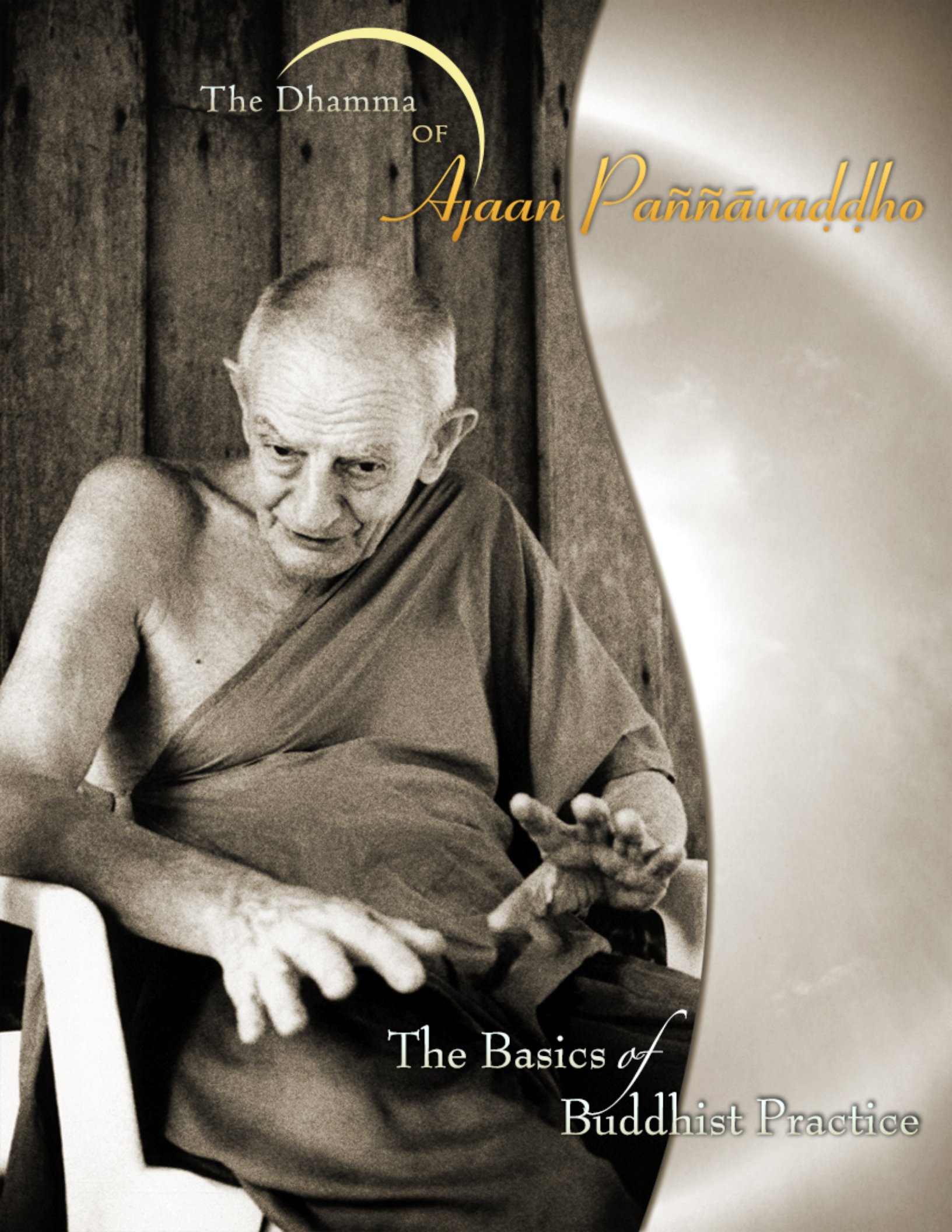




The Dhamma
OF

Ajaan Paṇṇāvaddho

The Basics *of*
Buddhist Practice

The Basics of Buddhist Practice

Transcriptions of Talks given by

Venerable Ajaan Paññāvaḍḍho

The Basics of Buddhist Practice

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Introduction to the Sangha

Fundamentally, like most of us, the Buddha had problems when he was young. He had many questions and he wanted to solve them. Eventually, he set off from his family and went out to try to solve these problems. He went to many different teachers and learned a great deal from them. But only after he left all his teachers and went off on his own did he finally manage to find the answers to those problems. What we have now is the teaching that came from the enlightened Buddha. That teaching is the basis of Buddhism. What we have to gain and the results we attain are based on his teaching. In other words, the Buddha is the one who discovered the way. He found the path to the solution of life's problems. We as Buddhists try to follow what he did and use the understanding that comes from him in order to clear the way for ourselves.

The Buddha's teaching basically hinges on the truth of discontent or suffering. Discontent is prevalent in everybody. It's always there in all sorts of ways, both small and large. It's never ending. Buddha saw discontent was the primary problem. It is, in fact, the motive behind whatever we do. When we do something, we do it because we feel we are going to get more contentment or less discontent by doing that than if we don't do it. All the time we're motivated in one way or another by this one factor of discontent. There is a background of dissatisfaction shaping the direction of our lives all the time.

For instance, how often do we have the factors of greed or hatred arising, in all there many forms? We're greedy because we feel that we're lacking something. When we lack something, we want to get it. Sometimes what we're lacking is something that's really necessary, like food, and that's okay. There's still a certain amount of greed in it, but that's not a major problem. But so many of our wants have been created by us. So we are constantly creating our greed. In that way, we are constantly creating our own discontent as we try to satisfy that greed. Hate is exactly the opposite. We constantly try to get rid of the things that we don't like or

want. It's really just two sides of the same coin: the wanting to have and the wanting not to have.

These are the factors that constantly motivate us and drive us on. In all of this, the one fundamental law we use to find satisfaction is the law of cause and effect. If I want to achieve a certain result from doing something, I always think in terms of cause and effect: If I do this, what's the result going to be? So we use cause and effect to predict what results we're going to get from our actions. Then we go ahead and act on that basis. If we have wisdom, maybe we'll get the results we want. But mostly we don't. Mostly we go the wrong way and do all the wrong actions, thinking they're going to bring us the satisfaction we want. But they don't; they usually bring us the opposite.

This you can see by reading any newspaper. You can see it in the way people act: lacking morals, lacking wisdom, and lacking any understanding of the way life works. They do the wrong actions, get unsatisfactory results and suffer the whole time. The more they continue going in that direction, the more they're going to suffer. It's not so much that somebody else causes them to suffer; rather, they bring it on themselves by their own actions.

Whenever we act, we program ourselves by that action. When we program ourselves, sooner or later that programming is going to show in the results, it's going to come back on us. The Buddha saw this tendency, and he taught us to observe how our minds work. He said that if we want to get free from suffering, we must develop wisdom. We've got to know what results will come from our actions. By virtue of that understanding, we can decide which actions we should do and which we shouldn't. Most people just don't know.

Take the question of morality: how many people have any real understanding of the way morality works? When people don't understand the way morality works, they do all the wrong things thinking they're doing the right ones. In the West, this tendency is very prevalent now. Lack of moral virtue is a problem that's causing a great deal of trouble. And that's due to a complete misunderstanding of the way

morality works. Peoples say: “Why should we be moral?” Many of them do not believe in any kind of higher moral authority. They think that there will be no repercussions from their actions. Therefore, if they do immoral actions they will get away with them. They failed to understand that they change themselves every time they do an immoral act. They change themselves in a manner that inevitably steers them into a situation where they will receive the repercussions of that action.

The Buddha saw that this is the way it is. He taught that since the discontent is our fault to begin with, we can free ourselves from it. We can get free from it by learning to develop wisdom and understanding. We develop this understanding by training ourselves to sharpen our minds, to control ourselves, and to stop the restless waywardness of our thoughts. In that way, we can hold the mind still and penetrate deeply with wisdom. If we accomplish that, then we can use the mind to probe the question of the causes happiness and suffering.

The first set of such questions deals with the body and the mind: What is the human body? Is it me, is it mine? What is this mind? Is it me, is it mine? Questions about matters out in the world are not important because all those questions reflect back to ourselves. So we must go directly to the center, which is one’s own body and mind. If we try to solve the problems in the world, it’s an endless task. As soon as one problem is solved, another one arises. So what we must do is solve the problems in the one that creates the problems, which is oneself. If we can solve the problems in ourselves, the problems of the world will automatically be solved.

The Buddha taught that to solve these problems and overcome our discontent we have to practice the path to freedom. To begin with, we must train ourselves in the way of morality, then develop the mind, and thirdly develop wisdom based upon mindfulness and effort. Mindfulness means keeping the mind in the present moment and thus being aware of oneself all the time. It means restraining the mind from thinking and wandering about, and thus not forgetting oneself. This is what the Buddha taught, and it forms the basis of Buddhism.

What I've given you is the core of Buddhist practice. The factors I've talked about can be expanded greatly, but the fundamental basis is the understanding of our situation as one of discontent and suffering, understanding the cause of that discontent, and seeing the path, or the way to cure discontent. That is the basis of Buddhism.

The curing of all discontent results in a situation that nobody has been able to describe because it has gone completely beyond this world. All the things we find in the world are conditioned. They all come under the laws of cause and effect. Everything has conditions. Every situation has conditions which bring that situation about. The complete cessation of discontent is an unconditioned state, an entirely free state where there are no conditions at all. It's quite incomprehensible to somebody who hasn't attained it.

I am curious about what attracted you to Buddhism in Thailand.

My interest was caught by reading. I was brought up rather vaguely as Anglican. I couldn't really see much in the Anglican Church. They're good moral people, but morality on its own isn't enough. It's necessary to go a lot deeper than that. Because of the situation in the Anglican Church, I really wasn't interested religion. Then I chanced to come across a book on Buddhism. This interested me a great deal. I read quite widely, with a special emphasis on books on Buddhism. Then I thought I should investigate one or two other religions. I looked into Hinduism, which is a terrific hodgepodge of things. It isn't one thing, it's a hundred things. Then I looked into Christianity. I was quite interested in Catholicism, but I wasn't satisfied. Eventually I made a choice. But I am not sure it really was a choice; I think the choice was all ready there to go the way of Buddhism.

Do all religions lead to the same end?

This you can't say precisely, because you have to be able to define what you mean by each one of those religions. Really speaking, under the heading of any one religion there are dozens of factors whose validity depends on the individual and

how he believes them. Whether they lead to the same end is not such a simple question at all. Christianity can be interpreted in a way that relates very closely to Buddhism. Not all of the dogmas can be fitted in, but the general ideas can be to some extent. It depends on the person who practices whether he can fit them in or not.

The Buddha used the comparison with a disease. That disease is our discontent. We must understand the cause of the disease, which is our wanting, our greed and our hatred, what we call our defilements, which are always coming up to push us in the wrong direction. Christians might call it the devil; but it's inside, it's not out there. These defilements are physiological factors in ourselves that always push us in the wrong direction. We must realize that they are the cause of the disease and so to cure it we've got to overcome the defilements. We need a regular path, a regular way practice and a regular way of training to do that.

In Buddhism, we hold very firmly the idea of what we call the *citta*. The nearest English translation for *citta* is soul; the only problem is I am not quite sure what soul actually means in English. It's not a simple word at all. I have a far better idea what *citta* means. So it's hard to equate the two exactly. The *citta* is an essence of knowing, which in its original state is utterly incomprehensible. The nature of the *citta* is beyond all ways of thinking and all ways of understanding. In its modifications, the mental faculties, it is used by the defilements to produce what we call the self, and all the ways that self works. The defilements take control of the self-identity, using the power of the *citta*, the human power, to push us in the wrong direction.

It's just these defilements that cause all of the trouble in the world. We get all sorts of problems in the world like the atomic bomb and dictatorships and so on. But the real trouble in the world is not these things but the defilements, the *kilesas* in each individual's heart. If we cannot get at those, we will never really cure the problems. That's what they all stem from. As the first verse of one of the prime books in Buddhism says: "Mind is the forerunner of all states". They all arise because of

mind. If we act in evil ways, that evil will come back on us. If we act in a good way, that good will come back too.

These teachings you explain should be applicable to everyone, why the necessity of monasticism?

You probably have in mind Christian monasticism as a comparison. You have to see what happened at the time of the Buddha. At the time of the Buddha, and to some extent today, the monk was a wanderer. He had just his bowl, his robes and not much else. He had only a few possessions. He wandered about from place to place, usually living in the forest outside the village. In India then, as in Thailand now, he could receive alms food in the village. People would give him food for the merit they gained from their generosity. He would then have the time and convenience to go out and do the proper contemplation and practices he should be doing.

When one does meditation practices and starts developing the mind, the mind becomes very sensitive. When it becomes sensitive, it can be very easily disturbed by things. We're always taught that when one's mind is becoming developed, one must be very careful. So one is told to control the senses, and try to keep them inside and not just let one's senses be wandering about. People who are living a lay life have to go about their normal business, doing a job, meeting other people, traveling and so on, which makes it almost impossible for them to really get control of the mind.

So the monastic life creates a situation where people can get away from everyday society for quite long periods of time so they can learn how to control their minds. If they can gain full control of their minds and get rid of the *kilesas*, then they can come back and help other people. They're in the situation to really help because know exactly what they are talking about from their own experience. They're the ones that have cured the defilements within themselves. They have the wisdom to see the right way. The average person hasn't. Because of this, monasticism is quite necessary. It's a very valuable tradition. Unfortunately, the number of monasteries that try to follow the way as it should be practiced is few. The number of monks

that do what they really should be doing is few. In Thailand there is an enormous number of what might be called traditional monks. They're just following old traditions; many don't really understand the teaching. Here at Wat Pa Baan Taad we are very fortunate. We have a very good teacher. He can lead people very effectively.

Can you tell us something about the daily life here?

The daily life here is really extraordinarily simple. We get up on our own and do our meditation practice early in the morning, some monks may even stay up all night doing meditation. Otherwise, we get up early, about four a.m. and practice meditation until it gets light, then come down to the *sala* and prepare it for the morning meal. We scrub the floor with coconut fibers and sweep it all around. After that, it's time to go for the alms round. We walk around the village where the villagers offer us the food, then we come back. The food is then shared out among the monks. We eat the food from our alms bowls using only our hands. We don't use a knife or fork. Afterwards we wash our bowls and clean up the *sala*. Usually the teacher will give a talk to the lay people who have come to offer food.

After the meal we return to our huts and there's time then to do more of our meditation practice until about 3 or 4 o'clock in the afternoon, it varies depending on the time of year, when sweeping starts. We sweep the ground and after that we have a bath at the well, using ordinary cold water. Then we have time for ourselves the rest of the evening. Sometimes in the evening the teacher will call a meeting when he'll instruct us on meditation, not every day but sometimes. At other times, we may have some work to do, a little bit of building, or sometimes other work. That's about what it comes to; our life is quite simply.

As far as daily chanting is concerned, mostly the monks do it on their own. This is a practice monastery. It's not like a city monastery where the monks go out to do chanting in people's houses. Normally the only time forest monks go out is if there's a funeral. When somebody dies in the village, they'll go out to chant for the dead.

How does the master instruct his disciples?

The master often gives Dhamma talks in the evening where he instructs his students on meditation. Or some subject will come up when the monks are eating the meal and the master will discuss it. Sometimes he tells monks off; he can be quite fierce. His admonitions are always pointing to the development of mindfulness and clear comprehension. He wants to make sure that the monks keep their minds on what they are doing and think about the correct way of doing things.

How did he become a master?

To begin with he was a disciple of another master named Ajaan Mun. Ajaan Mun was very famous and he had many disciples following him. Ajaan Mahā Boowa was with him for about nine years all together. He did his meditation practice under the watchful eye of Ajarn Mun. When he gained success in the meditation practice, he started going off in the forest on his own. The forest is an excellent training ground; there's nothing like it. Ajaan Mahā Boowa practiced for a long time with Ajaan Mun, who continually steered him in the right direction. Finally, he came to realize the truth. When that breakthrough occurred, he was in the position to become a teacher in his own right, but he didn't. Instead, he walked through almost every province in Thailand.

Ajaan Mahā Boowa eventually settled here in his home village because his mother was very old and he decided he would look after her. She became a nun and came to live here in the woman's compound with another old lady. Gradually the villagers came and he gave talks to them and they liked his talks. So they donated the land for the monastery. Then other monks came here because they liked his teachings and it spread like that.

Can a man ordain only temporarily as a monk?

In Thailand there's a tradition that young men become monks for a short period, sometimes for just a few weeks. Some people come from the three months of the rainy season. It's very prevalent nowadays. Personally, I don't agree with the temporary ordinations, but it's part of the tradition now and we can't change it. I think it's wrong that a person should become a monk when he's already thinking of leaving the robe. That's a personal view of mine. The person who's more sincere about remaining a monk generally will remain a monk for a minimum of two or three years.

In Buddhism the arrangement between the monk and his teacher is not fixed. A monk can leave the monastery anytime he likes. Whether he can come back again depends on the teacher. And he is quite free to give up the monkhood at anytime. It must be like that because we observe quite ridged and strict moral rules. A person who cannot stand it and feels he is going to do something in the robe that would be extremely bad must have the option to give up the robes at anytime. It's far better to give up the robe and then do what he wants as a layperson.

What does ordination empower you to do?

Ordination allows you to wear the robes and become a member of the Sangha, the monastic order. As members of the Sangha we adhere to a strict set of rules. And these rules are very beneficial to those practicing the path to end all suffering. They act as guidelines showing where we should go and where we shouldn't. As long as we follow those rules and keep within their boundaries, we feel completely free of blame as far as the world goes. There is a blameless sense that everything in the world is okay as far as we are concerned. That leaves our minds free of concern about external matters, which allows us to get down to the business of developing our minds to the fullest. Without those rules to protect us, we might be unaware of the proper boundaries and begin questioning our behavior, thinking: "I wonder if I should do that or not?". In other words, worrying about external things when we should be focusing inside. So the rules are psychologically quite important.

The ordinary person usually takes the five precepts. First one takes the rule of training to refrain from deliberately killing any living being. The intention to kill is important here. The other four are the rules of training to refrain from stealing, from indulging in wrong forms of sex, from using wrong speech and from taking drinks and drugs which cause trouble to the mind. Those are the five basic precepts. There are eight and ten precepts for those who want to go further. They don't take food after midday. They refrain from singing and dancing and other forms of entertainment, including television. They don't wear jewelry or use cosmetics. They don't sit on high seats or sleep on luxurious beds. And they don't handle money. Those are the full ten precepts.

It is said the basic five precepts are the basic minimum requirement for a human state. Anybody who violates these rules is in some way going against the human state. Conversely, maintaining that standard of conduct is equivalent to maintaining the human state. As far as rebirth goes, one is likely to be born as a human being.

The ceremonies of Buddhism today, would they be essential to the way?

Most of the ceremonies are not essential to the way. As far as the order of monks is concerned, we have a very large number of rules. We have a lot of procedure describing the way things should be done. However, as far as reaching the ultimate goal is concerned, it's not absolutely essential. It is used as a guide and training for monks as they strive to reach that goal. Many of the rules are designed to make one mindful; to keep one's mind on what one's doing.

Is the doctrine of reincarnation an essential part of the Buddhist beliefs?

Oh yes! We don't actually call it reincarnation, we call it rebirth. Rebirth is based on the principle that causes have effects. If by one's actions one creates certain causes, the effects that were set in motion by those causes are bound to arise sometime in the future. If those effects haven't taken place before one dies, the

effects have a natural momentum that will carry on into the future. There is a force generated by one's actions that must have an outlet. That force will have its outlet depending on the nature of the actions that have been done. Depending on the type of action done, that force can arise anywhere throughout the whole realm of existence. It may arise in the heavenly realms the gods, or in the human realm, or in the animal realm or the various realms of hell. Many Buddhist monks have seen these realms in their meditation. You can actually go to see them for yourself if your meditation is good enough.

Then each person is in a continual process of being reborn again and again?

Yes, you can put it like that. Among our mental defilements, one of the strongest is that of wanting existence. By existence we mean a state of being or a form of life where there is sensation and the knowing of sensation. Because of the defilements, we tend to promote those actions which lead to future existence. And because we tend to go depending on our actions, so the actions themselves tend to produce the next life.

The presence of the statue of Buddha in the monastery, is it simply to remind you to be grateful for the way?

Yes. Originally there were no statues of the Buddha at all. At first they simply used an umbrella and a seat. The idea being that the seat was ready for the Buddha in case he should ever come to give a talk. People used the seat and the umbrella as a focal point for their faith. Only later did image-making become common. I think the original idea of the images was that when the image was made by a skilled person it would depict a certain psychological state. If a person's mind is clear enough he can see this in the image and realize what it's meant to portray. In other words, the image is a teaching symbol. Nowadays I am afraid they're made just because people think they're nice to look at.

How do Christian and Buddhist monasticism compare?

Western monastics come together frequently for prayers and so on, and part of your purpose is to be a community. Buddhist monastics come together in a place that's suitable for meditation, where can live and have the freedom to do their practice. The whole idea stems back to the wanderer in the forest, who fundamentally went off on his own. A monk who goes off into the forest has to put up with a great deal of hardship. It's not easy living in the forest. Most of the usual conveniences of life are lacking and they are not easy to find. Monks living in the forest often have to walk long distances to receive their alms food, which can take quite a long time to make the round-trip to the nearest village and back. The food is often quite inadequate, just village food, nothing special at all.

The monk may be living in a place where there are wild animals about, some of them very dangerous. He'll have no external protection at all. At most, he'll have a platform made of bamboo to sleep on that affords no protection against elephants and tigers. He'll quite likely see tigers and often hear their roars at night. When he encounters tigers his only protection is the strength of his own mind. It's a very frightening situation. The overcoming of that fear is a very powerful training. Also, when one is in the presence of a tiger, all the nonsense is driven out of one's mind. It comes down to what one really is. It's no good pretending. One knows very well that one is absolutely helpless and faceless. It's a wonderful training.

Our idea of a personal God that we can relate to, that is very different from Buddhism, is that correct?

Yes, the usual concepts that are held in Christianity are not the same, I'd say that. I always find one of the difficulties with the word God is to know what the word means. There is certainly no universal definition. I would say that in some interpretations of the word God are quite foreign to Buddhism. In other interpretations, we may find some common ground. As far as a personal god is concerned, I can only speak for my own ideas. There is obviously something there which that word represents, but as a Buddhist I would not use the word "God" to

indicate it. I'd probably use the word *citta*, the pure *citta*. It's that which acts within oneself, but with the feeling that 'I am not doing it'. Something other is doing it. Whether that is what's meant by personal God in Christianity, I don't know. In Buddhism we would also call it Dhamma.

Dhamma is a very complex term. Dhamma means the norm, or that substratum that underlies everything. Because it underlies everything, we can't say what it is, because defining what it is is also dependant on it. In other words, that substratum can fundamentally be contacted only in one's own heart. I don't mean the physical heart. Everything relies on Dhamma; it is as though it's the foundation to everything. The things that rely on it are sensation, thought, and understanding; in fact everything we know. So if we try to know Dhamma, what are we going to know it with? We can only know it with something that has arisen from that substratum itself. That doesn't really tell us what it is. In other words, we can't know it the way we know other things. We can only know it by contacting it, being it. Whether you would call that a personal God, I don't know.

If you reach the high state of interior wisdom, can you reach a point where you no longer reincarnate?

Very definitely, that's the aim of Buddhism. We see life in this world as being "a veil of tears", as the Christians say. We see it as much worse, in fact. We see it as almost demonic. We know that the demons are inside of us, not out there. These demons are the defilements which lead to so much suffering. I don't think that people can realize the true nature of the suffering involved in our situation until they have overcome it, even for just a very short period. Then they will see that the difference is so enormous. People would never be satisfied until they found that. They don't see that because they are completely swamped by discontent and suffering all the time. It's always coming up, the whole time. Every thought is colored by it.

Is the purpose of the monks and nuns the same?

Fundamentally yes. But it seems to be much more difficult for women. Women are quite clever enough, it's not that they lack wisdom. Women have the same ability to sharpen their minds. One of the troubles is, they have difficulty getting on together. A group of men living together can usually get along, more or less. But a group of women has a different dynamic, I don't know why. They all seem to want to be boss. That's just the way it works. There are always difficulties.

I heard it said that in Thailand the monks are respected more than the nuns.

It's quite true. One reason is that many women don't become nuns until they grow old. The woman's section of a monastery becomes rather like an old folk's home. When you get old people together like that, they just go on behaving the way they've behaved all their lives, which is gossiping together and cooking and so on. There isn't much reason for respect. When that is the norm, the social outlook of non-respect tends to grow.

Even women who really want to do the practice properly find the situation very difficult. There are one or two places I know of where women live together in an exemplary manner. There is nothing to stop women from practicing Dhamma, but it always seemed to be more difficult for them.

The Buddha did establish an order of nuns to begin with. They used to wear robes the same as the monks do. But the order died out due to war and famine. Nowadays there is a concerted effort to revive the order of nuns. The problem is, they're going about in the wrong way. So many of its advocates have ideas of women's liberation mixed into their efforts, which brings in self-interest and the defilements very strongly. When that happens, everything goes wrong. Because it goes in the wrong direction, their revival won't last. The one thing that is absolutely essential is a degree of humility, a degree of acceptance.

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The Five Precepts

Could you please explain the five precepts?

The five precepts are the basic training rules one observes: the training not to kill, steal, indulge in improper sex, use wrong speech or take drinks or drugs. These are the field of training one takes upon oneself. Someone came to Ajaan Mahā Boowa and asked him if it's ok to take just a little drink...not a lot, and he said: "If you're going to take the precepts you should adhere to them strictly. If you're not going to keep them, don't take them in the first place". That's correct, because if you take the precept not to drink, then you should refrain from drinking. If you know you are going to drink, you should not take that precept. It's not good to resolve to do something, then break that resolution. That weakens one's strength of resolve. Taking a precept and then just breaking it is not right. If you take on a precept, you should have the full intention to keep it.

The precepts are really the definition of the human state. The five precepts are the required minimal behavior for remaining at the level of a human being. If one goes against them or breaks them, to that extent one is going below the human level. Someone who breaks them continually all the time is going down and down and down. This is very bad, because it's easy to go down but very difficult to get back up. So people should be careful to keep to the precepts as vigorously as possible.

People tend to think that taking a drink doesn't matter. It's true. The actual taking of a drink is not thought to be very important or considered so by the Buddha. He said that the problem is what you do when you're under the influence of alcohol. When you take a drink you're no longer in full control yourself. Because of that, you can do things that you shouldn't do at all.

If one looks at it from a psychological point of view, one can ask: “Why do I want to drink?”, “What’s the purpose?” If you look you’ll find out that drink is really an anesthetic. People want to do it to anesthetize themselves, at least to some extent. They want to dull themselves so they don’t notice the *dukkha*. This isn’t the right way to do things because it’s dulling one’s mind. It’s going against the way of the Buddhist path. One should be sharp so one can see things clearly and understand clearly, so as to penetrate clearly into the truth of Buddhism. If one goes dulling the mind all the time it’s going right the opposite way. It’s not the right thing to do at all. The fifth precept is a really important one because many people say they’re ready to keep the other precepts but taking a drink now and then they have to do that because when you are doing business of some kind the best place to talk to people is in a pub over a drink, or something like that. Take newspapermen. In the West, newspapermen usually have alcoholic problems. They really do. Because they get a lot of their information in the pub. It’s not a good state at all.

But the nature of the *sīla* is rather interesting. *Sīla*, morality generally, is a relative thing. But it’s not relative in the way they thought of it in the 1960’s in America. It’s not relative to the individual. It’s relative to the human being as a human being. It is the set of conditions that relates to the human being. Which are correct for the human being to practice. So to break those precepts is really going against one’s own nature. If you take something like a tiger, a tiger has a different set of precepts. It has in effect precepts, the precepts of its nature. Its nature is that of the tiger. If it acts within the bounds of what a tiger is then it keeps to that state. It’s that way with most animals. The *dhamma* of a tiger, or the *dhamma* of a human being, or the *dhamma* of a dog. These are different levels and forms of nature.

The human being is a very high form of nature, so we should at least try to keep the five precepts. Although we get enough *dukkha* as a human being, an animal gets a lot more. The animal is much more likely to find *dukkha* in a gross way. The law amongst animals is the law of the jungle; it’s violent, full of fear and danger. Human beings don’t have to be in that state. Because of that, *sīla* is one of the first things we should attend to.

In the way of practice, if your *sīla* is not good then you can be sure when you do the *samādhi* practice, any shortcomings in *sīla* will come up and cause trouble. The *kilesas* will bring it up. They'll bring it up as a problem. This problem will disturb your practice. It can quite easily prevent you from getting into *samādhi*. One must be careful to watch the *sīla*, not break it.

If a *bhikkhu* breaks any of the *vinaya* precepts, he quickly goes and confesses it to another *bhikkhu*. He knows that if he doesn't do that, it will come up in his practice and bother him. So he has to put that right first. In addition, if you go beyond the five *sīla* to the eight or ten *sīla*, or further than that, then you are going to level of the *devas*, the practice of the *devas*. It's always said that the higher levels of precepts is the way of the *devas*. It's the level of the *devas* in the sense these are fundamental necessities of that realm. It doesn't mean that you'll necessarily attain the level of the *devas* by keeping that level of *sīla*. It means if you are practicing in that way, you have the basic necessities. You can then gradually put your mind into the right state to get to the *deva* realm.

Morality can be a very difficult issue, sometimes. When you get problems that are obviously either right or wrong, there is no question about it. But you can get problems where both sides are right and you don't know which one to go with. Their positions are opposites, they're contrary. Then you have to go to other principles. You must check what to do. Life is not simple. Because of that, you often get moral dilemmas concerning what you should do in a particular situation. You can see two or three possible courses of action and you can't say that any of them are actually wrong. So you don't know what is the right thing to do. In that case you have to use wisdom. But that doesn't really come so much under the heading of *sīla*. It's more the and responsibility of wisdom to see the way through it.

What if there is a certain amount of drink in the food?

The Buddha said if you can't smell it or taste it, then it doesn't matter.

In the West they don't teach that one should not drink at all.

The precepts say one should not drink. For each precept the rule says, “I undertake the rule of training to refrain from...”. It is not a prohibition like, ‘thou shalt not’. If one takes upon oneself that rule of training, one makes the determination or the resolve to keep to that rule. If one does that then one should keep to it. Taking drinks or drugs brings about altered states of consciousness, the mind is somehow affected. And these substances do not take the mind to a higher level, but rather to a lower-level. They distort the mind in some ways. Those conditions are not a help on the path of Buddhist practice.

And you must be very careful about the potential harmful effects. LSD can have all sorts of odd effects. The effects are mostly sensory phenomena. and the amount of sensory phenomena people can take depends on the individual. Some people can't take much, and it drives them half-mad. Drugs can be very damaging.

Usually people who take drugs are trying to find a short cut. They're trying to get into a certain mental state by a short cut. What they don't realize is that the background of that state can only be correct if there's hard work behind it. You must go about it in the right way. If you attempt it by way of these short cut methods, you gain it, but you lose it just as quickly. It's not something that is a true part of your nature. if you attain some of those states by the hard way of the practice then you know how you got there. The way you've done it is orthodox and straight forward. No one can complain about it or criticize it or say it's wrong. If you attain something by taking drugs, its all wrong, the whole lot.

It is often said about non-killing that if someone had killed Hitler first, the lives of millions of beings would have been saved, how is that?

The precepts are personal matters. One takes them as rules of training. Because of that, if someone had killed Hitler he would owe that as a debt in himself. That's what matters. That's the whole way of it. We are not thinking here in vast numbers of people, or in what's right for society. It's not that direction. The direction is

what's right for oneself and one's future. It must be like that because, in truth, the only thing we really know is our own consciousness. We don't know any other. The whole lot is a really within oneself. Because it's within oneself, what happens in that inner world is what really matters. What happens out in the world externally is not so important. In any case, you don't know and that killing Hitler would have saved all of those lives; something far worse may have happened. You just can't tell. There were a lot of nasty people around at that time, so you just don't know.

Would the intention matter, if you killed out of greed or hate and if you killed out of wanting to save lives?

I doubt it, because the whole situation would be a delusion in oneself. It would be a completely deluded situation internally and in that case the understanding would be wrong.

What is the kamma of policemen and soldiers who have the right to kill?

The volition required to kill someone is not a wholesome volition in any way. It does not matter socially whether one is a policeman or a bandit or whatever. It's still the volition to kill. It's true people take on the duty of a policeman or a soldier. Because they have taken on that duty, they should perform that duty. That may mean that in the line of duty they will have to kill somebody to protect society. There have to be people like that in the world. Nevertheless, that *kamma* will come back on them just the same.

When it comes to the teaching of Buddhism, it's like the Buddha said: there are only a few people with little dust in their eyes, only a few. We can't expect many people to be like that. The best we can expect is that the general teaching on morality will reach people and take a little bit of the dust away from their eyes. In that way, more people will be in the position to understand. As it is, the general run of people in the world are not capable of much understanding. They go the way of their *kamma*: they kill when they feel they have to and they are dragged down by it. It's been going on that way for an extremely long time, and the momentum of

kamma will keep it going like that. Those people who have enough understanding to see clearly the nature of this world realize that this is not a good condition and know they should try to get free. For them, keeping the precepts strictly is very important. They should not give way on them at all. Again, it's like if a policeman has to kill in his duty he shouldn't take the precept of against killing.

Would you elaborate on what constitutes wrong sex?

It's elaborated in the *suttas*, where it says that there shouldn't be sex with anyone who's underage, betrothed to be married and so on. One also has to think in terms of what the law in a particular country and what is socially acceptable in that country. One must realize that to go against those customs might be a danger to oneself, if one is living in a country or a society like that. So one has to adjust one's behavior according to the circumstances.

In the contemplation of the body, do we have to look at the other four aggregates too?

No. Take the body as the body. Take it in the way we normally think of the body. We aren't attempting to find out what the body actually is. Rather we are trying to see this body in what we might call the light of "truth". See what it is to the extent that we realize that this isn't me. It isn't mine. This is the important thing. Later on we can examine the body is a mental image. At the beginning of body contemplation, we must look at the body in the way we normally do. Otherwise, the investigation becomes more and more nebulous. Then the practice doesn't work properly. The work of the practice is to see the body as a loathsome mess of bits and pieces.

Irritation causes angry emotions. To look at them should I stay with the feeling?

The thing is to watch and see how feeling arises. Because it isn't static, it's always changing. Notice that when feelings of anger arise there is a tendency for thoughts of anger to arise as well. Then you begin to realize how *paṭiccasamuppāda* is true,

how feeling is the condition for anger or greed or whatever to come up. You can see the link there quite clearly. To realize that is very important.

When you investigate feeling, you should find out where it is located and define it exactly. A precise definition is very important here. Buddha taught that things should be done precisely, in detail, as much as possible. So you should define exactly where the feeling is, how it's changing and what its nature is as an experience. You can't really describe that accurately to anybody, but you know in yourself what this feeling does, what arises out of it, and how it dies away. You experience how it's constantly arising and dying away. The Buddha said feeling is similar to raindrops falling in a puddle and causing bubbles come up and die away, pop, pop, pop. Like that the bubbles arise and die away all the time. That's the nature of feeling. But it's not as if the rain is coming down one drop at a time; it's pouring down and the bubbles are popping up all over the puddle. Feeling is like that.

The Buddha gave a very valuable set of similes for the five *khandhas*. He said the body is like a lump of foam. Sometimes the *ajāans* say the body is full of holes. There is an experience where the body appears to be full of holes. Feeling is compared to the bubbles coming from rain drops. *Saññā*, which is memory, is like a mirage seen in the desert. *Sankhāra*, the thought process, is like a banana tree. You peel away the layers of skin looking for the hard wood underneath, but there isn't any. The last one *viññāṇa*, or consciousness, is like a magician at the crossroads performing magic tricks. The whole of it is just his magic, so there is no substance in it at all. The five are given in the Sanyutta Nikāya.

I once saw myself as the five khandhas. I thought I should feel happy but I did not.

You won't feel happy because the *kilesas* will come up and cause trouble because you're cutting away at them. The happiness doesn't necessarily come up then. When you finally do cut down those *kilesas* and destroy them, then you will see the advantage, the relief that comes. Like you've been carrying a load all the time, and suddenly you just throw it off. It's then that you get the happiness. One has to work

to get that. In one way or another the *kilesas* will try to find a way to cause trouble, they usually do.

What is the kilesa of fear?

Fear is a very important one. It's one of the tricks of the *kilesas*. There are two types of fear. One which is object based and the other which isn't. If you go out into the jungle and see a tiger, fear arises. It's pretty obvious what happens there. The tiger is seen as a danger, and fear arises because of that. The other type of fear comes because of changes in processes going on within oneself, due to the practice. With that type of fear, there is no special object. The fear can come up as just a plain feeling. When the fear arises, you search around looking for something to pin the fear on. But you can't find anything, so you think: "What is it? Is it a ghost or what?" you don't know what it is. In fact, the fear is just a process going on inside you. When that comes up, it's important to deal with it directly, thinking, "This is an opportunity to look at fear. Look at it. The one thing you must never do is run away from fear. It's the worst thing you can do. Look at fear and realize this is just a trick of the *kilesas*. Nothing else. There is really nothing to be afraid of; there is no object, you can't find it. Usually you find that the fear dies away very quickly because the one thing the *kilesas* don't like is being looked at.

Sometimes I feel my mind is in a very high level of agitation expecting something dangerous to come in.

You should question why is that high level of agitation there. It's there due to *kamma*, of course. Don't worry, keep on with the practice and all those experiences can help you. A very profound understanding of Dhamma is not something that we can attain suddenly. If we come to that understanding suddenly, we couldn't stand it. At the same time, most people find it very difficult to get into the state where they can understand Dhamma deeply. If you're especially sensitive, you may be able to understand fairly easily. So be careful to let it come up at the appropriate time.

I saw woman the other day and got the feeling she hated me and I was afraid, all of a sudden all I saw was a skeleton and a bit of flesh and the feeling disappeared.

You can see how effective it is to see a person in a way that is not as we usually think of that person. Any hatred disappears because there is no longer anything to pin the hatred onto. It's a very important principle. When we talk about a person what do we mean? A person is composed of the five *khandhas* there, so which one is the person? When we think of a person we usually think of the body, but sometimes it's the speech, the sound of their voice. Sometimes it's the mannerisms, the way they move, sometimes it's the location they live at. When you consider what is the person, apart from all these, you can't find it. You realize that what we call a person is just like a tornado, continually whirling around. There is no entity there. So you realize that there's nothing there to like or to hate at all. The *citta*, the original *citta*, that's a different matter. That's not the person. You can't pin any personal identity onto the *citta* at all. You can't say that the *citta* is the *khandhas*.

We can say that the *citta* with *kilesas*, the *citta* with *avijjā*, is responsible for the 5 *khandhas*. In the ultimate analysis you can say that *avijjā* and the five *khandhas*, the whole lot are like clouds. There's no substance in any of them. We can't accept it like that because we've still got *avijjā*. Because we still have *avijjā*, we must think in the ways of *avijjā*, in the ways of ignorance. The *avijjā* is like something distorted or twisted inside the *citta*. If that straightens out, the whole lot just dissolves.

Are citta and viññāṇa the same thing?

Viññāṇa is really a function of the *citta*. When the *citta* functions as *viññāṇa* it receives sensations. The one who knows, that's the *citta*. If it's something you sense, then that's an object and not the *citta*. The *citta* is the one who knows and receives sensation, but it's not the sensation. The sensation is what it knows and receives. If something is known, there must be the knowing of that. There's a division between the one that knows it and the thing that's known. The one that knows it, that's the *citta*.

Is there any difference between the citta and the patisandhi viññāṇa?

Patisandhi viññāṇa is a very special term which is usually translated as rebirth-linking consciousness. It's that consciousness that goes to the bhava⁸, the next place of existence. It's the consciousness that grasps at birth. That's the *Patisandhi viññāṇa*. That's the only time it's used. *Patisandhi* means linking back, linking across.

It's what they call a *kamma* image, an image coming up from *kamma* at the time of death, which presents the situation we can be reborn in. If you're mindful at that time, you'll be able to remember your previous life. You'll remember the life you've just left. Mindfulness is essential. Mindfulness will give one a good human birth and may lead one higher. We can say that the more rapidly a being grasps a birth, the lower that birth will tend to be. If a being has enough strength to hold back then the birth will be much better, much higher. Mindfulness helps to restrain. This is a realm of the mind that is difficult to understand.

Some people can know the *citta* or the aura of other people. How they know it is different in different people. Some people just see an aura of lights in different colors. These things depend on the person, the characteristics of that person and how their minds work.

People should be very careful about psychic phenomena. Many kinds of psychic knowledge do exist, but in the ordinary person they can so easily get involved with *kilesas*. They can turn into this field of delusion. If a person has the power of knowing something, knowing the future, sometimes it may be genuine. If they're just completely uninterested it's probably genuine but the slightest interest, with that the *kilesas* are likely to get in and make it all wrong. This is the trouble with people who can foretell things and see in the distance, you don't know if they're speaking truth or not. They don't know themselves. It's only the Arahants who's really reliable.

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Personal Impressions

How did you come to Thailand?

My first introduction to Buddhism was in England, where I read books about it. As I became interested I read more and more on the subject. Eventually I decided to move to London where I contacted the Buddhist Society. There I met a bhikkhu named Kappilavaddho, an Englishman who had traveled to Thailand to ordain as a monk. He was returning to Thailand and I asked him if I could accompany him. I flew to Thailand with Kappilavaddho Bhikkhu and ordained at Wat Paknam. After my ordination I stayed in Thailand only about eight months before returning to England. I remained six years in England, running a small Buddhist organization. But I did not know much about Buddhism at that time. I knew the theory, but I didn't know the practice.

Your organization was Buddhist?

Yes. We had a small *vihāra* there for the monks to live in. I gave talks on Buddhism, but they were mostly based on what I had read about the theory. I didn't understand enough at a deeper level inside, so I knew that I had to return to Thailand to find a good teacher. While in England I met a Thai man whose job was connected with mining. When he returned to Thailand I asked him to find out who the good teachers were and where they lived, which he did. After a six years period an opportunity to travel to Thailand presented itself. Upon arriving in Bangkok I met the Thai man again and he advised me to go up to the Northeast, where he had made the acquaintance of several prominent teachers. Because of him, I had the opportunity of meeting Ajaan Mahā Boowa. When Ajaan Mahā Boowa visited Bangkok, I had the chance to meet him and ask him if I could stay at his monastery. He consented, and I've been there now for twenty three years.

Were you working in England?

I was an electrical engineer in England.

Did you marry?

No, I was never married. If somebody asks why I became a monk, I can only reply *kamma*. It seemed to me that I came to a point where I was certain what I wanted to do. The main thing then was to find out where to go and how to do it. This was the important thing. My life in the world was alright. I wasn't especially unhappy, but life just wasn't satisfactory. So I decided to become a monk.

When did you meet the master?

I met Ajaan Mahā Boowa for the first time in Bangkok, about twenty four years ago. At that time his *upajjhāya*, the elderly monk who had ordained him, was very sick in a hospital in Bangkok, so he came to very often to visit him. It was on one of his trips to Bangkok that I had the chance to meet Ajaan Mahā Boowa.

How did your master teach you?

It's very difficult to pinpoint it exactly. It was a combination of methods. He would teach by example, by instruction, by stories, by disapproval, by displaying anger and by many other means. It's rather strange but before I met Ajaan Mahā Boowa I was in correspondence with some English people. They asked me questions on Dhamma and I answered them. They kept my letters. After I arrived here I continued writing to them. Many years later one of those people showed me the letters that I'd written her, which she'd kept. Though I hadn't realized it at the time, I could see then that there was a big change in the nature of my understanding after I met Ajaan Mahā Boowa. There was quite contrast really. Much more clarity and certainty developed after I came here. It was quite noticeable. Why and how I don't know. With a good teacher it's hard to say where

and how you learn. When you're in close contact with someone like that, you pick up things in many, many ways. It's not simple at all.

Could you give me an example, maybe a story of how you were taught?

One afternoon I was reading Readers Digest, the English magazine, and Ajaan Mahā Boowa came along and asked, "What's that?" "It's a book about matters not connected with Dhamma," I replied. He started to look through it, asking "What's this?" and "What's that?" on another page, and so on. I thought about it and realized he was saying that the Dhamma is not so much there in the book, but rather if you have the Dhamma in the heart, everything you read is turned into Dhamma. All writings are Dhamma to the person who can see them in the right way. It's not that writings are about Dhamma or not about Dhamma. One person can read the *Ti-piṭaka* and it's not Dhamma; another person can read Reader's Digest and it's Dhamma. It depends on the heart and the mind of the reader.

*Did you study the Buddhist text, the *Ti-piṭaka*?*

I read much of the *Ti-piṭaka* on my own, and some commentaries. My reading was not very organized, more haphazard. I read other works from Christian and Hindu sources, and quite a lot of Buddhist texts from various schools. When you do that you tend to get jumbled up inside; you can't see the wood for the trees, you can't see what is really essential. There is so much mental confusion. It requires a good teacher straighten it out.

I would say when you look at the difference between Theravada and Mahayāna, mostly the differences are not so great. The differences are more on the surface than deep down. There is a tendency in Mahayana to stress the end product, Nibbāna, the very high states. Theravada does not do that so much. It tends to go right to the beginning. The difference would seem to be that Theravada deals with our immediate problems, here and now, and when the higher stages are reached then they are dealt with at that time. A lot of Mahayana, but not all by any means, goes very high to begin with. That's not good because the person who is untrained

in the ways of wisdom cannot grasp the truth of such profound meaning. In the end they just substitute a mental symbol in the place of real understanding.

Christians, for instance, talk about God, but the word God is just a symbol whose meaning is at best vague. How many Christians know the meaning of God? It's the same for the profound truths of Buddhism: they are way beyond the understanding of ordinary people. Because of that, they give them a meaning which is false. That's all they can do. Whereas, when they start with their immediate situation and their immediate problems, here and now, they will have a real basis to work with. People can understand that. When you talk about dukkha, suffering or discontent, everyone can relate to that. They have plenty of experience. When you talk about how we so often misunderstand our situation, thinking our actions are going to bring a good result only to find that the opposite usually happens, people understand that. This gives them a good basis for practical development. The whole of Buddhism should be practical. The Buddha said that Dhamma is like a steppingstone to get us across the stream, in other words, a practical teaching. As for the higher stages of practice, there is time enough to go on to those privately with the teacher when you reach that level. Too many people talk about the higher stages before they have gained any true understanding, which doesn't help much.

Is it possible to be enlightened?

Yes, the Buddha taught that it is possible to be enlightened. The psychology of human beings is not different from what it was at the time of the Buddha. The problems of human beings are fundamentally not different from the time of the Buddha. Nowadays we have a lot of technological advances, but those are all external, all peripheral. As human beings we still possess the five external senses. Our minds are not fundamentally different — they work in the same way. When you understand what is meant by enlightenment, you realize that its attainment is still entirely possible.

Basically, our minds are polluted by the *kilesas* — all the defilements of character, stemming from greed, hatred and delusion. These defilements are what prevent us

from attaining enlightenment. The *kilesas* are of the same nature as they were at the time of the Buddha. Greed is the same, hatred is the same, and delusion is the same. These are problems that we're trying to get rid of. By getting rid of them, we get rid of the poison. We get rid of the things that push us in the wrong direction all the time. After eliminating them, there is nothing to stop us from coming to know the essentially pure nature of the *citta*. When nothing prevents us from knowing the true essence, why shouldn't we become Arahants?

The problem is not whether one can become an Arahant; the problem is that people do not understand what's meant by attaining Arahant. Most people think it's something very strange or wonderful, that you can fly or something like that. But it isn't like that at all. In fact, I would put it like this: the Arahant is the normal person, he has become normal. It's all the rest of us who are peculiar, because we have strange ideas. Our mental outlook is at odds with Dhamma; it's not according to the truth. Because it is not according to the truth, it's all false. Our minds are going in strange directions, which are not natural at all. When it's like that, it's the ordinary person that appears very peculiar very strange. The Arahants are entirely normal.

Does your master teach how to meditate?

Yes. His teaching is broad, because meditation comes under two broad headings. Firstly, he teaches meditation for calm and concentration, or *samādhi*. Secondly, he teaches meditation for wisdom and understanding. These two types shouldn't be mix together in the beginning. When a meditator strives for calm, he should not try to develop understanding. If he is developing understanding, he should not make a concerted effort to be calm. Later when skill is attained, the two can be mix.

To begin with we are taught to meditate for the purpose of attaining calm. Calm means a state of mental integration. It is a state of unity and stillness experienced in the *citta*, the knowing essence of mind. The mind can become so still that the breathing stops. It also withdraws from all the senses, leaving no awareness of the external world. That calm stillness brings a great sense of happiness. That is the

first stage to attain. When you attain that, you will see practically, for yourself, how valuable the teaching is. Having clearly seen its value, you are spurred on to try even harder.

When the mind becomes calm and collected in that way, it's very easy to turn it to developing wisdom. Normally the mind cannot develop wisdom because it's too restless, always jumping about. Wisdom in the Buddhist sense differs somewhat from wisdom in the worldly sense. In the worldly sense, wisdom usually means clever and skilled thinking that leads to understanding. In Buddhism, it means much more of a deep contemplation. It's much more like a deep probing with calm and concentration underlying it. It is not restless at all. There's also a sense of peace and happiness, and an almost joyful quality about it. That is the state we are aiming at. It's very difficult to get to that state; it's not easy. It can come naturally to some people, but most people get stuck at the level of discursive thinking.

There are the two basic objects of meditation. The most common one is awareness of the breath. This is not a physical breathing exercise, like yoga; but rather it is an exercise of the mind. We use the breath merely as an object to hold the mind steady. The breath is merely something to catch the mind, to stop it from wandering. To do that you should keep your attention on the feeling of the breath where it passes in and out at the tip of the nose. Try to keep your attention on that point without wavering. When you begin to gain some success, that point becomes more interesting, which encourages you to pursue it more closely. You soon become quite absorbed in it. The breath's point of contact may move. But you should keep your attention on it wherever it moves. If you continue on like that, the mind will gradually sink into a very calm state. This is one of the basic meditation techniques. As an alternative you can use the repetition of *buddho* as technique as well. Just silently repeat the meditation-word *buddho* over and over in your heart. Another technique is to take the parts of the body — skin, hair, nails, teeth, etc — and keep your mind fixed on them. This is an excellent meditation, because when a person becomes skilled in that, then the nature of the body can very easily open up, turning into wisdom and understanding about what the body really is. This is the way of wisdom. The techniques of wisdom usually start with contemplating the

body, because this is the grossest and most worldly part of who you are. You should start with what's gross first before going on to more and more subtle objects. It's easier that way. So you take the body and examine it in detail until you see its true nature, until you realize that the body is just part of the world — not I, not me, not mine. Realize that the body does not belong to you in any way. It just comes from the world and goes back to the world, every bit of it. Then you begin to realize the importance of body contemplation. The body is our primary identification. It identifies who we are in the world.

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The Nature of Feeling

We have to train ourselves until we get to that level where we can understand what Nibbāna really means. We are all looking for contentment — for happiness. And we all have discontent. Discontent is our problem. So what we are really searching for is a refuge. People search for refuges all over the place. First of all, they look inside, but although the primary refuge exists inside them — the best of the lot — they can't get to it because it's covered by a lot of defilements — greed, hatred, delusion and ignorance. Because of that, when people go inside themselves, all they see is a mess. They find nothing there that they want. So they fail to find a refuge there. What do people do then? They go out into the world. They look for money, for cars, for other people — for all sorts of worldly things. But the trouble is, any refuge in the world cannot in any true sense be possessed. If you buy a car: it's only yours in a conventional sense. There's nothing that has changed in the car to make it belong to you. And anyway, the thing is going to rust and fall to pieces sooner or later. And then, it's all gone. Your refuge is gone. And money is the same: it comes, it goes. There's no certainty in any of that. So there's no really secure refuge in the world at all.

A wise person, upon hearing the teaching of the Buddha, learns that he must go inside prepared to struggle. He has to fight the *kilesas*, the defilements. Because by fighting the defilements, he may come to break through and see something of what's really there. If he succeeds, that which he sees is so worthwhile — so valuable — that his interest in the world just disappears. He's no longer interested in the world. He becomes interested only in getting inside his own heart the whole time — because this is the one place where there's a real and satisfactory refuge.

Our job in the practice is to find out how to train ourselves so that we can come to that point of understanding and see the truth. And the goal must accomplish, which underscores the whole of the *Buddhasāsanā*, is to destroy the *kilesas* — greed,

hatred and delusion — all of which spring from fundamental ignorance. This is what we have to do.

Now, when we look at the *paṭiccasamuppāda* — the wheel — we find there in the middle of it — there's feeling. And dependent on feeling arises *taṇhā* — craving. This is very important. Because all of the *kilesas* — the defilements — arise because of feeling. So we've got to learn to look within ourselves to find out where these feelings are; and we've got to find what sort of feelings give rise to what sort of states of mind. It is very important in meditation practice to look for feeling, to get to know it — particularly feeling in the solar plexus region. Because when we're upset in one way or another — it's always felt down there. And it's always there that the *kilesas*, the defilements, come from. When unpleasant feeling arises, we don't like to feel that the fault is our own. So we search externally and find something to blame. We blame somebody else or, if the defilement is greed, we crave for something external. If the defilement is hatred, we blame somebody else or something else.

This is the way people react to feeling all the time. To try and placate those feelings, they blame something externally. In other words, "I'm not at fault!" In that way, they try to cure unpleasant feelings; but it doesn't really cure them. Instead, by allowing the mind to go out and blame things externally, they make *kamma*, and that *kamma* comes back on them in the future in the form of these same sorts of feelings. So the wheel just goes round and round and round — on and on like that. If we don't learn to correct this, we will never get free of it.

To correct it one must do the right thing by not letting the mind go out. One has got to go in — every time — and look at those unpleasant feelings. And accept them. Accept that this is one's own fault. Because one has done unwholesome acts, unpleasant feelings arise as a result. So the result is one's own fault. When one accepts that it's one's own fault, and one examines that and doesn't let the attention go outward, then that debt is paid, and the one's difficulties become a little bit less. Each time one does it, they become less and less. Through that, one finds a certain joy and contentment arising within. One feels happy. One feels

contented. And it's because of the work one has done — because one has learnt how to cure the defilements to some extent. The more one goes on in this way, the more one feels buoyant and light. This result points out the right direction. This shows that one is going the right way. The more one experiences happiness, the more one knows that one is going in the right direction.

People in the world don't know how to look after themselves and how to behave. They're trapped and caught in the world. And they're trapped by attraction to the things they see, the things they hear, by other people and what they tell them. And the one factor that causes us to go on and on like this is the factor of memory. Memory is the one thing that teaches us to go in the wrong direction the whole time. Since we were very young, we've stored all sorts of things from the past in our memory. And they entered memory mostly at an early age when we couldn't really discriminate, when we couldn't think whether they were right or wrong. When memories go in like that — they stick there and come up later. Because these 'facts of memory' come up automatically, we think that they're right. Our view of the world is created by the ideas we've learned — and most of them are wrong. But because memory is constantly informing us, we think the world is like this, or we think other people are like that — we think all sort of things! And it's just memory telling us what to think. We don't check to find out whether it's true or not. But we should. We should learn to question everything. To look and question and see whether things are right or wrong.

Memory is very important. We try to make a refuge of memory as well. We think that if we learn everything about the world, then by knowing those things we know exactly what to do in any situation. The problem is that situations arise which we don't know how to deal with because we've never had that experience. This is what happens time after time really: we find ourselves in a new situation which we've got no memory for! So, we don't know what to do. Time after time it comes up like that. And because of that, the refuge of memory doesn't really help us very much. It tells us — but really in the wrong way — what to do. So, we've got to be very cautious of memory. One's memory tells one something, and one's got to think: "Is this true or not?" This is the way to learn.

Practicing the way of Buddhism correctly results in an increased understanding of how things are really working — how our minds really work. Why we do things. Why other people behave as they do. And we see all sorts of things and understand all sorts of things which were never understood before. The understanding comes in many ways. And the understanding that we gain gives us certainty that we are on the right path. It shows us that this must be the right path because everything fits together. And when we can see the path like that, we know what direction we have to go to get free. This gives us the confidence to go on practicing meditation in the way of Dhamma. If we can do that, we can gain freedom.

Most people in the world don't know where they are! They more or less give up the whole situation as a bad job. They're stuck — they're sort of like: "Oh, I don't know. Maybe there's a god. Maybe there isn't a god." They don't know where they stand. But in the practice of Dhamma, one can find out exactly what the situation is, and where the main root of one's problems lies. And one finds that the whole of it is in oneself — it's all inside.

If it were outside, it is possible we wouldn't be able to know about it — because we can't really contact it. We have to work through the senses. We don't really know what the senses are telling us. We think we know, but we don't. One can work that out quite easily. And because of that, if the problem is external, we may not be able to cure it at all. In other words, if there is a god out there somewhere, maybe we can't do anything about it, because he has just laid this on us — he just put this state on us. But when one realizes that the trouble is in oneself, it's right there to be cured in oneself too — by oneself. So, this gives one the confidence that one can do it.

And it's no good going to a priest or someone like that, they can't help. Even the Arahants — the Enlightened Ones — they can't cure others. They can point out the way. They can say what you should do, what way you should go. But you've got to do it for yourself. Nobody else can do it. In other words: it's a personal way and it's a practical way. That's the way of Buddha-Dhamma. But one must realize that this

isn't an absolute teaching. In other words, we're not saying there's anything absolutely true here. You can't talk about Absolute Truth — it's the end result. It's way beyond. But the teaching of the Buddha is a practical teaching. It practically leads one in the right direction. It practically leads one on towards freedom. This is the way the Buddha taught. He didn't teach that we have absolute gods or absolute dogmas, or that you must believe in them — anything of that sort. He taught that this way practically will lead you to freedom.

The Buddha once said in the forest to his followers. He picked up some leaves from the ground. He said, "Which are more? These leaves in my hand or those in the forest?" And they said, "Well, there's millions in the forest. There's only a few in your hand." And he goes, "Yes. This is what I teach you. It's like the leaves in my hand compared with what I know which is like the leaves in the forest." And he said, "Why do I only teach you this? Because this leads you to freedom. All the rest of this stuff is of little substance. When you get free you can understand for yourself. When you get free, then you're free to find out for yourself." When you are free you can. You've got the right attitude, and the right mind, the right way of doing it. But until you're free, even if the Buddha were to tell you all of these things, you wouldn't understand them. So, the thing is we've got to get free, we've got to develop our understanding on the inside for ourselves. When we can do that, then we can see for ourselves. After we've done the job, after we've got free, then we can ask all the questions we like. One's on one's own then. One knows what to do.

If we know that someone has ill will towards us should we do things together or just avoid them?

Practice *mettā*. One should do whatever doesn't upset them. In other words, if you know something upsets that person don't do it. If doing things together upsets them, then don't do things together. If it upsets them the other way, then you do things together. Whatever doesn't upset them: you do that.

But always practice *mettā*. Supposing you don't like someone: consider how that person has been born as a human being — that means that he has some good merit. If he had no merit, he wouldn't be born as a human being. So that's the first good point. Then you consider that: because he's come to the *Buddhasāsanā* and come to a monastery with a very good teacher, then he must have quite a lot of merit. One should think things like that to make oneself realize that that person, whatever his faults may be, still has lots of very good qualities too, so you should have *mettā* and look after him.

What if we don't have any dislike towards someone ...it's only one way.

In that case one does whatever is suitable there; and if they have ill-will, that's their business.

Do we have to avoid them?

You don't have to. It depends on the circumstances. If avoiding them helps, it's probably better to try and avoid them. If avoiding them doesn't help, then there's no need to. But *mettā* is very powerful so *mettā* can have a very powerful effect. The Buddha said that the most powerful force is *mettā*. It's true, because people are afraid of somebody with *mettā*. This is the way it is. They're afraid in a respectful sense: they don't know quite why but they feel that they don't want to do anything to that person — or to damage that person — because they're afraid of him. A very strange effect.

You said that we should look at the feelings. Is that all — just know the feeling? Or what do you do with that?

Examine it. If it's feeling, it has a location. It has a position in the body. The feeling has a mode — a particular quality — that's not the same as other feelings. And it has a mode of changing — of moving about. One looks and searches and finds out exactly what it's doing. Then one questions to oneself: why should I dislike this feeling when I like other feelings? What's the difference? One questions and sort of

probes into it all of the time like that. Then you think: well, supposing I wanted to change this feeling, could I? You'll probably find you can't, but it's worth trying. See what happens.

Does this relate to the levels one's samādhi is at?

No, this is automatic. The thing is: supposing you have an argument with someone and you don't feel very happy about it afterward. In a couple of day's time, you see that person again and immediately this feeling comes up because of that argument. That's the trigger for it, you see. That's the trigger for the *kamma* that one's made from that time. When that feeling comes up, if you're not careful the anger will come up as well. What you must do is: stop that anger. Examine that feeling to see what the feeling is. Search out that feeling. If you can control that feeling — or at least let it be and accept it and not give way to it with anger — then you defeat the *kilesas*, the defilements. Having done that once, you'll understand what the feeling means. Then you'll realize, "Oh! Of course. I see how this works now."

When is the best time to examine your feelings? When they arise or when you're sitting in meditation or when?

First of all, you want to be able to recollect a time when feelings of that sort arose in the past and how that led to an angry reaction. In that way, you begin to understand the causes of your actions. Then, when a similar situation comes up in the future, you're primed so that you know what to do. Otherwise, when the feeling comes up quickly, the sudden anger may catch you off guard — it's just too quick. You can't do anything. If you've thought about it and sort of analyzed this in yourself from past occasions, then you can learn a lot about it. You've got to get a road mapped out, so to speak. A route of getting to safety mapped out.

The same thing applies, of course, to greed. I mean, one walks along the street and you see a large television set and: "Wooh! I like that." Then what happens? Feeling of wanting arises — going out to the object of desire. So one starts thinking about it; and by thinking about it *upādāna*, attachment, arises. And once that attachment

has arisen, one can't stop thinking about it. This attachment is all based on feeling. The person who realizes this can see the problem and the solution. As soon as that wanting arises, stop! Look. Look inside. See what's going on. Feeling is very important because it's between feeling and *taṇhā*, the craving, that you can put a barrier. That's the place where you can put the barrier and not let it proceed from feeling to wanting.

When you do that, you start unwinding *paṭiccasamuppāda*: factors in the wheel leading from ignorance right through to birth and death and backwards again. It goes round like that. And the feeling depends upon what's called *passa*: the coming together of the sense base, the object and consciousness. And that depends on having the senses. Which in turn depends on having a mind and a body. They depend on *viññāṇa*: the consciousness without doors — as they call it. It's a technical term. And it goes back to the ignorance that produced the *kamma*, leading one to have all the conditions for birth arising. It goes around from ignorance through the various steps until it comes to the sense bases: eye, ear, nose, tongue, body and the mind. And based on those senses, you see, hear, smell, taste things and so on. This is followed by the contact of sensation. Then feeling! Feeling arises. Alright, that feeling is just based upon something that you've seen, heard, smelled or tasted. If you examine it you'll see that the feeling is just based upon a form — a shape — or a sound or a smell or a taste or contact. That's all. But, because of memory, we then associate that with something else. And because we associate it with something in memory, then a reaction comes: "Rrrgh! I don't like that!" or whatever it is. Because of the feeling!

The Buddha, when he became enlightened, said that he felt that he didn't want to teach the Dhamma because nobody would understand it. And it's said that the Great Brahma came to him and asked him to teach. But Ajaan Mahā Boowa usually puts it that he reviewed his own past and he saw how he also had ignorance and how he had worked trying to find the way. Eventually, he found the way and he saw that there were other people who could accomplish this also. There were people in the world that had the right attitude and the right mind-set to understand the truth. So he decided to teach. He worked out the best method for

teaching people of all different types. And his teaching is what we call the *Buddhasāsanā*, the teaching of the Buddha.

The Buddha's teaching is really a method to get people to go from their present state to a state where they can understand. A person in an ordinary state of consciousness can't properly fathom the truth of Dhamma. It's as though everybody has a totally wrong view of themselves and the world. And because of that totally wrong view, they see everything wrongly. And they perpetuate these wrong views. But because wrong view is all they've ever known, it's difficult for people to understand the predicament they're in. In other words, people are caught in a situation that they've created for themselves, but they don't even know what the situation is because we can't see any other perspective. This is the difficulty one has to understand.

One might ask: "Well, how did the Buddha know that what he understood was correct — as against what we understand?" And the reason that he knew that he was correct was that there was nothing left. When you come to nothing, then you know that you can't go further. That means that everything that he saw in the world, everything he knew, was kind of unreal, and what he knew as the Real Truth was not this kind of thing at all. It was something quite different. It's difficult to explain.

Does feeling arise based on saññā?

Feeling arises based on *saññā*. Yes, that's true. What happens is the *saññā* arising — the memory arising — of a particular situation has an emotional state associated with it. Now, if by this practice, watching the feeling here, one doesn't let the *kamma* be produced, that emotional state will gradually grow less. Until the *saññā* can arise, you can see — supposing it's somebody you don't like: you see the person, the *saññā* arises, "Yes, I don't like the person", but there's no feeling. No feeling arises, it's just neutral. The whole thing just dies away because there is no support for it — that's where the giving up comes in. The giving up is not something that you do — it's automatic. One can't let go volitionally. Rather, one lets go by

understanding. When the understanding comes, the letting go takes place of itself. A lot of people say, “You’ve got to let go”, but the things you can intentionally let go of are few. I mean, you can give up smoking, but even if you give up smoking, the *taṇhā* — the craving for it — is still there. There’s a pull all the time. It’s only when the *taṇhā* ceases to arise, and the thoughts don’t go in that direction, then it’s really been given up.

In that situation, investigating the craving for cigarettes will eventually cause it to die away?

When one is giving up something like smoking, the best thing to do when the thought of it comes up is to turn immediately to something else. Don’t let the thought arise. Practically, that’s the best thing to do. I know, because I’ve done it. You can also do that with other attachments. You can turn away and don’t let the thought arise. However one does it, one must avoid getting caught up in that feeling.

If it’s already caught up and it’s a very strong habit, then it’s just a matter of investigating that over and over again?

Yes, you’ve got to investigate the feeling. Yes, over and over again to counteract a strong habit.

If some feeling arises again and again, could it be related to our past action or past kamma?

Oh yes. Yes, definitely. *Kamma* and the results of *kamma* are very complex. You may have one strong incident which is the main *kamma* that gives rise to particular feelings for example — and those feelings arise time after time because of that one strong incident. If the same *kamma* is not reproduced each time, it will gradually get weaker. It may take a long time — especially for very strong *kamma* in a person. It’s very complex. *Kamma*: the Buddha said that if you try to work out the whole of *kamma* it will drive you mad. You can’t do it.

Is there a way to know if a feeling is kamma-related or not?

I think you can say feeling is always related to *kamma* in some way. This body is *kamma*-related. This body came from *kamma*. Because of that, this is associated with it in some way.

Can you produce kamma by thinking?

Yes. There are three types of *kamma*: thought, speech and action — and thought is the most subtle. Speech is more gross. Action is the most gross. The position of morality in Buddhism is that it concerns speech and action only — not thought — because thoughts are too subtle for people to control. They are too difficult to control, so the Buddha said that the first duty is to get everything right outside — and outside is speech and action. Even though you're turbulent inside, get it right outside first, so that you don't upset the world around you. Because, when you upset the world, the world comes back on you — and if they do that, then you're not in a peaceful situation, and you can't really do any of the other practices. So, one must set your responsibility to the world right with the *sīla*, moral virtue. When one is at peace with the world, then one is free to forget worldly concerns and go inside. But, if your relationship with the world is not right and people are coming causing trouble all the time, that's not good.

If someone asks you about another person and you know a lot of bad things about them, would telling them the truth create bad kamma?

This is where one has to use wisdom. It's like the old story of a soldier, an officer, who was saying a lot of bad things about one of the other officers to the commander. The commander pulled him up and said, "You shouldn't talk like that about your fellow officers." He said, "Either you should speak good of them or say nothing." He (the soldier) said, "Ok, I'll go now", and just before he went, the commander said to him, "And about that officer you mentioned, I have nothing to say." That's the use of wisdom. In other words, if somebody asks you, "What's your

opinion?” You say, “Well, I don't want to say.” Or you can say, “I like to speak good of people, but about this person I can't say anything at all.” Wisdom can get one out of many troubles.

If a thought keeps coming back, even though you say “Buddho, Buddho, etc...” What do you do?

If a thought comes back like that, it's based on feeling and memory.

I think it's memory...it's just something that happened.

Don't underrate feeling. Feeling is not something that's vague and uncertain. Feeling is very precise, very complex. In fact, you can say that before speech arises, there is always feeling; and that feeling, in a nut shell, has got the whole of what you want to say. The feeling comes out and goes into a dialogue. The way of feeling is most complex.

Sometimes I have a thought that seems to be trying to establish and increase my sense of self.

Yes! This is a strong factor of *taṇhā*: this is the motive behind so much. The promotion of self. Because we always want an identity and, to establish an identity, we've got to establish what is not us. What is not our self. And, because of that, we establish the world, the whole world, and everybody, other people — everything: “That's not my self, but it defines where ‘I’ am. I am in the middle of that, so to speak.” And these thoughts, in all sorts of ways, are trying to establish what one is.

Memory helps in this too, because one has memories from the past and that establishes what one is, based on the past. And these memories keep coming up, and one keeps thinking about them and keeps refreshing them so that one can be quite sure of one's environment. Memory is established there all of the time, and the constant bringing up of thoughts of the past — from all over the place — which one has thought about before many, many times: one does this just to confirm one's

situation — to confirm one’s environment — to confirm that “This is ME here”. It’s very complex. But, the tendency to have thoughts coming up to establish a self-identity is a very strong tendency. And it’s a difficult one to deal with. In fact, the attachment to self really isn’t eliminated until the Path of Arahantship. The self is one of the last fetters to go. This is the *attavādupādāna*: the attachment to the conceit of self.

Ajaan Mahā Boowa said that when one practices for *sīla* and for *samādhi*, one should think in terms of oneself and self-development. When one turns and practices *paññā* — investigating, examining, looking into things — one should see everything as being *anattā*, not-self. There is no self in anything. Until finally, when one breaks through, one chucks out both self and not-self as being two forms of delusion. This is a practical teaching. Many people get worried about the implications of *anattā* or not-self: “Have I got a self or haven’t I?” They talk about *anattā* quite a lot but they don’t really understand it. In truth, *anattā* is a practical teaching to overcome that false idea of self-identity that we have.

The Buddha said that the idea of self-identity can be associated with any one of the five *khandhas*. Sometimes, it is body. Sometimes, feeling. Sometimes, thought. Sometimes, memory. Sometimes, consciousness. And it can slip about from one to the other depending on circumstances. The aim of the wisdom is to see that all of the evidence is pointing to the fact that there is no fixed entity there at all. Whatever is there, just changes all the time.

The final one, and the most difficult one to understand is the *citta*. People don’t understand the *citta* at all. It’s difficult to understand because the *citta* is not something which you can point to. Normally, we perceive objects, which means that the object is there, and I am here perceiving it. With the *citta*, you can’t do that — because it’s the *citta* that does the perceiving. The *citta*, itself, is the one that knows. It doesn’t always know rightly, but it knows. Because the *citta* is the knowing, it can’t perceive itself as a object.

But the *citta* is really the basis of everything. I like the simile of the cinema screen. If you have a cinema screen, you get all sorts of images on it. Many things appear

there, and they change about all of the time. But it's all projected on that one screen. But no matter how real those images appear, just turn off the projector and they are all gone. Then, there is only the screen left. In the case of the cinema, we can see the screen; but with the *citta*, we can't even see the screen.

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Buddho

Should I use the repetition of buddho in conjunction with awareness of the breath?

The main thing is you have to try it for yourself because different people have different experiences. I find that I cannot use the repetition of *buddho* in conjunction with awareness of the breath. But many people find that it is very useful to combine them into one practice. Personally, I must do either one or the other, but not both at the same time. I usually focus on the breathing practice, but at times the repetition of *buddho* is very useful. It is especially useful for quelling restless thoughts. But this is something that you have to try for yourself. It is difficult to give any hard and fast rules which apply to everyone.

I'll suggest one practice that you might want to try. You can use either mindfulness of the breath or the repetition of *buddho* as the base practice. As you focus on your meditation object try to stop all thoughts, and the words that express them. When you focus on the throat and feel that a word or a phrase is pushing up, hold the pressure there and deliberately suppress it. Most of our thoughts are expressed in terms of speech, so if we can stop the words, the thoughts will begin to die away. So you use the breath or the *buddho* as an aid to counteract the verbalization of the mind. If you are using the repetition of *buddho*, eventually you should stop even the word *buddho* from arising. It's almost as though thoughts and words are like bubbles that are constantly floating to the surface, and it is your job to keep a constant watch inside to catch them before they burst into consciousness. In other words, you catch them and hold them still internally. At first, you will not be able to hold the words for very long before they break free into thoughts. But as you work at it with diligence, you will gain greater proficiency at controlling your thinking. Then it becomes a very beneficial practice.

It is important to keep in mind that most of our thoughts are maintained by words. For instance, when anger arises, the anger is maintained by thinking angry

thoughts. If you can stop those thoughts, then the anger does not have much of a basis to work from.

Is awareness of the breath suitable for walking meditation?

It is suitable, but you must be careful because the rhythm of walking and the rhythm of breathing tend to interfere with one another. In other words, there is a tendency to modify your breathing to bring it into line with the rhythm of walking. Although this tends to happen, it is still a good practice. However, Ajaan Mahā Boowa has said that it is probably better to use the repetition of *buddho* when doing walking meditation practice. If the repetition of *buddho* is coordinated with the pace of walking, that doesn't matter. In the end, it is usually a matter of experimenting to find out which method best suits your character. In other words, which method brings you the best results in meditation. In the *kammaṭṭhāna* practice of the Thai Forest tradition, you must be flexible and innovative, or even inventive, in the methods that you use.

What is the best way to investigate the three characteristics, the Ti-lakkhaṇa?

You look you see the three characteristics being displayed. First you should look for their grosser aspects, those in your own body and in the external world. I remember when I was young living in England I used to stay in my grandfather's house. Now the house is gone, it has been pulled down, it is not there anymore. The whole situation has changed completely. Time rolls on and everything from the past disappears. That's the nature of constant change. Whatever we are attached to will eventually disappear over time. One's body is the same; it is constantly changing all the time. The body doesn't last either.

From that we can see that whenever we cling to anything that is in a state of constant change, that clinging is thwarted by impermanence, which in turn brings dissatisfaction and suffering. You have something in your grasp that you want to hold on to, and suddenly it's gone. *Dukkha* is bound to follow. So it's easy to see how impermanence leads to discontent.

Since everything we grasp at turns into *dukkha*, we cannot find anything that is truly *sukha*. Happiness and contentment are what we are searching for; they are the characteristics that we imagine a true self must have. But because happiness and contentment are undercut by the changing nature of all phenomena, we begin to see that everything is *anattā*, devoid of any personal essence or identity. We desire self because we look on self as being a place of refuge, a place of peace and rest where we can always be happy and content. And yet, no matter where we look we cannot find that perfectly contented self. It simply does not exist for us.

The only place where we can find the kind of happiness and contentment we are looking for is in Dhamma. Only if we can make Dhamma into self can we reach our goal. Dhamma cannot be found by looking outside of ourselves, by searching in the world or the universe. Everything in that realm is *anattā*, so no basis for any refuge can be found there. If we try to make a refuge for ourselves in the world, that refuge will always be unstable and subject to disintegration. We identify with our bodies as being extensions of self, and therefore a refuge, much in the same way that we look on self as being a refuge. But the body isn't a refuge. The body is just part of this world. It came from the world, it's maintained by worldly substance and when it dies it will go back to the world. It can never be a stable refuge. It is the same with the four *nāma khandhas* as well. They are all constantly arising and ceasing.

So we can say that nowhere in the entire universe is there anything that can be a stable and enduring refuge, which would be the definition of a true self. So the Buddha taught *anattā* in the sense that it applies to the universe of the five *khandhas*, which incorporates everything we know. Beyond the five *khandhas*, there is that which we might call the self. But the word 'self' has a definition only within the context of the universe of *samsāra*, which makes the use of the word 'self' problematic here. The definition that we give to self does not apply to that which transcends the universe of the five *khandhas*. So in Buddhism we preferred to use Nibbāna. The only person who can correctly apply the word 'self' to that, is the person who has experienced it.

Nibbana is anattā also, is it not?

No, that's wrong. Nibbāna is not *anattā*. The ancient texts certainly say that, but Ajaan Mahā Boowa disagrees, and for very good reason. It is not possible to pin down Nibbāna with any conditions or characteristic whatsoever, be it *attā* or *anattā*. Wherever there is *anattā*, there must also be its opposite, *attā*, as well. It is the nature of duality that you cannot have one without the other. That is the nature of *samsāra*. In truth, there is nothing that you can say to describe Nibbāna. It is not subject to any conventional understanding. By saying that Nibbāna is *anattā*, you are ascribing to it a conventional characteristic. But Nibbāna, the Unconditioned, is entirely without conditions. So it is wrong to condition Nibbāna by saying that it is *anattā*. It's simply not true.

What is the aim of investigating the three characteristics?

The aim of one's investigation should always be to counteract the *kilesas*. So you should always use the *Ti-lakkhaṇa* in your investigations in ways that undermine the *kilesas*. For example, I've heard it claimed that the atomic nucleus is *anicca* because it is constantly changing. It may be true, but that is only a hypothesis, which is not the right way to get rid of the *kilesas*. In other words, if you use the three characteristics to promote your own views, you may simply be using them to increase discursive thinking, which helps the *kilesas* to grow. So keep your investigations to things that undermine and reduce to *kilesas*. Generally, that means that you keep your investigations to matters that affect you personally: to your body and your mind, and to those things in the world that your mind is emotionally attachment to. *Ārammaṇa* in Pali language. *Ārammaṇa* means objects of attachment. But not the objects of attachment out there in the world; but rather the objects of attachment perceived in the mind.

So basically you apply the three characteristics to the five *khandhas* and objects of emotional attachment, with the aim of reducing the *kilesas*. I've seen in certain of

the Buddhist publications some of the most abstruse scientific articles about Buddhist principles like the three characteristics. To me they just show that the person writing those articles hasn't understood anything about the Buddhist teachings. They are just full of theory and abstract views.

Investigation is very important in Buddhist practice. It comes from the Pāli word *vicāra*, which means to investigate or contemplate. It means that you take up the object that you are going to contemplate or investigate and you turn it around in your mind, thinking about it and probing into it to determine its relationship to other things, seeing what its nature is and why it's there. Rather like a dog gnawing a bone.

Calm is an important prerequisite for investigating, but it is not essential as long as you can keep your mind focused firmly on the thing you are contemplating. Lack of calm becomes an issue when your thoughts begin wandering to other things. A restless mind can easily hamper the investigation. As long as you can keep your mind on the object that you are contemplating, mental calm need not be an issue. The focus itself will have a calming effect.

Is mettā a quality that we can develop in our practice?

Generally, when we get good results in either the breathing practice or the *buddho* practice, *mettā* will be a natural byproduct of our success. When the mind is calm and properly focused, we tend to have a positive outlook on ourselves and others. The best way to maintain *mettā* is to always view others in a very positive light, and to avoid having negative thoughts about them. Criticism is a very important negative which should be avoided. Some people simply repeat the phrase "May you be happy, may you be happy" and call that *mettā* meditation. Often the motives of people who repeat "May you be happy" are quite contrary to that sentiment. The mere words are far from sufficient. In fact, those words simply display what a person's attitude *should* be, but they do not display what one's attitude *is*. The practice for *mettā* is merely a method for developing that state of mind, it should not be confused with the state of mind itself.

It is important that people develop all of the *brahmavihāras* because they act sort of as lubricants to help prevent friction in one's daily interactions. For people who actively dislike others, who have the characteristic of hatred, it is very important that they developed the state of *mettā* within their hearts. It is not necessary that they try to radiate *mettā* to other people, because all that will do is develop a certain conceited attitude within them that they have the power to radiate *mettā* to others. They must realize that the important thing is to develop *mettā* in themselves. So first of all they have to question: What is meant by *mettā*? Then try to search for the essence of it and develop that. Unless you actually have *mettā* in your heart you cannot radiate to anyone else. Usually the radiation of *mettā* is merely a concept that people have, and not genuine *mettā* at all. It can very easily turn into something to support their own conceit. For Buddhist meditation practices to be correct, they should be focused somewhere on oneself, either one's body or one's mind. Truly speaking, meditation practices should not be focused on other people. Awareness of the breath, *buddho* and body contemplation are all good examples. When you do the *mettā* practice thinking "May all beings be happy" the tendency is to be mindful outside of yourself.

Mahayāna traditions tend to emphasize compassion quite a lot.

Yes. But I have a bit of trouble understanding how they use the word compassion. I'm not quite sure what they mean by it, because it does not seem to equate with what I understand of compassion. As I see it, compassion is the seeing of the suffering of other beings combined with the wish that all beings be free from suffering. It's the seeing of suffering that is important, not necessarily taking any action to alleviate it. In fact we may not be in a position to have any effect on it. The compassion comes up regardless of whether we do anything about it or not. Whenever we think of other people and see the state that they live in, we realize that there is in large part nothing that we can do to remedy the situation. Mainly because people don't want help. Even if we are able to give help, oftentimes people are not interested in being helped. Often we can see their state, we can see what's wrong and we can see what they should be doing to remedy it. But they refuse to change, and there's just nothing we can do about it. There's a lack of interest or

concern in them that makes it impossible to reach them. No one is grabbing the lifeline that we throw out to them. Then we can merely have compassion for them seeing that this is the way they are and this is a state they're in. On the other hand, we should always reflect back on ourselves to consider that we may be subject to the same fault. Out of compassion someone else may be trying to help us, but we just can't see it or accept it. So we do not want to get caught up in the conceit of our own sense of compassion. There's a danger in that too.

Who is it that knows that the khandhas are not the self?

The *citta* is the one who knows. In the realm of the *khandhas* it is *viññāṇa* that knows. *Viññāṇa* is the aspect of the *citta* directly related to the *khandhas*. The best way to describe the relationship between the *citta* and the *khandhas* is to use the analogy of the ocean. The *citta* is like ocean depths, while the *khandhas* are like waves on the surface. The waves are not separate from the depths of the ocean, but they do not really affect the ocean either. Being blown by the winds, the waves can be quite turbulent, but the depths remain calm. The *avijjā* in the *citta* uses the function of *viññāṇa* to perceive objects — forms, sounds and so on. Those perceptions constitute the waves on the surface of the ocean. The Buddha said that perceptions are essentially all of one essential element, just with different names. For instance, with fire you can have a wood fire, a coal fire, a gas fire and so forth, but essentially they are all just fire with different names.

So *viññāṇa* is that which perceives the sensations. And it perceives them the way it does because *avijjā* is infused into the *citta*. The *avijjā* usurps the power off the *citta* and uses delusion to cloud its perceptions. And the one thing that the *citta* with *avijjā* craves above all else is to experience sensations. The reason that it desires to experience sensation is that it wants confirmation of its own existence; in other words, the existence of self. The only way that it can experience self is in relation to other things. And it needs a means to accomplish that, so *viññāṇa* is necessary. But in the larger picture of the *citta*, the depths of the ocean as it were, *viññāṇa* is quite unnecessary. From that point of view, if *viññāṇa* were to disappear, nothing would be lost. The waves are completely extraneous to the depths of the ocean. In

a sense, the *citta* is never defiled and never purify; it's there all the time just the same as it always was. What we see as defilement is really an outcome of the superficial activities of *avijjā*. The true depths of the *citta* are not affected. And Nibbāna is the realization of this truth, the truth about *citta*'s real nature. *Viññāṇa* as that which knows is only a function of the *citta* in *samsāra*.

One thing that I should point out: because of *avijjā* the one who knows does not always know correctly. That is not the fault of *viññāṇa*; *viññāṇa* is just a function. It is the delusion created by the *kilesas* that causes false knowing. For example, when you see a green color, that color is merely a sensation associated with *viññāṇa*. The sensation itself is quite neutral; it has no right or wrong. But when we come to identify it we have to interpret that sensation using the function of memory, and that interpretation can easily be affected by delusion. Based on that interpretation, we may act in a certain way that has moral repercussions. So the delusion of *avijjā* and the *kilesas* uses the functions of the mental *khandhas* to distort the knowing quality of the *citta*. When our perceptions are supported by greed or anger, the knowing becomes quite false; when they are supported by mindfulness and wisdom, there is a far greater chance that the knowing is right.

Why are mindfulness and wisdom so important to the practice of Buddhist meditation?

To begin with, we must investigate and find that what we are and the way we function. If we don't do that, we can't see what is causing the *dukkha*. Unless we investigate and look for it carefully, we cannot see the *taṇhā-upadāna* that is causing the *dukkha*. We have to identify these things within ourselves so that we can overcome them. In order to do that, we must overcome the status quo, our normal state of unawareness — the ability to think and act while being completely unaware of what we are doing. The mind is simply not present. When it's like that, thinking and acting are quite automatic without the underlying knowingness of the mind being really engaged. That is why mindfulness is so important. It keeps the mind focused in the present moment, so that we can see and know what we are thinking and doing. When we are fully aware of what we think and do, we must then put that knowledge into a framework of reference to see how our thoughts and actions relate to everything else that is going on around us. From that we can

make a judgment, deciding whether what we think and do is good or bad, right or wrong. We can determine what their results are likely to be. This is where mindfulness and wisdom come in.

Mindfulness provides us with the data that we need to investigate with wisdom. By being constantly aware of what is happening in the present moment, mindfulness is the awareness that gathers the data that we need to work with. It delineates the parameters of whatever it is we want to focus on. Once we have the raw data in the form of details, we can begin building up a clear picture as a basis for understanding. In a sense, mindfulness supervises the investigation, but in a passive, not an active, way.

In the context of our mental delusion, *avijjā* acts much like a demon. There is a very personal aspect to it in relation to us, almost as if it were a living thing. The reason is, of course, that *avijjā* is there in the *citta*, and the *citta* is alive. And because of *avijjā* being in the *citta*, it takes on the characteristics of the *citta*. That is its peculiarity — there is nothing like *avijjā* in the world outside; the only place you can find *avijjā* is in the heart. It cannot be found external to that. Because of that, *avijjā* is something very peculiar, almost like a wrong function in the *citta*. And this wrong function is the real cause of the trouble because the wrong function leads us to create *kamma*, the results of which will in turn promote that very same wrong function. Wisdom is that faculty which enables us to understand what's taking place in terms of cause and effect. When we understand the ways of cause and effect, we then have the wherewithal to begin to undo the damage.

When wisdom finally reaches the level of *avijjā*, that is a very deep and profound understanding. There is a very deep level of the *citta* known as *bhavanga*. The state of *bhavanga*, or the stream of *bhavanga*, is the location of *avijjā*. It is seeds planted at this level that lead us on to rebirth. So *avijjā* is the one that keeps the wheel of *saṃsāra* turning. Because it is embedded so deep, it is extremely difficult to get rid of. The practice of *samādhi* can take us into the state of *bhavanga*, but wisdom is required to root out the problem.

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Breaking Down Boundaries

It's important to realize that we essentially have two bodies: the physical body, and the mental body, which we can call the subtle body. The subtle mental body is that image of our physical body that we have in our minds. This is the one that is responsive to feeling and sensation. The physical body is the mechanism that produces data for the subtle body. When we think of ourselves, we think of the subtle body. This is the aspect of our own embodiment that we have in mind. And it's not the same as the physical body. Also, when we think of other people, we tend to think of them in terms of the mental body, rather than the physical body, because this is the only one we actually experience. We don't really know what other people are like. We can identify them only in terms of our own experiences, relative to what we know about ourselves. When I judge a person to be very irascible, I am making an interpretation of his character based on what I know about being irascible. I may claim that he is more irascible than I am, but that's merely fitting a scale onto something I already experience. I don't really know what he experiences; I can only guess in my own terms.

Can going deeper into this realization can help our relationships with other people?

Yes it can. But, in most people, the barrier to that realization is attachment to their own self-identity. In order to breach that psychological barrier, one must give up a part of one's self. One must accept that, at a certain level, one can no longer make a distinction between oneself and other people. Most people are not prepared to go to that extent. By accepting that, they would be forced to relinquish many of their personal motives and ways of behavior. They couldn't consider other people as real enemies then, because when there are no distinctions made, hating others is equivalent to hating oneself.

By making a distinction, we define what "I" am. We like hating people and loving people because that defines me as opposed to them. We like sensation because it

defines us as distinct from the things that we are not. So we like hating people because it makes us *feel* ourselves more strongly.

Isn't breaking down barriers one goal of the practice of Dhamma?

Yes it is. The whole of the Buddha's teaching is aimed at breaking down boundaries, because what we are striving for is the unconditioned. That's the goal. The conditioned means boundaries, psychological boundaries. But we must be careful that, when breaking down one boundary, we don't erect another one in its place. There's quite a tendency for people do that. There was a woman I once knew who, thinking she was very Buddhist, liked to claim that she loved the absolute. In fact, she was identifying herself: "I am the sort of person who loves the absolute". She was trying to break down boundaries in one direction, but in another direction she was putting up a very big one: the identification of self. The tendency is to focus on a certain aspect of Dhamma in an attempt to break down boundaries without being circumspect enough to notice the other boundaries we may be creating in the process. So we must be vigilant, and maintain all-around vision.

Do you think that equanimity and humility are signs that one is on the right path?

Yes they can be, but you have to be very careful when applying them to yourself that you are not fooling yourself.

Like pretending to be humble?

Yes, and it's so easy to do that. "I am very humble" can be a big conceit. In which case, it's the opposite of humility. So be very careful. Conceit is one of the most dangerous of the *kilesas*, and it's one of the last to go too.

It's very subtle?

Yes, that's why the end product of Dhamma comes when one can find absolutely nothing. One cannot even define the one who's found nothing. When there is nothing to find at all, no questions can come up. One can't find anything to ask a question about. That's the end product.

Is that true equanimity?

In the end, it's Nibbāna. The final cessation. The nature of it must be that all distinctions disappear. It's not so much that one attains anything, but rather that the one who would do the attaining has disappeared. When that happens, talk about humility and equanimity misses the point, because no one is there to be humble, or to have equanimity. In Theravada Buddhism, one epithet for reaching Nibbāna is "to come to the end of all questions". This doesn't mean that all questions have been answered; it means there are no more questions that one can possibly ask. The basis for asking questions no longer exists. No one is there to ask the questions, and there is nothing to ask the questions about.

Nibbāna is described as being empty of all distinctions. But you mustn't make the mistake, as many people do, of saying "we are all one". That's merely another form of distinction. On the one side, we are many; on the other side, we are all one. But who is this "we"? When you talk about one, you can also talk about many. In which case, all ideas of oneness disappear. When it comes to Nibbāna, all words and concepts cease, completely.

When we look at the Buddhist Canon, especially the more recent texts like the Visuddhimagga, we find numerous references to the Abidhamma. The Abidhamma is written in a kind of shorthand, shorthand for the entire teaching. But how many people actually understand its true meaning. Many people who try to practice the Abidhamma, especially Westerners, tend to learn all the texts by heart and work out intellectually how all the factors fit together, until finally they have an Abidhamma chart that looks like a huge football coupon. From that, they gain the

belief that they understand Dhamma. But it's not the Dhamma in charts that needs to be understood, it's the Dhamma in one's own heart that must to be seen.

The Buddha taught that one should build a raft of Dhamma for crossing the stream of *saṃsāra* — not an ocean liner. I suspect that, in many cases, people are trying to build an ocean liner for crossing the stream. It's the influence of the *kilesas* that pushes people to work to find out all these details, instead actually getting down to the primary task of crossing the stream.

The Buddha and his disciples, whose teachings make up the basis of these texts, found these truths out by experience. They taught by experience. Because they had realized the truth, what they taught was absolutely valid. People are now trying to reverse the process, by taking what's taught in the Abidhamma texts and turning it back into experience. They don't understand how much has been left out. The Abidhamma presents a concise, skeletal teaching, and the skeleton must be fleshed out by the individual meditator until it arises fresh and spontaneous within the mind. Otherwise, people become deluded very easily. For that reason, I feel that, as a teaching, the Abidhamma is not very suitable.

The proper way is to construct the raft as best you can to begin with and then set out across the stream, improvising and improving your raft as you struggle to make the crossing. It's not a matter of going through a set of procedures, progressing methodically from one step to the next; but it's more like using your own ingenuity to scramble across by taking advantage of whatever means you can devise. In other words, you have to take the basic teaching, the raft, and find your own way by overcoming each obstacle when you come to it. If you try to get everything into place first — if you try to build the perfect raft — then you will simply waste a lot of time preparing and never reach the water. So develop *samādhi* and wisdom as best you can, and then constantly put them to use, constantly strive to sharpen them, using your experiences in meditation as a whetstone. And always be searching for the way across, the way out of *saṃsāra*. As long as you are truly searching for the way, and remain within the bounds of Dhamma, you will always keep on the right track.

What is meant by effort in Buddhist practice?

It's like the effort you make to remain awake when you want to sleep, when you're tired and everything is pulling you into sleep. That's the type of effort you need in meditation. Everything is pulling you in one direction, but you know it's right to go in the other direction, so you use effort to reverse it. For example, when you're concentrating on the meditation object — whether the breath or the word *buddho* — and a thought suddenly comes into your mind that seems very important to pursue: it's the effort to pull against that distracting thought and say it's not important. It's the effort to stay focused on the meditation object.

Someone who has been practicing a long time sees how the identification with the body brings suffering.

Yes, but to begin with that understanding is usually only intellectual. You may see instances where it has practical applications, but the acceptance of the truth of it is probably quite a long way off. The results of body practice manifest in a rather peculiar way. While you are doing it, you often don't feel that you are gaining very much. You don't attain sublime states of *samādhi*, for instance. Only later, after continuous and sustained practice, do the results begin to appear. You start to realize that the body is not what you thought it was. You become less concerned about your bodily appearance and welfare. Doing body contemplation can cause quite a reaction in other people, too. It usually tends to repel other people. They don't know why they feel repelled, and you yourself often don't understand the reason either.

We harbor a lot of fond delusions about our bodies. When these delusions start to break down, the basis of self begins breaking down, too. Where the self is concerned, the body is the thing that's important. You begin to see that our whole outlook on the world depends on the body. When you consider any activity in life, almost all of them depend on the body. Our houses are built according to the needs of this body; our cars and towns are based on the dimensions of the human body.

All the things we use are designed to fit bodily requirements. When our delusions about the body break down, our delusions about the nature of the world begin to fall apart.

Is it necessary to have an experience of the unconditioned in meditation in order to be convinced we are not the body?

If one had experienced that previously, one would be on the path at the Sotāpanna level, and one cannot lose that level of attainment. That's something high.

A great deal of understanding can be gained thru practicing body contemplation. But understanding the body and seeing it as not-self won't necessarily bring one to the stage of Sotāpanna. There are other things one has to do as well. I would say that somebody who can see the body clearly and understand its true nature is close to Sotāpanna, and it wouldn't take much for him to get there. But it wouldn't necessarily mean that he'd attained that already.

Is using pain to investigate the body better than investigating the body without pain?

It is best to keep them as separate practices to begin with. Later, when you have more experience, you can join the two practices. But initially, it's better to develop strict body contemplation. Like any other meditation practice, you must go on working quite a long time without getting any obvious results. And when the results do come, they often come at a time when you least expect them — perhaps when you are not even doing meditation. For instance, you look at a person as you are walking along the road, and suddenly you see only skin, flesh and bones. Or maybe you look at someone's head, and suddenly you see only the skull. Things like that may come up unexpectedly. It's the sort of thing the average person never thinks about, it never occurs to them. It happens because body contemplation breaks down the hard and fast views we have of the human body.

How can we combine body contemplation with investigating pain?

We identify pain as being a part of the body, or as being in the body. So once you have investigated the body and seen it for what it is, you can then question: is pain really the same as the body, is it actually in the body, where exactly is it? In that way, you can use the two practices together. But investigating feelings involves a greater degree of subtlety. The location of the feeling will move; it's always shifting. The parts of the body are easier to grasp and fix in your mind. Because of that, working on the body is easier than working on feelings. The body is something that you know well enough that you can take parts of it in your mind and keep your attention on them, turning them around and thinking about them to see their attributes and their associations, and to see cause and effect in them. But it's difficult to do that with feelings. Investigating the mind is an even deeper level of subtlety, which is more difficult still. So because we know so much about the body already, it's a very good subject for meditation.

It's up to each individual to decide the best method to use for body contemplation, although starting with hair of head, hair of the body, nails, teeth and skin can form a very good basis. If you feel you would rather investigate the body as arms, legs, head, organs of the body and so on, that's quite a legitimate practice too. Consider that the human body is merely a combination of various parts; it's not a completely whole entity at all. Apart from the head, most bodily parts can be cut off and the body will remain alive. An enormous amount can be removed from the body without it dying. Then you can reflect: "If I refer to this as my body, what about this arm, is it mine? If it's cut off, is it still mine?"

What do you mean by dropping into a "state of paññā"? Is that the same as a flash of insight?

I wouldn't say it was a flash of insight, though it can appear that way in some cases. A state of *paññā* is that state in which we see the implications of what we are investigating. We may know theoretically what the implications of having a body are, but we don't truly see them in ourselves. We still think and act very much as

though the body is who we are. When we see with *paññā*, it's like standing back and viewing the body from a detached point of view. When we see it truly with *paññā*, a complete knowing arises that the body is in no way oneself. That wisdom state is different from mere thinking and reflecting. Thinking is jumpy; it doesn't stay long on one thing. *Paññā* remains fixed on the object. The mind goes deep into a meditative state where it ponders the object calmly and clearly without wavering in the least. It simply *knows* the object, in all its profound implications. It's not so much that one sees something that one hasn't seen before. It's more like seeing something that one has seen many times before, but seeing it from a completely new perspective. The understanding comes from quite deep inside, so there is no possibility of being deceived. On the other hand, there is no feeling of "now I understand". It isn't that at all. You are simply seeing something that you've seen before in a new and different way that makes the truth of it suddenly become very obvious.

Those meditators who are skilled at *paññā* can remain in that state for a long period of time. I would say that the Arahants are frequently, if not continually, in that state, where they see through everything and nothing escapes them. Many people think that the good Ajaans don't see or know things, but actually when they are in a state of *paññā* nothing escapes their knowing.

A state of *paññā* isn't like a flash of insight. Actually it can occur when you are not doing meditation, when you are just sitting down or walking. It will come and last a period, and then it dies away. You may suddenly look at your body and realize intuitively the profound nature of its loathsomeness. Then you become aware of another person nearby and you feel certain that he must be able to see your body in the same way. It seems so obvious to you at that moment. Of course, the other person can't see your body in the same way because his mind is not in a state of *paññā*. But when you are in that state, the truth seems so obvious that it feels as though everyone else should be able to see it too.

How should we investigate the ti-lakkhaṇa?

The *ti-lakkhaṇa* are very important. Take *anicca*. We think of things as being real. We think of them as having existence — even though we know very well they change. When something changes, our tendency is to explain *why* it changed. By explaining the changes, it's as though we are reassuring ourselves that, although it has changed, it's still the same thing. Explaining the change makes us feel better about it. For example, when we light a match, it burns up and disappears. Where has it gone? So we explain ...it's changed into gas and various other elements. That explanation makes us feel better, as though the match is somehow still there, just in a different form.

In this way, we are always trying to deny it *anicca*. We want to believe that things are real, that they are permanent, when in fact they are not. Existence is always a dynamic process. In truth, *anicca* is the essence of existence, because without constant change nothing could exist. If anything could remain stationary — absolutely still without any change — it would immediately disappear. It could not exist. So *anicca* allows things to exist. It is the very nature of existence. This is true both physically and mentally. If all manifestation of mind ceases to exist, the mind just goes straight into deep *samādhi* and all duality ceases. All objects of consciousness, all thoughts, ideas, and sensations, the whole lot just disappears.

In practicing *samādhi*, we try to reduce the amount of change by keeping the mind fixed on one object. By doing that, we force the process of change to become more subtle. When that happens, the mind becomes more subtle, which in turn causes the object to appear more subtle. This subtlety causes the awareness of the object to be more sensitive. The more we go into that powerful, sensitive state, the closer we come to the mind's knowing essence.

The *ti-lakkhaṇa* can be contemplated together. The realm of existence entails constant change. How can change be satisfactory? Even if you get the utmost satisfaction at any one moment ... it then changes. So it cannot be anything but unsatisfactory. Where there is change, there is always discontent. So *anicca* and

dukkha naturally follow one another. As for *anattā*: where there is *anicca*, there must also be *anattā*, because there is no time when any self-entity can possibly exist. What we call self is a relationship. It's a point that we try to define by using its surroundings. In other words, I see that tree, so that which is experienced as "I" must be the one that sees it. The same applies to the other senses, too. We use sensory input to try to define this point. But, because the point that we experience as self is defined by the changing phenomena of sensory input, it is also changing. It's not that the self perspective does not exist; it does, but it's not permanent. We like to think of our sense of self as being the ultimate reality, but actually it's just an impostor. The self is changing just as much, and just as fast, as the things that define it. Another way of putting it is: everything surrounding the center tells you where that center is. If those things were not there, you couldn't locate a center. The self is a point that is defined by everything surrounding it, and because that is all *anicca*, the point is *anicca*, as well. It's all impermanent. This is one way of contemplating *anattā*.

Another way of contemplating *anattā* is to reflect on what the *suttas* say. The *suttas* state that "All things are *anicca*. What is *anicca* is *dukkha*. What is *dukkha* is *anattā*." This indicates that in the Buddha's time it must have been plainly obvious to everyone that the true nature of "self" must be absolute *sukha*. In other words, if it was not *sukha*, then it could not be self. Time after time in the *suttas* you get this formula coming up. It must have been quite obvious to the average person at that time, in a way that it is not obvious to people nowadays. Philosophy seems to have been a common subject in those days, almost like politics is today. So the relationship between *sukha* and self must have been common knowledge.

To put it the other way, what is *dukkha* must also be *anattā*. Anything that is real must be *nicca*, or more properly, it must not be *anicca*. When it is not *anicca*, there is no relationship to other things, no changing. Therefore, it has the full possibility of being *sukha*, or at least not *dukkha*. Those who have attained that experience say that, if people could experience that state for even five seconds, for the rest of their lives they would never be satisfied until they found it again. They'd search for that high and low. Once they do see it clearly, that changes their outlook forever.

Do you find any major differences between what's called atman and pure citta?

In the Vedanta the word *atman* is used. It is apparently used in a rather philosophical sense — there is an ultimate reality called *atman*.

The Buddha did not go into ultimate philosophy at all. Instead, the Buddha used method. He gave the method of *anattā*, saying our problems are *anicca dukkha anattā*. He did not say that the ultimate reality was *nicca sukha attā*. He said that the ultimate was not *anicca*, not *dukkha*, not *anattā*. Which is very different. *Nicca sukha* and *attā* are merely the opposites of *anicca dukkha* and *anattā*; whereas the ultimate, the unconditioned, cannot be bound by any qualities that define it in any way. All definitions are wrong. The unconditioned is just that — totally unconditioned — so no words can possibly describe it. It's not something that can be pinned down with language. When you reach the unconditioned, all words cease. They have to, because all words are conditioned. The unconditioned can be known only by *being* that.

The Buddha was a teacher. In his teaching, he kept strictly to the teaching method, and did not emphasize theory. He said he taught only two things, *dukkha* and its cessation. His teaching is a practical method for overcoming *dukkha*. He did not give way to speculation.

My reading of his attitude is: The world is full of people who, because of their outlook and mental state, have no idea what the ultimate is. The only way they can come to know the ultimate is by actually getting there. Teaching them the philosophy of what it means won't help them to reach that. What they need to be taught is the way to get there. When they reach that state, they will know it for themselves.

What did you mean by saying that Zen is exclusively a wisdom teaching?

Zen methods try to force a person to understand everything directly. They do not deal much with *samādhi*. It's a most excellent teaching for people who have a lot of wisdom; but for people who don't, there is nothing they can get hold of. So it isn't broad enough as a general teaching. There is too little emphasis on *samādhi*, and too little emphasis on fully rational teaching, as well. The tendency is to try to break up reason. You can break up reason in people who are very good at reasoning, with possibly good effects, but you shouldn't try break up reason in people who have very little anyway.

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The Purpose of Practice

It is important to understand the need for meditation practice, that is, the reason why we do it. We start off with the fundamental basis of Buddhism, which is that we all have *dukkha* or discontent which we are trying to cure. When we attempt to cure *dukkha* we use the method of cause-and-effect. We always try to find those causes or those actions that will get rid of the *dukkha*. *Dukkha* can be anything from little irritations all the way up to big suffering. This is what we are trying to cure. It makes no difference whether we are Buddhists or what we are, this is what we are all trying to do, this is what drives us on. We attempt to cure our discontent by using cause-and-effect; in other words, we initiate those causes that we believe will lead to the relief of our suffering. If we're wise and we understand the situation correctly, then we might do the right things and actually manage to get the relief we are seeking. But because we have *kilesas*, the tendency is to do the wrong thing all the time. When we think and act wrongly, we receive more and more suffering. This occurs because we don't understand the right way to get rid of suffering. We tend to always take the wrong actions. This is the situation that we are in. For that reason, it is necessary to first turn our lack of understanding in to correct understanding. If we can accomplish that, then we truly will get rid of suffering. So the whole purpose of Buddhist practice is to search for the right way to act. This is really the whole of Buddhism: to learn how to think properly, how to behave properly, how to speak properly. Only when we learn that, can we cure the discontent.

In order to learn how to think, behave and speak properly, we must train ourselves. We train ourselves to have a sharp mind, to understand the reasons for the things that happen in our lives, and thus to get to know ourselves properly. By getting to know ourselves, we get to know other people. By getting to know other people we learn how to behave rightly towards them – all because we know how to behave rightly within ourselves. The method to achieve this is the method that was taught by the Buddha, which is comprised of *sīla* or morality, *samādhi* or training of mind, and *paññā* or wisdom. If we learn how to practice those three effectively, we can

overcome the *kilesas* that cause the discontent that we experience within us. As we overcome the *kilesas*, the discontent and the suffering will lessen and eventually die away. This goal is practically possible, we can achieve it. Many people have. Many people have done the practice and achieved very good results from it. They experience contentment and happiness. So the way to happiness is the way of *sīla*, *samādhi* and *paññā*.

In Buddhism, morality concerns only bodily actions and speech. That is the scope of morality in Buddhism. Morality does not concern the mind itself. The mind is just too subtle, it jumps about and one cannot catch up with it so easily. Training the mind is also very important, however, because if one thinks wrongly, that wrong mental attitude tends to go out into speech and action. For that reason, one very easily does wrong things. But it is the speech and action that constitute the wrong moral behavior.

In Buddhism, maintaining moral virtue is necessary to put ourselves correct with the world. In other words, when we have a firm moral basis we feel no pull to the world. We do not harbor feelings of guilt in relation to the world, which in turn lead to feelings of discontent that do not allow us to settle down and stay calm. If we have good morality we can settle easily to the meditation practice and forget the world outside. In that way, the more we do meditation practice the less our minds tend to go out into the world, and the more effectively we can do the meditation practice.

So it's necessary to understand the purpose and aim of meditation practice. That understanding gives us confidence in the practice. It also gives a method whereby we can work out what we should do and what we shouldn't do, based on what we're trying to achieve, what we're aiming for. If we know that, we can figure out the best method of getting to our destination.

It is important to understand that morality does not mean just the five *sīla*. It also means right behavior and good manners in general. It means being careful in speech and action, doing things in a seemingly and proper way. All of this comes

under the heading of *sīla*. The main pillars of morality are, of course, the five *sīla*. These five are the most important ones to practice. But there is a lot more than that to the practice of morality. You can see the general aspects of morality in people's behavior. Some people behave in a very coarse way, and it shows. When a person behaves in the coarse way, we refer to them as a coarse person. Whereas, someone who behaves in a refined way we call a refined person. Because their actions initiate from their minds, these two people will tend to think in different ways. When what flows out from the mind is good, then in the actions will be good. So one should pay attention to one's ordinary behavior as well as the specific actions covered by the five precepts.

When it comes to the meditation practice, the main training is the effort to hold the mind firm – the monkey mind, the mind which jumps about all over the place. In most people, the mind is quite uncontrolled. It jumps about as it chooses – without even trying the mind travels all over the world and back again. When one tries to do meditation practice on the breathing or on *buddho*, the mind may stick there for 10 seconds, and then be away for 20 minutes touring the world. This is a well-known problem in people who practice. It is this ingrained tendency one must try to stop in order to bring the mind under control.

When mind is out of control like that it is under the influence of the *kilesas*, which cause it to think of all sorts of things. The things that the mind thinks about under the influence of the *kilesas* are either neutral, in which case they won't help you, or else actually harmful due to the negative effect of the *kilesas*. The *kilesas* are the factors that are constantly causing trouble. If there were no *kilesas*, the practice would be easy, anyone could do it. So the aim here is to try to hold the mind to one object such as the in-and-out breaths or the meditation-word *buddho*, and not let it jump out all over the place. This must be seen as a training in which you are making a concentrated effort; that is you know what your purpose is and you strive to attain it.

When you keep this up continuously with the right amount of effort, gradually you will bring your mind under control. When the mind comes under control, you will

find that it becomes more concentrated and more capable, and you also will find more happiness in your life. In fact, concentration and happiness amount to the same thing, because when your mind is concentrated you are at peace and everything is united, which is a state of contentment – and a state of contentment is happiness. So we can say that when the mind is concentrated, it is happy. This shows up also in the pursuits that people undertake. For instance, why do people climb high mountains? The reason almost certainly is that when you climb a mountain you have to be concentrated. If you're not, you will fall and hurt yourself. This is the reason why people do many dangerous activities in the world, because it forces them to be mindful, and mindfulness brings concentration and happiness. It shows that when people are concentrated they are happy and content.

As far as Buddhist practice is concerned, control of mind brings concentration and happiness. That is the first step. And when the mind is under sufficient control, you can turn it to developing wisdom. This is another important step, because it's the wisdom that gets rid of the *kilesas*. Wisdom uproots and destroys the *kilesas*. It destroys them because through wisdom we can learn to distinguish between right and wrong, true and false. In other words, the ignorance that we've accumulated in the past – where we don't know whether we are doing right or wrong – that tends to diminish once wisdom develops. Using wisdom we begin to understand the ways of cause and effect. And when we see the ways of cause and effect clearly, we see how the wrong causes that we've done tend to harm only ourselves. They bring harm to us and they bring us nothing but suffering. Seeing that with insight, we no longer act in those ways. This is the nature of cause and effect. Because of that, the wisdom is the thing we want. That's what we have to work for.

The person who has developed *samādhi* and control mind, often will think that wisdom will follow automatically because they have developed *samādhi*. But it doesn't. The only chance of that happening is if a person has developed a high degree of wisdom in the past. Generally, when one practices for *samādhi*, one gets only *samādhi*. In order to gain wisdom, one has to do a practice specifically designed for that purpose. The value of the *samādhi* practice is that it sets the mind right and puts it in the right attitude and the right mood to develop wisdom. And when the

mind is in that mood, one can begin to investigate the nature body and mind. From that investigative approach, one gradually learns the ways of developing wisdom. But you shouldn't think that the *samādhī* on its own will bring wisdom. It doesn't. It brings one the basis for wisdom, that's all.

So when one has developed a sufficient degree of *samādhī*, one should turn the mind to developing wisdom. The first place to begin developing wisdom is on one's physical body. That means to look at and investigate the nature of the human body to see what it's true nature really is. It means asking oneself: Is this body me? Is it mine? Where did it come from? Where will he go to? Is it pleasant? We begin by asking a lot of questions about our bodies and the bodies of others. Initially we examine the body from many different angles, looking at it from the outside first, and then go inward. By looking at the body in this way, the understanding comes to us that this body isn't me, it isn't mine – this body belongs to the world, it comes from the world and goes back to the world. And when we can see that, we are far less concerned about the physical body. The fear and concern about death tends to drop away, too. By showing us that this body is not the thing that matters, wisdom brings a reduction of the *dukkha* associated with bodily matters. We understand that when the body dies, I don't die. When we see this clearly, our fears tend to ease off and diminish. We can progress quite a long way in Dhamma by contemplating the body. It can lead into quite valuable states of mind.

From body contemplation you can move on to investigate the mind and the various ways of the mind. The mind, however, is much more subtle and harder to see. The physical body is something that you can see very easily. You can take it to bits and look at its component parts, either by dissecting a corpse or by looking into one's own body and imagining the parts as they exist there. Being gross, the body is not difficult to get hold of. But the mind, that is very subtle and therefore difficult to catch hold of and understand. For that reason, you should first thoroughly train yourself in wisdom using the body as an object before you can examine the mind in the right way.

But once you can investigate the mind properly, all sorts of things will come up which you'd never thought of before. This is the way of the *Satipaṭṭhāna*, which deals with body, feeling, *citta* and *dhammas*. The body is just the physical body, and we deal with it as a physical mass; in other words, in the normal way that people ordinarily think of the body. Investigating feeling takes you deeper inside. Feeling is another, more subtle way of looking at the body. When you come to the *citta*, that's another way of looking at the body, going more subtle still. And when you come to *dhammas*, that deals with the whole principle of body and mind together, and thus becomes the most subtle aspect of all. So these four factors lead you more and more inward to subtler and subtler aspects of Dhamma. But you should start off with the gross aspects of it first. When you gain some understanding of the gross side, you will probably begin automatically going into the more subtle levels.

We investigate the body and the mind in order to discover who and what we are. In order to find out what you are, we must first find out what you are not. If you know what you're not, then you'll know what you are. So first we look to see what we're not. And the first thing we see that is not what we are is the body. We're not the world, that's outside. We're not the body either because this body belongs to the world. It came from the world, it depends on the world and it will go back to the world. We just use it. We've grabbed hold of it, grasped it. Once we've grasped it we have to put up with the troubles that the body brings us. But the body is also useful because with it we have a mechanism which allows us to think and to understand things and to retain them in our memory. And it is these faculties that we use to see the way of Dhamma. Without the body, it is very difficult to do the practice and see the way of Dhamma.

So the body is necessary, and quite valuable. At the same time, we must come to see that this body is not the nice, pleasant thing that most people think it is. It is a heavy and burdensome weight that we have to carry about all over the place, and that's quite tiresome. When we use it for any length of time we become exhausted. The body is unpleasant in so many ways. If we sit too long it feels uncomfortable and eventually gives us a lot of pain. It grows old, get sick, and finally it dies. Throughout most of our lives the body doesn't feel very well – it tends to be full of

aches and pains and tension, and thus we never quite feel fully at ease. In fact, the body brings us a lot of suffering. But we do not have to think that we are the body. When we think that “I am the body”, then whatever happens to the body happens to us. In that way, we are always identified with the body. And when we identify with the body, we are always very concerned about what happens to the body, and constantly afraid of what might happen to the body. And fear is also a form of *dukkha*.

By contemplating the body, we come to realize that “I am not the body”. It is a true realization, not just a way of thinking. Merely thinking about it is no use. That doesn’t do anything to get rid of the *kilesas*. Thinking can help only in so far as it can set up reasoning, but the actual realization comes through the meditation practice. And it comes of itself, in its own time. What usually happens with most people is that they do contemplation of the body, and then perhaps at some other time they suddenly see the body in a new light in which they’ve never seen it before. They see it as just being something walking about on this earth. They see it perhaps as being like an old tree stump – just something neutral like that.

You mustn’t think that your troubles come from the body. Although you may receive a lot of suffering from the body, the body is not the cause of it. The cause of the troubles is actually the fact that we have grasped at the body. The cause comes from the mind inside. The body is just part of nature, it’s neutral. And it goes the way of nature, which can bring us a lot of *dukkha*. But because we’ve grasped at it, we just have to put up with it and accept it.

The mind is also a part of nature. But it’s the one that’s behind the mind, the *citta*, that is the essence. It is something we might call “modifications of the *citta*” that make up the mental faculties of the mind. In other words, the *citta* issues forth in the mode of feeling, memory, thought and consciousness. These are the four modes of the *citta*. These modes of the *citta* are impermanent. They arise and they cease constantly. It’s rather like the waves on the surface of the ocean. When a wave goes up it has a drop down, it doesn’t remain, it doesn’t last. The waves of the *citta* are the waves of feeling, memory, thought and consciousness. These waves are

going up and down, up and down all the time. When a wave rises, it must fall. It's the same with feeling – it rises and falls. Memory, thought and consciousness are always rising and falling. They are completely impermanent. Their occurrence happens extremely fast, too.

But the one underlying these mental faculties, the *citta*, is not something you can point to; mainly because the one who points is the *citta* itself. The *citta* is the one that knows. When you experience something, the *citta* knows. When you see a color, you know that color. You can give it a name but you cannot adequately explain the sensation of color to anyone else. The same applies to feeling: when you experience a particular feeling you can say for example that it's a "sharp" feeling, but that is not really an adequate explanation. All you are doing is telling somebody else what experience brings about that type of feeling. Whereas the other person has actually got to put it into their own experience, and you don't know whether the two experiences are the same. There's no way of knowing. In fact, the feeling itself is a matter of the *citta*. It's the same with all the senses. We know how we hear things ourselves, but we don't know how other people hear things and whether they hear things in the same way or not. There's just no way of telling. This is the way of the *citta*. The *citta* is the one that's in the center. But you cannot find it if you look for it. The more you look for the less you can find it. You must just know it. You know it by, as it were, "falling back" into it. Because you are the *citta*, so you become it, so to speak. It's difficult to explain.

Another way of understanding the *citta* is in terms of time – the three times: past, present and future. Mostly we live in the past, because we experience something and by the time the mind has processed it, it's already in the past. So we are always in the past. And because of that, we are always dealing with something which is more or less illusory. We predict the future, based on the past, whereas the reality is really in the present. That is the only time that can possibly be real. When you reach that present moment reality, you reach the *citta*. But it is very difficult to do because we are always dealing with some object, sensation or whatever, which as soon as we deal with it is already passed. That makes getting to the real present moment very difficult.

It is a very old principle in Buddhism that that one should not think of evil or dwell on evil; rather one should keep one's mind on what's good and noble. The problem is, if you dwell on evil, evil comes to you. This is why it is so wrong to rehash the bad things that have happened in the past, because it tends to promote that sort of badness in the present. People whose minds are steeped in past misdeeds will unconsciously tend to copy that behavior in the present, which simply leads to the perpetuation of evil.

People should try to review their own minds quite frequently. For instance: What have I been thinking about for the last 10 minutes? Or the last half hour? Examine your thoughts and see, are they good or not? Are they beneficial or not? Are they following the way of Dhamma or not? This is a very good practice.

The value gained from walking meditation depends entirely on the individual. If you find you get much better results in walking meditation than sitting meditation, then you should do more walking. If you find you get better results sitting, then you should do more sitting than walking. Both, however, are required because you can't walk all the time and you can't sit it all the time. You need a change of posture to keep a balance in meditation. But you should emphasize whichever posture you find works best. Sitting often works better for someone who tends naturally to be very calm. For someone who is somewhat restless, the walking meditation tends to work better. This is often the case, though not always. When a person who is very calm sits down it is easy to get into a peaceful mental state. The person who is restless just tends to get more agitated when sitting, while the walking tends to give some movement to help alleviate the restless energy. It's as if that restlessness is absorbed into the walking.

There are several ways of doing the walking practice. One way is to just maintain the meditation object of your normal sitting practice. If you normally do the breathing practice when sitting, you can continue on with the breathing practice during walking meditation. However, the breathing practice can be somewhat more difficult when walking than when sitting. Or, you can do a completely different practice when walking. For instance, you can examine the body while walking, and

do the *samādhi* practice while sitting. You must find out for yourself which is the best method for you.

Kammaṭṭhāna literally means “basis or field of action”. The field of action is the whole of what we do in the field of meditation practice, and the mental training in general. In *kammaṭṭhāna* you must think for yourself quite a lot. You must try to find your own mistakes and solve them. When you do the practice and come up against a problem you should try and think out what will overcome this problem. People who practice the way of *kammaṭṭhāna* develop their own unique methods, which may be quite different from those that other people use. You have to learn the tricks that help to do the practice. These methods you have to work out for yourself. To begin with, you should start with the standard methods taught in the texts, because you do not know yet how to adjust them to your own particular needs in meditation. But once you have gained some skill in the standard methods, you can begin searching for more precise methods that suit your character and temperament. You have to test these methods by the results they give. Do the results lead to more calm and understanding? Or do they lead to less? Those that lead to more calm and greater understanding are most likely give you good methods.

Buddhist meditation is not a hard and fast system. We begin with the recommendations of the Buddha, which are the most effective because he took the nature of human beings into account. But these methods are not hard and fast. The whole of Buddhism is a method of overcoming *dukkha*, and if one likes one can adapt that method to fit one’s own particular needs and circumstances. It does not have to conform exactly to what the Buddha said. The method itself is not an absolute truth. It is true in the worldly sense, but absolute truth is beyond the world. So the methods we use are leading towards absolute truth, but the only way to get there is to adapt one’s present state of mind to that absolute truth. When one adapts one’s present state of mind to that of absolute truth, then one can experience absolute truth. So the training of Buddhism is designed to get us to that point. The absolute truth is Nibbāna, of course. And we have to adapt ourselves to

that condition. If we can adapt ourselves to that condition, then Nibbāna can arise, otherwise it cannot. The whole training is leading to that point.

When we begin the training, we start off from where we are, nowhere else. We are ordinary people with ordinary understanding, so we have to work with that ordinary understanding to begin with. As we continue to progress the ordinary understanding will cease to be good enough, and we will have to find new methods to gain further understanding. We have to find more subtle ways of looking at things. It is not so much that the ordinary understanding is wrong; rather it is inadequate to explain things correctly in terms of Dhamma. Our ordinary understanding is incapable of explaining many anomalies in the mind. Because of that, we need a new way of understanding. Eventually we find that new way of understanding is still insufficient, so we develop an even subtler level of understanding. In this way, our understanding gradually develops to a deeper and subtler level to keep up with the level of our practice.

For example, normally we think of a body is being physical matter. So we ask ourselves, how do we know the body? What tells me that I have a body? How do I know it? If you investigate carefully, you soon realize that feeling is the most important factor that tells you that you have a body. Feeling is over 90% of it. Then, when you think of the body you think of feeling. Immediately you've gone beyond the physical basis of the body in your understanding. But it's not enough to just understand intellectually, you must work on it at a deeper level to realize that in fact we know the body by feeling it.

It's hard for most people to see Dhamma because the *kilesas* put up a different and contradictory reasoning. The *kilesas* always searched for reasons to oppose the way of Dhamma. And the *kilesas* also use feeling, as in: if I did that, I wouldn't feel happy, which sheds that action in a negative light. That's the way the *kilesas*, they confuse us all the time. It is important to realize for yourself what is meant by *kilesas*. Fundamentally they mean greed, hatred and delusion, but when approaching them from your own experience, you will see the *kilesas* are mainly what you are and the way you think and the motives that you have. That's where

the *kilesas* will be found. When you look at them closely you will see that the *kilesas* are always associated with “I” or self. I think like that. I feel it in this way. There is always the self perspective coming up. And the *kilesas* come up with self in order to push self higher. And the more that self is pushed up, the more gratified we feel.

Of course, when the self gets pushed up high, it can easily fall down. When it falls down, there is *dukkha*. When a person pushes self up very high, conceit is the consequence. When the conceit is toppled, that’s real suffering. So the *kilesas* act to placate the self. The self is a construct of *avijjā*, our fundamental ignorance. The basis of self is the duality of subject and object. When we sense things, there is the one that is doing the sensing and the thing that is sensed. In seeing, there is the thing that is seen and the one who is seeing it. From that we get the notion that “I see that”. So immediately a self is assumed. This self comes up in relationship to all the senses in the same way. But in each case it is a different “self”. The self that relates to seeing is not the same self that relates to hearing. And the one that relates to the external senses is not the same one that relates to thinking or memory. Each time it’s a different self. In the end, when one follows the way of Dhamma, one has to give up the attachment to all ideas of self.

In Buddhism we have the three characteristics: *anicca*, *dukkha* and *anattā*. *Anicca* means change and instability, the tendency for nothing to last. *Dukkha* is discontent, because that which is changing all the time is not a basis for contentment. Everything is always changing, so nothing ever lasts for more than a moment. You receive something nice, and before long it’s gone. And what is constantly changing and therefore unsatisfactory is not a reliable basis for self. How can there possibly be a self in something that is constantly changing and thus never remains the same? When everything is always changing, the self is not the same for more than two consecutive moments. The way of Dhamma is to see this clearly and realize that this is the case. Everything in the world is characterized by those three marks. Anyone who can fully understand the implications of those three characteristics of existence can cut attachment to the world. How can you be attached to something which you know doesn’t last? As soon as you grasp it, it’s gone. It’s like trying to pick up water in a sieve, it all falls through.

To get free from attachment is not a volitional action. There are some attachments which can be broken intentionally, like cigarette smoking for instance, but there are much more subtle attachments inside that cannot be let go of in that way. The subtle attachments inside are the ones that really matter. Those are the really important ones. The only way one can break those attachments is by continuing on with the training until insight arises, in which case the attachments are broken of themselves. They just drop away. It's like a snake: it cannot shed its skin intentionally, but when the right time comes the skin sheds of itself. It's the same with the attachments in our hearts: we cannot get rid of them merely by willing them away. When the time comes that we understand them completely, they just drop away of themselves. They are gone, and we no longer think like that.

Take the example of impermanence or constant change. When we apply this principle to objects in the world and see the impermanence in those objects, we may think that we will not be attached to them. But that understanding is still superficial: on its own it will not get rid of all attachment. But when you really understand impermanence with an insight that penetrates deep inside where the attachment arises, the *citta* sees it with total clarity. Then it's as though attachment to things in the external world just disappears of itself.

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All Activities Can Be Meditation

After a long meditation retreat I can see myself going home and feeling rather despondent, thinking that life in the world is meaningless and so there is no point in anything except following the path and ordaining.

You must understand that whatever your life happens to be, you can still practice the way of Dhamma. If you do all of your daily activities with attention, effort, carefulness and mindfulness, then you will always be practicing the way. It does not matter whether you are cleaning, cooking, driving a car or working a job, if you look on everything you do as a training, it will all become a form of meditation practice. Even when things are difficult, you can look on that situation as a training in patience. If you train yourself like that, you'll make it so that when the time comes to go off to do another retreat, then you will find that the practice goes well very easily. On the other hand, if you are complaining all the time and feeling despondent about your life situation, that only serves to strengthen the *kilesas*.

Despondency is very much bound up with one sense of self. When you cannot feel yourself, you usually get an emotion like despondency coming up. The feeling of self is something that the *kilesas* want all the time. The self resembles a ping-pong ball balanced on the water of a fountain—if the water does not keep moving, the ping-pong balls simply falls down. So you have to try to keep it up all the time, and that's hard work. And if you get into a situation where the attachment to self is not being undercut by Dhamma, you can very easily get into despondency as a way of pushing the self to the forefront.

Really speaking, your present life situation is where you are, and in that situation you have to make do with what you have. So you have to find a way to practice in that situation, which takes advantage of your strengths while at the same time diminishing your weaknesses. When you find that it is frustrating and difficult, you should realize that sometimes life is difficult. You have to be patient and still try to

practice the Dhamma unperturbed as far as possible by the difficulties. You can look and question yourself, who is the one inside that is troubled by the situation. Look at hair of the head, hair of the body, nails, teeth and skin, flesh, blood, bones and so on, and question: where in that mess does the problem lie? When you keep your mind focused on by the contemplation, Dhamma comes to the fore and difficulties seem less important. If you keep your mind focused on what you are doing in the present moment, there is no time for frustration and difficulties. You are practicing the way, and that's enough to bring satisfaction into a difficult situation. When you keep your mind focused in the present, distracting thoughts don't come up. When distracting thoughts don't come up, the mind remains well concentrated.

There is no reason why you cannot practice the way of Dhamma as a layperson. It is not as easy as going on retreat, but not impossible by any means. You must learn to make do with what you have and find a way to turn it to your advantage. With a little cleverness you will find a way to do it. When you turn your mind to Dhamma, the results are always valuable. The three keys to success are mindfulness, wisdom and effort. Keep those three going and you will always be practicing the way of Dhamma. Whatever you do will become meditation practice.

So it is important to realize that no matter what your situation is you can always practice meditation. That's not to say that it is always easy; it's not. But it is only difficult because of the *kilesas*, which shows that we should look at the *kilesas* to understand what they are. In the final analysis, the *kilesas* are actually oneself — oneself as one is at this moment. But it is only after you have been practicing for a long time that you can come to separate your essential nature from the *kilesas*. Up to that point, you and the *kilesas* are one and the same because they are infused into the *citta* like dye in water. When they are mixed together, you cannot separate out the dye from the water, yet they are not the same. It's the same with the *citta*. When the *citta* is colored by the *kilesas*, the whole of it is discolored in the same way. That defiling discoloration constantly leads you in the wrong direction, which is what makes the practice so difficult. If you can learn to see the *kilesas* and understand how bad they are, you can begin to overcome them.

You must be very cautious about thinking that you have attained exalted states of Dhamma. People can fall into that trap, and it's a big danger. It's all a lot of delusion. And if they talk about it, you can be sure that it isn't true. Somebody who really has attained high states of Dhamma doesn't talk about it. They know perfectly well that there is no benefit in talking about it. It doesn't help to talk about it — what you are, you are. If you have reached a certain stage in your practice, that's where you are — and that's all. Talking about it to try to attract other people is just a matter of the *kilesas*. So be very wary of people who claim to have attained this or that state in their practice. Mostly, if they claim it, it's false. And for yourself, it is useless to speculate whether you have attained this or that level of Dhamma. You on what you are, and that's all. It's enough that you still have plenty of work to do in meditation. As long as you are working to overcome the *kilesas*, then it does not matter where exactly you are on the path; what matters is that you are going in the right direction. When you believe that you have already achieved success in meditation, the tendency is to relax and stop trying, which becomes a big blockage to further progress. So always resist the idea that you have reached a safe plateau in your practice, and attainment which you cannot fall back from. Just keep striving hard and when you reach the final goal you will know it is certainty.

Is it possible to remember our past lives?

If it is a natural ability that you have, you will begin remembering your past lives when you are still a child. Apart from that, it is not easy to attain the ability to remember your past lives. In the *Visuddhimagga* there is an explanation of how to train yourself to remember past lives. To start with, you attain any degree of *samādhi*. Then you try to recall every incident that happened to you today from the present moment back until the time you woke up this morning. When you are skilled at that, you try to remember back two days, then three days, a week, two weeks, a month, gradually going back year upon year until you reach the time of your birth. Only when you are successful at that are you in a position to go back to the previous life. It's very hard work, and what's the point of it?

Whatever you recall, whether it is a past life was something else, you do not regress back to that recollection, instead you recall it in the present. So in that sense memory is always takes place in the present. Why do we want to recall past lives? The main reason is that we want to see the ways of cause and effect — how actions we did in that life have had results in this one. That's valuable information. We also want to see whether our past actions have brought us happiness or suffering, pleasantness or unpleasantness. This gives us a very good perspective for the appreciation of *kamma* and the noble truth of *dukkha*.

But if you cannot go back to past lives, you can always see that in the present. You can see the ways of cause and effect working in your own life and in the lives of those around you. By observing, you can see actions and their repercussions quite clearly without searching in past lives. And as far as the truth of *dukkha* is concerned, we have enough evidence of it around us in our own lives. It is not necessary to look further. We can remember that in the ordinary way — that's quite enough. Because of that, the desire to go back into the past is usually driven by the *kilesas*.

Many people make a mistake in their understanding of what *samādhi* is. They read the descriptions of how to attain *samādhi* that are preserved in the texts, which they find hard to coordinate with their own practice. But in fact *samādhi* is something that comes in unexpected ways. For that reason, we often don't recognize what it is at first. Only after practicing for a long time do we begin to understand the true nature of *samādhi*. So, often people enter into *samādhi* without realizing it. Their *samādhi* may not necessarily be very deep, but it is still valuable nonetheless. You should recognize that when you attain a state of mind the result of which is sharpness and clarity of mind, the probability is that that was a state of *samādhi*. There are thousands of different states and conditions of *samādhi*. Because of that, the Buddha did not say merely that one should attain *samādhi*, he said that one should attain *sammā samādhi*, or Right *Samādhi*. Right *Samādhi* is *samādhi* as the path factor. In other words, it is *samādhi* that is supported by the other seven path factors—two factors of wisdom, three of morality, plus effort and mindfulness, all leading to correct *samādhi*.

You should realize, however, that the Noble Eightfold Path is not a path that one travels along as one would a road or a walkway. Rather, the path is set up as a path and when one has done the work to set that path up correctly the path acts like a channel for transcendent states of mind to arise — Sotāpanna, Sakadāgāmi, Anāgāmi and Arahant. Because of that, all the factors in the path come up together. It is difficult to accomplish because one must get all of those factors just right. Having done the work, when the right conditions arise they will all come together and coalesce into the path moment. It means that we must gradually develop all of the conditions that are necessary for that moment to take place. It involves not only formal meditation practice but all of one's activities throughout the day. The effort and the wisdom must be there at all times in order to turn every situation into Dhamma.

The *kilesas* are always trying to find some way of promoting self, by whatever means they can. One of the most important means they use is creating conceit. Conceit is the feeling that self is very important. But the problem is that when self is put up on a high pedestal, it can fall down. So conceit is very vulnerable. For instance, if you have a conceit that I am a Sotāpanna and somebody says they don't believe it, immediately the sense of self wants to fight back. There is vulnerability in conceit. If you did not have that conceit, you could just agree that maybe you are not a Sotāpanna, and the matter would end there. On the other hand, the person without conceit is almost untouchable.

Conceit ranges from that grossest to the most subtle. In the case of the Anāgāmi, they concede there must be of a very subtle nature, probably concerning that person's worldview. Each of us has a worldview built up inside him since we were born, informing us about the nature of things in the world. This worldview that we have is like a plan located within us which tells us where everything is. We always feel secure in this view because we know where we stand in the world and we understand how to behave in the world. Behind that view, is a belief that it is absolutely true. But it's not, is just to view, and that's all. Inherent within that view is our sense of self-identity. The self is at the center of it all. But by its very nature

the self makes that view false. Not only do we have a view of how things are now in the present, but we also have a view of how they became like that. In other words, we have views about both the present and the past. The past is essentially a memory. We also have a view which is projected into the future telling us what we think things are going to be like in the future. Most of our delusion is located in these views. And the trouble with delusion is that we do not see what is right and what is wrong. So we continue doing things in our habitual way even know it's all quite false. We look on greed and hatred is being bad, but they both spring from delusion.

The *kilesas* will fight back with whatever weapons are necessary at the time. They will fight back with persuasion, inducement, fear, beauty and strong enticement. Not only do you have to give up the unpleasant things, but you also have to give up the pleasant ones. When you get a feeling that everything is absolutely perfect and wonderful, you must realize that the *kilesas* is still there and undoubtedly have a hand in creating that feeling. Any feeling like that comes from the viewpoint of self; that is, the viewer. To transcend the *kilesas* you must go beyond that viewpoint. It can be compared to a person standing in the middle of a room who looks around, sees nothing and declares the room to be empty. Only when he realizes that he is still there does he know that the room will be truly empty only when he himself leaves it. Only then is the room truly empty.

It is not so much that the way of practicing meditation is so difficult, it is the overcoming of those things that are blocking the way it's really difficult. In a very real sense, we are our own enemies in meditation. It is not so much that we should do the right things, but rather that we should go in the right direction. When we go in the right direction, we will start uncovering the wrong things that we have done and begin to correct them. By going in the right direction we will slowly cut away at the delusion. Then we learn not to do those things in the future.

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The Effort

Right effort is very important. In a sense, effort is willpower. All of the gadgets we have in our lives, like televisions and automobiles, have a negative impact all on willpower. These gadgets all make our lives much easier, and when life is easier we do not have to make much effort. So instead of exercising our willpower, we look for an easy way out. This is a natural human tendency anyway, but nowadays there are just too many easy ways out. When that character trait is strengthened, a lazy attitude can easily spill over into meditation practice. People have forgotten how to put forth effort.

When you train yourself to put forth effort in everything you do, that positive tendency is strengthened. But effort is a neutral power, so it is important that you directed towards positive goals. Effort will go in the direction that it is directed to go, so the effort should always be accompanied by a certain amount of wisdom. When willpower has the power of the *kilesas* behind it, it will always go in the wrong direction. When a person goes in the wrong way until it becomes habitual, it is extremely difficult to turn around and go in the right way. He can reach a point where it is almost impossible for them to come back. It is not absolutely impossible, because there is no fundamental impossibility for anyone. But they simply have no interest in the things that will turn them around. They do not want to know about them at all, because they are only interested in bad things. What a sight gag, nobody can make them turn around. Only traumatic or catastrophic events can have an effect.

On the other hand, for the person whose willpower habitually goes in the right direction, it becomes increasingly difficult for them to slip back into bad ways. Their positive direction allows them to see the dangers of going bad, and because of that they develop a healthy respect for *kamma*. The person who sees the results of doing bad is fearful of making that kind of *kamma*. They know that the bad consequences will rebound back on them.

Effort is one aspect of willpower, and a very important aspect of it. Right effort is the willpower needed to prevent the arising of evil or unwholesome thoughts, and to abandon any evil or unwholesome thoughts that have already arisen. It is also the willpower needed to produce and develop good and wholesome mental states, as well as the willpower needed to maintain and increase those good states. That is the way willpower should be used. It is the effort to always go in the right direction. The three factors that are fundamental to success in meditation are: mindfulness, wisdom and effort. The mindfulness keeps you attentive and aware; the wisdom directs your attention in the right way; and the effort makes you progress further and further along the path.

Most people who take on meditation do not realize that it is very much an unknown path. From reading and listening, we have an idea of what meditation is about. But when we get down to the actual practice, we are unsure which way to go. It's like trying to use a map to travel through a foreign country: because the countryside does not look like the map, it is difficult to correlate the symbols on the map with the features on the ground. When you come up against things in meditation, they do not look like what the books say. The books use a variety of technical terms, whose meaning is at first very vague. Trying to define the technical terms by our own experience can lead to a lot of uncertainty. Because of that, it is best to study the books only after we have some experience in meditation. That is part of the reason why the forest meditation tradition minimizes the importance of books, and stresses the practice of meditation. Because they maintain the tradition, books are useful. Without the teachings recorded in the books, the tradition as a whole might drift. They can also act as a source for people to develop wisdom.

But as far as the meditation practice goes, books can be a hindrance. They can be a useful reference, but you should not place too much confidence in them. You should also use the technical terms in the books with caution, because it is very easy to misunderstand their meaning. Like any technical subject -- for instance, engineering -- you cannot use the technical terms properly unless you understand their precise meaning. And the definitions of these terms developed from ancient times are not the precise types of definitions we are used to seeing in scientific

subjects. Those definitions are more like descriptions that do not properly pin down the word. So you can not usually get the full meaning of the word from the old definition. The only way you can find the full definition is by experiencing it directly and seeing how it fits in with everything else, like a central piece in a jigsaw puzzle. When that piece fits in snugly all around, then you know what it means in relation to everything else.

At the ultimate stage, the attainment of Nibbāna, the Arahant know is that Dhamma fully inside, and so no longer needs books. Arahants will put their understanding in their own words, but when they read the teachings expressed in the language of the books, they clearly understand their meaning.

Are there signs that indicate when the meditation practice is progressing?

Pīti is one indication. *Pīti* manifests enthusiasm and zest for doing meditation. *Pīti* arises when the mind starts to become concentrated, which causes increased interest and attention. There is a definite feeling of relaxing into the practice, and not wanting to be distracted. *Pīti* is a feeling of satisfaction that comes from being absorbed in what you are doing. The arising of *pīti* shows that the mind is becoming interested in the meditation object, which is a sign that the meditator is developing toward *samādhi*.

But the obstacles to meditation are the most important things to recognize. The mental obstacles that people have are the things that prevent them from going into *samādhi*. The most prevalent of these is the lack of attention, or mindfulness. It is the inability to keep your mind on what you are doing, and stop it from wandering aimlessly. What people need most is the effort to pull the mind back when it wanders away from the meditation object. To begin with, you must catch the mind after it has become distracted and wandered away, and quickly bring it back again. But with constant practice you should be able to catch the mind before distractions drag it away and hold it firmly on the meditation object. Gradually one begins to see the dangers to one's meditation practice as soon as they arise, which allows one to anticipate those in the course of meditation. With the breathing practice, for

instance, distractions usually arise either at the end of the out-breath, or at the end of the in-breath. The mind tends to slip off at that point of change, rather than during the breathing out and breathing in. Still one learns to anticipate those points of change, and to make a special effort to remain mindful and focused.

Should that effort be made with a lot of force?

Only as a last resort. You should use other methods first, and only use a forceful method when nothing else works. Because you are dealing with the *kilesas* in meditation, and the *kilesas* are the enemy, sometimes it is necessary to use brute force to subdue them. That is the Middle Way. Middle Way means the mess said that counters the *kilesas* and brings the mind back to Dhamma. So whatever action is needed to pull the mind away from the *kilesas* is the Middle Way. It's a counterbalance, balancing the negative aspects of the *kilesas* with the positive aspects of Dhamma.

Some people teach that vipassanā practice is all you need.

The *vipassanā* practice has been very misunderstood by many people. People whose minds tend to go in the direction of *vipassanā* can only make real progress when their minds are sharp enough to do *vipassanā* properly. If it is merely discursive thinking, it will not give the right results at all. It is important to keep in mind the three aspects of wisdom: *suttamaya-paññā*, *cintamaya-paññā* and *bhāvanāmayapaññā*. *Suttamaya-paññā* is wisdom gained from listening and reading; *cintamaya-paññā* is wisdom gained from thinking and investigating; and *bhāvanāmayapaññā* is the wisdom developed in the meditation practice. The first two are the discursive side of wisdom, and they are necessary to give you the methods and the data to work with. They also help to give you faith and confidence in the Dhamma, because it shows how cause and effect work. But in the end, you must have *bhāvanāmayapaññā* in order to gain the true results of wisdom. And *bhāvanāmayapaññā* can only come when you have some degree of *samādhi*.

Normally the mind is hungry for sensations; it craves for new sensations all the time. Because of that hunger, it wants to think about anything and everything. But no matter how much the mind thinks about things, it is never really satisfied. So the first aim of meditation is to stop thinking long enough to develop *samādhī*. When that happens, the mind will be satisfied internally and remain still, with no tendency to think about external things. When there is no tendency to search for external sensations, the thinking mind is then pliable and adaptable, which makes it suitable for the work of wisdom. When you focus your attention on any aspect of meditation, the mind will stay fixed there without wavering. That turns the mind into a powerful weapon that can deal effectively with the *kilesas*.

Under normal circumstances, it is very difficult to use the discursive side of wisdom to develop the calm and the concentration of *samādhī*. The *kilesas* will tend to bring up so many enticing things to think about that the mind will remain scattered and fragmented, instead of integrating and converging into a calm and peaceful state.

It is said that a practice of Zen Buddhism involves self-power, while the practice of Pure Land Buddhism involves other-power. That statement is very misleading. That which you call your “self”, and think of as self, and all the associations of self-identity, are fundamentally bound up with *kilesas*. That which is Dhamma appears to be something other — something which is not self, but something which can come and help. But, like the *kilesas*, Dhamma is also in the *citta*. So the two are mixed up together in the same *citta*. The *kilesas* are the factors that make everything dual; they try to concretize and fix everything in place. And because of that, they bring us nothing but pain and suffering. No matter how high they try to fix things in place, those things always change because they are *anicca*. So we suffer because the one we think of self is constantly trying to resist change. That one, the self we think we are, can never know the truth. That which appears to be the other is the truth. So talk of self-power and other-power is misleading, because they are both present within us. But, whereas, the self cannot help us to realize the truth, the other, which is the truth, is not really separate from us at all. We must learn to recognize that within us is the Dhamma that will always tell us the right way to go, both in terms of which actions are morally right and wrong, and in terms of which

meditation techniques are best suited to countering the *kilesas*. You must learn to trust the voice of Dhamma within yourself. The more you trust it, the more its power within you grows.

One of the primary advantages of *samādhī* is that when the mind is still we can see just how harmful are restless thoughts are. It motivates us with a sense of urgency to try to solve that problem.

What is the best way to investigate pain?

The one factor essential for investigating pain is mindfulness. Mindful attention is the key. Focusing right into the center of the pain with mindfulness, you should begin to question the very nature of pain. Suppose the sharpest pain is in your knee. Begin by probing into the painful feeling and questioning where exactly the pain is located. Is it in the bone? Is it in the ligaments, the muscles, the cartilage? Search and examine as you pose these questions. Keep the experience of pain fully centered in your mind as you try to determine its physical location. As you eliminate these factors one by one, you will eventually see that the pain has no physical characteristics at all. In the end, by using relentless effort and firm determination, the pain will appear to move upwards, until it reaches the heart, where the feeling of pain will disappear entirely. But that final stage is difficult to accomplish.

Although the necessary conditions for pain are physical, the pain itself not a physical phenomenon at all. Our experience of pain arises dependent on certain physical factors, such as nerves and nervous impulses, but those physical factors themselves are not pain. Pain is actually a very peculiar experience: we know it, and we describe it as being painful and unpleasant, but beyond that we cannot really in play it. The experience of pain is something that is fundamental, something you cannot break down and analyze any further. In its essence, the experienced the pain is a creation of the *citta*.

Our thinking minds work by analogy. Take sound, for instance. We hear sound coming out of a loudspeaker; but in fact no sound comes out of loudspeakers, only vibrations do. And vibrations are a purely mechanical process — not sound. What reaches our ears is also a form of mechanical vibration, nothing more than that. Those vibrations stimulate the nerves in the ear, which send nervous impulses to the brain. Those nervous impulses are also mechanical, and therefore also not sound. It is only when the impulses go through the brain and get inside that the experience of sound occurs. So sound is not something that exists outside of ourselves, something independent of our awareness. The experience of sound is also a creation of the *citta*.

When you develop *samādhi* properly, you will begin to see that there is nothing really wrong with the world; what is wrong is within yourself. You can also see clearly that in trying to correct the problems of the world, people are simply creating more problems in the process. The more people do, the worse things get. That happens because they are dealing with the wrong thing. If they dealt with the problems inside themselves, instead of imagined external problems, all problems would eventually cease.

How does one deal with an emotional state like depression?

When you feel depressed, first check to see if you have any moral issues that might be causing that. Bad morality is one reason why depression can occur. If you find that your past behavior is causing you feelings of guilt and remorse, you must address those issues directly and resolve to make amends by never doing that again. If it is not a matter of morality per se, but rather an unpleasant feeling that comes up internally, you should ask yourself the question: How do I know that I am depressed? Usually depression is accompanied by a very distinctive physical-emotional feeling somewhere in the body. Search for that point in the body and focus your attention there.

At the same time, do not let the mind react to that feeling by thinking negative thoughts. It is very important to cut it off at the level of thought. Thinking

depressed thoughts sets a negative pattern. Those thoughts plant the seeds of new *kamma*, which will cause the same result to keep coming up over and over again. So if you can catch the unpleasant feeling at the body level, depressed thoughts and images will not take over your mind. The thoughts and images are merely an attempt to suppress the unpleasant feelings, which are often a form of aversion, and escaped from the suffering they cause. Unpleasant feeling is a product of past *kamma*, and you must accept it as a consequence of your past actions. You cannot suppress unpleasant feelings, nor can you escape from the results of *kamma*. You must face the problem at that level and prevent it from going any further. Thoughts of remorse and self-pity will only bring on more depression. So you must turn away from them strongly, and refuse to indulge in that kind of thinking. Seeing it as a form of self-indulgence.

How should we understand dreams?

Most dreams are the mind interpreting a physical-emotional experience. When a physical-emotional state comes up internally, the mind must bring up some situation which mirrors that state as an object of the senses. It is the mind's attempt to explain that feeling in conceptual terms. If the feeling is one of fear, a fearful object will appear in the dream. The reasoning side of the mind that is very strong, so it assumes that any feeling or emotion must have a known, rational explanation. The dream is then an attempt to explain in rational terms something which is felt internally. So dreams are merely interpretations of the mind.

What is the difference in the last two factors of the Satipaṭṭhāna, citta and dhamma?

Citta in the four *Satipaṭṭhāna* refers to the state of the *citta*. For instance, there is the psychic faculty of knowing another person's *citta*, which means that you know the state of the *citta*, not the content of the *citta*. You know its level and you know the *cetasikas* that are operating in the *citta* at any one moment. *Cetasikas* are the factors that make up the *citta*, like anxiety, anger, conceit, compassion, concentration and so on. In the case of investigating the third *Satipaṭṭhāna*, you are seeing these factors in your own mind, not in someone else's mind. The fourth

factor of *Satipaṭṭhāna*, *dhamma*, refers to the content of the *citta*. The content of the *citta* is very subtle, and thus difficult to understand. In essence, it is the realization that the whole world revolves around our sense of self, although that is not entirely true because our sense of self is part of the world as well. We see that these worlds that are revolving around the self are actually worlds of sense experience. These worlds of sensation, where sensations are constantly arising and passing away, are ruled by a set of immutable laws, like the law of cause and effect. Certain things arise and go in combination with other things, both in the internal world and the external world. This creates two factors: the things that arise, and the combinations that they create. The things that arise are the elementary things, or *dhammas*, which are very much like the *cetasikas*. The combinations are *sankhāras*, so *sankhāras* are made up of *dhammas*. Within this content of the *citta*, you find the whole nature of the world and everything that is known. So the *dhamma* of the *Satipaṭṭhāna* means knowing the basis of everything at the mind contains. And in the end, the basis of the content of mind is seen as being entirely empty. One of the primary dhammas is dukkha, still understanding the fourth *Satipaṭṭhāna* is a way of understanding the Four Noble Truths. Normally, the *dhamma Satipaṭṭhāna* is very high and very difficult to investigate, so you should stick to the lower ones first until you understand them more fully.

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An Anchor for the Mind

People must have an anchor to keep their actions, this speech and thoughts within morally accepted bounds. Otherwise, if left on their own, people will tend to drift, and they almost always drift downward. There must be something to restrain them; either a teacher, a set of rules or a religious belief. Even ancient cultures had quite strict and rigid cultural norms and standards of behavior to keep people in line, and to make sure their behavior did not deteriorate to the point where it became a danger to society. Nowadays people don't know where they are.

Until the beginning of the Second World War, the hangover from Christianity was quite strong. At that point, the faith in Christianity and the belief in its doctrine had not disappeared, but they were becoming very weak. Now it's come to the point where there are very few religious principles left in society. Because of that, there are no religious standards to hold people's minds. People just try anything. And when they try anything they get hooked on things which are bad, much more easily than things that are good. I am referring to things like drugs and alcohol; people easily get hooked on those substances as a substitute for religion. Testing new ways and new methods of having a religious experience can lead one into more trouble, so it should always be approached with great caution.

But people nowadays do not believe that their actions bring consequences. Then once people do start drifting down, it is progressively harder for them to bring themselves back up. Once they start going wrong, they lose all touch with things that are good. When people who begin with faith in religion start going in the wrong direction, they turn away from religion entirely and lose all belief. It ceases to have any meaning for them. That accelerates their momentum in the wrong direction. When the bad things take hold of them, they do not even want to look in the other direction. It is people like that who have no hope of understanding Dhamma. It's not that they are not capable of understanding Dhamma, but they are just not interested in considering it.

People in the world can be divided into good people and bad people. It is a far better distinction than race, creed or nationality. *Sīla* is the standard for making that distinction. Of course, the good people are not always good, and the bad people are not always bad; but the general distinction still holds.

How can a fasting help meditation?

First of all, you must make sure that you are fasting for the right reason. Fasting should be done for the purpose of developing the practice, and not for the purpose of health or relaxation. But you must keep in mind the fasting is only an aide to meditation, it cannot be used as a substitute for effort. It helps by weakening the physical body. It reduces the body's strength, and saps some of its physical vitality. The energy in the body then becomes more subtle. When the physical body is strong, the *kilesas* are also strong. Weakening the body also weakens the *kilesas*. Because of that, it is much easier to control the mind when you are fasting. Because the mind is so closely tied to the body, eating food can easily cause feelings of heaviness and sleepiness. Fasting lightens the burden of the body, thus brightening and sharpening the mental faculties.

Can thoughts be suppressed?

Yes, thoughts can be suppressed. Suppression of thought is when the desire, or volition, for thought to arise creates a pressure in the mind, which you then force down. As that pressure continue bubbling up, you keep forcing it back down. Cutting thoughts is when one stops thinking altogether. So suppressing thoughts and stopping thoughts are two different practices. You can only suppress thoughts for a certain amount of time before the pressure of those starts to bubble up defeats your efforts. To deal with that, you should let the thoughts bubble up for a time, and watch them. Do not catch hold of them, simply let them bubble up and pass away one after another. Don't hold onto them in anyway. Once the upward pressure dies down somewhat, you can suppress them again. That is one method. Another method is to investigate the thoughts. You can hold the thoughts if you keep the mind firmly focused inside. When you do this, you will discover that basis

from which the thoughts are created. It is as though you are focused on the place where they are being formed. It arises in the form of a whole thought, but when it comes out it turns into a long-winded discourse. But actually the whole thought is formed right there, almost like a symbol. The entire thought is already formed, so there is no need for long discourse. It arises as a complete thought and then ceases.

To begin with, when you try to stop thoughts you have to have something to replace them with, like the breath or *buddho*.

What is the best way to deal with anxiety?

Anxiety is a very important subject for investigation. When anxiety comes up, you must examine yourself to find out where it comes up, and how. You will find that anxiety arises initially as feeling, so you must look at that feeling. But first you must acknowledge, quite honestly, that you have anxiety, and don't try to resist it in anyway. Once you have acknowledged the anxiety, you can turn to investigate it with an open mind. Examine exactly how the state of anxiety comes up. You feel anxiety, so what is it that tells you that you have anxiety? What is that quality within yourself that you know as anxiety? In what way does it announce itself? When you investigate that thoroughly, you will probably find one spot, or one of feeling, in the body that is its focal point. From then on, when ever anxiety comes up, you can go straight to that point and deal with it directly.

The anxiety is almost certainly pointing to a blockage in your spiritual development. When your meditation begins to develop in the right way, certain positive changes take place inside. The *kilesas* do not like those changes, and try to hinder them. Anxiety is one negative tendency that the *kilesas* will bring up to counter the practice. For instance, when you follow the in and out breaths until the sensation of breathing becomes so subtle that the breath appears to stop, anxiety about the lack of breathing may come up to hinder your development. If you can realize that this is the *kilesas* coming up to cause a problem, then you can deal with that blockage and get rid of it.

The *kilesas* are suffused throughout the mind like fog, or like dye dissolved in water. The mind itself is clear and pure, but it is tainted by these defiling elements. If a person could free his mind from the *kilesas* for only 10 seconds, he would see their harmful nature so clearly that he would never want to experience them again. Unfortunately, people do not realize what a burden the *kilesas* are.

The *kilesas* are based in greed, hatred and delusion, but they extend into a great variety of negative mental states. But they are so much a part of us that we cannot see them. A person whose character is primarily based on greed, does not see the greed, because it is their normal state. What they do see is hatred, because hatred is not normal for them. Hatred arising in a greedy person can stand out so much that that person thinks he's a hateful character. But he completely overlooks greed. The same applies to a person whose character is based on hatred: he easily sees greed coming up, but the hatred is so much a part of his normal character that he overlooks that. Because of that, people always tend to assume that they are the opposite character type from what they really are. It's quite a paradox.

You should not underrate the *kilesa* of delusion. Delusion includes qualities like laziness, lack of attention, uncertainty, the inability to decide, slowness in understanding, and the tendency to prefer not to think. The average person likes everything prepackaged and ready to use; they prefer not to have to think about things. People prefer to reduce very complex things into slogans and symbols because they are too lazy to try to understand their true meaning. They simplify things excessively. It takes a lot of effort to understand the true meaning of something, and people don't like to make that effort. That is an aspect of delusion.

The other aspect, which is much deeper, it is the way in which we view the world and everything around us. In fact, the mind is riddled with symbols. There are the obvious symbols like words and numbers and signposts, but the symbolic nature of the mind goes much deeper than that. Our whole experience of the world is simplified into symbols by the mind. We also have symbolic attitudes and symbolic views. And we think, speak and act based on these symbols. When you think of another person, it's not so much the person you think of, but the symbol of that

person created in your mind. From another person's physical body, characteristics of movement and speech we pick out certain aspects that strike at us and create a symbol. That single then stands for that person in our mind. That whole person becomes simplified down to that one symbol. That simple becomes static, so that we no longer feel the need to reevaluate our awareness of that person's changing characteristics. If we can understand the complex nature of phenomena, we will realize that our view of the world is quite wrong.

For the most part, it is necessary for the mind to simplify things. It facilitates the task of dealing with a lot of complex information. But it is important to realize that these symbols do not truly represent reality. Always be willing to question them within yourself, because the symbolism of the mind is a product of the kilesas.

Thoughts are usually formed in words, which are themselves symbols. You should look to see the underlying idea behind thoughts. Generally, most thoughts that come up as words originate from something like seed deep down inside. If you trace lengthy thought that down to that seed, you will find that the entire idea expressed in that thought is contained in the seed. Thinking then expresses that idea in a dialogue. But fundamentally, the idea behind the thought is complete in that seed. When you realize that, you realize that you know the idea already, so there's no need to think about it. The thinking about it is an attempt to describe the idea to yourself, and to tell yourself who you are and what your environment is. Thoughts continually reinforce the notion of self: I am the sort of person who thinks in this way.

There is a fundamental difference between the scholarly approach to Dhamma and a practical approach to Dhamma. The scholarly approach takes the teachings that are in the books and fits them together by referring to the commentaries and sub-commentaries to understand the meaning of the Buddha's teaching. The practical approach takes the teachings in the books and tries to find their meaning in oneself. In other words, the meditator searches to find the meaning of the written text in his own experience. Even if one has not had that experience, one tries to find some comparable experience with which to compare it. In that way, even if

one does not know the full meaning, one can at least begin to understand it. This is the correct way to approach the Buddha's teaching. If the teachings that you read are of such a type that you cannot do that, then you should question their validity. When you read some explanation of Dhamma, then you should consider within yourself what in terms of experience does this actually mean. What is the experience that this is describing? Then you must search. And that searching is valuable because that is the way of wisdom. One has to read Dhamma texts and bring them inside to understand their meaning internally.

Can Nibbāna be attained by someone who practices a religion other than Buddhism?

It is a nearly impossible task, simply because the scope for people to be deluded and to be satisfied with something less than Nibbāna is so great. Because of that, most people would have no chance. The Christian saints are a good example. They actually got quite high, but then they grabbed a hold of something that was not the truth. It took the mind of the Buddha to find out the truth. The Buddha's teaching then became the guide, and that then make it much easier. Later, much of the Buddha's teaching was picked up by other religion, Hinduism, for example. At least half of Hinduism is Buddhism.

One of the problems with Christianity is its doctrine. The doctrine is all right up to a point, but then the person practicing that doctrine experiences things which contradict the doctrine. If you read Christian literature you will find that those who have practice have come to enormous doubt. Doubt and uncertainty are big problems in Christianity. Their experience shows them things which make them doubt the teaching. They then have a battle where there should not be any battle. This is something that limits the scope of Christian practice. For instance, there is the doctrine of being reborn in the physical body, the body that died, which is ridiculous. The view that Jesus is God, and that means that he and only he is God, and that nobody else can attain to that state, this is ridiculous as well. This is going to be a stumbling block for anyone who practices Christianity, because they will come up against the question of what is God. The way of Christianity is full of difficulties like that.

Restlessness is caused by the *kilesas*. The *kilesas* don't come up and cause trouble unless they feel they have to. So when restlessness comes up that means something is happening internally. In meditation, it can be an attempt by the *kilesas* to prevent you from going forward. So you must be patient and persist until you overcome that blockage. The *kilesas* use all sorts of tricks, so you must learn the tricks of the *kilesas*. They are often the blockages that prevent you from going forward in practice.

What is the citta?

People gave very muddled about the *citta*. They see a light or get a feeling, and they think that that's the *citta*. But it's not. The *citta* cannot be known by any sensation. In truth, the *citta* is the one that knows the sensation. Because it is the one that knows all objects, the *citta* cannot be known as an object. But the *citta* can be known directly, because direct knowing does not require duality, where as sensing does. You could not sense the *citta*, but it can be known because the knowing is right there all the time. But sensing always requires two: knower and known.

But you must be careful with the *citta* because, although the *citta* is the one that knows, it is not always know correctly. That is because its knowing is permeated with *kilesas*. In that case, the *citta* knows, but it knows wrongly. The perception of any sensation requires three factors: the object, the sense and the *citta* that knows them. If any one of the three is missing, no sensation occurs. In the final analysis, knowing is only correct when it's associated with Dhamma. When knowing is merely associated with the *kilesas*, people can easily do actions that are harmful to themselves and others, thinking those actions are good and beneficial.

If the sensation of the breath moves from the nose tip, should we follow it?

To begin with, it is best to focus on it at the nose; that is, the external point where it is felt most prominently. But that can change in the course of meditation practice. After meditating for some time, you may find it becomes more and more difficult to hold your attention at the nose. Then you suddenly realize that it has

become very prominent at another point; for instance, the upper lip or the throat. You should then turn to focus on that point. But if you find that by changing location distraction comes up more easily, you may have to go back to the nose tip. You must access that for yourself. You must determine where the breath feels most settled, where your attention comes to rest most easily, and stick with that point even though you may feel the breath sensation more strongly in another location. When the breath becomes more refined, that means that the *citta* is becoming calmer. So when the breathing comes down, the *citta* calms down. The breath then becomes a very good indicator of calm.

How deep does samādhi have to be before we turn to investigate with wisdom?

Your mind will tell you when it is the right time to use wisdom. You will find that it times the mind is tending toward investigating with wisdom. The mind will suddenly open up and begin to see and understand things more clearly. But keep on with the *samādhi*, because you are developing *samādhi* not merely for the purpose of investigating with wisdom, but it also allows you to go very deep and reach *bhāvanāmaya-paññā*, wisdom born of meditation. The first two types of wisdom — *suttamaya-paññā* and *cintamaya-paññā* — can be developed without *samādhi*. But *bhāvanāmaya-paññā* is essential, and that's what you need the *samādhi* for. In theory, you could give them up *bhāvanāmaya-paññā* directly without *samādhi*, but it is far too slow.

What is the meaning of khaṇika samādhi?

Khaṇika samādhi is a state where the mind focuses intently on a certain object of attention until all other objects drop away and the mind goes deeply into that point, almost as if it is dissolving into it. Usually the concentration lasts for only a few moments and then it breaks. It is a brief coming together into one-pointedness.

What is appanā samādhi?

Appanā samādhi is the state of concentration where the *citta* reaches a state of complete and sustained one-pointedness. It is a state where the *citta* pulls away

from all objects and integrates into oneness. Everything disappears from awareness, even the physical body. There is just one state of knowing without any objects.

Why is it necessary to have samādhi before you investigate with wisdom?

Normally, the *citta* is hungry, and it is searching for something to satisfy the hunger. So it searches for sensation, which is searching in the wrong way. It jumps around all over the place like a monkey, but it never gets any satisfaction. It is comparable to a man in the desert dying of thirst who reads books about water, but has no water to drink. The way to cure that is to stop all sensation — clamp it down and block it off.

In practice, that means keeping the mind focused on only one object. This anchors the mind and prevents it from drifting. When you hold the mind focused on one object for a long time, the mind will fill up with satisfaction internally. Eventually you'll get to a point where the *citta* is so fully satisfied internally that it no longer searches for sensations. When that happens, the *citta* goes still and quiet. When the *citta* becomes still and quiet because it no longer wants to look for external sensations, you can then turn it to investigate with wisdom, and it will do a good, thorough job. This is the main reason for developing *samādhi*. You must first get the *citta* to a state where it no longer wants to go out. You cannot always be holding the mind back, trying to put a fence around it. When the *citta* is very calm, it is easy to direct it inward, and it will stay there easily and go deep until it understands things clearly. Whereas, if you try to do that with ordinary consciousness, the mind jumps about and won't stay fixed on any one object, because it is still hungry and unsatisfied.

So you must overcome that sense of this satisfaction by giving the mind only one object to focus on, using mindfulness to hold it there. When held to one object, the mind gradually comes down. Because it can no longer jump about, the restlessness gradually subsides. In the *Visuddhimagga* it is compared to a calf that is taken away from its mother and tied to a post with a rope. At first, it bays in jumps about and tries to get away. Because the rope prevents it from getting away, it eventually gets

used to the situation and lies down and goes to sleep by the post. In a similar way, the *citta* wants its external objects because he thinks that that is the way to get happiness. But if you take the *citta* away from those objects and tie it to the post -- the breath or *buddho* -- with the rope of mindfulness, then it will gradually grow quieter and calmer until he gives way and enters into the “sleep” of *samādhī*.

What is the meaning of dukkha?

Anything which diminishes what I think of as my “self” is *dukkha*. Because of that, conceit is one of the biggest creators of *dukkha*. If a person's conceit is big enough, it can drive him mad. When conceit is big, but causes of *dukkha* grow larger and larger. That is a very important aspect of *dukkha*, but it is not its fundamental nature.

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What is the Citta?

With breathing meditation, what you want to do is very gently bring your attention to more firmly on the one point. But you should not do it with too much force, because if you do it with too much force, the mind will become restless. Just keep your attention steadily on the one point where you feel the breath most strongly. If the mind drifts away, pull your attention back again without thinking about where it went. Do not bother to investigate what has distracted your mind, unless the distraction becomes very persistent. In that case, as a last resort, you may want to turn your attention to the distraction and investigate why your attention is so attractive in that direction. Otherwise, refrain from investigating your mind, and simply keep your attention focused squarely on the point of contact of the in and out breath.

You begin by focusing on the point of physical contact at the tip of the nose, where the breath passes in and out, but as the breath sensation becomes more subtle, and point you are focusing on may shift to the extent that you may no longer be able to say exactly where that point is located. When that happens, interest develops in that point, and the mind becomes quite absorbed in it. Eventually, the breath sensation may become so refined that you can no longer feel the breath at all. When that happens, you can do as Visuddhimagga suggests and keep your attention fixed on the point where you last felt the sensation of the breath. Hold your mind on that point until the feeling of the breath returns to your awareness. It's your attention that's important, so you must learn to be attentive. When you keep your mind on the one object, other things tend to drop away until everything else is forgotten.

When everything else is forgotten, your mind becomes absorbed in the one object. Then a feeling of happiness and ease arises, and the mind will tend to rest in that calm, still state for a while. You should be able to develop *samādhi* until you can go into that calm state at any time. However, in the end that calm state can become so addictive that the meditator becomes thoroughly attached to it. Being too

attached to *samādhi* is not useful, so you want to deliberately turn your attention away from that calm state and begin to investigate some aspect of Dhamma. And that can be hard work, because the mind does not want to do the investigation. It would rather remain in the state of tranquility. So it is almost as though you have to learn how to meditate all over again.

Although *samādhi* is the necessary basis for wisdom, *samādhi* on its own will not develop wisdom. Wisdom will not automatically develop just because you have *samādhi*. Wisdom as the ability to develop *samādhi*, because wisdom itself is a very calm and concentrated state. If you have real wisdom, there must be a certain degree of *samādhi* there as well. To begin with, the *samādhi* and the wisdom won't necessarily work together. To begin with, in the initial stages of developing wisdom, the mind must use a lot of discursive thinking, thinking which naturally goes against the grain of the *kilesas*. Such as: What is the nature of the human body? What is the nature of suffering? What is the nature of the senses? And so on. The *kilesas* like to think about only things which promote self, things which are concerned with conceit in one way or another. That is the way of the *kilesas*. The investigations that develop wisdom go against the way of the *kilesas*, and put pressure on them. The *kilesas* will return that pressure, making the practice of wisdom difficult, and sometimes unpleasant.

When the practice of wisdom has become more fully developed, you'll find a happiness that comes from the wisdom practice is far more pleasant than that gained from *samādhi*. The happiness of *samādhi* tends to come and go, but the happiness you gain from wisdom remains as a firm foundation, which never fades or disappears. It becomes fixed, so you don't lose it. Because wisdom is actually destroying the *kilesas*, the happiness and the calm are automatically increasing. They increase because you are destroying the things that cause unhappiness and agitation. But *samādhi* is the foundation of wisdom, and mindfulness is the foundation of *samādhi*. That is why it's important to keep your mind focused on one point, so lets you develop the mindfulness necessary to put that mind into *samādhi*. Once you have mindfulness, as soon as a distraction comes, you know it.

Always try to keep your mind in the present. Try to avoid the tendency of mind to hark back to the past. This is the duty of mindfulness. When you feel dissatisfied with your present situation, I think longingly back to a seemingly more pleasant situation, remind yourself that you are living here and now, not there and then. You must realize that you must expect discomfort when you are living in the world with the human body. The human body and discomfort go hand-in-hand. Reflect on how your attachment to come for limits you in where you can go and what you can do. When physical comfort is your main standard, there are only certain places that you can go to do meditation. It is a very heavy burden to be always carrying comfort around with you. A major part of comfort is the fact that we get used to it. And when we get used to it, any small discomfort seems to be more unpleasant than necessary. On the other hand, when you get used to living with the bare necessities, and the limited amount of comfort, then it is very easy to live and do the practice anywhere.

You should never think that you must attain the deepest *samādhi* before you can start practicing wisdom. Meditation is not like that. You have your own natural wisdom, and you must use it whenever it is appropriate to correct or improved the situation you are in. You must always use what was then you have. However, the full-fledged practice of wisdom should come after you have developed a reasonable degree of *samādhi*. Before that, you should use wisdom wherever you find it necessary. The Buddha taught *sīla*, *samādhi* and *paññā*, and you have to use whichever one is appropriate for a particular situation. The *kilesas* do not come up in a nice orderly fashion; they come up randomly in their own time. Their arising is unpredictable, so you must be prepared to use whatever means necessary to counter them and bring your mind back into balance.

This is the true meaning of the much-talked-about, and much misunderstood, Middle Way. Most people think that the Middle Way is like any good old English compromise. But that isn't true. The Middle Way indicates that path that is necessary to counter the *kilesas*. Because of the nature of their *kilesas*, some people have to practice the strictest austerities to counter their *kilesas*. For such people, those strict austerities are the Middle Way. Other people, because their *kilesas* are

weaker, and practice with more ease and comfort. For them, that will be the Middle Way. When you go in the direction of the *kilesas*, you are moving away from the center. In some cases, practicing unnecessary austerities is actually going in the direction of the *kilesas*, and therefore throwing your practice out of the proper balance. Countering the *kilesas* means bringing your mind and your practice back to the center; that is, back into balance. The Middle Way is a matter of balancing the practice against the *kilesas*. The Middle Way really means a way of developing dispassion.

For instance, if a person investigates himself and finds he has a lot of greed for food, then that person might deliberately take food that was untasty, in order to bring his mental defilements back into balance. He might take rough, unsavory food, considering only what was necessary for nutrition. In that case, the greed for good and tasty food is pulling his mind in the wrong direction. So he needs to find a suitable practice to pull it back to the middle again. In a similar way, when you find a state of mind that disturbs your meditation practice, you must search for the right antidote. That is the Middle Way. But the Middle Way is much misunderstood in the West, because people think it means the easy and convenient way of practice. But that path is merely the way of the *kilesas*; the way of laziness and complacency. So people use their misunderstanding to justify insufficient effort in their own meditation.

Right effort is the effort that brings you to the Middle Way. It is the effort that actively works against the *kilesas*, and undermines their ability to manipulate a mind. But this effort should not be confused with letting go, or non-attachment, because non-attachment is not a mode of practice that you can actively develop. Many people say, all you have to do is let go. But that's not true, because you can't just let go. You simply don't know how to do it. When you don't even know what you are grasping, there is no way you can possibly let go. You can't even find what to let go. But what one does the meditation practice, and develops the wisdom, until understanding comes, then letting go happens on its own. Only then do you understand what letting go means. Letting go is a natural result of countering the *kilesas* and doing the practice properly. Until you come to that point, you won't

even know what to let go of. So letting go and non-attachment will come of themselves as the fruits of meditation. You need not try to practice them deliberately.

To begin with, it is necessary to learn about the *kilesas*. They are the enemy. Reflect on the *kilesas* as much as you can, and try to see them within yourself. Notice how deep and how subtle they are. And then learn what you have to do in your own mind to counter those *kilesas*. It's not always a matter of sitting formally in meditation; it is often a matter of observing your mind in the course of your daily life. This is where many people fail in Buddhism. They want very much to do meditation practice, but they do not want practice virtue to clean up their daily lives. And without a strong sense of morality, meditation will not work.

When we begin to do meditation practice, the *citta* is a very unknown quantity to us. The *citta* has many levels and many layers. First of all, there is the *citta* in ordinary life, which is comparable to the waves on the surface of the ocean. This is the one that knows seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting and touching. It is the one that makes decisions and the one that makes *kamma*. This is the *citta* in ordinary life. This aspect of the *citta* has qualities that are changing all the time. But this constantly changing *citta* is based on the "original *citta*", which is so vast and so unknown that we really can't say anything about it. Because everything is based on it, there is nothing to catch hold of to see it. The only way you can come to know it is by getting rid of everything else, by getting rid of all the things that are covering it up. But you cannot look at it and see it directly. Because the *citta* is the knowing behind the senses, the senses are not capable of contacting the *citta* in any way. It is comparable to what camera, which cannot turn around and take a picture of itself. We all original *citta* has such enormous scope and breadth that it is essentially unknowable.

We know the world we live in by means of the senses of seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting and touching. We then incorporate that sensual information into our thinking, which organizes it in such a way that we experience it as an external to us. In other words, we see the world as being out there, in relation to us, because

that's the way it appears to us. And we, the ones who know the world, appear to be inside. But if you investigate the senses closely, you'll see that the entire world actually arises inside the mind. An object of sight enters through the eye, contacts the optic nerve, travels to the brain, and from that we get the act of seeing. So the world is seeing somewhere inside of us, somewhere in the realm of seeing. The same applies to all the other senses. These realms of sensation all exist within ourselves. Our knowledge and understanding of our physical bodies also exists within ourselves. So we live with a personal world that is very difficult to pin down, because the entire world of our experience is known internally. It is not solidly grounded in anything outside of us at all. This center, or the basis, of our personal world is the *citta*. The *citta* includes everything, both inside and outside, so it is absolutely vast. Because it is so vast, it has the capacity to know anything. The *citta*'s capacity for knowing is unlimited. But what we are able to know personally is always limited by the *kilesas*. If we can manage to get rid of the *kilesas*, then the *citta* will return to its original pure state.

Ultimately, are your citta and my citta the same citta?

There is no way we can answer that question, because “yours” and “mine” are creations of the *kilesas*. They are part of our worldview, based on our understanding of bodies and personalities, and so on. And those are not what matters, they are merely peripheral. The original *citta* is the essence; it is the true center. The distinctions made between similarities and differences are just a superficial view of reality. The *citta*, the reality behind everything, has no distinctions.

Citta and Dhamma of the same thing. Both of them are deathless. Death is a process of change. For us it means the dissolution of the body, and the dissolution of those things which depend on the body, like the five *khandhas*. But the original *citta* never changes, so that is why we call it “deathless”. The *citta* is not a physical or mental phenomenon that is changing all the time, so there is no way for it to arise or pass away. At the same time, it is not the self, either. “Self” is a word referring to a personal perspective that makes distinctions between internal and external, which makes the self a relative concept.

The word “enlightenment” is often used to describe attainment of Nibbāna. But enlightenment, used in that way, is a contradiction in terms, because the experience of light for a person meditating at that high level is a manifestation of *avijja*, or fundamental ignorance. So, many of the Christian saints who saw manifestations of light in their meditation were trapped by their own ignorance. In fact, the final level must be absolute emptiness. There is nothing there to see. Anything that manifests at that stage is an attachment. Light, for instance, is an attachment. One must go beyond all attachments to get to Nibbāna. So the word “enlightenment” signifies a state of delusion, rather than a state of awakening. Although manifestations of pure radiance indicate a very high meditative attainment, they in no way represent the final goal. The final goal is empty of all conventional characteristics.

The Buddha was able to overcome all attachments and attain the final goal by developing fundamental principles, and by maintaining a fundamental doubt, which caused him to carefully scrutinize every mental state that arose to find out if there was anything wrong with it. That kind of doubt is very important, because it allows one to even question the validity of mesmerizing radiance.

Is Nibbāna a state of mind?

No, Nibbāna is not a mental state. When Nibbāna arises, there is nothing left to be defiled; there is nothing left to experience suffering; and there is nothing left that experiences change. When there's nothing left, then there can be no *kilesas*, no birth, and no death. There remains only absolute knowing, but there is nothing to be known, because there is nothing there. The world that we know, a world of *samsāra*, is completely gone. Phenomenon in the world of *samsāra* are like smoke and clouds -- they constantly arise and vanish. When the world of incessant change ceases, nothing is left to attach to. What is left, is the original basis of everything. That original basis of everything is completely empty of the world. It is said that if a person could experience that for only a moment, he would never be satisfied with anything else.

Our search for a sense of satisfaction is a very important motivation. It can be an example of the *kilesas* leading us in the right direction. The *kilesas* are based on greed, hatred and delusion, and all three can be turned to our advantage in meditation. For the ordinary person, your desire to attain Nibbāna is an aspect of greed. But at the same time, it can motivate us to make the effort to overcome the *kilesas*. Normally, hatred is a very negative emotion. But when a person turns that hatred against his own *kilesas*, it can have a very positive effect.

How would you describe fear?

Fear is largely an aspect of hatred, because it is a turning away, or an aversion. Greed, on the other hand, is an attraction. Fear, in almost all cases, is fear of the unknown. To deal with fear effectively, you must always face it. Whatever you do, you should never run away from fear. If fear comes up when you're doing meditation practice, and you feel that you are unable to handle it, you should withdraw from the meditation practice immediately. But the best approach is to face the fear and investigate it. Turn inward and try to discover the nature of fear. When you look at fear directly, it usually disappears. When a feeling of fear arises, ask yourself: what tells me that I have fear? You will discover that fear is mostly feeling, and that feeling has a location in the body and certain distinctive characteristics. You must investigate all of these things to discover the true nature of fear. Overcoming fear gives very valuable results, because fear is always a product of the *kilesas*. So overcoming fear it means overcoming the *kilesas*.

The *kilesas* use the power of the *citta*. In fact, they usurp the power of the *citta*, which is what makes them so powerful. When fear comes up, it is the *kilesas* that produce the feeling of fear, because their position is threatened. In that way, the *kilesas* act almost like demons. The *kilesas* feel insecure because they are afraid of death. They are afraid that the body might die and ruin their nice, secure home. When the *kilesas* feel insecure, they produced the feeling of fear in order to reassert their dominant position. So if you can overcome the fear, you can overcome the *kilesas* as well.

Mostly, the *kilesas* are what we call self. Their power is that profound. The Dhamma is almost like another power in the *citta* that is always telling us the right thing to do. But we just don't know how to listen, because the *kilesas* are always getting in the way and causing confusion.

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Foundations of Mindfulness

Too much sleep can be damaging to meditation practice; far more than too little. Too much sleep tends to make the mind rather dull, and he also tends to promote restlessness. But at the same time, unless your practice has gone very deep, you probably need a certain amount of sleep each day. It is generally recommended that about four hours sleep every night is sufficient. But because people differ, you must experiment and find out for yourself how much sleep is the right amount. Try more sleep, and less sleep, and see the results for yourself. Usually it is a good rule that once you have awakened from sleep, you do not go back to sleep again that night. If you get too little sleep one night, you may naturally sleep more than next night to compensate for that. But, when their practice is very deep, some people don't need any sleep at all. That is quite possible, but only with certain people. This is an individual matter. Some people can do without sleep quite well, but they cannot do without food. Others can do without food, but they cannot do without sleep.

Eating too much food is also very damaging to meditation practice. Not only that, but you must learn to eat the right types of food as well. Some foods are very heavy, making them a hindrance to meditation. Of course, when you eat only one meal a day, food is much less of a problem.

When doing meditation practice, you must have the freedom to follow your heart in making decisions about the methods you use. But to avoid falling into delusion, you should use reason to check your decisions, as well. Short of a skilled teacher who can point out the right methods, reason is the only sure guide you can use. Use reason to get to know your character and the nature of your *kilesas*. For example, suppose you have been practicing a certain method for some time with limited results, and you decide to change to a new method. To begin with, the new method seemed to work much better. But eventually you come to a point where the new method becomes just as difficult as the old one. That happens because you've come to a blockage inside yourself, some point that you cannot get through. You realize that whatever practice you do, you will always get stuck at that point. So you can

reason for yourself that the method you are practicing is not the problem; the problem is that blockage inside. You know then that you need to make more effort at that point, whichever practice you are doing. That is how wisdom can help to direct you in your practice.

Doubt is also very important. Not the kind of doubt that leads you to indecision, but the kind of doubt that makes you want to check to make sure that the results of your practice are genuine. That kind of doubt is very valuable. In other words, never be too sure that you are right. Always be prepared to doubt yourself. People who are lacking in doubt are easily convinced that they have attained high spiritual states, like Arahant.

It is also important to realize that there is that inside one's mind that will tell one what is right, tell one what is *kilesas*, and tell one what one should be doing. That is Dhamma. Once you realize it is there, you have to learn to recognize and listen to it. It never forces one, but there is something that will tell one what is correct, and it's often where one does not want to go. You should learn to know that one very well, because it is an excellent guide. The more one can get to know that, the more one has an internal teacher at the guide one. We have an external teacher, and that is necessary; but finally, we must replace the external teacher with the internal one. When that has been accomplished, we no longer need to be with a teacher. We can practice on our own then. For that reason, we have to learn to recognize the internal teacher, and listen carefully to the teaching. In the end, it can reach the stage when the internal teacher gives talks on Dhamma. By recognizing the internal teacher and listening carefully, one learns to distinguish between what is *kilesa* and what is not. In the end, you find that the *kilesas* are, in fact, yourself. The *kilesas* are the ones who are in charge of everything you do — all of your thoughts, speech and actions. And the Dhamma seems to be separate, something other, something which points the way. One must learn to recognize the Dhamma, which gives a feeling of being something outside oneself. You must come to realize that, while everything else is false, the Dhamma is real. Your task is to get rid of the false things that are the *kilesas*, so that only the real Dhamma is left.

It is important to always bear in mind that what you think of as yourself is *kilesa*. The image that you have of yourself is created by *kilesa*, which makes you a product of greed, hatred and delusion. So you must try to see these *kilesas* and realize what they are, and what they lead to. That realization itself gives you a very good reason to go beyond them; a very good reason to overcome those things that always lead you in the wrong direction. Right now, the *kilesas* have the upper hand; they are the things that are strong, because they have the power of the human *citta* behind them. It's as though the *citta* is pure, clean water mixed up with the mud of the *kilesas*. Once you filter out the mud, the water becomes clean and pure again. The mud of the *kilesas* has tainted the purity of the water. When the *citta* is impure, it acts under the direction of the *kilesas* that defile it. Fundamentally, the water itself remains pure; but being muddy, it is no longer suitable for use. In its essence, the *citta* is pure. But because it has become mixed up with the defiling elements of the *kilesas*, it thinks, speaks and acts in wrong ways.

Dhamma and the *kilesas* are both located in the heart. The Dhamma is they are inherently, because that is the nature of the *citta*. The *kilesas* are foreign intruders. These two are natural enemies that are always at war with each other. It is uncertain which one will gain supremacy. Even if the Dhamma gain supremacy, it still must work from the basis of the *kilesas*, because any good or correct actions we take still act on the basis of our understanding of life, which is deluded, and therefore, quite wrong. In other words, the *kilesas* are still there in the background all the time. It is as though we are wearing tinted glasses: everything we see is colored by them. Because we cannot see beyond the coloring, we do not know what the truth is.

Although the *kilesas* are still there directing your actions, you still have the decision to go in the right direction or in the wrong direction. Take selfishness, for example. Because it is based on a sense of self, everything we do is, in one way or another, selfish. But selfish actions can be good, as well as bad. If we constantly perform good actions, then the result will be happiness. Bad actions, on the other hand, bring suffering. That distinction is what determines whether an action is good or bad, right or wrong. The nature of the results of our actions is the test of morality.

Most of our understanding of the teaching ends up being an attachment to words. In other words, when thinking about the *kilesas*, people have in their minds a concept of what *kilesas* are. This concept stands for the *kilesas*, but by clinging to the concept, they fail to see the *kilesas*. One has to look beyond the concept and search inside oneself to find out what the *kilesas* really are. It can be compared to the concept of Wat Pa Baan Taad you had before you came, and the actual experience of being here. Before you came, Wat Pa Baan Taad was a name and a concept; now all it is a direct experience.

The *kilesas* are there all the time, underlying everything. They create a sense of gnawing dissatisfaction. Even in the happiest of situations, something inside is not quite right. This points up the fact that we are never living in the present. In the true state of happiness, the *citta* is in the present all the time. That means that the *citta* is still, calm and empty. In that case, there is no hankering or wanting. A similar state is attained when the *citta* enters deep *samādhi*.

There is a *sutta* the Majjimā Nikāya about Venerable Dhammadinnā, where she talks about dealing with three types of feeling: *sukha*, *dukkha* and *upekkhā* — pleasant, unpleasant and neutral feeling. She said that the ordinary person experiences a lot of *dukkha*, and very little *sukha*; while the highly developed person experiences a lot of *sukha*, and very little *dukkha*. For the person who understands the true nature of Dhamma, the neutral feeling, or *upekkhā*, is pleasant; for those who do not understand, neutral feeling is unpleasant. The reason being, that the neutral feeling does not give any taste. It does not give any sense of reflectively pointing to self. For the ordinary person, neutral feeling instinctively leads to boredom.

Is the Arahant always mindful?

The *citta* of the Arahant is out of time and space. It does not arise, remain or vanish. Mindfulness, being dependent on the five *khandhas*, does arise and pass away. In fact, mindfulness is part of the training to attain Arahant, it is not the result. So, an Arahant is not necessarily always mindful. Because of his training, he

is probably mindful most of the time, but he does not have to be, because he no longer needs to train in mindfulness. In that sense, the five *khandhas* might be compared to a tiger. A tiger is a fearsome creature that people run away from in fright. But once a tiger has been killed, the same people can walk right up to it unperturbed. Its claws and its teeth are still as sharp as they were before, but they no longer instill fear. In that case, the tiger is no longer harmful. The same principle applies to the five *khandhas*: once the *kilesas* are gone, they are harmless. Whether you are mindful or not mindful, whether your mind is sharp or forgetful, it no longer matters.

When we speak of *citta*, we are talking about the essential knowing nature that does not arise or pass away. Mind deals with the four mental *khandhas*: *vedanā*, *saññā*, *sankhāra* and *viññāṇa*. Mind refers to the thinking process, which constantly arises and passes away.

What is the meaning of dhamma, the fourth Satipaṭṭhāna?

Various factors make up the processes of the mind. There are feelings and memories; and then there are the two major factors that make up thought, which are *sankhāras* and *dhammas*. By *sankhāras* we mean, the bits and pieces that come together to form thoughts and ideas. Because of that, we get states of mind, which are a combination of many different things. *Dhammas*, on the other hand, are the ingredients that make up the mind, and those are not formed of any bits and pieces. They are qualities and faculties that arise in the mind. For instance, pure hatred and pure greed are *dhammas*. They simply arise on their own, and you cannot analyze them further. Mental feeling is also a *dhamma* that you cannot analyze further. Feeling has different qualities, but you cannot break them down into their component parts. You can point to what causes feeling to arise, but you cannot break it down any further.

What is the difference in the last two factors of the Satipaṭṭhāna, citta and dhamma?

Citta in the four *Satipaṭṭhāna* refers to the state of the *citta*. For instance, there is the psychic faculty of knowing another person's *citta*, which means that you know the state of the *citta*, not the content of the *citta*. You know its level and you know the *cetasikas* that are operating in the *citta* at any one moment. *Cetasikas* are the factors that make up the *citta*, like anxiety, anger, conceit, compassion, concentration and so on. In the case of investigating the third *Satipaṭṭhāna*, you are seeing these factors in your own mind, not in someone else's mind.

The fourth factor of *Satipaṭṭhāna*, *dhamma*, refers to the content of the *citta*. The content of the *citta* is very subtle, and thus difficult to understand. In essence, it is the realization that the whole world revolves around our sense of self, although that is not entirely true because our sense of self is part of the world as well. We see that these worlds that are revolving around the self are actually worlds of sense experience. These worlds of sensation, where sensations are constantly arising and passing away, are ruled by a set of immutable laws, like the law of cause and effect. Certain things arise and go in combination with other things, both in the internal world and the external world. This creates two factors: the things that arise, and the combinations that they create. The things that arise are the elementary things, or *dhammas*, which are very much like the *cetasikas*. The combinations are *sankhāras*, so *sankhāras* are made up of *dhammas*. Within this content of the *citta*, you find the whole nature of the world and everything that is known. So the *dhamma* of the *Satipaṭṭhāna* means knowing the basis of everything at the mind contains. And in the end, the basis of the content of mind is seen as being entirely empty. One of the primary *dhammas* is *dukkha*, still understanding the fourth *Satipaṭṭhāna* is a way of understanding the Four Noble Truths. Normally, the *dhamma Satipaṭṭhāna* is very high and very difficult to investigate, so you should stick to the lower ones first until you understand them more fully.

Get to know the body, the body is very important. That is the first *Satipaṭṭhāna* contemplation. In order to do that, you must question: What are you, and what is yours? When you understand what is not yours, then you will know what truly is

yours. So you question: Is my body with me? Is it mine? The idea of this investigation is to realize that the body is not you, and it does not belong to you. The body belongs to the natural world. You have grasped at that body, and continue to grasp at it by maintaining it in good condition. But the time will come when that body has to return to the world of nature. When you truly realize within yourself that the body is merely a temporary home, something you have all on loan, so to speak, then concern for the body drops away. Fear of death also drops away, because you realized that death is simply the death of the physical body. This understanding is not a matter of being alienated from your physical body; rather, it is seeing with wisdom the truth about the nature of the body. Seeing the body's true nature relieves the mind of an enormous burden. After that, when the body gets sick, the mind does not get sick as well. The mind remains free.

How are the Four Foundations of Mindfulness synchronized?

The Four Foundations of Mindfulness are dealing with the different aspects what exists at any one moment. But in practice, you cannot separate them out because they are all functioning together. All you can say is, at any one moment, this is the way of *rūpa*, this is the way of *vedanā*, this is the way of *citta*, and this is the way of *dhamma*. This is the way that each is functioning at the moment, but in truth they are all one thing. The Four Foundations of Mindfulness is simply an analysis of what is actually one complete thing. Because of that, the Four Foundations of Mindfulness are only one, not many. They are simply pointing at different aspects of one state.

Essentially, the Four Foundations of Mindfulness are teaching a method. As a meditation practice, it is a method of pointing out what may be easier for one person to understand and for another. That is, because it moves from the grossest aspect to the subtlest aspect, it presents a wide range of experience to choose from. But all of them must be present in any moment of the experience. It is not the case that these foundations of mindfulness arise one at a time.

When we say that things arise one at a time, we have to ask: what is meant by time? When analyzed, both time and space are found to be mental constructs. They are concepts that exist only in our minds; they do not exist out there in the world. We have clocks, but clocks do not tell us time, all they tell us is the position of the hands of the clock. Time is something that we interpret from that. The concept of time gives us a basis for associating various events together. But it is the mind that creates the idea of time. How can time exist, when the past is gone and the future has yet to come, and there is only this present moment, which doesn't last? Where is time to be found?

Another thing that we must realize is that the capacity of the mind is limited. Its capacity is not infinite. The capacity of the *citta* may be infinite, but the capacity of the mind is not. The mind is a part of the *khandhas*, and these are very limited. The mind appears to have been constructed by evolution to deal with the necessity of living in the world. All of our mental faculties are geared to that. When we try to use the mind beyond that capacity, there are definite limits. And we have to realize to what extent we see things from our own viewpoint. Because we cannot see any other viewpoint, we fail to realize it. It is quite extraordinary how personal are viewpoint can be. The whole world appears to us only in the way that we see it. The world we see you may or may not be the same world that other people see. What the world outside of our viewpoint is, we really don't know. According to a person's normal way of thinking, the world is something that we don't truly know. The center of the world is located in the *citta*, that is, inside oneself. Because of that, the trouble in the world comes back on one's *citta*. If the world seems to be an awful place, it is like that because of one's *citta*. If the world appears to be a good place, it is because of one's *citta*. If one gets rid of all the faults in the *citta*, the world becomes a perfectly happy place.

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The Fundamentals of Buddhism

I'll start with the fundamentals. The fundamental teaching of Buddhism is based on the human predicament. The Buddha found that everyone has a fundamental problem, the problem of discontent. Everybody is discontented. Nobody's really satisfied at all. Dissatisfaction is our motive for doing things. The reason we do something is because we think it will bring us more contentment. Sometimes discontent amounts to real suffering, sometimes it's just little irritations. But it's always there, one way or another. The Buddha saw that this is the fundamental problem that everybody is trying to overcome. It doesn't matter if they're Buddhists or what they are, there is discontent in everyone.

The Buddha used his insight to analyze the problem of discontent. He saw that fundamentally the problem came from craving. The mind is wanting all the time. With this wanting, the mind constantly goes out searching for things to fulfill its desires. When desire comes up, the mind focuses outward to grab what it wants. It tries to alleviate its discontent in that way.

By grasping at the things they like, people end up wanting those things more and more and so become attached to them. Conversely, when they find things they dislike, they want to get rid of them. They then become attached to not wanting those things. This attachment continues on into the future dependent upon conditions that were set up in the past. We set up attachments to things and those attachments come up time after time after time, leading us in the same direction. The grasping continues on until we die. When we come to the end of our life, only the seeds of what we've planted by our actions remain, and that determines how we grasp at a new life. In the next life we take up where we left off, the same thing happening again and again, life after life. Most people want life to go on forever, but if they realized the true nature of their existence, they wouldn't. They would see the value of trying to stop this process and attain something truly satisfactory.

The problem exists because our desires are always based on the *kilesas*, those mental defilements within us. The defilements are basically greed, hatred and delusion, all of which are caused by a fundamental ignorance. The ignorance in us does not understand the truth of what we are now, what we have been in the past and why we are here. Because of this fundamental delusion we are left to speculate about our condition and what we should do to remedy it. We suppose that it is right to follow the lead of other people because everyone else seems to be going that way. We suppose that when we see something we want, we should try to get it because we believe that will make us happy. Obtaining it satisfies us for a short while, but quickly the old habit of wanting comes back again. So we keep on making the same mistakes time after time after time.

When searching for a cure for their discontent, people use the method of cause and effect. When feeling dissatisfied, they consider how they can get rid of that dissatisfaction. What will overcome it? Their actions are based on their own level of reasoning. If they had wisdom and understood the situation, then they'd do the right thing to get rid of that discontent. Unfortunately, people are blinded by a fundamental ignorance that causes them to keep doing the wrong actions all the time, because they don't understand.

Using wisdom, Buddha saw the correct way people should act to overcome that situation. The correct way is to get rid of the attachment and craving that exists within us. As long as we are attached to life and the things of this world, we will keep on going in the same old direction. That attachment comes from craving. So what we must get rid of is the craving. The craving comes because of feeling. We experience feelings of dissatisfaction. We feel irritated or upset, say. When that unpleasant feeling arises, the craving arises to overcome that feeling. We then act in whatever way we think will overcome it. If we have enough wisdom to see the correct way, there will be no problem. The difficulty arises because we allow feeling to give rise to craving, and so are immediately on the wrong path to solve the dissatisfaction. Most people in the world stumble along in this way. When that happens, the world is bound to have no end of trouble. The world's troubles have always been there one way or another, and because of the *kilesas* in people's minds,

they will continue to be there indefinitely. As long as the *kilesas* are there, there's bound to be trouble.

For ourselves, when we've learnt the right way and we can see how to do things properly, we can slowly learn to undo the situation in which we're caught. We are caught in a repetitive process where the results of what we've done in the past ensure that we will keep doing those things which bring us the same results in the future. We just continue rolling along like a wheel in the same rut, sometimes veering this way, sometimes veering that way, but going along the same rut the whole time. When wise people realize that, they want to do something about it. They want to get free from that situation.

Buddha taught that when you stop the cause of a situation, you can stop the whole situation. The situation may not stop straight away, but you're moving toward its cessation. So he taught that if you curtail your craving then you can slowly undo the situation. The results of your actions will create a new direction for the future and the whole situation will gradually become weaker and weaker. You will then experience a satisfaction and contentment which you have never known before. The path that the Buddha taught is a causal path: if you want to achieve the cessation of discontent, you must produce the right causes for it.

The causes are what the Buddha called the path, the Noble Eight-fold Path. They constitute the path of action needed to overcome that situation. Basically, the path is comprised of moral behavior, mental training to control the mind, and wisdom. Those are the three factors that are necessary. Ultimately, wisdom is the primary factor that overcomes the mental defilements. In order to develop the necessary wisdom, your mind must be trained to a sharp edge. It's like cutting down a tree: when you want to cut down a tree, you must sharpen up the axe first. When the axe is sharp, cutting the tree becomes much easier. If you try cutting with a blunt axe, it's difficult. So, first you must train your mind. The results will come gradually, on their own.

The first section of the path deals with morality. In Buddhism, morality is an issue of speech and action, not thought. Thought is subtle. Thought is difficult to control. Morality involves our relationship to the world. We have to set up our relationship to the world so that there are no attachments. We then feel free from worldly matters because we don't feel any guilt or any debts pulling us in that direction. If we've done bad actions or are still doing bad actions, when we sit down to do meditation practice thoughts about that behavior will inevitably come up and cause trouble. In order to do the meditation practice properly, we need to be free from all forms of guilt and remorse. Because of that, the practice of moral virtue is absolutely essential.

The five basic moral precepts are the minimum standard of behavior necessary for the human being. By observing these five moral precepts—the precepts to refrain from killing, stealing, indulging in improper sex, telling lies and taking drinks or drugs that dull the mind—one will retain one's status as a human being. To the extent one falls below that standard of behavior, one is going below the human level. Conversely, if one trains to a higher standard of behavior, one progresses to a higher level. The moral training is very important in that respect.

In addition, the practice of morality will bring you a certain degree of contentment in everyday life. It brings the satisfaction of knowing that you have done nothing wrong, and that no one can rightly claim that you have behaved wrongly. That knowledge brings with it a measure of freedom and a comforting feeling that you are unblemished where the world is concerned. At the same time, you will experience a certain mental restlessness due to wanting, craving, and hankering for objects of attachment. In other words, dissatisfaction is there, but it is experienced in a more subtle manner than the discontent suffered from lack of morality. To overcome that level of discontent you must turn your attention to training the mind.

We begin training the mind by putting our attention on a single object of attention. Usually the breathing is used as an object: the breath as it is felt passing in and out at the tip of the nose. Some people may use the meditation-word *buddho*. The

important thing is to keep the focus of attention solely on the meditation object. As that is done, the mind will steadily become more and more focused internally. Eventually the usual mental distractions tend to die away, although that may take quite a long time, depending on the person. Some people can accomplish it very quickly. But for most people it's quite a job to control the mind because it has been habitually going in the wrong way for such a long time, being constantly distracted by wayward thinking. So the mind doesn't readily give way to the meditation discipline. The mental defilements are the reason it refuses to give way. If the defilements weren't there, meditation would be easy. But the defilements within us act like demons and cause us trouble all the time. They make us work very hard to get results in meditation practice.

But when we work hard enough and long enough, steadily the results do come. As they come, the mind becomes calmer and more contented. With that comes a feeling of confidence we are on the right path. That feeling of confidence encourages us to increase our efforts and the practice gradually improves. As the practice of controlling the mind gains momentum we become more focused and concentrated, so the practice becomes easier. Eventually, we find that we can enter *samādhi* quite easily. When the mind is well trained and well controlled in that way, it is then time to turn our focus to developing wisdom.

The first step in developing wisdom is to calm the mind by holding it firmly on a single object. Once the mind is calm, it is ready to begin investigating. We start by examining the human body. What is the body? Who does it belong to? Where did it come from? Where will it go to? Is the body what I call me? What sort of a thing is it? What is the body made up of? Is it a pleasant thing? Is the body a person? We have to look for ourselves to find out what the situation really is. When we do that we come to see that this body is not me or mine. The body belongs to the world, its part of the world. It's made up of the world. It's made up of food. We eat food and food goes into the body and replenishes it. When it dies, it returns to the world. We find out that, in fact, the body is something separate from us.

Seeing that, we find that concerns about the body diminish. We're not so worried about death, disease, and aches and pains. Here again we feel a reduction in our discontent. The discontent is gradually dying away. With constant practice of body contemplation we come finally to realize that the body is completely separate. It is not me, and never was me. It has always belonged to the world. This is a very profound state of realization.

We then turn our full attention to the mind and ask the question: what is the mind? The mind is a mixture of four aspects: feeling, memory, thought and consciousness. All four of them come from one essential nature we call the *citta*. The *citta* is "the one who knows", the underlying basis of all knowing within us. It's central to every form of consciousness, and it's always there. The one who knows has been trapped by the *kilesas* into tuning itself into consciousness, into thought, into feeling and into memory. Because of that, the one who knows is not free and so is always causing us trouble. It causes us trouble because it's been infiltrated by the defilements within our own hearts. The Dhamma, the pure way, is the original nature of the one who knows, and it also resides within the heart.

If you want to understand what the one who knows is you have to ask yourself: how you know things? When you examine seeing you will realize that when you see something, you know it, no question about it. For example, when you see the color red, you know that experience perfectly well for yourself. But in no way can you explain that experience to anyone else. There's just no way you can tell them. By using the word red, you rely on the other person having an experience similar to your own. Really speaking, you don't know if they see that color in the same way or not. The way of the one who knows is like that. When you hear something, you know what you hear but you don't know if anyone else really hears it the same way. All you can say for certain is physiologically the bodily mechanism for hearing is similar in both cases. But that doesn't mean that two peoples' experiences are the same. When you try to explain precisely to someone what a particular sound or color is like, you find you can't do it. You must refer directly to that person's own experience and hope there is a close correlation. So there's no way you can explain

seeing to somebody who's been blind from birth, they just won't be able to understand. They have no experience to guide them.

The one who understands these things is an aspect of the one who knows. And it is that aspect which can become free. It has no physical characteristics and so it is not a thing of the world. It only becomes associated with the world because of the *kilesas*. The one who knows is infected by these defilements. That infection causes ignorance. Being pervaded by ignorance, the one who knows has no confidence in itself. Because it has no confidence in itself, it feels compelled to grab hold of things to give it confidence. So we need to have other people, other objects and sensations about us to give us confidence in our own existence.

Thus our existence is created in relationship to all the things we experience. We call the one who is related to those experiences, me—the self. The self is ever-changing. It's never the same from one moment to the next. Self really an imposter making out that it's something that it really isn't. The idea of self is the idea of some permanently-fixed entity within one. In fact, no such personal entity exists. It is entirely false. People use the word self to refer to several different aspects of this personal identity. Sometimes they refer to the body, sometimes to feelings, sometimes to thoughts. Someone who says "I am going thru the door" is referring to the body moving through the door. When a person says "I am tired" or "I don't feel happy" that's referencing feeling. When a person says "I think it's good", that's the person identifying with thought. In that way, the self is always something different. It's never one thing; it's constantly changing all the time. Because it is constantly changing, it does not deserve the name 'self'. Conceptually, the true self should be something permanent. So in Buddhism we say the self is not a true thing, it's an impostor. It is the purpose of Buddhism to realize that the self is not true in reality.

By overcoming the sense of self-identity, we can return to true nature of the one who knows. It's difficult to do because we lack faith in the one who knows. We cannot simply will ourselves to have faith in it. We have to build up that faith. In order to do that, we must develop knowledge and understanding. We must see with insight what we are and the way we work. Gradually, by cutting off the things we

are not we come to what we are. In other words, by cutting off the body we see that the body isn't me, so that one is gone. No need to worry about that. Then we cut off the nature of feeling and see that it isn't me either. By 'cut off' I don't mean that you get rid of body and feeling, but rather that you remove them from the idea of who you are. Similarly with memory, thought and consciousness, you see that you are not those either. Seeing those factors gradually drop away, you gain confidence in the one who knows. Confidence in the one who knows increases until you can finally make the jump and become the knowing essence, entirely. That's the final result. A few are able to make it, not many. It's a very difficult thing to do, but there are people who have achieved it.

Memory seems the most important factor in seeing everything as permanent.

Yes, but ignorance is also required in order to be deluded by memory. It's the delusion that really matters; without that, the memory is neutral. When you realize what memory is, then it's not a hindrance at all. There is nothing fundamentally wrong with body, feeling, memory, thought or consciousness. They're just phenomena. They are part of the way things are in the world. That's not where the fault lies. The fault lies in one's own heart. It's in the heart that good and evil resided. Evil is the cumulative effect of the *kilesas*. That's where the fault lies. The *kilesas* act like devils in the heart. The problem and its solution are located just there. In fact, the essence of life is the 'one who knows'. Without that, there is no life. The thing to realize is that whatever happens, the one who knows is always there in the background. When somebody gets Alzheimer's disease, the one who knows still knows. When a person has brain damage, the one who knows still knows. The knowing never ceases. Although it may not know the external situation, the internal knowing remains.

Think back to the time when you were very young. That knowing was always there, even though you may not have understood much of what you knew. As you've grown older, that same knowing has always been there. Philosophers throughout the ages have always experienced a lot of difficulty with knowing, and how we know things. It has always been a problem. It's a problem for philosophers because,

since they have *kilesas* clouding their judgment, they are looking at knowing in the wrong way. Due to their mental defilements, they cannot see clearly the situation they are in. When they can't see their own situation, they can't realize what knowing means.

Memory is very important. Memory informs our worldview. Our worldview is also very important, because this is the net that traps us. We hold a view of the world based on our past and everything we have learned. Whenever we see anything we refer back to that basic view to see where it fits in. Where in my past have I seen something like this? The first things that come to mind are the things we're familiar with. Familiarity means we have a view of that in our memory. We have an internal plan in which to fit it. The trouble is, because that plan has been built up in conjunction with the *kilesas*, the plan itself is distorted. When the plan is distorted, our basic understanding tends to be distorted. Then it's difficult to understand the truth, because the truth is distorted by a plan that's wrong inside.

Like wrong programming?

It is, yes. The only thing is, you mustn't think that memory in the human being is the same as memory in a computer. It's not. In the sense that human memory stores information, there is a similarity. But the human memory is an active function, not a passive storehouse. It's rather like a line of soldiers, where the Sgt. Major calls out 'who can play the piano?' and somebody answers 'I can' and the Sgt. Says 'alright'. In other words, he finds out because there is a response from that person. With memory, when you call for some recognition, a response must come from memory.

How do you overcome the kilesas there?

One must realize that there are not only *kilesas* in the heart, but there is Dhamma as well. Both are there together. What happens depends on which one comes up most. The defilements bring up a certain view from memory, which is from the past, so one is already looking at things from a wrong viewpoint, which has been

built up in the heart. This we might call the basic worldview. But the *kilesas* give a view of the world that is not correct. When the memory is set up according to the *kilesas*, one tends to have a wrong view of most situations. Because the memory plan has been built up in the past based on the *kilesas*, there is always a wrong view associated with the normal person. That's because the ways we look at things tends to be based solely on that plan. In other words, we don't search for evidence to verify our perceptions; we simply accept things as the plan calls them.

Take young children for instance. Dhamma is there in children, but the *kilesas* from the past are also there. Children don't come completely brand new. At birth, the mind grasps at the world. A child will pick up the world in its natural way. That natural way will depend on its past, on its kamma. When a being is born as an animal, it can pick up the world only in the way of that animal. That animal cannot grasp the world in the way a human being does, even though it may have human characteristics from the past. The basis is right to see things only from the viewpoint of that animal.

My memory told me to avoid that poison plant...and it tells me to avoid the person who hurt me last week.

If you look in yourself, there is a difference between contacting a poisonous plant and learning to avoid it, and meeting an unfriendly person. It's not the same attitude. You have quite a different attitude when you meet a person who has harmed you or done something wrong. Your mindset is absolutely different. When you meet the plant, you know it's inanimate. You know perfectly well it doesn't intend to harm you, but you must be very careful not to touch it, that's all. When you meet a person, you feel that person should have characteristics similar to your own, so you expect of them what you would expect of yourself.

Then wisdom would have me avoid that person if he is harmful to me.

If one can't overcome the situation by any other means, it's best to avoid it. In other words, if you see that person and hatred arises, and you realize the hatred

itself is damaging to you, the best thing then is to avoid meeting the person until you overcome the situation in your own heart. When you overcome the situation in yourself, then it doesn't matter. Overcoming the situation is really a matter of watching your thoughts and steadily developing control of your thoughts, until the whole problem just disappears. It no longer has the potential to bring up any harm. The unpleasant sensation that arises when you meet that person is not the problem. There's nothing wrong with that. That's just a result from the past. What is wrong is the thought: "I don't like that person", going on and on. That is what's bad. Because that thinking is making *kamma* that's producing seeds for the future. In some cases, avoiding that person might be the most expedient method. Here you must use wisdom and adapt to circumstances. The way of wisdom is to assess: "Can I control myself when I meet this person. If not, meeting him may bring more harm than good." That is the way of wisdom.

You might think, that person has done me harm. I want to meet him because I want to bonk him one. This can happen too. You want to settle the matter, but in the wrong way. The difference between those two approaches is the use of wisdom. When you intend to aggressively attack another person, it's your own hatred leading the charge. And that's wrong. It causes more trouble, because it doesn't really deal with the situation inside. It merely reinforces the internal problem.

All these problems come because of attachments. Attachment is fundamental to self, and self is the main problem. Time after time, self is the thing that causes the trouble. Everybody knows selfishness is wrong. Yet if self was true and real, selfishness should be the highest virtue. But it isn't. When you are attached to your self-identity, you attribute value to that self. Then when somebody says something to you that diminishes your self-importance, up comes hatred to defend your self-worth. This happens because of your attachment to self and the value of self. At the same time, you must realize the scale of the problem, because attachment to self is one of the last defilements to be eliminated. It's very persistent and very difficult to overcome. You can overcome it in certain minor respects, but the total overcoming of self-identity does not happen until the very end.

In the world, our self image is very important. Many worldly situations rely on it: social position, the pecking order in various systems and situations, the relationship of who shall be the boss, from the government on down; even who is prepared to accept the idea of boss. Life in the world is all bound up with the idea of self.

Most people in the world are stuck in a helpless situation. It's helpless because they're not interested to do anything about it. The lack of interest makes it helpless. A person who's interested wants to find out what's wrong, and then find a cure. There is some hope for that person. But people who are disinterested simply don't care. Because their attention is focused out into the world all the time, their situation is hopeless. It's very difficult for them to accomplish anything meaningful. It's because of this that the Buddha said he saw only a few people with little dust in their eyes, not many.

The fundamental idea of self is expressed in one's relationship to other people and things. A comparison is made between oneself and others in the form of a fundamental distinction between me here and that one there. It divides the world into this and that. A suggestion of this can be found in the word *viññāṇa*. The 'vi' suffix means to divide into two. *Ñāṇa* means knowing. So *viññāṇa* could be translated as "divided knowing". The one who knows divides into subject and object, and that's where *nāma* and *rūpa* come in. Once you have those two everything else follows from there.

Is that how we distinguish one color from another?

When we see a color, like red, that's just a bare experience. The bare experience is merely the first stage of the division process. There is 'me' seeing 'that'. That experience defines the separation. Later we think about it and make comparisons. To make comparisons we must retain that experience in memory and then consider a different color. Then we bring the two together in memory, which is entirely a mental process. It's not external at all. It takes place inside the mind. The comparison goes back and forward. By comparing the feeling of 'this was pleasant,

but that was unpleasant', the decision is made: I like this one better. But it's a very complex process.

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Fragments of a Teaching

Ajaan how then do you see the role of a contemplative in a society?

I don't know that a contemplative has much of a role in a society at all. A contemplative really should be considering himself. In other words, he asks (himself): “What and who am I?” is. This is fundamentally the question. I mean, he searches for that. Now, when the answer is found, and when he gets through that and he sees and he knows what the end result is, then he'll get understanding for the benefit of society as well – understanding for the benefit of other people because he'll have seen *avijjā*. He'll have seen the *kilesas*, he will know the *kilesas* and he'll know exactly what the problems are in the world. He'll know exactly what's right for the world. He is standing in the ideal position to advise people, because any advice comes from his wisdom – wisdom which is free from *kilesas*. That's a very good situation then. But until he gets there, it's another matter. Even then it depends on the person.

Generally, for somebody who's learning at the Wat here I don't like giving talks. I don't mind answering questions – but I don't like giving talks. I mean, if Ajaan Mahā Boowa goes away I don't give any talks to people at all here, because I feel that the person who should give talks here is Ajaan Mahā Boowa. If I go giving talks here, I'd try to put myself in Ajaan Mahā Boowa's place – and it's not right. It's not right at all jumping in where I shouldn't. But if people like to come and ask me questions, I don't mind answering them. I'll talk to them. Nothing is wrong with it. I do not mind doing it. The only thing is that I am prepared to give talks for the people who don't understand Thai because they can't listen to Ajaan Mahā Boowa's talks anyway...that's reasonable...

Talking too much is not good. If one finds out about Dhamma and talks about it a lot, it's almost as though it all leaks away. When one finds out for oneself, one

should really be careful about it. Do not talk about it too much, until it's very well established. Don't talk.

It's strange really: when one finds that one's on the right of track with Dhamma and one talks about it to people, trying to explain it and so on – you'll find that it weakens it – so that you can't get back to what it was before. It can be quite a long time before you learn to bring it back again.

The way Dhamma works is quite subtle – I mean, the way one's *kilesas* work is subtle as well. One mustn't under estimate them.

I understand Ajaan Mahā Boowa does not like to take on any new Western Bhikkhus.

Now, he says that he can't look after them. Because he's got to know the language. He says that if he takes on pupils, he says that he's got to look after them. He looks on it as, a sort of, important duty. He feels that he can't look after them now. He used to take on Western pupils, but not now. Thai *bhikkhus* he takes on some, but not many.

Westerners who can speak Thai pretty well, is that a different situation?

So far, he hasn't recently taken on any. I think, also, he's uncertain about it – not knowing their background. He knows what's right for Thai people, but he's not quite sure that it's right for Westerners as well. A long time ago, he said that he feels like a chicken looking after ducks.

Yesterday, I asked Ajaan Baen whether he thinks Westerners need different skillful means to practice than Thais. He said: "I've never seen a farang, I don't know!" (Everyone Laughs).

Ummm...I would say that the basic skillful means – the underlying psychology (of Thai and Westerners) is the same, but the way in which you teach it is often quite

different – the modes of teaching are quite different. What you teach is the same. Fundamentally, people are not different from one another. The characteristics of people are the same, but the ways in which they think and the ways in which they do things – there are differences. And, the thing is, if you put something in the wrong way for a person, then that person gets a completely wrong impression. And that can cause a lot of trouble.

Do you find in yourself that you have become comfortable with the Thai character? Do you feel like you've become so Thai yourself?

Oh, I feel quite comfortable with them now. Yes. Having been an engineer in the past, I do lot of work with the Thais, and I can't find any difficulty in getting on with the villagers – no trouble at all. They're really quite amusing. They have quite a good sense of humor.

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Advice to Lay People

Do you have any suggestions for people in the West who are interested in practicing as Buddhist laymen? What are some of the ways that they might practice, including practice of sīla, and especially the area of sex?

Yeah. I can certainly suggest things. But will people do them? And how many people are prepared to put up with the difficulties entailed? The trouble is, when people have to apply restraint to themselves, they don't like it. It's unpleasant. It's unpleasant because their pleasures are bound up with sensual desires all the time. And when their pleasures are bound up with sensual desires, the tendency is to see any restriction as being something unnecessary and unpleasant. So they don't see the results of self-restraint because the results are not necessarily immediate, they often come later on. But those results are very important.

Before undergoing moral training, people should understand the reason why they are doing it. In other words, what's the purpose of being moral. Frankly, most people in the West don't seem to have any idea why they should be moral. Westerners are brought up with the idea that there is some God up there who is looking down on us and writing things down in his black book — everything that we do bad or good or whatever goes in his black book. And then when we die, he's going to come along and we're for it. He's like the judge in a court. I know this is not the real view of Christianity; the real Christianity is something much deeper than this. But this is the popular concept that people have in mind. Even if they realize that this is rather naive, at the same time it's still lurking there — like a childhood concept that they have never bothered to get rid of or change. So this is the way that they think.

But of course, if there was a god up there writing things down in a black book, you might be able to evade him. If you're very skillful, you might be able to do it while he wasn't looking or something. But the trouble with morality is that you can't

evade it. Because it's not a god up there who writes it down in a black book, it's yourself who writes it down. The one person who always knows about it is yourself. Whatever you do, you know. It goes into you, and it lurks there. It goes in as a cause; and later on, in one way or another, that cause is going to bring a result. And if the cause is bad, that result will usually come up at the most awkward time possible.

People who do immoral things are actually loading themselves up with trouble. It's they who load themselves up; no one else brings the trouble back to them. It's from themselves that it comes. For example, when people do bad or evil actions very frequently, the doing of those actions changes their character. This character change happens because of the actions they've done. Look at people who are always killing animals and see what their like. They're dull, stupid people. You don't find clever people doing that. And so it is with other immoral behavior. People who take drugs all the time — look at them! They're just deadbeat, those people. And when a person is deadbeat, or dull and stupid like that, what results are going to come from their actions? The results are bound to be bad, and unpleasant. In that stupidity, there's a lot of suffering. In the end, they themselves suffer because of what they've done.

True morality is a practice that maintains your status as a decent human being. It maintains that status by keeping your actions within the bounds of what's going to bring you reasonable results in the future. If you do actions that bring you bad results, you'll just go down and down and down. And the more you go down, the more dull and stupid you become, and the less you are able to see the rut you are in. So you do more bad actions, causing you to go down further, until the end result is very bad indeed. But people don't realize that, they don't understand the consequences of their actions. If you want to see some of the consequences, just go into any mental hospital and have a look around. Look at the really burned-out cases and see what they're like. This is the sort of thing that can happen. And this is one reason why you should be moral — just to keep yourself sane. It's a mental hygiene. Normally, people don't eat dirty food, or go without bathing until they become filthy. Because they're afraid of disease, they maintain standards of

cleanliness. They worry about diseases of the body, but they don't care a damn about diseases of the mind. And most people have diseases of the mind lurking within them all the time. More than anything else, these diseases of the mind come from bad states of morality.

As to the practice of moral discipline, there are the standard five *sīla*, the five precepts of Buddhism, which constitute an excellent moral training. They are: not to kill, including not only human beings, but animals as well; not to steal; not to indulge in any wrong forms of sex; not to use bad language, false speech, lies, slander, gossip, and so on; and not to take drinks and drugs. These five rules of training form the basis of a decent human being. If you can't even adhere to these, you become less and less human. And the end result, well, I'll leave it to you to guess.

What specifically constitutes wrong sex?

The practices that go against the general social norms concerning sex are wrong sex. It's a rough guide, but I think most people have a fair idea of what that means. It means you don't go sleeping about all over the place. It means you tend to remain faithful to one partner in a consensual relationship. Unlike Christianity, Buddhism has nothing to do with marriage. So the question of sex is much more open. As far as Buddhism is concerned, if a man and a woman agree to live together as partners, they're married. Whether they actually have a ticket or not is simply a legal matter. As far as Buddhism is concerned, they're married.

Concerning less orthodox sexual relations, I would advise people to be very cautious. Those practices can lead to a lot of damage and a lot of harm. Sex is a very important factor in moral virtue. And the consequences of immoral sexual practices are plainly obvious. But, although people see those consequences every day, they don't realize where they come from. Because people can't link causes and their effects, they don't understand that the harmful effects they experience are a direct result of wrong forms of sexual behavior. And because of that, they see no reason why they should stop engaging in them.

You mentioned before that a couple living together, in Buddhism, is considered the same as being married. Now, in the West, there are a lot of people who are living together. In a situation like that, if either of those partners is sleeping with another person would that constitute adultery, or wrong sex, according to Buddhism?

I would say yes.

Perhaps you could give a general introduction to Buddhism for someone who has had no exposure to it.

When you look at life, you have to ask yourself, “What is the main problem that we have in life? What are we always trying to aim for? What is our purpose, our goal?” You can say that the goal, in all cases, is the attainment of happiness, the attainment some measure of contentment. This goal points to the problem — the thing that is always wrong. And that problem is discontent. Everybody is discontented. They’re discontented with little things, with big things, with everything. If there’s nothing to be discontented with, then they find something to be discontented with. Always there is discontent. I use this word, rather than “suffering” — which is the usual translation of *dukkha* — because “discontent” brings a much wider and better understanding of the nature of *dukkha*. All the time, from moment to moment, hour to hour, day to day, we’ve always got discontent. And the thing we want is happiness, which is contentment. So this is really our problem. In fact, it’s our motive. Whatever we do, we do it because we think it’s going to bring us more happiness than if we don’t do it.

Now, if we were very wise and we could see the ways of cause and effect very well, then we would do those things that brought us true happiness — and we’d attain it. The trouble is, though, that we have a lot of ignorance in us, a lot of stupidity. Because of that, we always do the wrong things. We do causes that instead of bringing us happiness, bring us suffering and discontent all the time. So we’re always putting ourselves into the same trouble that were trying to get out of. You can see this in the newspapers. Just look at the front page of any newspaper and

you will find endless instances of people who think they are doing things that will bring them happiness. But they don't find happiness. They go right in the opposite direction. They just encounter discontent their whole lives.

In Buddhism, we say that the cause and the basis of this discontent is craving, always wanting. We crave for things. We want this, we want that. We're always wanting things. We're always wanting them because we feel deficient — we feel that we're lacking something. And when we feel that we're lacking, we want things to fill the deficiency. We usually have to work damn hard to get them. Often they cost a lot of money, and we spend years paying back the credit. But people never stop wanting things. And even when they receive those things, they soon lose interest in them and want something else. Or they want something better. A person wants a car, but once he gets that car he looks at it and thinks, "Oh, it's just a ordinary car. I'd much rather have a better one, I'd much rather have a bigger one." And so it goes on and on and on. People always have this craving going on.

And craving is always bound up with discontent. When we crave, we do so because we feel deficient. We then think that acquiring the things we crave will make up for that deficiency, that they will make us whole, make us complete. But they don't, because the deficiency is within us, whereas the things that we want are outside, and external to us. And external things remain outside, whether we get them or not. Simply to claim to be the owner of something doesn't really make it ours. At most, it means is that we exercise a little control over it. But it isn't an integral part of us; it doesn't belong to us internally. It still remains separate. Because of that, receiving possessions, status, or whatever you want in the world, is never really satisfactory. So in Buddhism we say that the underlying cause, or the underlying basis, of discontent is craving.

Craving arises because of ignorance. We don't understand. We don't know the way cause and effect works. We don't know the way our minds work. We're very clever at science; we know a terrific amount about the ways of the external world. But when it comes to ourselves, we are absolutely ignorant. People don't know about themselves at all. And they don't even like looking to find out, because they might

discover things that show them that they are not as good as they think they are. Being full of admiration for the world and full of knowledge about the ways of science, they keep their mind outside in the world. But external things don't bring them any real contentment and happiness. That's because contentment and happiness arise within oneself; they don't arise out there. But to make them arise within oneself, one must change oneself internally. And that's difficult work. We've got to get down and really work hard at that. Morality is one part of it. And that often requires quite a lot of effort. There's a lot of restraint, a lot of control, a lot of doing without, a lot of criticism from friends who think that you should go and do things in the sloppy way that everyone else does them.

So we can reflect that, if the causes of our discontent exist within us, then it must be possible to stop it. If our discontent was caused by the dictates of God, or some other external factor, it might not be possible. But if it is caused by us, by our own wrong actions and misunderstandings, then we should be able to do something about it. In fact, the Buddha taught that we can come to the cessation of discontent by getting rid of those defilements in ourselves that constantly lead us in the wrong direction, that constantly blind us and prevent us from seeing.

The way to get rid of these defilements begins with moral discipline — practicing morality, so that we can have a feeling of freedom towards the world, as though our behavior has not left us with any moral debts to repay. Secondly, we must train our minds so that they become stronger, more powerful, more capable, and more unified. Thirdly, we must use our minds to develop wisdom, to search, investigate, and to find out all about ourselves — what we are, what we are made of, how we function, and what our problems are and how we can get rid of them. Because it's wisdom that gets rid of what's wrong. Wisdom puts things right. But it's no good trying to develop wisdom without first developing a basis of calm and concentration. Otherwise, it won't be wisdom; it will just be discursive thought. Discursive thought is merely on the surface — it flips about without ever going deeply into things. Wisdom is different. It's much deeper, and much more penetrating than mere thinking.

These four factors: discontent, the cause of discontent, the cessation of discontent, and the cause of that cessation — these are the Four Noble Truths.

Is it possible for lay people to develop the calm that produces wisdom in the same way that monks are able to do?

Yes. They can. You mustn't make such a sharp distinction between monks and lay people. Fundamentally, we are dealing with human beings. But monks and lay people do take on different modes of life, and follow different rules. And in so far as those rules and that mode of life are important, monks do hold a definite advantage. A monk does not engage in the same restless activity that the average lay person does. As monks, we don't need to catch trains and buses. We don't have to drive cars, go shopping, or fight our way down the street through crowds of people, and so on. Because of that, our living environment is calmer and more peaceful, making it much easier to cool off and to get into meditation.

The average lay person, living a busy life, will find meditation much more difficult. Undoubtedly, there are lay people who can develop calm and concentration, and they can also develop wisdom while living their daily lives. But they are few and far between. There are other lay people who, try as they may, will never be successful at meditation. They are just too involved in the world. A worldly mentality takes hold of them, and they can't stop themselves, they can't control themselves. In between those extremes, there are people who can develop spiritually as lay people, but only slowly and gradually. It is not easy for the average lay person to see and follow the true way. The world grabs everything. It takes their bodies, their interests, their minds, and their hearts, until they have nothing left.

Do you have any suggestions for a meditation practice for a layman who is involved in the world, who wants to calm his mind and be able to better live in the world and also at the same time to develop himself as a Buddhist?

The first thing is to realize the importance of moral discipline. Without a basis of morality, meditation practice is likely to go wrong. People may get results from it,

but the results won't be the right results. So there must be some basis of morality. To think, as some people teach nowadays, that you can practice meditation without having morality, because morality doesn't matter — that's real nonsense. It indicates that they haven't understood morality. They don't know what it means. Meditators must have a firm moral basis. At least, they should be practicing a moral way of life. Even if they have been morally lax in the past, they should at least be practicing a moral way of life in the present.

With moral virtue as a basis, you can practice techniques for developing calm. Probably the best one for most people in the West is mindfulness of breathing. Begin by sitting quietly, either cross-legged on the floor or in a chair. If you sit in a chair, it shouldn't be too comfortable or too soft — not the sort of chair that inclines you to go to sleep. It's best to sit upright, without being too tense. Then put your attention on your breathing. Putting your attention on your breathing doesn't mean that you try to breathe more deeply or to modify your breathing in any way. You just watch it. It's really more feeling the breath; you feel it. You feel the natural flow of the breath as it goes in and out somewhere in the area of the nostrils. Place your attention on the breath where you feel it most strongly. Maintain your attention on the breath there, noticing it going in and out, in and out. Try to keep your attention only on that.

The first thing you'll find is that your attention remains on the breath for maybe half a minute, if your concentration is good, before your mind jumps away to something else. It can be away for 10 or 20 minutes before you realize that you meant be focusing on your meditation object, and so you bring it back again.

What's lacking is what we call "mindfulness". Mindfulness means keeping your mind in the present; in other words, "presence of mind." Don't allow the mind to daydream and wander — thinking about this and that all the time. Keep the mind focused right here and right now. In the meditation practice, you focus it on the breath. The breath is the anchor. It's not that there's anything special about the breath. The breath is merely a device. It's merely a convenient object to focus your attention and hold it steady. Later, as the meditation progresses and develops, the

breath as an object can be dropped. But usually it's quite a long time before that happens.

Some people find that they get results quite quickly using this meditation practice. But for most people, it's a hard slog for quite a long time. Those people who get results quite quickly find that they get absorbed in the breath, and they often perceive things — images, sounds, all sorts of things can occur. A person of that type should view all of these things as distractions to their meditation. You may see images of people and places that you recognize, which intrigue you and make you want to follow them. But these simply represent things that you have seen during the day that come up in the mind during meditation. Then again, it's possible that some people may perceive things of a deeper nature. They may see nonphysical beings, like gods or angels. That's possible too. But to begin with, the meditator must not have anything to do with them. Once they have enough skill, meditators can access those realms. But their mindfulness must be very strong first. Until it is strong, they mustn't go playing in that field, it's dangerous. However, provided they keep focused on the breathing, or they keep their attention within the body, meditation practice is quite safe. Danger can arise only if they let the mind wander outside when it becomes concentrated. But if the focus is kept inside, there's no danger.

For a lay person who is involved in the world, and whose mind is very active — thinking about different things, worrying about things, and planning things — how might such a person cut this off and let go of it without being preoccupied when sitting in meditation?

It's very difficult, because when you have started the flywheel spinning, it won't suddenly just stop. It goes on whirling. The world is like that: it doesn't suddenly stop, it goes on. Because of that, only in meditation training can we learn to drop these things. There are methods for dropping them, but they are not easy to do.

One method is to stop words. Most of our thinking is kept going by words. It's as though we have a dialogue going on within the mind all the time. One way is to block those words, don't let them come up. But most people can't do that unless

they have trained themselves to do it. If you block those words, and keep them blocked, they'll gradually calm down and die away. This is one method.

Another method is to put your attention as firmly as you can on the breathing. That's probably the best way for most people. If you succeed at that, you will find that the breath becomes a friend. Anytime when you are free and don't have to think about anything in particular — say you're waiting for a train, or sitting at a red light — you can put your attention on the breath and immediately feel calm and relaxed. The breathing practice is very beneficial in that way. It can help you a great deal.

But you must not think that the methods used to overcome thoughts are easy to practice. They aren't. Controlling the mind is very difficult. But the more you train yourself in this way, the more you develop mindfulness — presence of mind. The methods train you to keep the mind in the present, and not allow it to go wondering as it likes. This is the real benefit. Generally speaking, if people do not succeed at meditation practice, it simply because they don't have enough mindfulness. That's what's lacking nearly every time.

There's another contemplation, which people in the West sometimes feel is morbid — the contemplation of death. Perhaps you could say something about the purpose of the contemplation of death, and how to do it?

Generally, people feel that they're going to live forever. They act as though they're going to live forever. They act in careless ways, flippant ways, as though they've got all the time in the world to play about. When contemplating death, we can realize that we don't have all the time in the world. In fact, our time in the world is short. And we better start doing something.

This can be a very important contemplation for giving you a sense of urgency. When contemplating death, the mind tends to wander far less. When you realize that death might come at any moment, you can't be sure that you're not going to die in the next 10 seconds. If you can live like this, you won't go hankering after

things in the future because you know that the future is very uncertain. Because you don't hanker after things, craving doesn't arise. To the extent that there's no craving, there's no discontent. Because of that, the contemplation of death can reduce discontent.

The books always say that the contemplation of death is the most suitable contemplation for the person who's quite intellectual — the person who likes to reason a lot and think about things, the university type. Obviously it's suitable for other people as well, but the contemplation of death as a meditation practice is mainly suitable for the intellectual person.

Can you suggest an approach to the contemplation of death?

What does death mean? When you reach the time of death, what's going to happen? Try to visualize it. Think of the body. What happens when the body dies? When the body dies, all sensation goes with it — sight, hearing, smell, taste, and touch all vanish. So your normal perception of the world all disappears. Your possessions all go completely — you won't have control over the slightest part of them. You are totally on your own. You should consider that, and think about what it means? Why do you place so much importance on your possessions? Why are you so concerned about what other people think of you? Why are you so concerned about your social status? Or your position in your job? If you are well aware of death, if you contemplate death a lot until you feel it and see it clearly, the importance of these things tends to die away. Because of that, when they change or disappear, you are no longer affected.

For example, one's money. Supposing one's managed to make a lot of money. If one contemplates death, one realizes that: I can't even take the tiniest little bit of it when I die. It all goes to someone else. Actually, it's hardly mine now. I use it, but to call it mine is not very suitable. First of all, it's purely a conventional thing in society. It isn't something that I can just do with as I like. I can only do with it as I like within certain, very definite limits. Then when I die, I won't even have that much control. The whole lot goes to someone else. When people contemplate in

this way until they really feel that money isn't so important, then if for some reason they lose their money — if it's stolen or the financial situation changes and they lose it — then the loss doesn't come so hard on them. They don't feel it so badly. When they don't think of money as belonging to them, or as being an indispensable possession, they won't take its loss as a personal tragedy. Because of that, they experience less discontent, less suffering. Such people are much happier.

The Buddhist concept of death is that we die but our mind doesn't really die. How does this fit in with the contemplation of death? In what respect do we actually die?

The mind, or the *citta*, is something that is very difficult to understand. To give an idea of what it means: we see, hear, smell, taste, and touch things. But how do you know those sensations? What is the quality of knowing? Supposing you see something and you know perfectly well that that is such and such an object, and you know its purpose and so on. How do you know you're not deceived? There's something in you which knows. But when you ask what is it that knows, it's very difficult to catch hold of it. In fact, this knowing is a quality of the *citta*. It's "the one that knows." But the knowing is not the same as a sensation. When you know something, it's not a sensation. A sensation is something that is known. In other words, you see something and you define it as such and such an object, and you know that's a correct definition of that object. But the knowing itself isn't an object, you can't find it.

I have a question on another type of practice that Westerners also consider rather strange, and that's the contemplation of the body. Could you say something about the purpose of the contemplation of the body and an approach to it?

Contemplation of the body is very important. Here again, people know all about the world, but they know very little about themselves. They've studied science, so when you asked them the reason for doing this or that, or the way something works, they can go into great detail. Even if they themselves don't know, they can easily find out by asking someone who does know, or looking it up in the right book. But when it comes to themselves, what do they know? Even if they know

physiology, in the medical sense, all they're doing is studying someone else's body, or pictures of the human body in a textbook, not their own body. But surely our bodies are extremely important. If we don't have a human body, where's the world? It's only this body that allows us to access the world. It is our outlet into the world, so to speak.

Surely, to know the body, to know its true nature, is very, very important. In order to comprehend its nature, we should question ourselves: What actually is the human body? What's it made of? Is it a very nice thing or not? We can ignore our preconceived ideas about it, and just ask objectively: Is the body something beautiful or not? Let's have a look. Most people in the world seem to think that the body is very beautiful, that's it a most desirable thing. But let's look at it and see whether it is. What happens if we don't wash it for a few days? We've got to keep washing the thing, otherwise it stinks before long. We must keep feeding it with food, which if we examine the nature of food, is not really very nice stuff. Suppose the foods we eat were smeared all over the outside of our bodies, would we like it then? Well, we put inside! There are many such aspects of the body that we must look at to determine whether it's a nice thing or not, whether it's beautiful or not.

We must get to the truth of the matter. After all, most people think that they are their bodies. If that's the case, surely you should want to know something about yourself. When you are so interested to know everything about the world, why did you leave out the one thing that is the most important of the lot — yourself? Why not try and get to know yourself? And the first step is to question the nature of the body, because it's the grossest part of who you are, or who we think we are. As you probe deeper into body contemplation, however, you begin to realize that the body in fact is not yourself. It comes from the world, and it returns to the world. It's part of the world. It consists entirely of atomic structures — atoms, molecules, chemicals, and so on. And it's nothing apart from these things — it doesn't go beyond the state of physical matter. When you look at it properly, you can see that it isn't really you. It doesn't even belong to you, because you can't control it completely. The body is derived from the world; it goes back to the world. And you can't stop it from going back to the world. When you cling to the body, it's almost as if you are confining

yourself in a prison house. The human body becomes a prison house that restricts you to certain conditions that you cannot free yourself from. So you must understand the body's true nature, and realize that the body is not who you really are, and that clinging to it creates an undesirable situation. Search and find the truth of the matter. After all, why not examine the body? It's such an obvious thing to look at.

Once you have examined the body and realized that it is not yourself, then when something happens to the body, you are not concerned about it in the same way as the person who identifies with the body. Because you know that it's not happening to you. You realize that, although it's happening to the body, that body is not you. Although the physical condition may be unpleasant, the unpleasantness is merely the body's unpleasantness. It's not you that's affected. When you can see and know that truth, that knowledge gives you great strength. So at the time of death, when the body dies, you know that it's not you that dies. By bringing you to this realization, body contemplation can give you a great deal of moral and emotional strength.

There's one other type of practice that you haven't mentioned, and that's the repetition of the mantra "Buddho". Could you say a little bit about how to practice this meditation?

"Buddho" is not actually a mantra. It's simply a mental repetition. A mantra is something rather different. The silent repetition of "Buddho" is used in the same way as the breath, in that it is a mental object that you keep your attention on. In this case, it's a sound object. Reflecting on the virtuous qualities of the Buddha helps too.

But I'm not sure that this practice is so suitable for people in the West, mainly because we were not brought up as Buddhists when we were children. People who were brought up as Buddhists have an emotional side to their idea of the Buddha, which most people in the West don't have. Because they don't have that, the word "Buddha" does not mean the same thing to them as it does to people in the East

who have been Buddhists from birth. It's a very good meditation practice, and many people have found it extremely valuable. But mostly they are Thai people.

It's often said that listening to the Dhamma calms one's mind. I've noticed tonight that just listening to you talk has a very calming effect. Do you have anything to say about that?

The thing that knows the truth within you, the thing that realizes the truth — even though it doesn't realize it in a conscious way — is the heart. It's the heart in the sense that we use it when we say “take it to heart”. Talk on Dhamma doesn't rouse you up, it's not disturbing. It cools you down. You appreciate the truth of Dhamma there in the heart. Because of that, there is a tendency to feel relaxed. When listening to a Dhamma talk, many people feel like going to sleep. It's as though they get absorbed in themselves and then go into a semi-sleep state. This is actually a state of mental calm. It's not wrong, though if you actually go to sleep, that goes a bit too far. But it is a state of calm.

Jim's friend: This afternoon Jim mentioned to me that why he disrobed the last time was because he had a lot of fear. He said he kept on having images and experiences in meditation which caused him to be afraid that he was going to go crazy.

The trouble is, people don't know what drives them crazy. Images don't drive one crazy. Seeing images and hearing things, this is not being crazy. How can it be? I mean, if you see something, you see it. If you hear things, you hear them. But if you believe you are Jesus Christ while you're seeing and hearing those things, then that is crazy. It's one's belief, one's thoughts, that make one crazy. Not the images. If people in schizophrenic states who see strange images could realize that those images are merely products of their minds — nothing more than that, just images, just color and form, but nothing really important — they'd jump out of the state straight away. Of course, they can't understand that because they create the images suitable to their own state. But there's nothing wrong with the images, it's the fear of these images that's the trouble. This is where the problem arises. And whenever fear comes up, it's important to learn to deal with it.

There are several methods for dealing with fear. The best way, if you can do it, is to face it directly. Whatever the feelings you experience inside, be determined not to give way to the fear. An excellent example is Ajaan Chob. Once, a tiger approached him at night in the forest. When it came close to him, he spoke to it. He said, "Why have you come here? You're frightening me." And then he deliberately walked straight towards the tiger. Immediately, the tiger leapt away. Now, that's the way to overcome fear. The worst thing you can do is to run. You'll never overcome it fear that way. When you sit in an armchair and listen to a story about somebody walking towards a tiger, it may seem rather interesting. But try to picture yourself in that situation. Realize what it means. You wouldn't have the security of a nice warm room and a comfortable chair. You're out in the jungle. The nearest person is probably five miles away. There are wild animals all around. It's nighttime, and it's dark. Maybe you've got a small lantern, a few candles, but that's all. You are completely reliant on yourself and your own inner strength.

You mentioned that there are several ways of dealing with fear. What are the other ways?

When fear comes up, you can question: What is fear? How do I know I'm afraid? What tells me? And you will find that fear begins with a feeling inside yourself. You look inside and search for that feeling. You want to find out exactly where it is. You shouldn't be satisfied until you can find that feeling inside you, and discover what the nature of fear is. You really want to know. Because of that, you try to keep the fear going in order to find out what it is. But, in the end, you can't find the fear, because fear disappears when you try to pinpoint it.

Another method for dealing with fear is to continue doing your normal meditation practice, regardless of the fear. If you are doing walking meditation, for instance, disregard the fear and continue walking. If you doing the breathing practice, stay firmly focused on the breath. Take no notice of the fear at all. Keep your attention on what you're doing. That is another method.

The method given in the *suttas* is to recall the protective virtues of the Buddha, the Dhamma, or the Sangha. Unless you have strong faith in the Buddha, that method

is not likely to be effective. But it can be very effective to the person who has such faith.

There are many ways of dealing with fear. But you should realize that sometimes fear will arise internally, without an external cause. When it arises internally, then you search for the cause of that fear. In other words, when fear starts arising, you think, "What happened? Why am I afraid?" You look for a cause. What has probably happened is that changes have taken place internally, due to one's meditation practice, which give rise to that experience we call fear. No external object is causing it; it's merely due to a changing state of mind. In that case, the fear is merely a feeling. It's merely a situation that arises internally. It doesn't arise due to an external threat. So if you find fear coming up, and a quick look around tells you there's no external danger, you should realize that the fear is simply caused by internal changes in your mental state

There is another very important aspect of fear to consider. Suppose a situation arises in your life where you are required to do something that you would prefer not to do, even though it is your duty and your responsibility to do it. Maybe you find yourself in a position where you have to tell somebody that they're sacked from their job. You don't like doing it, but it's your duty to tell them. You haven't sacked them, somebody else has, but it's your duty to tell them. Whenever this happens, you must always go and do it. You must never shirk your duty by getting somebody else to do it for you. Because when you get another person to do it, you are giving way to fear, and that is very bad training for yourself. You should do it for your own sake, and look on it as an important part of your mental training. It's very important for strengthening character. And it's very important training to overcome weakness in yourself.

When you examine yourself, you will find that there's something in you that you must overcome — some reluctance. And you have to ask: Why is that reluctance there? What is it that produces the reluctance? If you do that, and do it properly, you will gain from it every time, regardless of what other people think of your actions.

When we have to take an action that may adversely affect the life of someone else, the fear that arises is usually the fear of hurting oneself, rather than the other person. Essentially, we identify with that person. We think other people are human beings in the same way that we are. And, in a sense, they are. But what we have to realize is that the view we have of ourselves is a false view anyway. So the view we have of other people is also false. Because of that, what we think of other people is something false, not true. The true nature of the other person is something very different from what we think it is. What we see of other people is their personalities or characters, which are actually quite false — like impostors. They don't represent the real person. The real person is much more like the child they were when they were very young. But the person that we see is just a lot of trappings hung on a mannequin, like a decorated suit of clothes. We ourselves are the same.

Could you say something about the kilesas. What are they?

The basic *kilesas* are greed, hatred and delusion. But the word *kilesa* includes a whole range of mental defilements, such as, envy, worry, conceit, vanity, pride, and all sorts of more subtle ones as well — all the wrong, harmful states of mind. But the *kilesas* also involve wrong views that come under the heading of delusion.

Buddhism teaches that the whole world is *sammuti*. *Sammuti* means supposition. We suppose everything. We suppose that the world is like this, we suppose that people are like that. Everybody is supposing the whole time. When you look at the views and opinions that people have, the whole lot is just supposition. Even science is merely supposition. Scientists just do it in a more orderly way, that's all. People are not concerned with what the truth really is. All they have are their suppositions. Which means that the reality of the whole world as we know it is relative. The world has no fixed basis; there exists no underlying foundation which is solid and dependable. Because of that, our entire outlook is distorted. And it's the *kilesas* that create the distortion.

Kilesas stem from *avijjā* — fundamental ignorance. And it's important to realize that the *kilesas* are always present defiling our minds. They're there the whole time. In fact, what we think of as our self is practically made up of *kilesas*. But that self is an imposter, it's quite false. What we truly are is a very different from what we believe our self to be. What we truly are is something that we don't recognize as self. Because of that, in Buddhism, we teach *anattā* — that there is no self-identity to be found in us. Everything we recognize as self — everything we feel to be self and think of as being self — is false, so the self is actually an imposter. When people with *kilesas* hold to a wrong view about their self-identity, they look on the world in completely wrong ways, they look on themselves in completely wrong ways, they get wrong ideas of what they are, what the world is, what their purpose is, and what they should be doing. Because their views and purposes are based on mental defilements, conflicts of interest easily arise. Self-orientated views quickly lead to selfish interests and selfish actions. People with selfish ideas and selfish behavior have difficulty getting along, so disharmony occurs. If you want an example of the *kilesas* in action, just look in the newspapers. The *kilesas* create all the trouble in the world. Without the *kilesas* there wouldn't be any problems. What causes the world's problems is the *kilesas* in people. Which makes them very important indeed.

The only realistic way to solve the world's problems is for people to try as best they can to cure their *kilesas*. But what are people doing? They are going in the opposite direction, increasing their *kilesas* the whole time. They're broadcasting it on television and radio. Everybody is being prodded into increasing their greed by being told they must buy more products. This is just promoting people's *kilesas*. And when they promote the *kilesas*, they also promote the discontent in people. In fact, advertisers create a feeling discontent in people so that they will buy things to try and regain their contentment. I don't blame the advertisers. They are also in the same boat—they're discontented also because they can't sell enough. But they will never sell enough to make them contented. However much they sell, that wouldn't be enough. This is the way of greed. The whole world is being taught that greed is a virtue, and it's dragging the whole world down. But we call it "progress". Today people are progressing materially, but regressing spiritually.

Another important factor is the failure of religion. A hundred years ago, Christianity was still quite strong in the West. People's actions were quite constrained by it. Although people didn't know much about the workings of the church, there was still a legacy of moral behavior coming from the past. And they were quite well-restrained. Nowadays, it's hard to understand what Christianity really means. It's fragmented into all sorts of bits and pieces. So the true teaching of Christ is hard to find now. It's hard to find anything that's genuine. Christianity has become a mess, really. So people have gradually moved away from it. And because they've moved away from it, they no longer see any reason for morals. This is due partly, I think, to a wrong teaching of Christianity. Christianity teaches that the main reason for practicing morality is the necessity to placate God, which is a false reason for morality. Because the reasoning is not sound, people very easily turn against it. I'm not going to blame the original Christians. I don't know what they taught about morality. I think their teaching was far deeper, and more profound. But the Christianity that took over in the West has become very superficial.

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Developing Meditation

Fundamentally, the teaching of Buddhism deals with oneself. We all have a big problem, and Buddhism teaches us how to correct that problem. The problem is discontent or suffering. Discontent is always there in our lives; in little thing and big things, always in some way we're dissatisfied. When we want something, we want it only because we don't have it. That lack creates a state of disharmony inside which expresses itself as *dukkha* or discontent. Our habitual reaction is to search for something to overcome that disharmony within ourselves. Because of that, we're always searching, always looking for things. This constant searching is a major source of frustration, because whatever solution we find is never quite satisfactory. This in fact is the fundamental problem of all people; not just Buddhists, but everybody throughout the world.

We always search for a solution by using cause and effect. We encounter some problem and we ask, "What will be an effective means to overcome this problem?" In that way, we examine causes and their effects. But the trouble is that we lack wisdom. Because we lack wisdom, we always tend to do the wrong causes. So we usually end up putting ourselves in situations that are worse than they were before. Because we can't see clearly the way things work, we usually do things in just the opposite way of what we should do.

You can see the truth of this in any newspaper. When you read a newspaper and see the way people act, you wonder, "Is that the right way to act?" The people you read about are in one way or another trying to relieve their suffering, their discontent. People steal and commit other crimes as a way of finding happiness for themselves. They want happiness and contentment. They commit crimes because they believe that will bring them happiness. But because of their ignorance, they do the wrong causes, which only bring more suffering than they had before.

To practice Buddhism effectively, we have to realize what our situation is. We have to see that dissatisfaction is always with us. And we have to understand that the usual ways people go about curing it are rather ineffective. If they were effective, then all dissatisfaction would disappear. In reality, people in the world often think they have discovered a wonderful way to cure their discontent, only to find in the end that it doesn't work. So they try another one and that doesn't work either; and then another, and so on to no avail. The reason they fail is that their actions are based purely on their feelings and emotional reactions. They come up with an idea that sounds good, and so they act on it. They're like goats going along nibbling one thing and, when that doesn't taste very good, nibbling another and another. There's no sort of rhyme or reason behind their choices, they act simply on instinct. People approach discontent in a similar way. What people need to find is wisdom, and then put that wisdom into action.

Finding true wisdom in ourselves may take quite a long time. In the meantime, we should act in right ways, having faith in what the Buddha taught. In order to gain a level of wisdom that we can depend on in all circumstances, we must start to gradually train ourselves in the way of wisdom. Before we reach that stage, we need to have a certain code of action that will tide us over until we can see the truth for ourselves. This is where the moral precepts come in. These rules are modes of training ourselves that lead us in the direction of calm and understanding. We take these training rules on trust as being the right way because they were taught by the Buddha. Those who followed the Buddha all agree, from their own experience, that this is the right way. The best way is to take up that teaching and practice it as nearly as you can to what the Buddha taught.

As you practice in that way, you steadily come to see that results in your life. You will find an increase in calmness and contentment. You no longer feel the same as other people who are all running about crazily looking for satisfaction in worldly things. Everybody's just running about; they don't know what they really want. They're all constantly searching. When you attain a greater state of calm and happiness, you may suddenly realize: "I don't do that now. I use to but now I don't. I can see the way they are and I know what's driving them on". From your own

calm perspective, you can observe other people and see very clearly the way they work. You begin to understand the motives behind their actions.

So you must begin by practicing the basic teaching, which will allow you to steadily come to more and more calm, and more and more understanding. As you come to more calm and understanding, faith, in the sense of belief in the Buddha's teaching, is no longer so important. Seeing the truth directly for yourself replaces mere faith because you see for yourself what's right and good and what's wrong and bad.

Most people don't even consider how constantly restless their thoughts are, spinning around thinking of this and that all the time. They're hardly aware of them. Thoughts go on like movie frames flashing on a screen. If one can stop that mental activity, for even for a short while, and look inside, one will realize just how baneful and troublesome those thoughts are. Even though the thoughts come back again and again, because the habit of thinking is so strong, still one can realize how dangerous they are. One will see the value of controlling one's thoughts and gaining a state of calm free from thinking.

The results come steadily as one goes on. Gradually insight develops and one begins to see for oneself what is right and what is wrong. One begins to realize how much discontent one has been living with. And the discontent one has in the present becomes more apparent. As one's suffering becomes apparent, the desire to cure it becomes stronger. As that happens, the ways of the world become less attractive. The world may take on a rather shabby appearance. The things that looked so good in the past seem rather tasteless now.

Life is like that. We're always looking forward to things. We always want to get the things we desire. But when we do get them, they usually last a very short time and they're gone. If we try to experience something over and over again to satisfy our desire for it, what happens? We get use to it, and before long we don't find any satisfaction in it. The trouble is we can easily get caught up in that. You can see with drugs how people take drugs again and again and again because they think it's such a wonderful sensation they can't get enough of it. After a time they find that it

doesn't have the same effect. So they take more and more until it nearly kills them. That's the way life is. When one sees the world for what it is, the desire for external pleasures tends to drop off. Eventually one comes to the point where one realizes that there's really nothing to do but to train oneself. Everything else is just playing games.

In Buddhism we divide training into three levels; first is the body, second is speech and third is the mind. The way of training the body and the speech constitute the moral training. The five precepts are the basic training rules for the lay person. Beyond that comes the mental side of the training, dealing directly with the mind. So following on from moral training what we have to do is train our minds.

If we try to develop wisdom directly, using the ordinary methods of thinking, at best we will gain a low level of wisdom. To gain the full effect of wisdom, we must practice *samādhi* meditation for calm and still mind. Nearly all people have to develop calm and concentration first before delving deeply into wisdom. With skill in *samādhi*, the wisdom can be developed quite easily.

Normally the heart is hungry, it wants something that's lacking. So it searches around all the time. It searches the only way it knows how to search: by looking out in the world using the five senses. That's all it really knows. It focuses outward wanting sensations to satisfy its hunger. But what it gets from the world in this way never satisfies the hunger. On the contrary, it tends to increase desire in the end. After all the searching it's done, the heart is still hungry. The way to satisfy the heart is by going in the opposite direction—by cutting off sensation, or at least reducing it to an absolute minimum. In order to accomplish that we have to keep our attention on a single object, like the meditation-word *buddho* or the breathing. In other words, give the mind one anchor to hold on to.

At first the practice is very difficult because the mind refuses to settle down and stay put. Eventually the mind develops an interest in the practice, and when interest arises the tendency for the mind to jump about is gradually curtailed. You've probably noticed that when you were forced to do work you didn't really

want to do, if you stuck with it eventually you got into it and it started to get interesting. Once your interest was aroused, it no longer became such a hard task and the good results came more easily. It's similar with meditation practice. At first it's hard work, but once you get into it, enthusiasm arises. Once enthusiasm arises, the mind becomes more and more absorbed in the practice. When the mind becomes absorbed, external things automatically start dropping away and the mind focuses inward. When it focuses inward and stays there, it gets complete rest, as though it's fully satiated within itself. Withdrawing from that internal absorption, the heart feels quite satisfied. Because of that satisfaction, it no longer wants to search for external stimuli. It's prepared to remain still just as it is.

Because there is no hindrance, that is the appropriate time to turn the mind to develop wisdom. Instead of the restlessly wandering all over the place, the calm mind is in a pliable state. When it is turned to investigate phenomena, it penetrates into them very, very deep. This is real wisdom and it has a profound effect on one's understanding.

On a more superficial level, you may occasionally gain some insight in ordinary life which surprises you with its clarity. You may consider this understanding to be very important at the time. But later when you review it you realize that it did not have much of a profound effect on you internally. The insight may be quite true, but it didn't fundamentally alter your outlook. The type of understanding that does profoundly alter one's outlook is like that of a young child who picks up something very hot—and doesn't do it again. That lesson penetrates deeply and is very effective. One doesn't easily lose that sort of wisdom.

The path of wisdom that we're striving for is of a much deeper nature. It can only be effective when we have a basis of *samādhi* to develop it. By developing *samādhi* we open a pathway to the heart, which allows wisdom to go straight in. Normally, the heart is covered over with all sorts of defiling influences. It's virtually wrapped around with defilement so nothing can get through. The *samādhi* opens the heart and makes it quite pliable. Then the wisdom can be extraordinarily effective. It can quite easily reverse people's habitual ways of interacting with the world.

The *kilesas* are the things that wrap around and obscure the heart. They are like sand in the gears, which mucks everything up. These are the things we have to get out of the way if wisdom is to penetrate deeply. So the *kilesas* are things we must come to know well. Mainly, they are greed, hatred and delusion. But a whole heap of other mental defilements spring from them, which have endless ramifications.

You mustn't think that the *kilesas* are small things. They're deeply ingrained and extremely important. It's just these mental factors that cause all the trouble in the world, nothing else. Atom bombs don't set themselves off. That requires people. Bullets aren't fired by guns without somebody pulling the trigger. What's behind people and their actions is the *kilesas*. The *kilesas* are ever present. They are also quite subtle and extremely resourceful.

They are resourceful because they dwell in a person's heart. In fact, they've taken control of the heart, which is why they are ever present. We can almost say that the person is the *kilesas*. It's not that they're there sometimes and sometimes they're not. They are there all the time. And their constant presence completely colors and distorts our outlook. Our fundamental views about other people and the world around us, and the approach we take to life and our customs, all these are full of *kilesas*. Because of that, everything we do in life is, so to speak, wrong. It's all mixed up with *kilesas*. We cannot do anything perfectly until we get rid of our *kilesas*.

At the same time, we mustn't be too worried about this, because we always have a choice of two directions: one direction that is wrong and one direction that is right. It is our responsibility to always choose the right direction, even though it's far from perfect. Even though it's colored by the *kilesas*, still there is a right direction to take. When we head in the right direction, the *kilesas* steadily grow thinner and the understanding that undermines the *kilesas* grows stronger. By going in the wrong direction we become more and more caught up in delusion.

You only have to look at people who do bad things all the time to see what happens. They become coarse and gross. They don't understand anything subtle at

all. This is because their *kilesas* are growing fast. They're going in the wrong direction. People who go in the right direction have an aura of contentment. It's as though there's a shadow of happiness around them all the time. They're not worried about things in the way other people are. The world is not an unpleasant place to them. Because they are fundamentally good inside, the problems in the world don't touch them very much. The troubles in the world are really a reflection of troubles in oneself. The external troubles are merely occurrences or happenings. The real cause of the trouble is a state within oneself. If one can learn to cure oneself, the external troubles will no longer affect one.

When meditating, is it good to switch from one meditation object to another?

At the beginning the main task of meditation practice is to keep your mind firmly in check and to prevent it being involved with distracting thoughts. If you find switching the meditation object, or *parikamma*, as we call it, helps to accomplish that then switch it. You will probably find that after time you'll tend more and more to settle on just one *parikamma*. It's better to stick with the one that works best for you. To begin with, use whatever is necessary to hold the mind. Don't make it too rigid; leave yourself some flexibility, some room to adapt. People who practice the way of Dhamma need to experiment and be a bit inventive. No one goes very far in Dhamma without working out their own methods to some extent. Those who are determined will discover ways that suit them well because they work it out for themselves. Having experimented, they've found ways of overcoming their problems.

Have you read about the Zen masters?

In the Zen stories, the masters have all sorts of odd sayings and unusual ways of teaching their disciples. But those are individual teachings. Unfortunately, nowadays with Zen the students read books of those teachings, which they think they then have to copy. But that's a completely wrong approach. They're not teachings to be copied. They were individual instructions for people who had specific problems at that moment in time. The real job of today's Zen students is to

deal with the problems they have at the present moment using whatever method is suitable here and now.

Is there a deep purpose to Buddhist chanting?

Chanting has quite a calming effect on body and mind. Also, sound vibrations can be quite effective for establishing a good state of mind. Chanting is a very useful tool for calming one down when feeling distracted or agitated. Chanting doesn't usually lead to very deep states of calm, but it can be very beneficial. Most of the monks use chanting quite a lot to help them in the practice.

When walking meditation should I be thinking only about buddho, or is it okay to think about the walking itself?

Thinking about the walking is too much for the mind to handle. You've got to simplify it as much as possible. You'll probably find that the best way is to concentrate your attention on the repetition of *buddho*. You'll find the repetition will automatically synchronize with the rhythm of the walking. It's better to keep your mind on one thing rather than have it split between two. For instance, when you do breathing meditation, you shouldn't follow the breath down. That could easily break concentration. The best place to fix your attention is usually around the tip of the nose. Fix it firmly at that place. In the books it's compared to sawing a log; you watch only the place on the log where the saw blade falls, just that one spot. You don't watch the saw going back and forth; you just watch the log.

How quick should the breaths be?

Keep it absolutely natural. Don't try to push the breath or manipulate it in any way. This isn't a breathing exercise, so just let the breath take its own course. Breathing meditation is actually a mental exercise, giving the mind something to hold on to. Your task is to just keep the mind on the breath without trying to modify it in any way. Just let the breath do whatever it will. You'll find if you do that, the breathing will become finer and finer and finer until it becomes so subtle that it is very

difficult to hold it. You may then have to use something like *buddho* to hold your attention. The idea here is to try to draw the mind into a finer and finer state of calm and concentration. If you lose the breath and it seems to disappear, keep your attention on the place where you last felt it. Keep your attention focused there and eventually the breath will come back. It's best to put your attention on the breath at that place you feel it most strongly. I think with most people it's somewhere around the nose; with some, however, it may be on the upper lip or inside the mouth. If you find that you get headaches from breathing meditation, you should focus on the breath somewhere below the throat, not up in the head.

Is there a reason for the headaches?

Usually it's the intense concentration that's causing tension.

So the concentration would not be tense if it was in the abdomen or chest?

Probably not. If you get headaches it's usually because you are trying to use the eyes to see. You can't because in meditation it's quite a different process. If you see anything in meditation practice it will be with the mind. Much in the way you see a dream image. If you do get any visual images coming up in meditation, to begin with you shouldn't have anything to do with them. Keep your attention firmly on the meditation object. If images come, they come; if they go, they go. Don't have anything to do with them until you are skilled at meditation practice. Completely ignore them, if you can. Once you are skilled you may be able to use them, but you should be careful even then. The main danger is having a frightening image come up. If you ever do experience a frightening image, and if you can stand it, just look at the fear and try to overcome that fear. If you are overwhelmed by the fear, get out of the meditation as quickly as you can. These things can cause trouble. It's not the image that causes the trouble, it's the fear. The fear is the real danger; the image is just like a picture on a screen.

Then if you fear nothing then there's no danger?

No danger at all.

Also, when a frightening image arises, the tendency is to concentrate on it. Like when you see a snake, you concentrate on it straight away. When you concentrate on these images they become larger. The concentration makes them larger, making them appear to come closer. That makes the fear stronger and they become larger still. It can drive people mad.

The forest monks use fear as a meditation practice. They go off to the forest to practice, what we call *dhutanga*. They trek through the forest and put up an umbrella-tent under a tree somewhere and do their meditation practice in that place. Often they choose places where they know there are tigers around. Less so nowadays because there just aren't so many places like that anymore. If a tiger roars in the forest, fear comes up very quickly, and there is nothing between them and the tiger but a mosquito net. One of the purposes of living in dangerous situations is to arouse fear in order to examine it and overcome it.

There's a story of one monk walking meditation back and forth at night using candles and suddenly there was a big growl. He heard the growl just off the meditation path. He couldn't see it; there wasn't enough light. He was terrified. He just stood there listening to the growling. Eventually he turned his attention inward and took stock of himself, "I've been learning Dhamma all this time, surely it's about time to use it." He eventually put Dhamma into effect. Once the power of Dhamma arose in his mind, the fear dropped away. His whole attitude toward the tiger changed then—he suddenly felt the tiger was a good friend of his. He even went out searching for it, but it had disappeared. This is a way of training the mind. If a person can overcome fear like that, fear won't get them again easily.

What is the easiest and quickest way to calm fear for a beginner?

It depends on the person. The way I've always found effective, though it may not work with everyone, is to question myself when fear arises: "How do I know that fear inside?" It is a feeling, so I go searching for the feeling. Where is this feeling? If

it's feeling, it's in the body somewhere. We feel it as having a location. So we search. Where is the feeling located? What is the nature of the feeling? You must keep your attention on the fear. One thing *kilesas* don't like is being looked at. Usually they disappear. If they're seen, they usually disappear. So when fear arises, you should think: "This is an opportunity to see fear". Go down and have a look, search for it.

Can you say anything about the meaning of heaven in Buddhism; is it the same as Christian heaven?

The heavens are not really Christian or Buddhist; they are just the heavens. Just like the world we live in now is neither Christian nor Buddhist; it's just the world. The Buddhist theory on the various realms of existence does differ from the Christian view. Buddhists recognize innumerable different levels of the *citta*, or the mind. A human being with the necessary training and expertise we can go to any one of those levels of mind. Buddha could go through the whole lot; the average person cannot. Corresponding to these levels of the *citta* are realms of existence. The reason for this is when a being, whether its person animal or whatever, dies, that being takes rebirth depending on the state of the *citta* at the time of death. That mental state has two aspects. It has level and it has content. The content of the *citta* will probably be some emotional state connected with the past, which will help to determine the direction taken after death. The level of the *citta* will be much the same as that person's level of mind when he was still alive. The realm the person is reborn in will depend on the level at the moment of death. If there are different levels of *citta*, the corresponding realms for rebirth must be there. The way of nature would seem to be that the types of bodies in those realms or forms of existence in those realms have developed based upon the various possible levels of the *citta*. In other words, the *citta* has the possibility of all the realms and where it is reborn will depend on the specific level of the *citta* at the time of death. A person whose mind is at a human level will be born as a human being. A person whose level is that of an animal will be born as an animal. A person whose level is that of the devas will be born in a heavenly realm.

So most people in that realm have the same citta?

These levels of the mind do not have clear-cut boundaries; they extend over quite a broad bandwidth. So there are plenty of variations in each level. But the realms of birth and the states of the mind do have a direct correlation. Now we come up to the big question: Are they real? Are the levels real? To answer that, we have to ask another question: Is this world real? Exactly how real is this world? We must then ask ourselves: How do we know this world? We know the world through seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting and touching. That's all. When we know it in that way, exactly where do we apprehend the world? Where do we see it? Think of it in this way. When you see an object, an image goes into the eye and then travels as nerve impulses or electro chemical impulses through the optic nerve until it reaches the brain. And bang! We see a tree, a house, a person. So really speaking, we don't see those objects outside at all. We see them all right here. That isn't the end of it, of course. It's even more complicated than that because we have to include the body as well. We have to include the eye and the optic nerve, and so on. So when we come down to it, this world is a really shadowy place. We don't know really what it is. I think Shakespeare said that the world is the stuff of dreams. It's true. It has its laws; we don't know why, but it does. All the other realms of existence have their basic laws also. Since this "real" world of ours is a pretty shadowy world anyway, why shouldn't the other worlds be equally as real? And why shouldn't there be any number of such worlds? If we want proof of the existence of *devas* or ghost, the only real proof is to see it ourselves. Even if we were to see them ourselves, we might still question their "realness". It's quite unreasonable to ask if those realms are real and not to ask if this world is real also. How real is this world? Is it any more real than those other realms? Why should we think it's more real? We think that way only because we are used to it. That's all.

Is it possible to born again into the same realm but at a different level?

Yes, just look at people in the world. People are born at many different levels. It's hard to define what those levels are. The divisions are not clear-cut, but people are not all born equal by any means.

Does Buddhist theory allow for animal being born into the body of a man?

Yes, that's quite possible. Especially if the animal has experience of human beings, either as having been human in the past or through having had very close contact with human beings over a long period of time. In that case, there may be the possibility for that animal to be reborn as a human being. For an animal that has no contact with human being and no past experience as a human being, it's very difficult to gain a human birth. By virtue of their *kamma*, animals are much more restricted in their potential. Animals have their natural instincts. The natural instinct of a tiger is to kill for food. It's not the natural instinct of human beings to kill for food. The natural instinct of an elephant is to eat vegetation, not meat. It's just their nature, their natural way. The natural state that an animal lives in is likely to promote its rebirth in that same level.

If a man and an animal are closely related to each other, is it possible for the man to be born as an animal?

Not unless the animal had the power over the man. In other words, if the man makes his *citta* like the animal, yes. If the man lacks all moral virtue and behaves in very bad ways, yes it's possible.

So by imitating man, the animal will take on his tendencies?

Yes. Dogs trained by human beings can be extremely clever. One would suppose that they have good chance of human birth in the future. But for a wolf living out in the wild, what chance is there? Its nature is wild, it's not a human nature at all. When the wolf is reborn it will most probably be as a wolf, because that's what it knows. There is no certainty in that, but the probability is that it will experience the same kind of birth.

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Kamma and Rebirth

Is it possible for a man to be reborn as an animal?

Not unless the nature of the animal has power over the man. In other words, if the man makes his mind like the animal's, and if he behaves in morally reprehensible ways, yes it's possible.

Christianity has God and Jesus Christ. In Buddhism, you have the Lord Buddha. Does Buddhism have a concept of God, the creator of all things?

The answer depends largely on what you mean by the word "God". Here we are dealing with something that lies outside the scope of language. For example, take the word "chair". If you don't know what a chair is, I can point to one and show you: this is a chair. That's easy enough. But what happens when you come to the word "God"? You can't point to one. You have to ask yourself: where did your concept of God originate? Where did you get it from to begin with? When you look, you'll probably find that your parents taught it to you when you were young. They instilled the idea of a "heavenly father", say, and the concept grew from there. The concept gradually became refined, polished here and modified there, until eventually a symbol was created within yourself — a symbol that you equate with God. But whether there exists a real entity, separate from you, that corresponds to that symbol, depends very much on what the symbol is. The same is true of the creator. To find out what is meant by a "creator of the world", first you must ask: What is this world? And what is meant by creating this world? Creation is said to have happened a long time ago, so you must ask: What is meant by time? All these questions are hedged around with so many difficulties that they can never be satisfactorily answered. You can't say that there is no God, because it depends on how a person defines the word God. Nor can you say categorically that God exists, because outside of one's own symbolic representation, there is nothing that one can point to. If there is a God that doesn't influence us in anyway, then it's

exactly to us as though he wasn't there. If we feel he influences us in some way, then we have to question these alleged influences: Couldn't they be explained in some way other than the actions of a God? The whole matter is riddled with uncertainty.

The Christians believe in God. I don't think their belief does them any harm. It's probably a very good thing. It's a lot better than believing in some of the nonsense in the world nowadays. The general Christian teaching on morality is quite good. I don't think one needs to quarrel with their ways. If people practice Christianity as it really should be practiced, they'll be very good people. Christianity, when it is practiced properly, will get people to their intended destination, the heaven realm. As far as Buddhism is concerned, that's not enough, because all things are changeable and impermanent, they don't last. Life in the heaven realm does not last forever. In the end, one will move on to a different destination.

In Buddhism, the heavenly realms are said to be superior to earthly existence in terms of happiness. Yet the groundwork is laid here on earth, in a human existence. We can see the types of people who are reborn in the heavenly realms. Take one example, Mother Theresa in India. She's the sort of person who goes to heaven. She's a very good person who has done a great deal to benefit others. When she does good, she is ultimately the person who is most affected by that good. Our actions are accomplished by our volition; and the nature of that volition determines our future. Because of that, we should be careful of our actions.

Perhaps the earth would be considered a heaven by someone coming from a hell realm.

A being leaving the lower realms retains very little memory of that experience. There may be a residual aftertaste, but no clear memory. When beings are born into a realm, they adapt to the conditions in that realm. When it is born, a young baby is completely at sea because it doesn't have anything to anchor it in its new existence. It doesn't know where it is, or what's happening. It quickly grabs at sensations and tries to fix itself in its surroundings. With the terrific effort it puts into that, it's not long before it is learning speech and learning to recognize things.

Then everything starts dropping into place. With all this effort of establishing oneself in a new realm, memories of the previous realm do tend to fade quickly.

There are people who can remember their past lives. Ajaan Mahā Boowa related the remarkable case of a *bhikkhu* who could remember his last life. In his previous life, he was a *bhikkhu* who died of malaria. After he died, he stood looking at his lifeless body for a long time. He had the impression that he was still alive and still wearing monk's robes. Eventually he wandered off until he came to an assembly hall. The hall was crowded with people, most of whom looked very frightened. A man sitting at a desk was directing them to go to various places, often in quite a fierce way. Finally, only the young monk and an old woman were left. The man at the desk changed his countenance when he addressed the woman and became very respectful. He said: "A heavenly vehicle will be coming to pick you up in a moment, please wait outside." When it arrived, she got in and her appearance immediately changed to that of a beautiful young woman. The vehicle then floated up and vanished straightaway. Now only the monk remained. He approached the man and asked: "What about me?" The man said: "Well, your name is not here in the book. There must be some mistake. What do you want to do?" The monk said: "I don't know. I feel very thirsty." The man pointed to the door, so the monk left the hall and wandered off. Soon he came to a house, where he saw a woman drawing water from a well. He walked up to her and asked for a drink of water. She told him to sit down and wait for a minute. When he sat down, and he felt so drowsy that he couldn't stay awake. The next thing he knew, he was reborn as the woman's son. He couldn't remember what had happened in between.

When he first started speaking, he referred to himself as *atama*, a personal pronoun used only by Buddhist monks. For the first few years of childhood, he had the impression he was still in robes. Eventually, when he grew up, he ordained as a *bhikkhu* again. One day, at Ajaan Mun's funeral, Ajaan Mahā Boowa met the young monk and heard his story. Many monks were attending the funeral, so Ajaan Mahā Boowa decided to try to find the abbot of the monastery where the monk had died in his previous life. Ajaan Mahā Boowa walked him around and asked him if could recognize any of the elder monks present at the funeral. After meeting

many senior monks whom he did not recognize, he finally pointed out the abbot and said: "That's him." The abbot could remember that monk dying. The monk mentioned various landmarks in the monastery, and the abbot was able to verify them.

It is said that, to remember the last life, you must have mindfulness when you die. You have to be mindful. Also, and this is important, it's very difficult for people who don't believe in rebirth, or have any notion of it, to remember their past lives. They don't even know what happens at death. They have no idea. What does the average person in the West do at the time of death? They don't do anything, they just let everything happen to them. They don't know what to do. They've never learned. They've never trained themselves. They've never taken any interest in it. In fact, most people are afraid to think of death. They call such thoughts morbid. People don't like to think of death, but actually it is the one thing they should think about.

Can someone with very deep concentration see into the minds of other people?

This is a faculty of mind. Ajaan Mun had this ability. But one has to look into one's own mind and see what's in it most of the time. And then ask: Is it worth looking into the minds of other people? What is the average person's mind like? It's a garbage can. Why should anyone want to look into a garbage can? It's full of all sorts of junk. So people who have the ability to read other people's thoughts aren't likely to be prying into other's minds.

Is it good to meditate on death?

Death is said to be the meditation of a person who's very intellectual.

But concentrating on ... you are dying, you are dying?

Each person must do it in their own way, but to me it's thinking: I won't be here, what will that mean? I am very used to me. What happens when I'm not here any longer? What are the implications?

I am starting to become anxious thinking about going back home, and its cutting into my meditation. I'll concentrate for a while, and then I'll start thinking about home. What's the best way to cure this?

Just effort. Keep bringing your attention back to the meditation. You can reflect how thoughts about home aren't home. You think about all the things you're going to do and say when you get home, but will you actually do those things? Will you say them? In fact, the things one thought one was going to do, one never does. Realize that these thoughts are not real; they're just shadows, clouds, nothing substantial. Try and bring your attention back to the present as much as you can.

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