. Examine your body and see what it is: bones and skin and flesh and blood. What are those things? They are just parts of this world. When you see what you really are, that can make you feel very humble. Look at the mess of bodily tissues you grasped at birth. It's very effective to see the nature of the human body. At first, your investigations may not strike home, but as you pursue them more and more, a time comes when you begin to see the body clearly. Then you suddenly realize: This arm, is it really mine? And it looks peculiar, as though it is something quite separate from you. So you begin to understand that your body is not something in any way good or desirable or superior. You may even feel somewhat ashamed that you ever grasped at that sort of thing. The body offers plenty of scope to develop humility.

How should we practice the brahmavihāras?

Some Buddhist texts recommend that you should practice them as meditation subjects, meditating first on *mettā*, then going on to *karuṇā*, *muditā*, *uppekhā*. But, actually, most people inherently tend to have some aspects of the *brahmavihāras* within them, and they can begin by cultivating those. For instance, *mettā* is having the idea that other people are much like oneself, so they shouldn't be criticized or despised. It's natural to feel friendliness toward them. *Karuṇā* is seeing the suffering of other people and feeling as though one wants to take it on oneself. *Karuṇā* is often seeing the suffering of others, and being unable to do anything. *Muditā* is the one that people often lack. It's the gladness of seeing somebody else developing in a good way, or even getting rich. One's glad instead of being envious, so one overcomes all thoughts of envy. Most people are envious of other people's success. They feel they deserve the same good fortune, and often resent those who have achieved it. *Muditā* is the thing that is lacking, so it is quite important. *Uppekhā* is complete equanimity, a completely calm state where one realizes that people are all receiving the results of their *kamma*. They have created their own situations, and the results of *kamma* must play themselves out. All of the *brahmavihāras* are very powerful, but they don't lead directly to Nibbāna.

Cultivating *mettā-bhāvanā* is a good, although the *ajāans* don't usually recommend it as a specific practice. That's because practicing *mettā-bhāvanā* tends to attract people like a magnet. And meditators don't want too many

people coming around. At the same time, you gain proficiency in the practice of *ānāpānasati*, or *buddho*, *mettā* will come automatically. When your mind becomes calm and peaceful, you feel happy in that state. So *mettā* will naturally be present. If you go on cultivating *mettā*, it can become very powerful. *Mettā* is an excellent practice for an angry person. That's because *mettā* is the opposite of hatred. However, when I was in England I found that quite a lot of people look upon themselves as being *mettā* broadcasting stations. This is not the way.

What's wrong with being a mettā broadcasting station?

If you really have the *mettā*, there's nothing wrong. But many people who think they are broadcasting *mettā*, actually don't. They think they are broadcasting to other people, but that's just their own conceit. People who think like that are probably not broadcasting anything, not even to themselves, because they are simply fooling themselves. People who really do have *mettā* don't care if they are broadcasting or not. Because the *mettā* is there, and that's sufficient, it doesn't matter to them. Even without broadcasting it, *mettā* does have quite a positive effect on people.

Broadcasting *mettā* can easily lead to conceit. People who think they have a lot of *mettā* for everybody can be rather condescending, as though they are positioned above the rest of humanity, like an angel or a deity dispensing *mettā*. That's just conceit, and nothing else. Conceit's a bad characteristic too. Conceit pushes the ego up high, and when it comes down, it hurts. The ego usually comes down with a bang. Buddha said that one should be like the Earth. The Earth doesn't care what you put on it. You can put excrement on it, or you can put gold on it, it makes no difference to the Earth.

For the Arahant, obviously he's going to be quite beyond the past. It doesn't affect him because, if I understand it rightly, the Arahant has broken up *bhavanga*. *Bhavanga* is no longer re-linking from the past to the future. Because of that, the Arahant doesn't pull up the past all the time. Every moment is taken as a moment.

How are feeling and memory related?

Feeling and memory are two separate *khandhas*. Feeling is the tester, it's the one you use to test whether you like something or not. Memory is the identifier. It identifies what the thing is.

How do we know the body?

The body is an experience of feeling. We know our bodies by feeling. Because of that, when we examine closely, we can identify a feeling body. The feeling body is the one mentioned in the second of the *Satipaṭṭhānas*. In other word, we use feeling to see that we know the body by feeling.

What practices do you recommend for developing patience?

Waiting for the dentist is good patience. Patience is really the readiness to wait without criticism. Patience is very valuable in meditation. When you are practicing meditation and the results you expect do not come quickly, patience allows you to wait for those results to come naturally. This is quite necessary. We are aiming for Nibbāna; but because we don't know Nibbāna, we don't really know what to aim for. So we undertake practices that are taught by the Buddha, and recommended by our teachers, and continue practicing them faithfully without knowing if we are getting nearer to Nibbāna or not. We must have the patience to keep on practicing diligently without becoming discouraged or neglectful. The opposite of patience is when one feels greedy for quick results; and a person who is greedy for quick results might end up taking drugs, for instance. Or else, one feels angry because one doesn't get the expected results, and then quickly turns to something else. Both are going the wrong way. To develop patience and increase it you must keep a watch on your mind. Mindfulness is really important. If you are mindful, you can see when greed and hatred arise in you. Then you can avoid them. So the practice of mindfulness will help greatly with patience; although, patience may not help much with mindfulness.

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Dhamma Principles in the Heart

You must strive for what Ajaan Mahā Boowa calls *lak tham*, or firm principles of Dhamma. Dhamma principles firmly established in the heart create a level of stability in your meditation that is not susceptible to decline or deterioration. That level is the ground of the *citta*, so to speak. Once you reach that plateau, progress tends to be automatic, though an increase of effort may be needed to gain more momentum. So achieving *lak tham* is essential.

Does lak tham refer to a realization, such as Sotāpanna, or does it refer to a level of samādhi that is firmly reliable?

I never liked the terms Sotāpanna, Sakādagāmi, and so on. They are, of course, levels of attainment discussed in the Buddhist texts. But there they are described only in terms of the *kilesas* that have been eliminated to reach them. They are not explained in any other way. That leaves the door wide open for people to claim: “Well, I have no doubts about Buddhism. I don’t believe there’s a self, and I don’t agree with rites and rituals...so I must be a Sotāpanna.” Such people don’t realize that that’s nonsense. There is far more than that to the establishment of firm principles in the heart. A person’s entire attitude must change.

When one attains Sotāpanna, one also realizes the Noble Eightfold Path. The Eightfold Path is like a bridge crossing to the other side, and each of the stones has to be in place. When they are all properly in place, then one can cross. In practice, it means that one must develop all eight factors of the Path until they are in a perfect condition. Then one crosses over, and the fruition comes automatically. But the Noble Eightfold Path is not merely a teaching you put into practice. It’s a level you attain; and you attain it by means of the meditation practice. For that, all eight factors are necessary.

Can you say something more about lak tham, or Sotāpanna? How would you describe it in a way that differs from what the books say?

When you have Dhamma principles firmly established in your heart, you will automatically resist doing any action that brings unwholesome consequences, even though you may have previously done such actions unashamedly. You also gain a new perspective, which brings with it a subtle knowledge of the teachings. You see all sorts of ins and outs that are not discussed in the books. For example, you begin to carefully analyze the senses. What do you find when you

analyze your senses? You have seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting, and touching. Upon careful analysis, you will see that they all work in much the same way. Up front, the sense organs have different functions; but the nervous sensations they send back to the brain all work in the same way.

The sense organs are sensitive to external stimuli. For instance, the eye is sensitive to electromagnetic radiation. But, although the eye picks up electromagnetic radiation, it does not send electromagnetic radiation back to the brain. It sends a nervous current that initiates a biochemical process, which is then converted into light and color in the brain—and you see images in glorious Technicolor. But in the world outside, there is no light and no color; there's only radiation. Understanding that makes you realize that the world is not quite the place you thought it was. When that realization strikes home, your interest in the world starts to wane. You begin to see that the world out there is merely a kind of magic show, lacking any real substance.

The other senses work much the same manner, each in its specific mode. Smell is obvious. Out there in nature are only chemicals, not odors. Chemicals in the air contacting the nose send nervous impulses to the brain. Only when sensations get inside of us does the experience of smell occur. So our sensory experience represents an interpretation of input from the external environment, not that external environment itself. In fact, we don't really know the world out there. All we know is an internalized version based on our personal point of view, the perspective of the knower. The knower inside can never actually contact the world outside, because contact takes place between material substances, like chemicals and bodily tissues. The internalized sensory imprint is as close as we ever get to the physical world.

The natural world seems to be very real and solid. But it appears that way only because our bodies are made up of stuff the same material elements. Fundamentally, there is no difference. In modern terms, they both consist of atoms and molecules. You ought to see this and think about it. Think about the body a lot. It's very important. If you can see the body as being merely part of the world, and therefore not you, you will get a glimpse into where the *citta*—the knower—lies. Then you realize that your physical body is not so important. It's just a conglomeration of material substances that will one day be reabsorbed into the physical environment. The question then is: why do you grasp at it?

This is the crux of the matter, and the basic purpose of the meditation practice. You must learn to see the body properly. By seeing it for what it is, you realize that it isn't self. It's that fundamental realization that is important. Having

realized that the body isn't self, you simply drop it. Eventually you see that all of life is just shadows, like images flickering on a cinema screen. But to do that, you must first have a firm basis in *samādhi*.

How firm would samādhi have to be before investigation goes beyond the superficial?

That depends on the person. If it's one of the local villagers, who works pushing a buffalo around a field, then the *samādhi* will probably have to be very deep; because he must rely on that to help him with his wisdom. If it's somebody who is more intellectual, then the *samādhi* does not need to be quite so deep.

In the end, *samādhi* must be firm enough to fix your undivided attention on the senses, or on the body. When you set the mind on the body, you must be able to keep it on the body. That's where the *samādhi* helps. If you have trained yourself to keep your mind on *buddho*, or the breath, then that training can come into play when you are investigating with wisdom. You can use the same basic principles in the wisdom practice that you developed in the *samādhi* practice. Some people find it very difficult to attain *samādhi*. They should try nonetheless. And they should use the fruits of *samādhi* to develop some wisdom. Wisdom, when practiced properly, can help to develop *samādhi* as well.

One has to be cautious about trying to get results too quickly with the wisdom practice. Some people are very impatient. Practicing wisdom with great intensity and determination, they may be able to breakthrough and see the truth very quickly. Then they may be so shocked by the true nature of existence that they give up. Seeing the truth of *anicca*, for instance, can be a mighty big shock. We think we understand *anicca*, but our understanding is merely intellectual. It does not penetrate to the heart. A firm foundation in *samādhi* can prepare you for the shock. When you have *samādhi*, you will have no problem accepting the truth.

I'd like to know when to push myself in meditation, and when not to push. I find if I push really hard, then I get quite tense.

Most people tend to think that striving hard in meditation is like doing physical exercise, but it isn't. Striving hard in meditation is comparable to the effort you make to stay awake when you feel drowsy and want to fall asleep. That is the type of striving that's required.

The main problem is always too much thinking. People's thoughts are usually wild and uncontrolled—they jump here and there, all over the place. And memory is the main factor that prods the thoughts. As soon as you hear a sound,

you grasp at it and define it. When that happens, the mind becomes embroiled in thought. You can't stop memories from coming up. They arise automatically. They will lessen gradually as you get more experience in meditation, but they will still come up. What you can do, though, is not take any interest in them.

You must have enough mindfulness to recognize the thoughts that come up in your mind, and enough presence to reject them as distractions. Using mindfulness, you can pull away from them immediately and return to the meditation you were doing. Mindfulness is number one. Mindfulness is much more important than *samādhi*, because mindfulness is necessary in everything. Mindfulness brings great calm and stability to the mind. Without mindfulness, *samādhi* just won't work. So, mindfulness is the thing you must strive hard to develop. It is absolutely essential.

Otherwise, the main thing you have to do is just keep on with the practice. Just keep on doing it. That's really what striving means. It means you continue trying and don't give up. Don't relax and let thoughts take you over and run your life. In other words, you don't allow the mind go into wild daydreams. You keep enough mindfulness present to always have control of the mind.

The mind's defiling influences, the *kilesas*, are always trying to take over and drag the mind into discursive thinking and daydreaming. They will trick you into relaxing your efforts, or even giving up meditation. That's what happens to most people. When the mind is under the sway of the *kilesas*, it cannot attain the calm and concentration of *samādhi*. So you must learn to rein in the mind with mindfulness. It is far better to do twenty minutes of serious and intense practice, than to do hours of sitting with the mind wandering all over the place. Without mindfulness present, there is no meditation at all. Ajaan Mun said that when you have mindfulness, everything you do is meditation. If you don't have mindfulness, walking and sitting meditation are merely postures, that's all.

Ajahn Mahā Boowa speaks in terms of getting up into the boxing-ring to give the kilesas a punch in the face and throw them to the canvas. How do you interpret that?

When you reach the stage where mindfulness is sharp, then the battle starts. Mindfulness fends off the *kilesas* and keeps them at bay. But as soon as you let down your guard, the *kilesas* rush in. Mindfulness recognizes them, and the fight begins anew. A natural tension develops between the effort to be mindful and the *kilesas*' tendency to relax and drift into daydreaming—often thinking about sexual matters. That's very important. You should realize that sexual desire is the primary *kilesa* of human beings. It's number one. This is the one that

captures our attention most of the time. The boxing-ring analogy is used to highlight the struggle between Dhamma and the *kilesas*. When the time comes to stand their ground, neither one is willing to back down. When the *kilesas* press their advantage, causing the mind to drift into daydreaming, mindfulness will counter-punch to restore control. When mindfulness lets down its guard for a moment, the *kilesas* land a few punches of their own. That seesaw battle is the “boxing” that Ajahn Mahā Boowa refers to.

I remember you were once told that Buddhism is becoming popular in the West because of its association with peace, and you said, “When you really get into practice, you realize you’ve got a fight on your hands.”

Yes, that’s true. People don’t really understand Buddhism. People generally think of the Buddha’s teaching as an absolute teaching, but it’s not. Nobody can give an absolute teaching. It’s not possible. The absolute is not susceptible to conventional language; to know it you must experience it directly.

What the Buddha did do was teach a method by which we can reach the point where that absolute is known. We have to follow the path ourselves. Teaching uses the conventions of language—similes and metaphors and so on. But the interpretation of those conventions is always personal. For instance, the color red. I know what the color red means to me, but I don’t know whether it means the same to you. Although we both call it “red”, we may react to the experience of red differently. I know my experience of the red sensation, and I assume that you experience a somewhat similar sensation, but maybe you don’t. Experience of the absolute is rather like that—it is an individual matter. All you can teach others is the way to get there.

What would you recommend for stress?

First of all, watch your thoughts. Thoughts are the things that set up stress. When the thoughts come up, they usually polarize around some emotional state, and that triggers an emotional state you’ve known in the past. Once that emotion comes up, then you are on the merry-go-round, so to speak, as thoughts swirl about. But it doesn’t have to be that way. Using mindfulness, those thoughts can be cut off. You must be mindful enough to realize what’s happening, and then to something else in their place, like *buddho*, or the breath, or chanting. You’ve got to turn to something. Go down and chop some wood if you like.

Ajaan Mahā Boowa talks about the citta that never dies, is never born and is independent of the five khandhas. To an unenlightened mind this sounds like a ‘thing’. How is this teaching to be understood?

My understanding is that the *citta* is the active one. It’s life. Without *citta*, there is no life. *Citta* creates. It creates the five *khandhas*, creates the body and thoughts, creates *vedanā*, *saññā*, *sankhāra*, and *viññāṇa*. It creates everything. You mustn’t think of the five *khandhas* as being five different rooms that the *citta* enters one after another. It’s not like that. The *citta* creates a moment of *viññāṇa*, which then dies away. Then it creates *vedanā*, and that dies away. Then it goes to *saññā*, and that dies away. Then *sankhāra*, then *viññāṇa* again. It jumps about, doing the duty of those four: *vedanā*, *saññā*, *sankhāra*, and *viññāṇa*. It’s all the *citta*, the whole thing, but it takes on different duties.

It’s like a man who, when he’s at home, is a father to his kids and a husband to his wife. When he goes to work, he’s the managing director. When he goes to the pub, he’s one of the boys, and so on. You can say he’s the same person performing all those duties; or you can say he’s a different person in each place, taking on different functions. It’s like that with the *citta*, although the *citta* is not a material thing. You can’t pin it down, because the *citta* is the one that is doing it all. You can only know the *citta* by becoming the *citta*. You can’t see it.

Can you see the citta directly in deep samādhi?

No. The *citta* is what does the seeing. If you hear someone say: “I’ve seen the *citta*”, you have to ask them: “What have you seen it with?” The mirror cannot see itself; nor can the knife cut itself. But when you fall back into being that seeing, you know it, and that’s all. You can’t say anything about it. But it is totally creative.

Is ‘knowing’ an intrinsic quality of the citta?

Yes, but one must realize the *citta* can be with Dhamma or with *kilesas*; so the knowing is not always right. You can know things, but be totally wrong. *Citta* with Dhamma is bright. *Citta* with *kilesa* is dull.

What happens when the process of the five khandhas ends?

That’s not possible to say. It’s effectively one of the questions the Buddha refused to answer. The Buddha said everything exists. “Everything exists” means that the six senses exist. “Existence” means sensation, and sensations are always

impermanent. So existence is impermanent, and thus not real. “Reality” means permanence, or rather not impermanent. Because reality is not impermanent, it is not existence. So we get the strange proposition that: “What exists isn't real, and what is real doesn't exist”. Reality is something that existence cannot comprehend, because existence is something that reality knows to be false. Put it like that. But talking at that level is always difficult. One must qualify whatever one says.

If someone were to argue that nothing exists outside of the five khandhas, how would you respond?

If nothing exists outside of the five *khandhas*, then everything that exists must be inside the five *khandhas*. That is true because everything in the five *khandhas* is impermanent, and the hallmark of all existence is impermanence. But, by the same argument, the five *khandhas* are not reality, because reality is not impermanent. Reality is not known through sensation; and because you can't sense it, it's not the five *khandhas*. But you can know reality. You know it by being it.

How do you understand the teaching on not-self?

Many Buddhists like to say there is no self, but that's nonsense. There is a self, no doubt about it. But it's not a permanent entity; it's not stable at all. I like to compare the self to one of those whirlwinds in America that spins around with great force and velocity. It appears to be a solid formation moving across the landscape, but in fact it's never one thing for more than a moment. It consists entirely of wind, and that's all. There is no substance. The self is like that.

Substance or no, a whirlwind can also be very dangerous; and the self can be dangerous too. The self is actually a creation which must be continually recreated. It requires inputs of energy to keep it spinning, and that's hard work. That's also where a lot of the *dukkha* comes from. If you can get rid of that created self, you are free. But you cannot simply give it up. Basically, you don't know how to give it up. The only way to accomplish that is to get rid of *taṇhā*, craving and the attachments that it spawns. But you cannot just drop attachments that are deeply embedded. If you drop them in one place, you just pick them up in another. It merely shifts the focus, so it doesn't help you. What you need to do is get rid of the causes of attachment, which are *taṇhā* and the *kilesas*. When you do that, the *taṇhā* and the attachment will drop away automatically. It's like a child who is very much attached to toys. When the child matures, he loses interest and throws them away. By getting rid of *taṇhā*

and the *kilesas*, you've reached maturity; you've grown up, so to speak. You grow out of those attachments, and they drop away automatically. That is the work of wisdom. That's the way wisdom gets rid of the *kilesas*. First you must see clearly with wisdom. And the most important thing to see is the body.

Why is body contemplation such an important practice?

When you think of the way we live, the things we use and the activities we do, all of them are in some way related to the human body. Look at your surroundings. Cars are built to transport the human body. Airplanes are the same, and their capacity depends on the size of the human body. The houses we build—what are they for? They protect our bodies. The food we produce and eat promotes the body's health and well-being. Exercise is done to keep the body fit. The body and its needs are a part of everything we do. Because of that, we identify strongly with the body. Breaking that sense of embodiment is very difficult, but very important. In fact, the attainment of Anāgāmi can come only when a person drops attachment to the body. But you cannot force it to happen. It has to occur in its own time, as a result of persevering at body contemplation.

When I visualize body parts and organs in my meditation, afterwards I feel a physical tension and headaches. Can you recommend anything?

It looks like the *kilesas* are reacting against the body contemplation. You may have to change the way you look at the body. Sometimes it helps to look at the body more externally, relating it to other physical phenomena. Realize that the body is just part of nature. It is made up of elements that break down and disintegrate along with all other things in the world. Or, you can try focusing on one external part—like the knee, when you're walking. Look especially at the movement. Don't try to visualize it, just feel it. As you feel it, try to detect the relationship of the moving parts. You may find a visual image coming up automatically, but the feeling of movement is the main focus.

The Buddha suggested that if we do body contemplation, we should also practice mindfulness of breathing. That calms down the emotional side. So it is best to do the two together—not at the same time, but one after the other. Mindfulness of breathing, if that succeeds, can bring a calm state which allows you to view the body with equanimity. If your mind is not calm, seeing the body's true nature can be disturbing.

In practicing meditation, you have to learn which methods suit you. There's no benefit in doing practices that suit someone else. You must find the methods

that work for you. Some teachers claim: “This is the only correct method. You must practice this method.” For instance, the *sammā araham* practice taught at Wat Dhammakāya. They claim that everyone must do the *sammā araham* practice, because that’s what the Buddha taught. But that’s nonsense. The Buddha taught dozens of practices. So you must choose the practices that bring you the best results.

How should a beginner approach body contemplation?

First of all, take the body in the normal way we understand the body. Without going into any subtle ideas of the body, simply examine the condition of the human body. Ask yourself: “What sort of a thing is it?” When you investigate, you will see that your body and the material world are not fundamentally different. You ask: “Where did this body come from?” Fundamentally it came from the material world. It’s only atoms and molecules. Then you ask: “What does it depend on?” It must depend on the world for food, air, heat, light, and so on. And in the end, what happens to it? It goes back to the world. If you like, you can picture dead bodies. If you have seen dead bodies, you can picture one, and think: “My body is not fundamentally different from that.”

Don't speak of yourself as the owner. The world is the owner of this body, not you. You simply have this lump of matter for temporary use. It’s rather like a person with a computer. In the computer, there is the hardware—the body, and the software—the four *nāma khandhas*. The person using it is the *citta*. The hardware is made up entirely of material substances; it’s part of the world. The body is part of the world in the same way. The software cannot be pinned down so easily, but it’s a good analogy for the four *nāma khandhas*. Now, what happens when you die? Fundamentally what happens is, the person using the computer has turned it off. The body has to decay, however; the computer doesn't. Perhaps it’s better to look on death as a power failure where you lose all your data.

What is the value of the dhutanga practices?

Generally speaking, the *dhutangas* should be tailored to your own *kilesas*. You should use the *dhutangas* to overcome those *kilesas* that are most prevalent in you. That is the true meaning of the Middle Way. You bring your mind back into proper balance, back to the middle. When the *kilesas* are biased in one direction, counterbalance them with a meditation practice that brings your mind back to the middle. If you find it makes you even more stressful, you’re probably using the wrong types of *dhutangas*. A person with a hate character should not

practice the *dhutangas* that are likely to increase anger. He should have things neat, clean and tidy, so that the anger doesn't arise. But the greed character should live in a horrible place, a place that is dirty, messy and uncomfortable; a place where life is difficult and the food is lousy. That helps to get rid of greed. So it depends on the nature of one's character.

But keep in mind that most people misunderstand their own basic character traits. In fact, they usually think their character to be the opposite of what it really is—for the simple reason that their intrinsic character is such an integral part of who they are that they don't see it. But the opposite characteristic sticks out like a sore thumb. They see that very clearly. Greed characters will think that they have got lots of anger, because anger stands out whenever it comes up. It's not easy for them to see the greed, because it is there in the background all the time. It is too much a part of their nature to stand out clearly. You can get hints of your character by looking at your actions.

There are passages in the *Vissuddhi Magga*—the early parts of the *Vissuddhi Magga* dealing with the *dhutangas*—that tell you what to look for. When the hate character walks, he digs in his heels. The greed character walks neatly. The delusion character...his feet just flip here, and flop there, all over the place. The *Vissuddhi Magga* is quite instructive in that way.

When you were practicing did you have a sense of faith that would keep you going through doubt?

Yes early on I did. I wanted to find out. I wanted to go with the practice, and I did quite a lot. Now you want to be cautious about what you do at all times. One's got to be very careful and guard one's citta all the time. This can help to spur one on. I would say it's probably best to cut out all newspapers, periodicals and journals. The less one hears of the world the better usually-helps one's practice.

What is the role of spiritual companionship in Buddhist practice?

Companionship is very important; the Buddha always stressed that. The things that you meet in your environment—particularly people—are important. If you associate with people who are always talking Dhamma, then the mind inclines towards Dhamma. If the talk is about the world, then the mind inclines to the world. And your choice of companions is usually influenced by the practice. If the companionship is not right, it is usually because your thoughts are going out all the time. When you think about other people, there is a tendency to be

critical of their behavior, which makes developing companionship very difficult. When you turn inward and put the criticism on yourself, that eliminates the problem. And, of course, you should cultivate a friendly compassion towards all beings.

But firstly, you should not think badly of others. This is very important. Avoid bad thoughts—or, at least, put them aside. You must realize that bad thoughts are going to affect you more than anyone else. And the negative effect of bad thoughts will only make it more difficult to practice meditation. It is best to completely drop those thoughts from your mind and go back to the meditation. As you gain positive results in meditation, your critical view of other people drops away. You tend to get on with people quite easily, without being overly interested in what they're doing or what they're saying.

What is the best way to deal with emotional problems?

Emotional troubles are caused by *kilesas*. In order to deal with them properly, you must be able to control the mind. Emotional problems begin with thinking, usually excessive thinking. If people can't control their minds, then they will always be thinking about things that stir the emotions. When that happens, emotional troubles immediately start coming up. It is an aspect of the *āsavas*, the *citta* flowing out into thoughts. If it flows out strongly, it continues on into speech, and then into action. This causes endless trouble. If you can keep the mind on the meditation object—just on that—there is no problem. If you look at the hang-ups of people in the West, practically all of them come from thought, from thinking too much. If they stopped thinking so much, their problems would disappear. Those emotional hang-ups stimulate certain thought patterns, tending the mind to always think in that direction. Once you cut those thoughts, the problem disappears. So thinking is the problem. People experience nervous breakdowns because they think too much. They never give their minds a rest. The cure for that is to stop thinking. And meditation is the way to accomplish that.

In the case of conditions like anxiety, loneliness, or depression—these are modes of feeling. They are emotional states that give rise to modes of feeling. When those feelings arise, thoughts that correspond to those feelings arise, as well. Take depression: People experience feelings of depression, and instead of looking directly at those feelings, they start thinking in ways which correspond to the depressed feelings. Once they are thinking in ways which correspond to those feelings, their minds flow out, thinking: “This is a terrible place. What's the point of life? I don't want to live like this.” Negative thoughts always create

the trouble. If they were to examine their feelings, questioning and analyzing them, to see what the nature of those feelings is, they could overcome them. Then the thoughts and the depression would gradually die away. By turning the mind inward and focusing on the negative feelings, anybody can overcome them. But it requires effort. And what's often lacking is the effort to do it, and the willingness to do it. Very often, people who are in a state of depression cling to that depression. The *kilesas* want it, because it enhances their feeling of self. Without that feeling of self, people feel lost. The desire to feel the self is very important, because it drives so much of human behavior. To accentuate a feeling of self, people will do all kinds of silly things; even, in some pathological cases, mutilate themselves.

Isn't there a difficulty in bringing the Buddhist teachings from Thailand to the West?

There is no reason why the teachings shouldn't go to the West. After all, people are born in the same way as they are in the East, their minds work the same way, their fundamental problems are the same, their *dukkha* is the same—why shouldn't the Buddha's method work in the same way? I don't mean that one has to transport all the traditions; that's not necessary, but the teaching is necessary. That can work in the West perfectly well. Of course people in the West are used to their ways of thinking, and they would have to give up some of those... but they can do it.

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The Whirlwind of Self

You spoke about the attitude of wisdom and the importance of developing it. What exactly do you mean by that?

When it's true wisdom, you must see:

Suttamaya-paññā, which means learning the teaching from listening and reading.

Cintamaya-paññā, which means thinking about what you've heard and read and working it out for yourself.

Bhāvanāmayā-paññā, which is the real wisdom. That's more difficult to attain, because it's as though the mind flips over into a different state, where you see things exactly the same, but you receive them in quite a different way. It's as though you see them and you see their true nature at the same time. You see what they really are. This is something you must experience directly for yourself.

Generally, if you use a lot of wisdom in your practice, thinking about things and trying to work them out, you'll occasionally attain the state of *bhāvanāmayā-paññā*. It's as though you suddenly see what you are examining with insight and realization. And when you see it, you know it totally. It's absolutely clear. Within five minutes, it may be gone—obscure again. Then you want to get back to it, and you can't. That's usually what happens. But at the time you experience that insight, its truth is absolutely obvious. It wasn't something you had to think about—it was seen directly.

But that state is unusual, and difficult to attain. The *kilesas*, of course, are what prevent it from arising. *Kilesas* are always blocking it. They're giving the wrong story. So the more you rid yourself of the *kilesas*, the easier it becomes to gain experiences of genuine insight. But it's not at all easy to do. People who have the right past *kamma* can achieve it with reasonable ease. Those are the types who can attain quickly and easily. But they're quite rare—you don't find many of them in this day and age. Mostly results come slowly and with difficulty.

Attaining a state of wisdom is very important, because that's what destroys the *kilesas*. Because the *kilesas* are based on false understandings, wisdom gets rid of them by undercutting their basis. When that falseness is removed so you see the truth, the *kilesas* can no longer stand up. They just dissolve. But the *kilesas* don't like this, so they fight back.

When fighting kilesas, how does one give rise to the warrior spirit?

It depends very much on one's character. Some people have something of the warrior spirit, some people haven't. The warrior spirit is associated more with people who have an innate tendency toward anger and hatred. They can bring up a warrior mentality fairly easily. When the warrior spirit is turned inwards and directed at one's *kilesas*, that approach can be very useful. But that type of person has to be careful, because when one turns that mentality outwards, it can create a lot of bad *kamma*. In trying to develop the warrior spirit, some people merely become belligerent—which isn't the warrior spirit at all. If one can develop it, it's very powerful and very strong. But one must be a bit careful with it.

When you mentioned about fighting kilesas and the kilesas fight back—can you describe how to approach that?

The primary weapon is mindfulness. When you have mindfulness, you'll see the *kilesas* clearly. By seeing them clearly, you'll know how to apply the antidote. Those *kilesas* rooted in hate can be eliminated by using *mettā*, or by developing calm through *ānāpānasati*. Those rooted in greed are countered by using *asubha* meditation. The *asubha* method is very effective against greed. For *kilesas* rooted in delusion, you must rely on your teacher for guidance.

Do you need to study the kilesas to actually know what Dhamma is?

Yes, you do. The true meaning of Dhamma is very difficult to understand. The word "Dhamma" comes from the Vedic root, *dharati*, which means the upholder. So Dhamma is the upholder of everything. Dhamma is the great supporter. It's the truth. It's the way things work. When you practice Dhamma correctly, you develop in the right direction. If you go against it, you experience constant trouble within yourself. But you cannot really pin Dhamma down and accurately define it. You cannot reach it in that way.

The word Dhamma is used in various ways. Most usages do not refer to the true Dhamma, but the relative Dhamma. For example, we talk about the Buddha-Dhamma. The Buddha-Dhamma is really the teachings of the Buddha which lead one to realize the true Dhamma. Most people consider the Buddha's teaching to be either a philosophy, or a religion. But it's neither, it's simply a method. Because it's a method, you should not look for the absolute truth in it. It's not there. Absolute truth is something you can't talk about. You can't use

words to elucidate it. The Buddha-Dhamma was conceived as a skillful method that enables most human beings to develop themselves spiritually until they reach the point where they can realize for themselves the truth of Dhamma. People must train first before they can see the truth for themselves.

If you try to understand Dhamma and Nibbāna without attaining them first, you'll be left with mere concepts and ideas, which won't be the real thing at all. They will just be ideas and symbols in your own mind. To actually know for yourself, you must get to that state. The stages of *Sotāpanna* and the rest are stages where Nibbāna has been experienced, if only briefly. Withdrawing from those attainments, you can't remember anything of it, because nothing is there to remember. You can only remember things that are relative, and that state is not relative. So withdrawing from *Sotāpanna*, for example, you wouldn't actually remember what happened. All you would know is that there has been a change. When Nibbāna is experienced, the truth of Nibbāna is known, and later only the aftertaste of that truth remains. The aftertaste means that you have complete faith in it. With complete faith, you do not doubt the Dhamma at all. Because you've experienced it, you know that it is the true way. So doubt cannot possibly arise.

Experiencing Nibbāna means knowing the truth in a deeply profound way. That knowledge is not something superficial that you can contemplate and think about. You can't think about Nibbāna because everything you think about must be relative. Thinking means duality: you thinking about that. In the non-dual nature of Nibbāna there is neither subject nor object. So what is there to think? You cannot pin it down with anything.

The Buddha said that his teaching was not exciting, that it was not explosive. His teaching actually leads one to normality. The thing to keep in mind is that Nibbāna, whatever it is, must be there all the time. It is not a state of mind that can arise and die away. Because of that, the Nibbāna that you strive to attain must be there within you all the time. It cannot be otherwise. Nibbāna is not something which can arise in you, because anything that arises in you must cease. By their very nature, all things that arise must cease. For that reason, it is obvious that Nibbāna is there all the time. But it is covered up and defiled by a lot of filth—the filth of the *kilesas*. Our job is to peel away the filth, and reveal the truth that it conceals.

How do you tell the difference between a state bhavanga and the attainment of Nibbāna?

The difference between the two is made quite clear by observing the results. The person who goes through any of the Path moments must know a big change has taken place. And that big change does not die away. It remains. *Bhavanga* is just the burbling of the subliminal mind. And that's exactly where *avijjā* is located. That's its home. When it comes to getting free from the *kilesas* and attaining Nibbāna, the *bhavanga-citta* is the place where you must do the work. That is where you find the continuity of self, or the apparent continuity of self.

When the person attains Nibbāna and becomes *Arahant*, the *bhavanga-citta* is broken up. Thus the continuity of self is broken up. Because that continuity has been destroyed, that person is in the present all the time. Or rather, the *citta* is in the present; it's not really the person, because the person involves the body and mind, and those are just relative things. The *citta* has gone completely quiescent and still, as though absorbed into Nibbāna. No distinction can then be made between the *citta* and Nibbāna.

Is knowing still present?

Knowing is the characteristic of the *citta*, yes. There is always knowing. The knowing may not be reflective or conscious, but it's always there. The person with Alzheimer's disease, for example, has no idea what to do, where he is, what his situation is—it all goes, because memory is gone. But there is knowing. Knowing is always present. But that knowing is merely bare knowing—you can't do anything with it.

That is the reason why the body and mind are necessary. The body and mind are comparable to a computer: the body is the hardware, and the mind is the software. The person using it is like the *citta*. But the computer must be there for the person to use it, just as the body and mind for the *citta* to function in the world. That person can use the computer in whatever way he wants, either for doing good or for doing bad. And the computer just follows. The same applies to the *citta* within us. When the *citta*, under the influence of the *kilesas*, wants to go in a certain direction, it makes the body and mind do its bidding. And the body and mind simply follow. They carry out the dictates of the *citta*. Because of that, the body and mind are not really essential. The essential thing is the *citta*. But in order to free the *citta* of *kilesas*, we must have the body and mind as the mechanisms necessary to see the *kilesas* in action. The *kilesas* are in the *citta*, but they express themselves in the body and mind.

The *kilesas* are not in the body and mind, and this creates a dilemma. Because the *kilesas* are in the *citta*, when the body and mind die, the *kilesas* remain. They don't disappear—nor do the results of *kamma* created by the *kilesas*, and tendency for them to arise in the future. And they will arise. They arise as the *sankhāras* in the *Paṭicca-samuppāda*. Because the *kilesas* and their results are still there, there is the next birth. So they become active again in the next body and mind.

Suppose that the *citta* grasps at the body of a dog in the next birth. The dog has a body, a mind and the *citta*, the same as we have. But because its body and mind are different, it has only the faculties of a dog. So the *citta* is limited in what it can accomplish. The body and mind being like a computer—what the user can accomplish depends how good the computer is. If the computer is good and the software is good, then you can do a lot with it. But if they're poor, not much can be achieved.

Moral virtue and mental development are the factors that enable you to have better software and better hardware. Doing wholesome actions always promotes them, making them better and more powerful. Unwholesome actions always hinder progress.

I have a problem in my meditation where some force comes and puts pressure on my body. I cannot move—I'm paralyzed. Also there are some voices...should I stop my meditation practice?

The most likely cause of this is inside you—coming from your own *kilesas*, and your own *kamma*. That is the most likely cause. There may be other possible causes, but in ninety percent of the cases, the cause it comes from oneself. And cause is usually one's *kamma*. The factor that has the most influence over us is our *kamma* from the past. *Kamma* can come up in many ways, and it's quite extraordinary what it can produce. I don't know if you've read any of the accounts written by psychologists about people who get mental trouble—what they see and what happens to them. Ninety percent of such occurrences originate from oneself. There are cases where other entities do have an influence, but they are rare. And most such entities are not very powerful. Generally, it's safe to assume that those experiences stem from one's own *kamma*. In order to live with them and deal with them effectively, you must counter them somehow. Does this pressure occur to you during sleep or during meditation?

When I sleep.

That is quite often the case. You should find an effective means to deal with it. One suggestion is not to go to sleep until you feel your mind is cleared through meditation practice. And when you lie down, watch your thoughts very carefully before going to sleep, because if they go bad, that can very easily influence you. Also, be very careful about morality. Morality in Buddhism concerns only speech and action. In other words, it defines our relationship with the world. Morality doesn't concern thought, although thought is very important. Thought technically comes under the category of *samādhi*, not *sīla*. Learn how to get yourself under control. Another thing you might try is doing some chanting before going to sleep. Learn some of the chants and go through them. Because it sets the mind right, chanting can help.

It's helpful to keep in mind that the problems you experience now have their roots in something you did in the past. So, at all costs, you must avoid blaming other people. This is important. Some people do experience a lot of trouble when they do meditation. The way they have to go is hard, unpleasant, and sometimes slow. But it can be fast sometimes, too. If that is your way, then you must accept that—there is no other way forward for you. In the past you created the *kamma* that is bearing fruit today, which determines the path you have to take now to get free.

It seems the Thai Forest Tradition has changed since the old days. If it continues on in this direction, what do you foresee in the future?

The problem arises largely because the Forest Tradition has become popular, almost trendy. And many of the people who join the Forest Tradition today are not very well suited to it. In the old days, forest monks came mainly from rural communities. People who grew up in the villages had very strong faith; they were not always terribly clever, but they were quite hard-working and could put up with difficulties. If they had a good teacher when they went to live in the forest, they developed a firm foundation quickly. The disciples of Ajaan Mun are an excellent example. But nowadays monks in the Forest Tradition come mostly from the cities, where they've been educated in universities. And that can be a big disadvantage. A university education has some benefits, but for the way of Dhamma, it is not particularly helpful. The reason being that, when a person is highly educated, he feels that he knows a lot already, which makes him reluctant to put the teaching into practice. Because his knowledge is limited to what he has learnt from books, his understanding never goes very deep. He finds it easy to think about Dhamma and discuss it, but he lacks the experience to

understand properly. Because of that, the standard of meditation nowadays is not very high.

Some monks today are very good at meditation, but not many. And those who have an ability to do well at *samādhi*, tend to end up going in the wrong direction. They soon become the abbot of a wat, where they spend their time searching for money to develop the wat. They receive plenty of donations and they become caught up in material development. Instead of doing the practice, like they should, they make a name for themselves. And their meditation is finished then. One should remember the parable of the log. The Buddha saw a log floating down the Ganges, and he said, "If that log doesn't get stuck on the sandbank, if it doesn't go rotten and sink, if it's not taken by people, etc.; if the log can get through all that, it will eventually reach the ocean."

What is the best way to persevere and remain a monk without disrobing?

Direct your efforts toward meditation practice—meditation and mindfulness. The two go together, of course. But the mindfulness is very, very important. It is the key to the whole practice. When you are mindful, your mind is focused in the present, where you are; and it's focused on the objects that arise there. And because you are mindful, you take note of everything. When you take note, you are collecting the data for wisdom to work on. Without the mindfulness, wisdom does not have much hope of developing. The mindfulness is absolutely essential. Try to be mindful in everything. You'll find that is the best way to *persevere*.

Also, don't pay too much attention if other monks criticize you for focusing solely on meditation. To some extent, when living in a monastery, you must adapt your practice to the general duties and routines of that community. But within that framework, try to keep the meditation going as much as you can. Otherwise, your attention tends to get diverted into other things, like building, repairing, writing, translating, and so on. While all these activities are beneficial in their own ways, they will not lead you directly to the goal. Until your mindfulness is strong, these extra duties will only become distractions. When your mindfulness is solid enough, then you can attempt them if you like. But not many monks have enough mindfulness to do both successfully. Mindfulness is always the key. If you work at building or repairing and be truly mindful while doing it, you can use that activity as your meditation. But if you do it with ordinary, untrained mindfulness, it's just another job, and that's all.

What would you say is the way we who have received a modern education should practice that is perhaps different from the previous generation?

We know what the world is like, that's one important advantage we have. Because we have lived in the wider world and been in touch with the communication media, we know what the world is like. Many rural villagers in Thailand don't know much about the world. All they know is their local environment. That's alright for them, provided that the environment is reasonably good. But our experience of living with the dangers of the modern world can help to encourage us to have right effort. Also, we can put to good use the capacity for thinking that is a hallmark of a modern education. In other words, we must use your innate wisdom to understand the Buddha's teaching. If you have wisdom, you must use it. You use it by thinking, analyzing, looking, searching—this is the right way.

If you have the wisdom to develop using the ways of ordinary thinking, you can learn about the Dhamma by reflecting on what it means for you personally. When studying the Dhamma, it's no good just memorizing what the books say; you must turn that teaching into personal experience. In other words, when reading a passage of Dhamma, you should consider: How does this apply to me? Where have I seen this in my life? In that way, you search for the real meaning behind the words.

The books of the *Tipiṭaka* are in many ways rather obscure. They're written in a type of theological style. Because of that, unless you know *Pāli*, it's difficult to make the teaching really personal. You have to see through the words to get the essence. There are also many aspects of the teaching that you cannot understand properly until you have developed an understanding of Dhamma in your own practice. Only then can you realize the various subtleties of meaning implicit in the texts. That realization comes from the insights that gradually change your understanding. By using wisdom to think and investigate, you attempt to discover how the world works, and how you work as well. The insights that arise from that effort will change your overall understanding of Dhamma. When you started out, your mind was out in the world ninety percent of the time. People in the West have a very good knowledge of the world. They know all about the external world, but they don't know anything about what goes on inside their own minds. As you learn how to look at yourself, and get to know yourself, you will understand that your view of the world is all wrong.

Most people's understanding of the world is totally wrong. This wrong view is picked up from early childhood. A young child learns from its surroundings all

the time. The child is in no position to criticize, or to analyze and think: "Is this right, or is it wrong?" So it just accepts what others say. Because it accepts what others say, the young child is completely open to their concepts and opinions, which begin to shape its entire worldview. In the end, that worldview becomes deeply ingrained, and colors the way we see everything around us. No matter how old we grow, that basic worldview remains entrenched in our minds. So we must use wisdom to investigate those views to see if they are really true, or not. We can accomplish that gradually as we develop. But we must be very careful about hidden assumptions in our views.

Having views is not wrong; but the problem is, we hold onto them tightly. When you have a view of how things work, you must be prepared to check it out if you find the evidence shows it to be wrong. If you do that, you can develop. Rigid views are a big obstacle to spiritual development. Rigid views, fixed ideas, and the inability to change—these prevent development entirely.

In the Forest Tradition, we often use the word 'citta' in a way that other Buddhists might not find in consonance with the suttas. Could you explain what you mean when you use the word 'citta'?

The word 'citta' is difficult to explain, mainly because it does not represent a material object. Because the *citta* is not something that can be pointed to or defined in anyway, from the viewpoint of the world, it does not exist. The *citta* is, in its ultimate form, emptiness. But you must realize that emptiness means empty of the world. In other words, it is not like anything in the world. There is nothing in the world that you can compare it to. The *citta* in that state of emptiness can take on any characteristics. And, in fact, it does—it takes on the characteristics of the *kilesas*. And then it has an apparent movement. But its fundamental reality is not affected.

One can put it like this: Everything in the world is impermanent, everything is constantly changing. In fact, change is the essence of existence. Without change, there is no existence. Everything that is impermanent is unreal. It never has any time to be real; it's changing all the time. If you say it's a thing, then that "thing" is gone, immediately. So there is a lack of reality. But because everything is moving, we have an experience of the world. We can experience movement through the senses; but we can never actually get at the reality of things, because they are always separate from us.

Now if you come to the point of *Nibbāna*, the pure *citta*, that is real. It is real because it's permanent. There is no change in it. From that you can reason:

What is impermanent cannot be real; only what is permanent is real. What is real does not exist; what exists cannot be real. That's a difficult one to understand.

We talk about *anattā*, not-self. Most people misunderstand the basic teaching on *anattā*. We cannot claim that we don't have a self, because we've created it. It's there. We refer to it. That reference, in fact, creates it. The self-perspective exists. But certainly there is no entity of self, no permanent self. The self is the *kilesas*, and that's all. I visualize the self like a whirlwind, a tornado. It comes buzzing across the plains, whirling violently, creating havoc and damaging everything in its path. But when you examine it closely, you find it is only air, and nothing else. And when the air stops whirling, where is it? You can't find it. It's gone. In other words, there's no substance there. There's no entity there. Its existence is merely that whirling, that dynamic movement. The self is very much like that. It just whirls about constantly, driven by the *kilesas* in the *citta*. The *citta* empowers the *kilesas*; it's what gives them the power to whirl. The *kilesas* are rooted in the *citta*, so it tends to go in the direction of the *kilesas* all the time—and that creates the whirlwind effect.

When you say 'pure citta', is it the same as *Nibbāna*?

Yes. But the pure *citta* is always there; it's just covered up by a lot of filth. The nature of *Nibbāna* is emptiness. Normal worldly consciousness cannot become aware of emptiness. Because we're always aware of sense objects and mental phenomena that are apparently separate from us, we cannot know emptiness. In other words, there is a duality—the one that knows as opposed to the thing that's known. So we never really make direct contact with our perceptions. Because of that, we're always in a sort of half-state where we want things, but we can never truly get them.

For example, say somebody buys a motor car, and then says, "Now it's mine." In what way has the motor car changed? Nothing changes. All that changes is the idea in that person's mind. The car is just the same. To say "its mine" is just a figure of speech. That's all. Because of that, we really have no possessions—we just imagine we own them. We don't really have a body, either. The body doesn't belong to anyone; it belongs to the world. It comes from the world and goes back to the world. It's supported and nourished by the elements that make up the world, so it really belongs to the world.

Can reflections on non-self turn unskillful? If so, how?

Some people like to claim: “I have no self.” But who is it that has no self? They are using the word “I” to negate self. Who is the “I” that doesn’t have a “self”? Other people try to avoid saying “I” conversation, as if that’s going to make any difference. This is the way of being unskillful. Many Buddhists have a belief in non-self, but belief is just a view. There’s no depth to it; it’s just a superficial view. The depth is that they firmly believe they have a self, and they act as though the self is something real.

Many Buddhist publications use the term “no-self”. All the time you read that *anattā* means no-self. This means that they haven’t understood *anattā* properly. True, there is no permanent self, no fixed entity that you can call self. But that does not mean that there isn’t a whirlwind of changing phenomena, which you could call a self.

When you say the nature of Nibbāna is emptiness—empty of what?

Empty of this world, empty of *saṃsāra*, and empty of the whirlwind of changing phenomena. What we think of as being full is always *saṃsāra*. It’s always dualistic, always relative. Because of that, when those things that fill up *saṃsāric* existence disappear, we call it emptiness. But that emptiness is not a nothingness. It’s a reality. But because we have to think in relative, dualistic terms, emptiness quite incomprehensible to us. Our entire existence is built up around fullness. So when we try to comprehend emptiness in relative terms, we can’t do it. Because of that, we suppose there is nothing there. But what we call a “thing” is itself empty. We don’t realize that.

Consider how the senses work. In seeing, for example, the object seen contacts the eye, and that contact is then processed internally. From that we get an internal image. And it is that internal image that we see, not the external object that initiated the contact. That is quite simple to work out. Because of that, all of our seeing is bound up with internal images. Even though what contacts the eye is very small, and it’s upside down on the retina, yet what we see are huge mountains and trees and so on. We don’t realize it is initiated by objects contacting a very small spot on the retina. That contact is processed by the brain, causing the object to be “seen” internally. So we see objects internally, not externally. Because of that, the whole world of seeing is within us. It’s not outside. In fact, we don’t know what’s outside. All we know is what arises internally.

The same is true of hearing. Out there, there's only vibration. When those vibrations contact the ear, that contact excites the auditory nerves. Nervous pulses go to the brain, which in some mysterious way processes them so that sound arises inside. Really speaking, all sound is within us; it's not outside at all. The same principle applies to the other senses. The basis of smelling and tasting is just chemicals. They become smell and taste only after the resultant chemical reactions are processed within us. Feeling is the same. It's just contact caused by variations of temperature, and so on. But when that is processed within us, it turns into feeling.

Because of that, our view of the world is a very personal view. We can only view the world from within ourselves; we can't view it from anywhere else. Even if we try to put ourselves in the position of someone else, we merely imagine their position from our own perspective. So we see the world entirely from our own perspective, and all of it arises internally. If you look at the world in that way, the whole lot is quite empty. Because it is just images on our minds, there's not much substance in it.

The problem is, we have a fixed idea of our own reality. Being attached to this fixed idea of our own reality, we cannot see the relativity of the world. We do not understand how relative our existence is, and how changeable. The *kilesas* don't like that uncertainty, so they create a self-image, and make it appear very real and important. Then there's a clinging to this fixed idea of self. And there is the dislike of letting go lest that self be swept away in the whirlwind of changing phenomena.

Do you have any more reflections on how to bring up right effort?

You should strive to get some experience of *samādhi* in your meditation, even if only briefly. Then you can recollect that experience, and be motivated to attain that again in the future. This can help to bring up effort. Otherwise, it's difficult to bring up effort until you've had some good experiences in meditation. Until then, it's hard work. Developing determination is not easy to do when you are trying to practice meditation. It is easier to be determined to attain more worldly aims. When playing football, for instance, you can be absolutely determined to put the ball in the goal and win. But the *kilesas* are behind that kind of determination.

It's very easy to find the determination to do bad things; whereas, for good things it's much more difficult. A cat waiting to catch a mouse is so focused that it is almost in a *samādhi* state. But that's not right *samadhi*; it's wrong *samādhi*.

Thinking about unwholesome things is easy. It's the good things that are difficult to think about, because the *kilesas* don't like them. It shows that once the *kilesas* are out of the way, it's easy to think and act properly. In fact, when you think about bad things, the *kilesas* will help you. They don't interfere; they let you do it because it's going in their direction. But when it comes to thinking and acting in the way of Dhamma, then the *kilesas* don't like that at all. They kick up and cause trouble.

It's worth reflecting on the amount of effort that's required to overcome the *kilesas*. You mustn't think the *kilesas* are insignificant and don't matter. They matter a lot. All the troubles that human beings experience in the world come from *kilesas*. Guns don't shoot themselves; people don't torture themselves—these things happen because people's hearts are filled with *kilesas*.

The most important of the *kilesas* is, of course, sexual craving. It's very important, and it comes up in all sorts of guises. In the male, it comes up as aggression. In the female, it comes up as enticement. From there it spreads out into all human activities. You get aggression coming up in business, in war, in sport—all over the place you get these things coming up. Sexual craving, or *rāga-taṇhā*, is a very important factor in human behavior. In truth, *rāga-taṇhā* is probably the most important group of *kilesas* in the human being. If you can overcome *rāga-taṇhā*, then the majority of your problems are solved. That's the level of Anāgāmi.

Does rāga-taṇhā include all the sense-desires, or just sexual craving?

You can't fix any definite boundaries. When you investigate this matter, you will find so many common aspects of human nature that are related to *rāga-taṇhā*. The human mind thinks in a symbolic way; it constantly uses symbols. And sexual symbols are everywhere. People use them without even realizing it.

Is that why body investigation is so heavily emphasized in the Forest Tradition?

Yes. Body contemplation and *asubha* meditation. The *asubha* contemplations are the ones to deal effectively with sexual craving. When *rāga-taṇhā* comes up, the *asubha* contemplations are the best antidote. They're very effective.

From a Western standpoint, some Arahants seem to have addictions, whether it be betel nut or cigarettes. Can you explain this? It would seem that these addictions come from desire, yet an Arahant is free from desire.

First, you must understand what the Arahant actually is. The Arahant is the pure *citta*. It's not the body; it's not the mind—it's the pure *citta*. And the pure *citta* has no *kilesas*, and thus no desire. All desire is gone from the Arahant. Because of that, if an Arahant happens to find that chewing betel nut sharpens the mind, he may take it as a stimulant when he feels a need for one. But the stimulant affects only his body and mind; the pure *citta* remains completely unaffected. So it's not *tañhā*. But there is nothing to stop an Arahant from taking pleasure in something. He's done his work. He's gotten through. The pleasure has no effect on the *citta*, only on the body and mind. The *citta* remains pure. In other words, having already attained the goal, an Arahant does not need to do any more training. He doesn't need to cut out things that many people think are bad. He knows that taking them is not a moral issue; it is merely a matter of personal preference.

On the other hand, even after having attained the goal, most Arahants still maintain all the monastic rules, attend the *Pāṭimokkha* recitation, and walk on almsround every day. They don't do this for their own training; rather, they do it to set an example for other people. Going on almsround and attending the *Pāṭimokkha* are no longer necessary for the Arahant. His training in Dhamma is complete. But it is proper that he set the right example for his disciples. So, as teachers, *Arahants* are careful to set a good example, even though their work is done.

There's the case of one Arahant who didn't go to the *Pāṭimokkha*, and the Buddha asked him: "Why don't you go?"

The Arahant said: "Well, I've got no need to go."

The Buddha then said: "If you don't go, who will? You're known to be an Arahant. When you don't go to the *Pāṭimokkha*, the other monks will say, 'If he doesn't go, then we don't need to go either.'"

So the Buddha said: "You must go to set the proper example."

What is it that's addictive to the smoker?

For the person who still has *kilesas*, there probably is *tañhā* involved. About thirty-five years ago I was in a monastery in Lopburi, and I was smoking at the time. There was a hut up on a hill, and I went up there one night and thought: "Now why do I smoke? Well, it's probable because of *tañhā*. The Buddha said that *tañhā* brings *dukkha*...I'm going to stop." So I did. And I haven't smoked since.

I'm not saying that using logical arguments makes giving up smoking any easier. Of course, I had thought many times before that I should give up smoking, like many other people who smoke, but this time I stopped.

When you give up smoking, it's not so much that you simply stop smoking cigarettes. That's not enough. You've got to give up the *idea* of smoking. Because of that, anyone who gives up cigarettes should not even think about smoking. If that thought comes up in the mind, turn away from it quickly. In that way, you quit smoking both externally and internally. That's the way it must be done.

But in the case of the Arahant who continues smoking—after he reaches Arahantship he could theoretically say, “Now I should quit smoking because for unenlightened people smoking is an example of more craving.”

Yes, he might. But in the Forest Tradition and in the Northeast of Thailand generally, the idea that tobacco is harmful has never been very strong. As a matter of fact, northeasterners refer to tobacco as “medicine”. The cigarettes they smoke here are usually rolled by hand from locally grown tobacco. Nowadays I'm not so sure, but in the old days that was how it was done. Smoking was normal; people smoked because they liked to. There was no stigma attached to smoking. And people never took the attitude, which is very prevalent in the West, that anything that gives rise to pleasure must be bad for you, or even evil. This Calvinist attitude is very prevalent in the West—that all pleasures are in some way evil, so you mustn't enjoy them.

There is nothing evil about smoking. Even though it can affect the body adversely, it has no damaging effect on the mind. Another question that comes up often in the West is: Why do monks eat meat? The obvious answer is, of course, because we're hungry. People assume that it is fundamentally wrong for a Buddhist monk to eat meat. But the monastic code does not forbid the eating of meat. It strictly forbids killing; but taking life and eating meat are two very different matters. Killing an animal requires a very definite type of volition, a volition based on aversion. That volition is completely absent when one eats meat. The meat is not an animal. People may say: “But the animal was killed for you.” If that is the case, a monk must not eat it. The monastic rules state that monks must not eat any meat if they know or suspect that an animal was deliberately killed to feed them. If the meat was bought in the market, that's a different matter. The point is: you can't work backward from effect to cause in that way. It's not unwholesome *kamma* for a monk to receive an offering of meat obtained in the market. There may be cause and effect in it, but there is no

unwholesome *kamma*. In the end, eating meat does not prevent one from becoming an Arahant, and that's our purpose.

How do you view Mahāyāna Buddhist teachings in view of Sammā-ditṭhi and the Noble Eightfold Path?

The fundamental teachings espoused by the Madhyamika school and the Viññānavāda school can be found in Theravāda as well, although the emphasis of the teachings is not quite the same. But, on the whole, those teachings are not too bad. When it comes to the Bodhisatva ideal, I don't see it. After all, is it right to refrain from attaining Nibbāna, so that you can come back and teach people? What brings you back after all, if not the *kilesas*? Should you promote *kilesas* in order to come back again? It seems all wrong to me. That's what I think.

In your assessment, are there fully attained monks in other Buddhist traditions?

Oh, yes. There's no doubt that many of the good Zen masters were fully attained. No doubt.

The Arahant realizes Nibbāna so that he can teach others, is that not the same as the Bodhisatva?

No, because the Bodhisatva makes the vow that he will keep being reborn until all sentient beings are enlightened. Now, there's a get-out in that, because when you've attained enlightenment, the only "all beings" one can know are those in one's own mind. So if you have enlightened yourself, then you've enlightened all beings.

It's obvious to me that the *kilesas* are the problem, so we must do everything in our power to get rid of them. What's the point of making a resolve to come back again, until you have gotten rid of the *kilesas*? When you are free of the *kilesas*, you're in an excellent position to know what to do. You are free then you know what is possible. If any coming back is needed, you'll know about that, and arrange it accordingly. But the thing to keep in mind is that the *kilesas* must be dealt with first. That's what Buddhism is all about.

When the kilesas come up, what should we do with them? Let go?

It depends on the nature of the *kilesas* that come up. There are many different types of *kilesas*. They can come up in subtle ways, and easily catch you when

you're off-guard. But the most important tool for overcoming the *kilesas* is mindfulness. There is no doubt about that. Mindfulness is the best tool you've got. Mindfulness will automatically tend to shine a spotlight on the *kilesas*. With mindfulness present, you always know where they are. You remain watchful, and the *kilesas* can't easily get a grip on you then.

It's important to realize that to overcome the *kilesas* you must go directly to *taṇhā*, or craving, and eliminate that. Craving is the root cause of attachment. If you overcome craving, you'll overcome attachments. But you cannot deal with the attachments directly. Trying to overcome attachments by sheer determination or will power won't work. The only way to overcome attachments is to get rid of their cause, which is *taṇhā*. It's stated clearly in the *Paticca-samuppāda*. *Taṇhā* is the condition for the arising of attachment. When you get rid of *taṇhā*, attachment can't arise. Because feeling is the condition for *taṇhā*, if you want to get rid of *taṇhā*, you have to watch feeling.

This is an important point, because exactly at the juncture you can place a barrier between the feeling and *taṇhā*. Feeling is just feeling. It is a result of past *kamma*. Whereas the *taṇhā* is new *kamma*, so by allowing the two to link up you are creating more *kamma*. If one can turn away at that juncture and prevent that new *kamma* from occurring, the situation gradually gets better. But the *Paticca-samuppāda* does not give practical guidance on how to do that. It tells you what happens, but it does not indicate the way to deal with it. In order to deal with it, you must learn to find the feeling. Examine feeling and see how feeling gives rise to *taṇhā*.

For example, you hear a sound you don't like. Then based on that sensation an unpleasant feeling arises. That unpleasant feeling is a feeling of hate. But the feeling of hate isn't the emotion of hate. There's no hatred in the feeling. It becomes hatred when you start thinking, criticizing, blaming, and so on. That's when the trouble comes, in the thinking.

The feeling of hate is an unpleasant feeling. It usually occurs down near the solar plexus area. You've got to learn to turn inwards and look at that feeling. That's very important. If you can turn inwards and look at it, you don't let it escape and turn into bad thoughts. So you defeat the *kilesas* at that point, because no more *kilesas* are then created by *kamma*. Mind you, you only defeat it a little bit at a time. To get rid of hatred completely, you'll probably have to do it many times, until it gradually, gradually goes.

You've got to learn to look carefully inside. Learn where those feelings are, and what types of feeling arise. When unpleasant feelings arise, examine them at the point where they occur. Don't let those feelings turn into thoughts about blaming others. Think only about the feeling, not other people. In other words, if you keep it internally, no harm is done. Trouble comes only when you let it escape out into thought, speech, action. And that's where the *kamma* is generated.

The human being is divided into the emotions and the intellect. Though often neglected in the West, the emotional side is very important. In the West the intellect has been pushed to the forefront. And although the intellect is important, it becomes a menace when it gets out of balance with the emotions. Both should be in balance. If the imbalance favors the emotions—if they are strong, and the intellect is weaker—it's not actually dangerous. But it can lead to some pretty bizarre actions. But when the intellect is excessive, and the emotions are not developed enough, that's dangerous. It can easily lead people into insanity and suicide.

Because of that, you must get to know your emotions. The way of *samādhi* is the right way to develop the emotions. *Samādhi* practice is the method to stabilize the emotions. The intellect is the way of wisdom; but *samādhi* first, intellect second.

By samādhi practice do you mean sitting and walking meditation?

Yes. It's all about training the mind, restraining the mind, and developing mindfulness to prevent wild, wayward thoughts.

So with the balance between samatha and vipassanā meditation, would you recommend striving for deep samādhi—upacāra and āpannā—before putting much work into vipassanā?

I would say yes. It's best to develop *samādhi* for quite some time, until one has a reasonably good foundation in it. Then you can gradually turn your attention to wisdom practice. It's best to keep your practice on the *samatha* side to begin with. Later you can turn to investigate the body.

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Advice to New Monks

What kind of advice do you have for new bhikkhus?

Within the first year of being ordained, a *bhikkhu* should go to live with a good teacher, and work as hard as he can to achieve *samādhī*. Until one has a taste of *samādhī*, one doesn't know the value of the Dhamma and the teaching. Until a *bhikkhu* experiences *samādhī*, he fails to see the value of the Buddha's teaching. He may read about it in books, but paper and printer's ink are not very tasty food: after a while the mind gets rather tired of it. After that the new monk may think: "Why am I doing this? I'm just making difficulties for myself and don't seem to be getting anywhere..." And eventually he gives up the robe. But if a monk gains some *samādhī*, he knows instinctively that that experience is right and good, because it is an experience of more happiness than he has ever known before. If a newly-ordained *bhikkhu* can get to that state and maintain it, things are okay.

The best advice for a newly-ordained monk like you is to get out of Bangkok as soon as you can and go to a forest monastery where there is a good teacher so you can get down to the meditation practice. Then work at meditation as hard as you can and keep that effort up as long as possible. Don't become distracted by external matters. There is a great temptation to stop when you have gained some experience and to begin talking to other people about it. And soon it all just fritters away.

So learn the method, do the practice and to not talk to other people about it. It is well-known experience that if a person gains some valuable insight or understanding and then shares that with other people, it's as though the strength of it dissipates. This is found with bad things very easily. If a person has done something bad in their past which he feels sham or guilt about, speaking to other people can dissipate that feeling. The same thing happens in the opposite direction with good things. If one talks about valuable personal experiences with other people, those experience appear much more ordinary and lose their taste, to the point where one no longer feel they are so valid. So it is very important to keep those experiences to oneself until one has a lot of experience, until one is strong inside.

So it is important to do your *samādhī* practice and don't talk about it. If you gain something or find some method of your own that works very well for you, don't go telling other people. Not until you have had enough experience, are well used

to that method and know it works well: then maybe, but not until then. This is very important.

The essential thing for a new *bhikkhu* is to get some *samādhī* experience, because if he does not have that there's nothing really to hold him. Otherwise, it's just theory, ideas and so on: and in the end they are not enough to sustain one. It must be *samādhī*. It is no good thinking about things. You must keep on one thing, like the repetition of *buddho* or the breath. Just keep focused on the breath at the nose tip and stopping thinking, stop the thoughts entirely. When you are able to stop the thoughts, only then are you in a position to use them properly. Until you can stop thoughts, you do not have control of them so they go everywhere, and consequently remain weak. By learning to stop the thoughts, you can learn to put them where you want and to make good use of them, so they become strong.

So to begin with: stop the thoughts and learn to gain calm. Because people in the West come from an environment that's a hell of a mess, they need calm. Because, being influenced by such an environment, they're in a hell of a mess too. And it takes them a long time to settle down and sort themselves out. They must realize that they haven't got very long before the *kilesas* start coming up and saying: "Hey what are you doing here? This isn't doing you any good!" So they must go to a place where they don't have all the distractions, where they can get down to doing the practice properly and work hard at it.

Another thing I would advise anyone who practices *samādhī*: stop reading, particularly newspapers and magazines. You should realize that whatever you read or hear goes into the mind and becomes food for thought. So your thinking is influenced by that. If it is food concerning bad things, the mind thinks about bad things; if it's food about good things, it thinks about good things. But if one is trying to stop thoughts, neither kind of food is useful. So the best thing is: stop thinking. Stop all contact with news and so on, and talk with other people as little as possible. Keep to yourself and remain focused inside. It's the best thing you can do.

Be careful not to talk too much. You should watch yourself talking and then reflect on your talking: "Did that conversation do me any good? What did I get from it? What value was there in it? Did the other person get any benefit from it?" You should always try to contemplate in this way. Because we do not have enough mindfulness, we all make mistakes, we all forget quite often. So you should reflect on your speaking habits often until it starts to have an positive effect. When that happens, as soon as you think you want to start a

conversation, you reflect: “Why? What’s the point?” Then the teaching is beginning to have an effect.

Also I would say, for a new *bhikkhu*: don’t neglect simple things. New *bhikkhus* know about the necessity of contemplating food when they are eating, and they know they must try to be mindful when eating and walking, but they think: “These are just the simple things.” But they are not, these things are very important. Although contemplating food may initially seem to bring no results, when it is practiced steadily over time, it brings excellent results.

One of the most difficult things for a new *bhikkhu* to control is sexual desire. Probably the most effective way of controlling this is contemplation of the body. If you find sexual desire is arising, contemplate the body. Traditionally, this means the thirty-two parts of the body. Try to see the *asubha* side of it: see the body as a mess, see it as though it’s all broken up, think of it as a corpse and so on. You may find that you don’t feel within yourself any special result, but you will find that the sexual desire has diminished. A very good test for this is to watch your dreams. When one has a lot of sexual desire there is a tendency to have dreams of a sexual nature concerning women. When you practice body contemplation, the women in dreams don’t come near you; you may see them, but they don’t come near you. The effect is almost as if some force is somehow pushing them away, but one doesn’t quite know how.

For a monk, I think this contemplation can work particularly well with women, especially if they get quite close and become rather a nuisance. Just contemplate the body, think of them as a messy lot of bones, flesh, blood, shit and so on. You will find that they are repulsed. This is a protection that a *bhikkhu* should have because some women are rather unstable and unpredictable, and he needs some protection. That is definitely an important thing.

Or when a former girlfriend keeps coming into your head: okay, cut her head off. See the blood coming out. Pull the meat off and look at the bones. Of course you will find repulsion from doing this, thinking: “I mustn’t do that with her!” But why not? It’s not harming her. It’s just something in your mind. The only thing being damaged is the image you have of her in your mind, that’s all. It won’t harm her at all. So that’s probably the best way to deal with something like that. But you must make the determination to do it. If you just let it come up and don’t make a determination, it won’t have any effect. The thoughts will just go on.

Eating too much food easily causes trouble with meditation practice, and can encourage sexual desire. A lot of monks at Wat Pa Baan Taad go on fasts. If you do try fasting and you find it effective, then use it — but use it with caution. Don't go to excessive lengths with fasting. Generally, when Ajaan Mahā Boowa went on fast, he fasted for about a week without eating, never more than that. Sometimes he went a week without eating, and then ate one day, and then went for another week, and ate one day, and then for another week and ate one day. But he never went more than one week without eating. It seems to me that his was a very reasonable approach. Otherwise, monks can become almost addicted to fasting, and that's not good. Another thing you can get with monks who fast: they start competing. Somebody else is doing a fast, and they think: "I'm going to go further than that." In fact, that is contrary to the way of the Vinaya. It's wrong according to the Vinaya, because it's doing it for the wrong reason. Fasting should be for the reason of developing your meditation practice.

What benefits should one expect to see from fasting?

It clears the mind by preventing the digestion of food being a kind of 'load' on the mind. Because there is less of a tendency to feel sleepy, one tends to be more mindful. When fasting, the mind is generally much brighter, so one feels lighter and more inclined to doing the practice. Those are the general benefits of fasting when it goes properly. And one should use the extra time that one gains from fasting to intensify one's efforts in meditation.

Some teachers say that samādhi meditation is unnecessary.

Yes, in Thailand many teachers now say: "The way of *samādhi* and all the things connected with it are unnecessary. What you must have is *vipassanā*." All I can say is: don't listen to them. Ajaan Mahā Boowa was once asked whether that was genuine *vipassanā*, or not. He replied: "Some people who are thieves claim they are good, honest people. But even though they say they are good, honest people, they still remain thieves." In fact, they use the word *vipassanā*, but what they are really practicing is *samādhi*. However much they claim it is *vipassanā*, it still remains *samādhi*. They are doing things like breathing practices, or the belly movement practice, which are not *vipassanā* practices, but *samādhi* practices for attaining calm and concentration.

The vipassanā practice that is very popular in Bangkok is the Burmese method. They claim to attain Sotāpanna in two weeks.

If that were the case, why don't we see the results of it? I can't see that the people who practice in that way are any better than other people. Whereas the Ajaans that I've met, who are known to be genuine Arahants, they are different — and they show it. There's no ostentation about it, they just show it in their character and their bearing; the general feel you have about them, and the way they talk. You can see the difference. But the people who practice that kind of *vipassanā* don't show the same results. There's nothing you can see of it. They may like to call themselves Sotāpanna, but personally I don't believe it. I don't think they know what Sotāpanna means.

I find it very difficult to keep samādhi. I can reach it in meditation and everything is fine for a while, and then it just dissipates.

The reason for this is probably a lack of *saddhā*, or faith. You cannot link that *samādhi* to anything. It is difficult for Westerners, who were not brought up in Buddhism, because they lack the *saddhā* inherent in a Buddhist background. For the Thais it is a bit easier in that way, because when they attain *samādhi* they can link that back to the Buddha and his experiences. They have a whole background in Buddhism. But still, you can't do anything about that. You must accept the situation as it is and use your determination. When you find it difficult to maintain *samādhi*, continually refresh your commitment to get back there. You know that *samādhi* is good and worthwhile, so continually make a new resolve to get back there.

It seems that saddhā is one problem Westerners seem to have. Are there other problems that Westerners in particular have?

Yes, *diṭṭhi-māna*, opinionatedness. This tendency is very bad, and very strong. Mainly because in the West we are all taught that everybody should have opinions. Because of that, people feel they must be experts on everything. You can't mention a subject without somebody saying: "I know everything about that." Whereas, in fact, they know very little, so all they are giving is their opinions. *Diṭṭhi-māna* is a very prevalent conceit, and one you should be very careful about.

There is a very distinct difference between opinionatedness and knowledge originating from wisdom. Opinionatedness tends to jump to conclusions without having any facts, or without knowing any background. Whereas wisdom

searches the whole field, looks the whole way round and searches the background to see the workings of cause and effect. Because of that thoroughness, there is knowing, not mere views and conceited opinions born of the *kilesas*.

It is very important to try to know the *kilesas*. *Kilesas* are the enemy, and you should know the enemy. By knowing the enemy, you become aware of when he is likely to attack, so you can understand what defenses are needed. First you must realize that the *kilesas* are always there. It's not as though they are sometimes there and sometimes not — they are always there, so there is no time when they're not. In fact, the *citta* is completely ruled by the *kilesas* and under their sway the whole time.

The *kilesas* give rise to something we call 'self'. And this self is really the essence of the *kilesas*. We relate everything to self, and that very act of relating is carried out by the *kilesas*. Our outlooks and our whole worldview are created in relation to self, so they are all bound up with the *kilesas* as well. Everything is colored and distorted by *kilesas*. Because of that, we are completely subsumed by these things. But because they are so much a part of who we are, we can't see them and so don't know about them.

You should realize that the *kilesas* are always present. You mustn't think that they are minor things that don't matter very much. Think of the evil that some people do — the Nazis in Germany or the Japanese in China, for example — all that evil comes from the *kilesas*. The *kilesas* can drag us into doing things that bring us immeasurable suffering. They lead directly to rebirth — sometimes good, but sometimes quite bad too. So they are no small matter. And they're very sticky, so they don't go easily. They are always on the defensive against any attempt to counter them. They use the power and skill of the human *citta*: that is why they are so clever, because they are using the *citta*. Not that the *kilesas* in themselves are especially clever; they are a distortion of the *citta* and use the *citta* to think up their own ends.

The *kilesas* are the enemy, and they are not an easy enemy to deal with. One has to learn to recognize them first of all. In order to do that, you must observe your mind to see them in action. Generally you cannot see them clearly when they are acting because you are too caught by them. So you should reflect to see how they made you do this or that, how they always arise to take control of a situation.

At first you won't be able to see the difference between what you feel to be your 'self' and the *kilesas*. But in time you do begin to realize that there is a difference: that the *kilesas* are one thing and the *citta* is another. You realize that the *kilesas* usurp the *citta*, and in doing so produce what might be called your self-image. And this 'self' is an impostor; it is not the genuine thing at all. The one that is genuine is very hard to realize, because that one is 'not-self'. That one is true and without blemish. And this one is not at fault. It might be called the 'true *citta*' or just 'Dhamma'. And that is the one we are searching to become. But doing that requires that we learn how to give up that which we call the 'self' — and that's hard work.

You must to train yourself until you reach the position where you can do that. Until you reach that position, there's no hope of giving up self. You cannot just say: "I'll give it up now.", because the *kilesas* are the ones saying that. All the *kilesas* do is give up one thing and take up another. Usually when people try to do that before it is time, they give up 'self' and they take up the idea that "I am an Arahant", or something like that. What they've actually done is made another self and given it the name 'Arahant'. So they are worse off because they think they have nothing more to do. They have an opinion that leads them in the wrong way all the time. If they can't shake that false view, they are finished.

So the *kilesas* are a formidable enemy; in fact they are the only enemy. Invariably, if your meditation practice doesn't seem to be going right, it's the *kilesas* that are responsible. Often, they are dragging you down so much that you can't think straight, or make any firm resolve. And the thing they get hold of mostly is feeling — just plain physical feeling, often located around the area of the solar plexus. That's all, just that feeling. If you can make the resolve: "To hell with these feelings, I'm going to do the practice regardless of feelings", then can beat them. But you've got to keep on defeating them time after time — not just once.

But, although the *kilesas* are powerful, we still have the power of choice. And in any situation that arises, we always have the choice of whether to go in the right direction or the wrong direction. The right direction still has *kilesas* in it, but it is leading to a reduction of the *kilesas*, to thinning them out. In other words, it leads in the right direction to get free from the *kilesas*. But if we choose the wrong direction, the *kilesas* will increase and become thicker. The *kilesas* will always try to bias our choices to point us in the wrong direction. But we always have the choice to deliberately go against them; that is, to go in the right direction. We won't get rid of the *kilesas* by making that choice, but we will be headed in the right direction to get rid of them. Moral behavior is essentially

that: going against the pull of the *kilesas*. Whenever a question of morality arises, to go in the right direction is to go against that pull. It's difficult because the *kilesas* put up a stubborn resistance.

The enticement of the *kilesas* is so often merely a desire to feel relaxed and at ease, which we want so much. Whereas going against the *kilesas* produces tension, irritability, annoyance, feelings of constriction and so on. But all of those unpleasant feelings are an attempt by the *kilesas* to pull us back, because countering them means going in the direction to get rid of them.

In a more technical sense, these unpleasant feelings are merely the results of bad *kamma* created in the past arising in the presence. Because of the natural pull of the *kilesas*, the arising of those bad feelings tends to induce us to follow our habitual downhill path — the wrong direction — in a misguided attempt to get rid of those unpleasant feelings. But when we go in that direction we reinforce the *kamma* that will produce those feelings in the future — so the wheel of *samsāra* rolls on.

So we always have the choice of going in the right direction, or in the wrong direction. When we deliberately and continually choose the right direction, we not only start thinning out the *kilesas*, but we gain the power and strength of will to go against them with greater ease. Whereas, if we follow them all the time, we just end up like jellyfish: weak and completely under their sway.

How do we know if our efforts are having an effect on reducing the kilesas?

You find that your estimation of your own self-esteem becomes greater. I don't mean this in a negative way of feeling self-important, but rather as a feeling of your own worth, experienced internally and unrelated to what anyone else may think. Inside you feel that without a doubt you have something that is truly valuable. You don't feel like an old foot-rag. As the *kilesas* are reduced, that thing of value starts growing. And you will also find that there is firmness inside, a firmness that is capable of fighting the *kilesas* and going against them. All these factors do show externally, but the external appearance is not what matters — that's just a by-product. It's the internal changes that really matter. It is possible that you may not realize what specific things you have done to bring that change about, but at the same time you are quite certain that you have developed in a positive way. You may not be able to put your finger on it, and say exactly what has brought it about, but a real improvement has taken place. You know that you have changed, that you have a decidedly different mental perspective.

Some meditators try to use sheer will power to get results quickly.

That rarely ever works. The more one tries to push it in that way, the more the obstacles come up to oppose it. Because that will power to get quick results is bound up with the *kilesas*. It is “I am going to get quick results”, with the emphasis on ‘I’. In other words, “I am going to force those results, regardless”.

If one is practicing under the supervision of a really good teacher, one might be able to use that faculty, that power. But without that expert supervision, what generally happens is this: A person, who has a number of ways to go, will only see one or two of these ways and not see the others. And the way he should go is the way he doesn't see, because, due to his character, that is the way where his *kilesas* are strongest. So he will stick only with his strengths and not develop the areas in which he is weak. But the areas in which he is weak are the areas in which the *kilesas* are strongest, so in order to overcome them those are the areas in which he has to make the greatest effort. So he will always continue lopsidedly developing his strengths at the expense of his weaknesses. It's much easier that way. But he cannot see the factors that really need development, so he doesn't go that way. He goes the other way, the wrong way.

Typically, people who are greed characters always think they are hate characters, while people who have a problem with hatred always think their real problem is greed. The reason for this is: when greed arises in a person who is a greed character, it is so much a part of his nature that he does not see it. Whereas, when hatred arises, it sticks out like a sore thumb, so he thinks his character is rooted in hatred. He thinks he must do practices to counteract hatred, but that's not his real problem. It's greed that he must counteract.

That's one of the reasons why it is very difficult for people to develop Dhamma on their own without a teacher. A good teacher will, in one way or another, indicate the general direction that a person should take. Ajaan Mahā Boowa is very skilled at that. He rarely tells somebody: “You should do this practice or that practice”. Although he usually suggests a range of practices, in one way or another he will do things or indicate things or say a little bit here or a little bit there to gradually steer a meditator on the course that is proper for that individual. He is very good at that. But, as long as it's within the realm of Dhamma, he will not force the person at all.

Do you think it wise for a new bhikkhu to stay with the first teacher for five years?

I would say that it is not good to take the attitude that some monks do, that they will stay with a teacher for five years regardless, but without concern for doing the practice properly. You should think of living with a teacher for five years as being the period when you learn the practice well enough so that, if you want, you can leave him and find a calm quiet place to practice on your own.

One of the troubles now, of course, is the way of the world has invaded the forest monasteries. The young men who become *bhikkhus* nowadays usually have a very good education, often a university degree, and they are completely infected with Western traditions and views, so they don't have a proper feeling for religion. This is a difficult thing to describe really. It means that with the right spiritual outlook, one sees the religion as being the important thing, not just another aspect of the mundane world. In other words, a *bhikkhu* thinking in terms of the way of the world thinks in terms of expediency: how one should behave properly in a worldly context. The knowledge that he seeks concerns the way people think and act in the world.

Whereas the way of religion is quite different. It is the way of that which is true, genuine, and leading to freedom. It does not like the sham of the world. The spiritual attitude is quite different from the worldly attitude. Seeing people in the world, one feels sorry for them. One feels that one would like to help them; but at the same time one feels a certain disgust for them and the way they act. Even good people lack the right spiritual attitude. One sees the things they are interested in, the things that they do and the way they act, and one knows it isn't right.

Can one get a good foundation in Buddhism from reading books?

Books are quite valuable, but they must be used in the right way. And the right way is to use them to enhance your practice, especially the wisdom practice. For instance, when you are doing a lot of wisdom practice, a lot of investigating, you can find some line of text that will set you thinking in a positive way. Books can point out good objects of Dhamma to keep in mind. Books can be quite useful as a mine or storehouse of potential for your wisdom practice.

But for *samādhi*, it is different. Ajaan Mahā Boowa says that before he went to Ajaan Mun he had been a *bhikkhu* for seven years, and learnt Pāli up to *mahā* grade. His teacher wanted him to go further with his studies, but he himself wanted to go off to the forest and develop his meditation practice. So he left and began searching for Ajaan Mun. When he finally met Ajaan Mun, he told him about his previous Pāli studies. Ajaan Mun told him that for the time being he

must forget all that he learnt and focus only on meditation. He must put aside all the knowledge that he gained from his studies because it would only be a hindrance to his progress. Only later, when he had developed enough spiritually, would that knowledge become really useful to him. In the beginning stages of meditation it wouldn't help at all.

The books really deal with an analysis of the way. But until you have developed a suitable basis of calm, analyzing in that way will not lead to proper wisdom. You must understand the nature of wisdom. Wisdom is not merely thinking about things. Thinking and reflecting can lead to wisdom only when you have a basis of calm. Without the calm, all you have is discursive thought, which just produces restlessness. So you must develop a basis of calm to start with. A few people can develop wisdom directly from the words, but they are very rare. It is something of the way of Zen: they start with the way of wisdom and let *samādhi* develop from that. But the majority of people cannot do that successfully, so they must go the way of calm. Then they find with time that thinking can lead to wisdom. But this thinking is quite unlike their normal restless thinking. It does not merely slip around on the surface. It can go deep into one thing with ease and slowly work over it. Probing deep into the object, it sees the whole thing with absolute clarity. And the feeling is quite different: it is a feeling from the heart, which is very satisfying, very cooling, and very firm.

It is worth realizing the nature of calm. Mindful calm should not be muddled up with unmindful calm. When people listen to a *desanā*, given by a skilled Ajaan, a state of calm can develop just by listening. To the person listening it feels a bit like going to sleep. There is a feeling of drowsiness, strange thoughts may come up spontaneously, which can seem like a distraction. When that happens confusion sets in. That person is actually experiencing a bit of calm, but he doesn't realize it. So he tries to pull himself out of it and breaks it all up. In fact, that state of calm is valuable, so one should just let it be. One should not try to remember what the Ajaan is saying, but just let the sound of Dhamma go in. When it goes in, the understanding will stick there on its own. After the *desanā* one can hardly remember a word of it, but it doesn't matter because it is all still there. And at the right time it will come up again. So that state of calm is important. The fellow who is nodding off isn't simply falling asleep. The mind starts drifting a little bit, and images often come up, as though one is about to nod off. The skill of practice is to get to that state and prevent it from actually going into sleep. One has to keep it on the edge with mindfulness. Recognizing it, one must avoid getting restless and pulling out, but also avoid going in so deep that it falls into sleep.

People don't understand the nature of these experiences. They hear of *samādhi* and wisdom and so forth, but they don't realize that there are experiences in ordinary life that are close to them. People don't recognize them because they don't know what they are looking for.

Do you ever have experiences when you feel drowsy and all sorts of things come up, *nimittas* like sounds and sights and so on? Not external, but internal: calm and unaffected. It can be quite beneficial to get into that state and hold it. If a lot of *nimittas* come up, don't take any notice of them, don't become interested, just keep on gently holding the practice at that level. Too much interest in *nimittas* can lead to negative results, particularly if they are frightening images. When your mind becomes absorbed in frightening images, that's bad because it is unpleasant, and fear can come up. You must realize that all *nimittas*, whether audio or visual, are just that: mere sounds and images. In and of themselves, none of them are harmful. The harm comes from fear. That's the danger; fear is the danger, not anything else.

It's common in the West for people to think that anyone seeing or hearing things like that is mad. What people don't realize is: that's not madness. After all, if one sees things like that, one sees them, that's all. What is madness is if you then believe you are Jesus Christ or Napoleon or something of that sort. That is madness. It's one's beliefs and one's thoughts that make one mad, not the images that come up.

The general rule is: when *nimittas* come up, sights or sounds, don't pay any attention to them. When they come, ignore them and just let them go. Don't become interested and don't think about them, but just keep on with the practice. That's the right way. Occasionally, you can learn something from them, particularly if they are *nimittas* of the body. But mostly they are just junk from the past. Sometimes you might see something psychic: something at a distance or something that might happen tomorrow. But they are usually just chance occurrences. To become interested in those experiences as a manifestation of psychic ability and to try to gain control of it is all wrong. We have enough problems to deal with in our practice already without cluttering our minds with more. Especially as we can't even deal properly with the ones we have.

The field of psychic phenomena is a field for delusion, there's no doubt about it. It can definitely drive people mad — because of their views and opinions about it. If you naturally have psychic powers, all well and good, but it is wrong to go searching for them. We are searching for the freedom we can gain from

overcoming *dukkha* by practicing the way that leads to *sukha*. This means focusing internally to find the causes of *dukkha*. But psychic phenomena are nearly all external phenomena out there in the world. Whereas the right way of Dhamma is not focused out in the world — it is always focused inwards.

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The Knowing Inside

What methods have you used for mind training, and have they changed over time?

I was first ordained at Wat Pak Nam, near Bangkok. There I used the method which is called *Sammārahaṃ*. While repeating the parikamma *Sammārahaṃ* one goes from the nostril to the corner of the eye, then to the center of the head and down to the throat, then down below the navel and up to the solar plexus, all the time keeping one's attention on *Sammārahaṃ* internally. The idea is that after a time one should see light *nimittas*. After seeing the initial light *nimitta*, then one has to try to see them all. Then one sees the feeling body and the *deva* body, and so on. I wasn't very good at doing that because my mind doesn't work in that way. I couldn't see the reason behind it, so I couldn't understand what was meant to be happening. I didn't know whether I should create these bodies by imagination, or whether they were natural things that arise of themselves. Because of that, I wasn't very confident in that method; so I changed to *ānāpānasati*. *Ānāpānasati* was fine, and I got reasonably good results with it.

That was forty-one years ago. After that, I went to England, where I lived for six years before coming back to Thailand. I spent one year at Wat Cholaprathan, then I came to. I've been here ever since.

While living at Wat Pa Baan Taad with Ajaan Mahā Boowa, I found my understanding of Dhamma changed. I didn't realize what was taking place at the time; only later did I understand it. During those early years, certain people kept writing from England asking me questions, which I had answered. They kept the letters, and many years later sent them back to me. What I found was, the letters I had written prior to coming to Wat Pa Baan Taad were much more eclectic and undeveloped. After coming here, they became much more in line with Dhamma, and much more developed. It's interesting, because I hadn't noticed that happening; but it was clear from the letters.

When I came to Wat Pa Baan Taad I continued with *ānāpānasati* as a *samādhi* practice. I can't say that I was very good at it, because my mind works more in terms of thinking, which goes in the direction of wisdom. I did become quite calm, however, though I never went very deep in *samādhi*. Later on, I changed to using wisdom to investigate various aspects of Dhamma, and that brought quite good results. I used to vary my methods of investigation. I started on the body, doing body contemplation, which is a very valuable practice. I reckon most people should do it. I like asking questions, so I asked the question: How

do I know the world? I saw that it all came in through the senses. So I started investigating the senses, and how the senses work. What happens when we sense something, when we see something or hear something? The conclusion I came to is: We don't know the world at all. What we know is the world we have inside our minds. In other words, all sensations come in thru the senses to the *citta*, and the *citta* knows only those sensations. It's in that knowing that we create the world.

We build up the world from the internal sensations we experience, and those impressions of the world are stored in memory. We've accumulated an enormous amount of memory dating back to when we were small children, covering a vast amount of data. We become very concerned about learning everything we can about our environment. We want to know everything that we can, first of all, for purposes of security. When we know about things, we find security in them. If any change occurs in them, we immediately recognize it and note it, because that change may signal a danger. So we want to get to know every change that takes place. In the process, we are constantly updating our memories, all the time.

Memory is a necessity for living in any environment. We instinctively look around and get to know our surroundings. Then, when we want something, we immediately know where to get it, because its location is there in memory. Memory sets it all up for us. Because of that, we must understand that memory is very, very important. The data for memory comes in through our senses; so it's the senses that tell us what to remember. An enormous amount of our thinking is based on memory. When we see or hear something, we identify it by comparing it to memory. We may associate it with external sensations, but those sensations have to be identified by memory. Once we've identified it, we think about it; and for that we again go to memory. Memory is really a very important part of all our perceptions. People in the past have translated *saññā* as perception; and although that's not entirely incorrect, the best translation of *saññā* is memory.

I do quite a lot of investigating and analyzing to find things out in my practice. I like to go deeper inside, as well. It's important to get to know what's going on inside the body; not merely by physiology, but by experience and feeling. The area of the heart is very important. That is where the Dhamma bears fruit. For example, thoughts arise in the heart. By that, I don't mean they arise in the physical heart. They arise in the heart where it is located in the image of the body we have in our minds. We can call the body-image the "subtle body". The heart area located in the subtle body is the natural seat of the *citta*. When the

citta becomes calm, it comes together in that natural seat. When the *citta* is disturbed, it can go anywhere; when it is calm, it will come back to the heart. That's why the heart is so important.

The value practicing *samatha* meditation depends largely on the character of the meditator. Some people need a lot, and some need less; but *samatha* is always necessary. You must not think, as some people claim, that you need only do *vipassanā*, not *samatha*. That's all wrong. It's one-sided. In truth, you need both. The amount you need of each will depend very much on your character and what your needs are. It's the middle way. Actually, there is a lot of muddle in the middle way. Many Buddhists have the idea that the middle way is a sort of old-style English compromise, but it isn't. The middle way is uncompromising. It's the *kilesas* that pull us away from the middle. Instead of giving in to them, we must use a practice that restores the proper balance and brings us back to the middle way. If we have a lot of greed, then we should contemplate the body, and the *dhutangas* connected with food, to counteract that greed. We should do whatever is necessary to correct the imbalance and return the mind to the middle way.

The middle way also means that as those *kilesas* are overcome, there is less and less need to practice the *dhutangas* designed to counteract them. So eventually a time comes when those *dhutangas* are no longer needed. This should be recognized. On the other hand, there is no point in doing a practice to counteract the *kilesas*, and then just go on stolidly doing that whether you get the right results or not. When it doesn't work, continuing is pointless. In that case, you must search for another practice gets better results. The way of *kammaṭṭhāna* is the way of being resourceful. When you find problems in your practice, you must use your own ingenuity to think up ways to solve those problems. Only if it is really necessary do you go to the teacher for advice — only when you can't work it out for yourself. Resourcefulness is a very important part of meditation practice.

Would you recommend building a base in samādhi before doing wisdom practice?

Because characters differ so much, you can't say categorically that you must do *samādhi* before *paññā*. Practicing *samādhi* first before undertaking *paññā* is the general approach that the books usually give. This was particularly true in the old days when many of the *bhikkhus* came from farming and village backgrounds where they never learned to think very much. It's not the same nowadays when people are taught a variety of subjects in school, and have learned scientific reasoning, and so on. Because of that, people today are much more use to

thinking. This can be both an advantage and a disadvantage. On one hand, when one tends to think a lot, the *kilesas* take hold of those thoughts and turn them to their advantage, causing the thoughts go all over the place. At the same time, if one learns to focus them properly, those thoughts can go into the development of *paññā*. But you must understand that *paññā* is not just thinking. Thinking is necessary to *paññā*, but *paññā* itself is not mere thinking. When the mind goes into a state of *paññā*, it's almost like something has turned over, so that the understanding becomes absolutely clear and automatic. When it happens like that, the understanding goes to the heart. If it is mere thinking, it won't go to the heart. It's as though the thinking creates a barrier that prevents the understanding from dropping down to the heart.

Could you explain the subtle image-body used in investigating the body?

When you begin investigating the body, take the body just as you usually think of it; that is, as the physiological body. The aim is to see that your body is not a beautiful or desirable thing that you should cling to tightly. At the same time, you realize that the body is a necessary and valuable instrument, because without it you don't have a basis for the mental faculties. Without a physical body, the knowing remains, but the faculties of thinking and recollection are gone. There's just bare knowing, and that's all. Therefore, you must have the body to function. So although you see it as loathsome, you also realize that it is necessary. If you don't have that balanced view of the body, you might become depressed and think of committing suicide. That would be a serious mistake. Seeing all aspects of the body will overcome any such tendency.

The *Satipaṭṭhānas* state that one should contemplate “the body in the body”. There are two possible ways to understand this. It can be understood as “a body-contemplator contemplating the body”. It can also mean that “one contemplates the body as the body”. When we observe the means by which we know the body, we find that our perceptions of the body come through feeling. It's always feeling that informs us about our bodies. Nothing else. So the body we know is really a feeling body. That feeling body is the subtle body. The physical body is the basis for feeling, but we don't actually know the physical body at all. When we want to investigate our bodies, we must turn to feeling to guide the way. The internal makeup of the physical body is known only as a mental image, as a concept that comes from seeing bodies dissected to show what the various parts look like. All of those parts do make up the physical body, but that is not the body we know internally. When you contemplate the body by examining those bits and pieces that make it up, you are working with a mental image of the body. When you contemplate it as the feeling body, then you may find that the feelings inside

give you quite a different picture of the body; and quite a different understanding of what is in the body, as well. It is important to realize that feeling is the most important aspect of your knowledge of the body.

When you do body investigation are you using visualizations of the different parts?

To begin you, you can use visualizations. Eventually the investigation goes deeper to the point where the visualizations turn into true seeing and understanding. The visualizations and the knowing blend together. It's as though you know the parts intimately; as though, when the body moves, in your mind you can see the parts moving.

When doing body contemplation, you should be aware that sometimes you may feel very grumpy and irritable the next day. You don't feel very contented, and you don't know why. You should examine yourself and see it stems from body contemplation. Body contemplation stirs up the *kilesas*. The *kilesas* don't like it and fight back. Because of that, you can get a lot of emotional disturbance coming up. The degree of emotional disturbance depends on one's character. Some people get very little, some a lot. In order to quell those emotions, you should do another practice like *ānāpānasati* or *mettā* to calm down and cool off. This accords with what the Buddha said. He said that when one does body practice, one should do *ānāpānasati* as well.

What do you do when anger arises in your practice?

You must try to realize what happens when anger arises. This is quite clearly stated in the *Paṭiccasamuppāda*. Feeling arises first. That feeling comes from *kamma* — the past *kamma* created by anger. The feeling arises inside, in the solar plexus area. When that feeling arises, you experience a diminution of self. You feel as though you are losing face to yourself. When that happens, you struggle to regain that face. Mostly you do it by blaming other people and becoming angry at them, all as an attempt to pacify that unpleasant feeling and uplift your sense of self-esteem. But it's the wrong way, because all those thoughts are *kamma* — and that *kamma* will produce the same feeling in the future. When something occurs to trigger anger, it just comes back again. Due to continually making the same *kamma*, you will tend to get that same situation coming up time after time.

The main cure for this is mindfulness. As soon as a feeling arises, you are mindful of it and immediately turn inward to examine it. You realize that the feeling is simply a sensation that arises because of some action you have done in

the past. You were angry in the past, and this is a result of being angry. Then you watch for the reaction, for any thought or action that is aimed at regaining self-esteem. And you reason that if you are doing it for the sake of self, then that self is a merely delusion. So what's the point. So you don't let your thoughts go out and cause angry reactions. Anger comes because of thoughts going outward. In fact, I reckon the word *āsava* means outflow, the mind flowing out into the world. When the mind flows out into the world, it gets into trouble every time.

That is the story of anger and the way to deal with it. It's not easy because the *kilesas* are very subtle and very clever. They will always try to counteract any method that you use. But if you keep trying, eventually you will be able to gain the upper hand. First you must see for yourself how anger works. Greed works in a similar manner. Greed comes up as feeling to begin with. You see something, and then there is a feeling: "I like that. I want it". Then you start thinking about it, and before long the desire for it grows and grows and grows. Gradually the greed becomes so strong that it's as though a hand goes out to grasp it and won't let go. The *kilesa* of greed wants that thing regardless of whether you can afford the cost of it or not. This is the way of greed.

Sometimes I feel indifferent, as though I don't care about meditation.

When you feel indifferent about meditation, you should reflect on the results of your *kamma*, and what will be like if you don't do meditation. Look in your life and see how much discontent you've experienced. From that, you can probably access the kind of discontent you will continue to experience if you don't meditate. You don't know what's going to happen in the future. You don't know if you will get cancer or be in a car accident. You just don't know what the future will bring. Suppose a car accident left you completely disabled...what would that be like? What would you do? Perhaps you get into a situation where you can no longer be a bhikkhu, and no longer do meditation. Then you're stuck. Look at what ordinary life in the world is like.

When I was younger, I use to think that I'd like to find an ideal place to live in this world. In my mind, I looked around and realized that there wasn't such a place to be found. Everywhere you look there are disadvantages, and the future is so uncertain. There are many dire predictions for the not-so-distant future. I can't say whether they are going to come true or not. But they could. And if the world blows up in one way or another, what do we do then? It's alright now. We've got plenty of food to eat, a decent place to live, a reasonable climate, and good people around. But all that may go. We can never be sure, so we should see the importance of being diligent now while we have the opportunity.

Is there a structure of balancing body contemplation and ānāpānasati?

It's probably best to develop *ānāpānasati* first until you get some calm. When you've attained a level of calm that you feel you can get back to without much difficulty, then investigate the body.

There are basically two ways of doing body contemplation. One is the way of *samatha*; the other is the way of *vipassanā*, or *paññā*. Using the way of *samatha*, you keep your attention on one aspect of the body, like skin, and don't think about it much. You just keep the skin fixed in mind as much as you can. That can act as a *parikamma*, much in the same way as the word *buddho* acts as a *parikamma*. One advantage of this practice is that when you develop calm using this method, because you've been focused on a part of the body, it's easy to turn to investigating the body and develop wisdom.

The other way of doing body contemplation is to begin by questioning the nature of the body. "Where does skin come from? What are its characteristics? What happens if I don't wash it? How is it useful? What happens if it peels off? What's it like? Supposing you cut a piece off? Consider all aspects of the parts that make up the body. This is the way of developing *paññā*.

Can you use pain in this kind of investigation?

You can. It's a difficult practice; but if you very determined you can do it. When pain arises during meditation, you must resolve to investigate that pain, and try to figure it out. To be successful in this practice, you must investigate the pain. It's no use gritting your teeth and bearing it. That won't work. That won't accomplish anything. There is no value in merely enduring pain. You have to start investigating.

Basically, there are two ways to investigate painful feelings. First of all, you can question: The pain is located in a certain part of the body...How do I feel that pain? Who is the "I" that feels it? Eventually you realize that the one who knows the feeling and the actual feeling are two different things. It's as though the pain is down there, but the one who knows it is up here. Then you can ask: There is pain in my body, but am I painful? And you'll realize that you are not affected by the pain. A separation takes place between the two. That's one way to investigate pain.

The other, deeper way is to question: Where is the pain I feel located? Is it in the skin, in the bone, in the marrow? Is it in the sinews or in the nerves? Where is it? By trying to pinpoint it, you come to realize that the pain cannot be found in any of those locations. In fact, pain is not a physical phenomenon at all. But you must be careful not to have any desire for the pain to go away. If you want to get rid of the pain, that's a form of *tanhā*. Your intention must be to understand the meaning of pain. When you focus in on the pain, it will appear to grow more intense. It will continue to increase in intensity for an hour or two, then it will break. The pain will suddenly stop, and an understanding will come from that. But that is merely the first stage of pain investigation. You continue sitting, and eventually pain returns feeling even stronger than before. So you must investigate pain again using a different method until it subsides again. This pattern may repeat itself up to five times. By the last time, the body feels as though it is on fire, so much so that you are quite sure you will die. But if you persist until the pain breaks again, then the understanding is very profound, and very important. You gain a realization very deep inside. You also gain the certainty that you have dealt successfully with the worst pain possible. No pain could possibly be worse than that. Because you were able to deal with that effectively, you know you can handle whatever pain arises in the future, even the pain of dying. That gives you great confidence.

I am curious about your relationship with Luangta Mahā Boowa. When you have insights or questions do you go to him?

Only occasionally, because I've been able to work out nearly all problems by myself. I also gained an enormous amount of understanding from the explanations in his talks and in his books. That's been a very important factor for me. From my experience, Luangta Mahā Boowa tends to address the problems of his students while he speaks, and give the answer to them before he has even been asked a question. So often, there is very little need to ask him.

If you've worked out problems mostly by yourself, what benefits are there from staying with Luangta Mahā Boowa?

A person of Luangta Mahā Boowa's caliber has a powerful influence on everyone around him. So one feels the security of being in the presence of an exceptional teacher. Not only does he set an impeccable example, but you can be confident that should he see something wrong in his students, he will point it out straight away. Following his lead can give a lot of confidence that one is going in the right direction. It's as though the teacher is like a stake driven firmly into the ground. His students can count on it to maintain their balance.

Practicing alone, on one's own, there is a tendency to drift. And that is dangerous, because the drift takes place very, very gradually. This is one of the dangers a *bhikkhu* going back to the West faces. Unless the *bhikkhu* is absolutely firm inside, he'll find that the lay people gradually pull him in their direction. Not deliberately, but unconsciously they are always pulling in their direction. Unless the *bhikkhu* is absolutely firm, he tends to drift in that direction. And the drift comes so gradually and slowly that he doesn't recognize it. One needs to be very firm inside. One needs to have what Luangta Mahā Boowa calls "Lak Tham", the basic principles of Dhamma within one. When that's present, there's no drift.

When he says Lak Tham, is he referring to a level of calmness, or a level of insight?

Both. He says that, at least, a person should have experience in *samādhi*. More than that, it means really that a person possesses a basic understanding of the principles of Dhamma. By a basic understanding I mean a firm basis of understanding in the heart that one can always rely on for guidance in every circumstance.

Do his disciples go to him for confirmation of their spiritual attainments?

Some do, yes. Sometimes Luangta Mahā Boowa questions monks about their practice. From their replies, he can confirm levels of attainment. A certain number of monks develop enough in their practice to ask him meaningful questions. Many others don't. It depends on the amount of practice they do, and their skill in the practice. Those with a lot of skill and ability are in the minority. Of the number of monks that practiced with Ajaan Mun, a relatively small number turned into really good teachers. And they had what I would call ideal conditions.

Nowadays we don't have ideal conditions. There's a paved road outside the monastery, which allows carloads of people to visit us whenever they want. If we want to go somewhere, we simply hop into a car, and we're there. Previously monks had to walk, and that was actually much better. When they arrived at their destination, they didn't think about buzzing off again. Because they had to stay in one place for a long time, their meditation went much deeper. The trouble nowadays is that things are too easy. And because of that, monks become much more like lay people, and take on the interests of laypeople. Modern technologies and modern conveniences are distractions from the real root of Dhamma. Television is especially bad. Computers, too. Computers have their benefits, but they can also be damaging. They can be damaging when we

misuse them, but they also have a damaging affect on the world in general. And monks can't be separate from that influence, because we too are living in the world.

Would you say that a bhikkhu fulfills his duty to the laity by being an inspiring presence, by doing the practice and going on almsround?

Fundamentally, a *bhikkhu* has no obligation to the lay people at all. The ordination ceremony says: “I request ordination for the sake of obtaining Nibbāna”. That’s the obligation a *bhikkhu* has, that is his duty. Out of compassion a *bhikkhu* may see that his assistance can be beneficial to the lay community, but fundamentally there is no real obligation. *Bhikkhus* often think they do have an obligation to lay people, but in truth they do not. When a *bhikkhu* gains some knowledge about Dhamma, it is natural for him to want to share it with his lay supporters. *Bhikkhus* are also human beings, and they sympathize with the many people who suffer. Teaching them to go in the direction of Dhamma will help them to overcome their suffering. And that is a very noble aim. But a *bhikkhu*’s fundamental obligation is to obtain Nibbāna.

Can you explain about the different types of citta?

The true *citta* is the original *citta*. All the rest are modifications of that basic *citta*. It’s very difficult to talk about the *citta*, because there is nothing with which we can compare it. The nearest we can get is to say that the *citta* is like the ocean, and the modifications are like waves on the surface of the ocean. The waves are still part of the ocean, but at the same time they have their own separate appearance. Sights, sounds, smells, tastes, touches and the five *khandhas* — these are the waves on the surface of the *citta*. They are just ephemeral things that arise and cease. They are not real; they are only illusionary. It’s a fundamental paradox: what exists is not real, and what is real does not exist. The meaning of that is: what is real is permanent, so you can't say what is permanent exists because the essence of existence is impermanence, constant change. In order for things to exist, they must change. When things cease to change, they disappear immediately. All things are changing, and are therefore not real, because they are never the same thing for two consecutive moments.

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Right Effort

What is the role of right effort in the practice?

The main right effort is the effort to keep on doing the practice. And for that you must strive to maintain mindfulness all the time; you must try not to forget it. This is right effort. If you are doing the practice using a *parikamma*, for example, you must use that *parikamma* like a stake which you firmly tie your mindfulness to so that it never has a chance to stray. When you begin focusing your mind on a *parikamma* object you will inevitably have thoughts coming up to distract you. This is the nature of the untrained mind. Right effort in that case means the effort to be mindfully aware of each thought as it comes up, and then to just let it go. The trouble is that the mind becomes interested and intrigued by thoughts and cannot resist grasping them. Once a thought is grasped, the mind follows after it, and the mindfulness is gone. It is the grasping of thoughts that's the problem. If you can just see them as puffs of smoke coming up, and let them go, let them go without grasping at them, your mindfulness gradually becomes stronger.

There is a tenacious tendency in the mind to grasp at thoughts and their content. While meditating, you suddenly have what seems like a wonderful idea, something that seems to be so important that you feel you have to think about it at that moment. It has an insistence that won't give the mind any peace. It feels so irresistible that it pulls the mind away into self-indulgence. But later, when your mindfulness returns and you reflect on the "importance" of that train of thought, it seems so every-day and ordinary. With hindsight you see that there was nothing so wonderful about it at all. You must recognize this tendency in yourself, realize that it is just *kilesas* coming up and refuse to fall for their distracting tactics. Seeing and knowing the way the *kilesas* work is another aspect of right effort. You must see them as they come up and make the effort to not let them have their way. Sometimes it is very difficult, especially when the mind is untrained in mindfulness practice. Out of habit the mind always tends to lean in the direction of the *kilesas*. So to resist that tendency is to go against the grain, and that's not easy. It's like someone addicted to cigarettes who decides to give up smoking. To resist reaching for a cigarette requires considerable effort and determination. He must make the effort to overcome the craving of the *kilesas*.

In order to bring up the right kind of effort, you must stir yourself up to see the danger of your life situation. The danger is always there. You never know when

you may have a blood clot in an artery that can cause a sudden debilitating stroke, or even death. You just never know. It may come at any time. You should think about that and reflect how life is very uncertain. The one thing we really want in life is to be able to relax. This is the message that the *kilesas* keep whispering to us: don't think about death and uncertainty, because if you are constantly thinking about death and uncertainty, you cannot relax the way you want to. So the *kilesas* don't like that. Resisting that tendency to find comfort in ignorance, and keeping the practice going no matter what, is a kind of effort that is difficult to arouse. But that is what's needed; that is the nature of right effort.

To arouse effort you can also reflect on how you are now practicing Buddhism as fully ordained monks; you know more or less what you are trying to attain; you have the methods of doing it; you have skilled teachers to help you: when will you ever get a chance like this again? The future being so uncertain, you may never be blessed with this opportunity again. Why not take full advantage of it? Why not make the most of this opportunity? Thinking like this can stir you to arouse effort in the practice, the effort to apply yourself fully before it's too late.

Effort is difficult because it goes directly against the pull of the *kilesas*. There is an innate desire to just relax, or to go into some pursuit that you feel comfortable with, some habitual activity that is second nature to you and is therefore easy and undemanding. Because of habit, the mind finds it very easy to think about such thing. There is no real effort involved. But training the mind to go in new directions is much more demanding, and difficult. Going against habitual tendencies, going against the grain, requires a purposeful effort of mind that must be intentionally brought up and applied.

What is the best way to deal with fear?

The most important thing is to never run from fear. When fear comes, try not to get rid of it. Look at the fear, inside. Look at it and question yourself: What is this fear? I must know. Fear is an aspect of the *kilesas*. It's an enemy coming in the disguise of a friend. You think it's a friend warning you, but it's not, it's an enemy. Because when we are afraid we always take the wrong action. Instead of acting in the rational and right way, we nearly always do the wrong thing. So if fear comes up, look at that fear. Look at the fear itself, not the thing that is giving rise to the fear. Investigate that fear by looking at the feeling. When you want to investigate something, the first thing you have to do is define that thing exactly. In the case of fear, how does it arise? Say you experience it as a feeling. Try to precisely pinpoint that feeling. Where in the body is the feeling located?

Search for it. You'll probably find that it's down in the solar plexus area. Then try to determine the nature and quality of that feeling. Why do those qualities define it is fear? Why do you call that feeling fear, but call another feeling pleasure? Investigate the feeling in that way, focusing in to pinpoint its true nature. And don't try to get rid of the fear. Just let it be and use it to deepen your practice, even to the extent of keeping it going, if need be. When you investigate fear properly, the mind usually goes inward, into a clear, calm state. Then the fear vanishes so that you feel no fear whatsoever.

Fear is the danger in *upacāra samādhi*. In *upacāra samādhi* all sorts of images and *nimittas* can arise. Usually they are very benign, but for some people the images can be quite terrifying. The danger there is that the meditator becomes afraid, and the fear causes increased concentration on the object. That concentration appears to make it bigger, as though it's coming closer, which in turn makes one more afraid. If the meditator can see those images as though they were images on a cinema screen, then they would appear quite harmless.

How prepared does the mind have to be before attempting to investigate severe pain?

Normally, unpleasant painful feelings in the legs will come up after sitting in one position for an hour or more. When that happens, you should try to investigate the pain as best you can. The one thing you should not do is to just grit your teeth and bear it. There is no real benefit in merely enduring pain. Even if you can manage to do it, it won't help. There must be an investigation involved. Because of the discomfort, you may not be able to investigate it for very long to begin with. In that case, realize that you are not yet capable of doing it and deliberately come out of the sitting. Then make a determination to continue your investigation the next time that similar pain arises.

What is the role of spiritual companionship and mutual support in dealing with various emotional difficulties, especially in the case of Westerners?

Companionship is very important, the Buddha said that. But it should come about by means of the practice. If the companionship is not right, it's usually because your thoughts are going out all the time. You are thinking about other people all the time, and there may be some criticizing of other people, thinking badly about them for doing this or doing that — this is where the trouble comes. If you turn and put all the criticism on yourself, then there's usually no problem. And you should also have *mettā* for others. But the first thing is, you should not think badly about them. This is very important. You must avoid bad thoughts.

Put aside all bad thoughts. You must realize that your bad thoughts will infect your own mind first and foremost. So keep the bad thoughts out.

You should also reflect that your companions are *bhikkhus*, and therefore keeping a standard of *sīla* which is higher than the average person. Because of that, they are worthy of respect. The best thing is then to drop the thoughts completely from your mind and go back to your practice. Once you begin getting good results in your practice, the concern with other people naturally drops away. You will get on with other people quite easily and not be terribly interested in what they are doing or what they are saying.

Some Western bhikkhus have tried doing the traditional practice but found that it hasn't been successful for them because they have some culturally conditioned neuroses of various kinds which seem to be an obstacle to more refined levels. To what degree are Westerners different from Thais?

I don't think that Westerners are very much different from Thais. There are some differences, but not many. As for the emotional troubles, they are *kilesas*, after all. What's required to deal with them is mind control. If people won't control their minds, then the mind will always be thinking incessantly. And when the thinking mind takes over, emotional troubles immediately start coming up. The emotions are driven by thought, which is the first aspect of creating *kamma*. It is the *āsavas*, the *citta* flowing out into thoughts. And if they flow out strongly, they flow into speech and then into action. This is the cause of all the trouble.

If we can keep the mind on the meditation object — on just that — there are no problems. If you look at the hook-ups and hang-ups of people in the West, practically all of them come from thought, from thinking about things too much. If they stopped thinking so much, they would have far fewer emotional hang-ups. Emotional hang-ups tend to stimulate certain thought patterns that build a momentum of their own. But all you need do is cut those thoughts — and the problem disappears. The thinking is the problem. People have nervous breakdowns because they think too much, they never give their minds any rest. The cure for that is to do a meditation practise designed to stop the thinking. When you stop the thinking, there aren't any problems, it's as simple as that.

From the experience of people who have problems like depression or loneliness, the direct approach of cutting thoughts or controlling the mind doesn't seem to work.

When you examine them, all of them — anxiety, loneliness, and depression — give rise to modes of feeling. And when those feelings come up, then thoughts arise that correspond to those feelings. Take depression. A person has depressed thoughts coming up, he grumbles about the place or the people, he feels bad and all the rest of it — it's his thoughts that are the trouble all the time. If that person would look closely at his feelings, question them and analyze them to understand what sort of feelings they are, then he could overcome them. But what happens is that the person gets a certain feeling, a feeling of depression, and instead of looking at it he starts thinking in ways that correspond to that feeling. And once he has started thinking in ways that correspond to the feeling, his mind goes out, out into the world: "Oh, this is a terrible place. What's this life about? I don't want to live in this..."

With depression, you will find that there are always feelings giving rise to thoughts that create the problem. If you turn around, focus the mind inside and look at those feelings, they can easily be overcome. But it requires effort. And the effort and the willingness to do it is what's so often lacking. It's very often the case that people with thoughts of depression cling to that depression. The *kilesas* want it, because it gives them a feeling of self. Without that feeling of self, they feel lost. This feeling of self is very important because it drives all sorts of things. To get a feeling of self, people will do all kinds of crazy things; even, in some pathological cases, mutilate themselves.

Isn't there a great difficulty in bringing the Buddhist teachings from Thailand to the West?

I don't see why the Buddha's teaching shouldn't go to the West. After all, people are born in the same way as they are in the East, their minds work in the same way, the fundamental problems are the same, they've all got *dukkha* in the same way — why shouldn't the Buddha's method work in the same way there? I don't mean that one has to transport all the traditions; that's not necessary. But the teaching is necessary. That can work in the West perfectly well. Of course people in the West are used to their ways of thinking, and they have to sacrifice some of those opinions to make the teaching work for them, but they can do it.

Is it a good idea to read suttas to help us in our practice?

Only if you can relate those *sutta* readings to your experiences in meditation practice. The true meaning of the *suttas* can be very difficult to understand. There is no harm in *sutta* reading, but you must be careful of the language used in the English translations because the words chosen can be misleading. In almost all cases the translations are made by people who do not have a proper understanding based in the practice. Because of that, the translations are not necessarily very accurate.

The first thing to keep in mind when reading the *suttas* is that the Buddha never taught absolute truth. Because you cannot teach absolute truth. It's not possible. What the Buddha taught was a method. The *suttas* are describing a method of raising one up from one's present state to a state where one is capable of attaining Nibbāna. The Buddha is consistently teaching that method. Some people take the Buddha's teaching to be absolute truth, but that is a wrong understanding. Other people take the Buddha's teaching to be a philosophy, but it was never intended to be that either. You can squeeze a philosophy out of the teaching, but that is not its true purpose.

The Buddha laid out a practical teaching. For example, the *Paṭiccasamppada* explains the process of what happens to create *dukkha*, but it does not give the method of how to cure *dukkha*. In order to discover the method of how to cure *dukkha* you must go to the Four Noble Truths and the Noble Eightfold Path. But an understanding of the process of *Paṭiccasamppada* can help one quite a lot in meditation practice. It is a process that can be understood at different levels of subtlety. The most subtle levels are probably beyond most of us.

It is important to realize that our problems arise because our minds are full of *kilesas*. It's as though the mind is pure water mixed with a lot of mud. Because of the mud, the water is not fit for use. Since we cannot find refuge in the pure water of mind, we must find something else to take refuge in. So we take refuge in our physical bodies, in other people, in places and in other worldly attachments. We try grasping at these things. The trouble is that when we grasp at these things they never last, they are always changing. For that reason, we cannot really grasp anything properly because as soon as we catch hold of it, it's gone. We want to somehow make things belong to us and become part of us. But our grasping of these things is false. Say we buy an object and call it ours. What in that object has changed by the mere act of purchasing it? Nothing. It is the same after we bought it as it was before. Only our idea of it has changed. It now "belongs" to us. Because this grasping is based on a false premise, we can

never be satisfied with what we grasp. And because of their unsatisfactory nature, we cannot take these things as refuges.

The mind is always searching for a satisfactory refuge, but it never finds one. Sometimes the mind finds things that are intriguing, which spurs it on to search in a certain direction. Because of that, people become interested in all sorts of things that lead them on and on in a fruitless search for a personal refuge. It's like the scientific search for the ultimate particles of matter. There is a belief that if science can only find that ultimate unifying theory of matter, they will have found the perfect refuge. But even if they were to find that ultimate particle, it would not affect their personal happiness one bit. So they end up with *dukkha* all the time. They experience *dukkha* because they try to grasp at things that have no real substance, like grasping a handful of air. So they keep on grasping, hoping for *sukha*, but always receiving *dukkha*.

So what to do. In Buddhism we have a method that we use to cure ourselves internally, not out in the world. In other words, we try to cure those *kilesas* that are causing us to grasp at *dukkha* all the time. As we begin eliminating the *kilesas*, we get a glimpse of what the *citta* is. And we then see how valuable it is. When we begin to see the true value of the *citta*, an attachment to the *citta* begins to manifest. When the attachment to the *citta* grows strong, attachment to the external world dies away. The more we eliminate the *kilesas*, the more we see the value of the *citta*. Until finally, when we realize the nature of the *citta* completely, the attachment to the world entirely disappears. There is no need to make an effort to give up things because at that stage giving up is automatic. When you have established a true refuge internally, attachment to everything else naturally disappears. So the things we do wrong and the problems we create are all concerned with the *citta* flowing out into the world. It is as though the *citta* leaks out into the world, causing all of its energy to leak out too. When we keep our attention inside and stop that leakage, then we are always in the present and everything is just right.

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The True Nature of Perception

Can you explain the difference between saññā and paññā?

Saññā is the learning that comes from books that is stored in our memories. Understanding then tends to proceed from that learning, although it may not come directly from it. It may first be digested, and then turned around and put another way, but it still originates from that learning. That's all right, but it has not been involved with the heart. *Paññā*, on the other hand, comes directly from the heart. And *paññā* can function without the learning. For example, Laung Por Boowa, who couldn't read or write, was said to be an Arahant. His understanding came straight from the heart. All of the knowledge and understanding of *paññā* exists right there in the heart. It's all there if you can only get it to. And the true meaning of what is learnt from books is available for those who develop the wisdom and get the proper insights. That is the way understanding should arise. When you have also learnt the books, then you can express it in a very, very skillful way. Even if you haven't learnt the books, the understanding will still come out. But if you have only learnt from books, and have not done the practice, then the understanding comes basically from memory. Your heart isn't in it, so to speak. That's the difference between *saññā* and *paññā*. They're two quite different states. *Paññā* is a very useful training.

Ajaan Mahā Boowa said when he first became a *bhikkhu*, he studied all the Pāli texts. He achieved the level of mahā in Pāli. He read the *Ti-piṭaka* in Pāli. When he went to Ajaan Mun, Ajaan Mun told him that he mustn't bother about what he'd learnt from the books, saying that it would be of no use to him for a long time. Later on, he would find what he had learnt to be quite valuable, but not yet. In other words, he had to practice the Dhamma first. Then he could refer back to the books and immediately understand their meaning. What he had learnt, he could then see in his own practice. The *saññā* and the *paññā* would blend together. That's very valuable. That's partly why Ajaan Mahā Boowa can give such good talks now. If he could only talk from the books, his talks wouldn't inspire in the same way.

How would you describe right effort?

Right effort is the kind of effort, when you're feeling tired and sleepy and want to go to sleep; you force yourself to stay awake, that kind of thing. It's the effort when the mind wants to go into daydreams; you turn it to the practice. It's the same thing with contemplating the body. It wants to go off and play, but you

pull it back, and the effort to pull it back, that's the right effort. The effort when one's doing the practice, one hasn't got enough mindfulness, is difficult, of course, because you don't even know you've gone away. And this is where the training comes in. One has to keep on training. Generally, if one finds that the mindfulness won't stay there, it's best to have a grosser *parikamma*. If you're just doing the mindfulness on breathing, you may need to add the repletion of *buddho* to hold it more firmly. If you find there's a reluctance to do that, one should realize there can be a trick of the *kilesas* to drag your attention away, but there's nearly always difficulties there. Ajaan Mahā Boowa says right the way thru that he never found the practice easy. He said, at the first stage it was difficult in one Way. As he got higher, it became difficult in another way higher yet, difficult in yet another way and it went on like that, never easy.

One has to keep in mind that there are the four different characters. The quick and easy. Slow and easy. Quick and hard. Slow and hard. Because of these people do differ. The quick and easy way needs such a genius, you can hardly find nowadays. It's very dangerous to assume that one's like that oneself. Slow and easy, yes, maybe there are. Most people it's slow and difficult. A few people it's quick and difficult. But for it to be quick, a person's got to have a lot of energy, and they've got to be able to direct that energy right.

What is it that determines whether it is difficult or easy?

Kamma. The difficult side of it is usually the effort one has to use, the putting up with difficulties, and the overcoming of the tendency to sloth, the tendency to relax and give way. Now if a person's got the right *kamma*, that won't be there very strongly. Most people it's there quite strongly. Whatever way one goes, there isn't much else one can do. One has to go the way that is suitable to oneself. And whether it's difficult or easy, fast or slow, one can only go on doing it. It's like a tree. You plant the tree. You can't make it grow any faster than it will grow. All you can do is give it water, a bit of fertilizer and leave it to grow. It depends on the type of tree whether it grows fast or slowly. People can't develop faster than they will anyway. You can say each person for a maximum rate at which they can develop. So patience is necessary.

Have you encountered many obstacles in your own practice?

Yes, both external and internal obstacles. I don't think one can avoid that. There are *kilesas* there and one can't avoid obstacles coming up. I mean one of the external difficulties is my foot. Just sitting is difficult. Generally I like walking but the foot makes that a problem too. There are difficulties. But I don't

complain too much, because if I hadn't had this, I might have had to go and drop bombs on Germany. True, I would have been called up in the war, and they mostly wanted bombers too. I didn't have to do that. So I don't complain too much.

Sickness or ill health can sometimes be a handicap. Was that a struggle for you?

No, that wasn't in that way. Because this wasn't like health in the body normally, it's just an extremity. It's just that it was more difficult to sit. I mean at one time I could walk moderately well. And now not so easy. It's a bit more difficult now. I mean I could have walked five miles, ten miles. But I couldn't do it ever day. Now I'm not sure. It's not as good. I'm getting older. Getting more rusty.

The thing is, though, to realize that as far as illness is concerned, one can look on illness as being an opportunity. If one's ill and feels unwell, the right thing to do is to investigate that, look at it, look at the feelings, check on them, and the method of looking is you have to define it, precisely if there's an illness and you feel unwell, define precisely what that feeling of being unwell is. Define where the feeling is located, how it's changing, what is its quality, and keep on doing that. One has to get down, round and round and round.

There's a teaching which Ajaan Mahā Boowa has given about when you're sitting, when you sit for a long time with pain in the knees, particularly in the knees. Now he says at first what you should do is try and forget to feel pain in the knees and go back to your ordinary practice, but when it gets so strong that you can't then you must turn to that pain and you must investigate it. It's no good just sitting and grinning and bearing it. That doesn't work. It doesn't get rid of the pain and it doesn't help anything. It doesn't help in the practice either. What you must do is investigate it and say this pain is feeling, now where is the feeling? Is it in the bones, is it in the flesh, skin, where is it? You have to try to assess where that feeling is and what that feeling is. Until you realize in fact the feeling isn't really even there. We feel it there, but that isn't where the location of the feeling is. You work it out for yourself in the way of where feeling arises and what happens. Because all that's there is material. There are nerves, which just transmit the signals. The rest of it, there's nothing there which can be feeling. Now as far as nerves transmitting the signals are concerned, the feeling is not down there at all. It's at the end results where the signals go. But for some reasons then we think the feeling is there. We seem to experience it there. One can realize that in fact that feeling that's there and me, the one that's feeling it, are not the same thing. I'm okay. The feeling there is really a thing that's an

appearance. And that's all. When that happens it's as though instead of being identified with the feeling, one separates out. When you separate out from that feeling it's not too bad. You can stand it. You go on watching it.

How can they actually experience the body apart from feeling?

You can't. But the trouble is that we inherently believe that we can. This is where the *avijjā* comes in. Where the *kilesas* come in as well. There's an ignorance there. There is an identification with body. There is an identification with the feeling of body, with the feeling as being the body. And even though we may realize that we can't experience the body apart from feeling, we still tend to think of the feeling as being in the body. It's just because of karma, because of our past, because we identified with it so much.

So how can you get to know rūpakhandha?

Rūpakhandha is a way of investigating when one hasn't realized the nature of feeling. The investigation of *rūpakhandha* is to get rid of the attachment to *rūpakhandha*.

How can one experience rūpakhandha?

You can't really except in feeling, but the point is the ordinary person thinks they can so they have to work with the level of *rūpakhandha*.

Which practices, what kinds of investigation?

In *rūpakhandha*, you think of the body as being loathsome, as being bits and pieces and so on. And because of one's identification with the body and one's attachment to it, this is very valuable. It breaks that attachment. When that attachment's gone and one can realize that this body can only be known through feeling, then you go to the feeling *satipaṭṭhāna*.

So investigating rūpakhandha is basically working with a concept.

It's more than a concept. Because we identify the body as being mine and me, we identify the body by our senses. And this is the way the ordinary person thinks and understands. You can tell the person that in fact there's only feeling there; they say yes, yes but they still act as though the body was themselves. In other words the emotions are going much more deep than the intellect. And one has to be able to resist at the emotional level. I have to clear up the

emotional problems first. And one has to use the right methods and the right symbols in order to do it. At the first level the right symbol is body. Body is loathsome, bits and pieces. The next level is feeling. The third level is *citta*. In other words, you're going more and more inward all the time. Finally you come to *dhamma*. These are the four *satipaṭṭhāna*.

These are things — one's up against this problem really that when you go in, you see more and more that everything's inward — then you get the problem that if everything is inward, what is meant by outward? And the whole thing ceases to have much meaning, inward and outward. In other words, I know perfectly well that those things I see out there, they're images within myself. At the same time I still happen to see them out there. So for me that is the outward world although I may theoretically know that it's inside.

One has to work with these symbols in the right way to overcome the attachment to them. Overcoming attachment is an important thing. Mostly you cannot do anything about directly overcoming attachment. Attachment is something that's inherently there. All you can do is go on doing the practice. When the insight comes, the attachment tends to drop away of itself. If you try to let go of the body, how can you let go? You let go with one hand and grasp it with the other. That's what happens. You can't let go of these things just like that. But when the practice has gone far enough, when the understanding has come, when the wisdom has done its job and the *citta* has accepted the situation, then the attachment just goes of itself. There's no need to do anything.

Should the four satipaṭṭhāna be taken in series, with each step being a foundation for the next?

It isn't quite as clear cut as that. When I'm working on them, anyway, this is what I find myself, when I'm working on them; you have to go time after time through these things. You go back to *rūpa*, go to *vedanā*, something you go as far as *citta* there. Dharma's a bit far, but you have to go through these things. You do the analysis of body, then you see that's all right then you do the analysis of feeling, then you see that that's okay, and then you often have to go back to body again because you realize that you haven't gone deep enough. It's a matter of going back and forth over and over the whole thing again time after time. But some people prefer to work on one of the *satipaṭṭhāna* until they get deep results in it. This is an individual thing. Like some people like to go entirely on body contemplation until they get very far in that. And that's okay, too, in a good way. But it depends on the individual what's done like that.

Is our success in the investigation of dukkha vedanā linked to our ability to do body contemplation?

No, it's not limited by that. But the trouble is that if one starts understanding *dukkha vedanā*, and one can then not realize that one still has a lot of bodily attachment. So one has to keep referring back and seeing I'm doing *dukkha vedanā* at the moment, doesn't have to be *dukkha vedanā*, can be any *vedanā*, but *dukkha* is the most prevalent one of course. One's started dealing with *vedanā* all the time here, and one's forgotten that the body I'm still attached to as a body. When one realizes that one may have to go back and do more contemplation of the body. It's not something, for me anyway, it's not something that you don't fix on one you have to go back and forth, go round. This is an individual thing. Each person must find out for themselves what works best.

The way the senses function is interesting. I don't want to go into all of it. You have to work out some of this yourselves. But the thing is that when any feeling occurs, nervous signal is produced. Nervous signals seem to depend on two things: the nerve casing within the particular nerve at any point of feeling, the amplitude, or the strength of the feeling depends on the number of pulses that go through the nerve, the second one. In other words, the more pulses that go through it, that's the strength of it.

You can see it with the eye. When there's an image on the eye, each line carries its own bit of information back to the brain. That's the exchange. That's where the micro processers are located. But this information that goes through that nerve fiber is not feeling; it's not the thing that produced the feeling either. That's merely a signal. When it gets up here somewhere, that is turned into both feeling and location, so both of those must have a particular area of information. That's quite interesting.

They say that people who have an arm amputated can sometimes still feel the hand.

Yes, they call them "phantom hands." And I mean that's obviously the stimulation of the nerves within. And displays very clearly the fact that you get both the feeling and the location. But the feeling and the location's not there. It's somewhere up here. We don't know.

Another very difficult thing to sort out is the influence of memory on this because memory comes into it the whole time. Very, very important. When you've got the feeling coming up, feeling arises. The location is given. Then there has to be the memory which associates that with past experience and

identifies what's happening. This is where *saññā* comes in and then it's going beyond just feeling. It's going to the rest of the *nāma khandhas*. The *khandhas* are a superb field for investigation, very good indeed, but they're quite a puzzle.

The other one that's good is *paṭiccasamupāda*. It's all right going back a certain way from *jarāmaraṇaṃ*. You go back a certain way on it. One gets a little stuck back at the level of *nāmarūpa*. *Salāyatana* is all right. *Nāmarūpa* is difficult. You get the *viññāṇa*. The thing is that one's got no platform to view it from. What I mean by that is the normal thing you see in the books is that with giving the teachers past time, present time, future time, this is typical. Where does this time come from? I mean, there's no clock up there. *Avijjā paccaya sankhāra*, *sankhāra paccaya viññāṇa*, *viññāṇa paccaya nāmarūpa*, etc. What is the actual time sequence here? There's no time apart from what's happening in you. That gives you the time. And it's never going by clock time or the sun time or anything of that sort. That doesn't mean anything. The time sequence is out really. You can't use it. And to see exactly what's happening there and the conditions, the way these give rise to one another, is not easy.

Is it possible?

Oh yes, it's possible. To see the whole thing, I think one's got to go very deep inside. That's another matter.

One thing I found quite interesting, though, is that in the *khandhas* you get two factors: *saññā* and *sankhāra*. Now it seems to me that *saññā* is the basis of time. Because, the time that we know is past time. Future time we don't know; we predict that. We only predict future time on the basis of past time and what's happened in the past. We can say that *saññā* is memory and that memory is time. Because if we look at anything that we remember, then we can't actually go back in time to that point, no way we can actually go back in time, so we must go in depth so to speak in the present to it. Now our understanding of time is just how deep that is. So it's memory. Past time is memory. The whole idea of time comes from *saññā*, from memory. And I would say that *sankhāra* is really involved with the predicting of the future as well, to a large extent, but that's not the whole of it, but it's involved with that.

You say that saññā is memory, but it is often translated as "perception"?

What is perception? In English, perception means the internal seeing of sensation. Philosophically it means that, according to the dictionary anyway. But I can't see that that fits really there. The point is we've got this factor of memory

that can be called recollection as well. You can call it recollection and this is absolutely essential for identification.

You see something, how do you identify it? By just relating it to something in the past. And that is a function of memory. This is such an important factor that, if one calls *saññā* perception, one must then ask where's memory in the five *khandhas*? It isn't really there at all. And yet it's a very, very important factor. I mean memory is a factor in so much of everything. I know they call this perception, but I don't know why. I mean this came from Sri Lanka, I think, and the early Buddhists in England as well. They called it perception, but then I don't think they understood it properly. In Thai, it's never called perception. It's always referred to as memory.

For instance, when you see something as beautiful, that's a complex, in so far as it's got to be identified first. In other words, *viññāṇa* is really perception. *Viññāṇa* perceives the object or just the basis of sensation, and that's all, not even the object. It gets the sensation. It accepts it. And then there's the question, what is this? There's identification with *saññā*. Then it's thrown up for considering, so *sankhāra* comes in. Association then: Do I like this or not? Is the feeling pleasant or unpleasant? When it's seen as pleasant, we call it then beautiful. I mean that's putting it more simply than it is, but it's something like that. The idea of beauty comes up a long time after the whole thing's been going through a whole heap of things.

Earlier you were talking about how you could separate out and look at things, so then is there something outside the five khandhas that is looking at the five khandhas?

No, there's something now looking at the five *khandhas* as they were, in other words we have to use the memory to tell us about the five *khandhas*. The separation here is not in space but in time.

The question often arises: is there only the five khandhas, or is there something outside that knows the five khandhas? Would you please comment.

You can't say there's something outside, or that there isn't. Because we're using words, and the word "something" is a word of *saṃsāra* and that's a word within the five *khandhas* so you're trying to assess the meaning of the five *khandhas* with something that's outside of them. You can't do it.

All I can say is look at the meaning of Nibbāna. Nibbāna is the *asankhata*, the unconditioned. Now we can define what *asankhata* means, it means there's no

conditions, there, no definitions, no boundaries, no limits whatsoever, it's utter freedom, but can you imagine it? Nobody can imagine that. So we can't think of that. In other words, it goes beyond the five *khandhas* entirely. The five *khandhas* are a method of overcoming the *kilesas* and *avijjā*. They're not absolute. They're a method. We have to see the whole the Buddhadhamma as a method of overcoming these *kilesas* and this *avijjā*. When you go beyond that, as the Buddha said, you can throw it away. You don't carry the raft with you.

Buddhism is a method all the time. The whole teaching is a training and a method. It's a very important point. But many people don't understand that. They look for absolutes in Buddhism. They try to make a philosophy out of it, but it isn't. They're using it in the wrong way. It isn't a philosophy; you can squeeze a philosophy out of it, but it is not meant to be one.

Do you have any advice on parting?

The thing is, you're in an organization. The organization should be kept going because it's a very valuable organization. You're also have to think of your own practice. To some extent it is necessary to help the organization. But you mustn't do that to the exclusion of your own practice. Your own practice is very important. I mean, the organization is a temporal thing, it's not absolute at all. Your own practice is dealing with your own future. So try to look after your own practice. It's very important. Where possible try to do your practice whenever you can. The ideal is that you try to make everything part of your practice. It's almost impossible until one's done an enormous amount of practice. I know that from personal experience. But one can try to. And when you get the opportunity, get away to a very quiet place, its important. Above all try to be mindful.

Because even for the organization it's important. If the organization is full of people who are just running the organization, it ceases to be of value for what it's meant to be. On the other hand, if everybody's out doing their practice, there's nobody there for the organization so there's got to be a little bit of both. The thing is the practice also takes a lot of time. Generally, probably the best thing to do is to spend time in the organization to begin with, perhaps several years, but gradually pull away to do your own practice so you get more, you feel more that you want to do that. Because there should be other people coming in to help in the meantime.

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