

*The Craft
of the Heart*

by

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(Phra Suddhidhammaraṅsi Gambhīramedhācariya)

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for free distribution

First edition, Bangkok, 1982
Second edition, revised, Bangkok, 1988
Third edition, revised, USA, 2009

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Foreword

This book, Ajaan Lee's first, is like a catalog. In it, he gives the full range of his teachings on the practice of the Buddha's craft, from the observance of the five precepts to the attainment of total liberation. Thus the different parts are written for different people at different stages in the practice, and the reader is advised to read, not judgmentally, but judiciously—taking whatever is useful for his or her own practice, and leaving the rest for others.

The structure of the book, with its two overlapping parts, is explained by the fact that the two parts were originally written and published separately, Part II appearing in 1936 as *The Training of the Heart*, and Part I the following year as *Precepts for Laypeople*. In 1939 Ajaan Lee revised and expanded both parts, putting them together as self-sufficient but complementary halves of a single volume. Later, in the early 1950's, he revised the book once more. This final revised version, however, contained many typographical errors, so I have compared it closely to the 1939 version, basing this translation on whichever version seemed to have the better reading for any particular passage.

Although Ajaan Lee's teachings continued to develop over the course of later years, the basic outlines remained constant. Most of his later teachings are simply elaborations on themes already given in this book. One of these later developments, though, deserves special mention here: It concerns the question of how a beginner should get started in practicing meditation. Ajaan Lee's eventual solution to this question, given in his book, *Keeping the Breath in Mind: Method 2*, can briefly be stated as follows: Start right in developing the factors of *jhāna* by (1) being clearly aware of each breath, (2) evaluating and adjusting the breath so that it is as comfortable and satisfying as possible, and (3) letting this comfortable sensation spread, along with a sense of present awareness, throughout the entire body. If an individual meditator had trouble sticking with step (1), Ajaan Lee might recommend some of the methods given in this book—the repetition of the word "*buddho*" in conjunction with the breath, the contemplation of the basic properties of the body, etc.—but these methods were regarded as ancillary to the central practice of keeping the breath in mind.

Yet even though Ajaan Lee's later teachings developed new perspectives on some of the individual themes contained in this book, none of his later writings have its scope or completeness. For this reason, it remains to this day one of his most popular and esteemed works.

But for all its scope, it is only a preliminary guide—a map or a mirror—for the true craft of the heart lies, not within its covers, but within the reader.

To quote from one of Ajaan Lee's later sermons: "What does discernment come from? You might compare it with learning to become a potter, a tailor, or a basket weaver. The teacher will start out by telling you how to make a pot, sew a shirt or a pair of pants, or weave different patterns, but the proportions and beauty of the object you make will have to depend on your own powers of observation. Suppose you weave a basket and then take a good look at its

proportions, to see if it's too short or too tall. If it's too short, weave another one, a little taller, and then take a good look at it to see if there's anything that still needs improving, to see if it's too thin or too fat. Then weave another one, better-looking than the last. Keep this up until you have one that's as beautiful and well-proportioned as possible, one with nothing to criticize from any angle. This last basket you can take as your standard. You can now set yourself up in business. What you've done is to learn from your own actions. As for your earlier efforts, you needn't concern yourself with them any longer. Throw them out. This is a sense of discernment that arises of its own accord, an ingenuity and a sense of judgment that come not from anything your teachers have taught you, but from observing and evaluating on your own what you yourself have done."

I hope this book will be of help to all those who sincerely want to master the craft of the heart.

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Introduction

In the first part of this book I will discuss virtue, before going on to discuss the practice of mental training in the second. I put together this first section as a cure for my own sense of dismay. In other words, there have been times when I've asked lay Buddhists to tell me what exactly is forbidden by the five precepts, the eight precepts, and the ten guidelines (*kammapatha*) that people observe, and their answers have been a jumble of right and wrong. When I ask them how long they've been observing the precepts, some say they've never observed them, others say "two years," "five years," etc. The ignorance of those who've never observed the precepts is understandable; as for those who have taken the precepts, there are all kinds. Some people who've observed the precepts for three years understand them better than others who've observed them for five. Some people have repeated the precepts against taking life for three years now, and yet keep on taking life, with no idea of what the precept is for. Of course, there are many people who are better informed than this, but even so I can't help feeling dismayed because their behavior isn't really in keeping with their knowledge.

Now, I say this is not to be critical, but simply to be truthful. For this reason, I have put together this book as a way of relieving my sense of dismay, and have arranged to have it printed for distribution to lay Buddhist adherents, as a guideline for honoring our Teacher through the practice of his teachings, and for fostering the prosperity of those teachings for a long time to come.

In conclusion, I ask the reader to read reflectively. Some things here may be to your liking, others may not. But at any rate, I feel certain that you could find it meritorious and skillful to bring your conduct into line with the various teachings mentioned here.

If anything I have written in this book is incorrect in terms of the Dhamma, please forgive me.

Whatever skillfulness there has been in the physical and mental energy used in writing this book I dedicate to those who have felt inspired to provide the financial energy for its printing. As long as they are not yet totally released from all suffering and stress, may they be perceptive and discerning with regard to everything of every sort that pertains to their genuine welfare in whatever realm they may be reborn.

Phra Ajaan Lee Dhammadharo

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PART I

Training in Virtue

Precepts for Lay People

There are three sets of precepts for laypeople: the five precepts, the eight precepts, and the ten guidelines. Here we will discuss the five and the eight precepts first, saving the ten guidelines for later.

The five precepts can be divided into two sorts: those dealing with bodily action and those dealing with speech. Normalcy in bodily action is expressed by three precepts: refraining from taking life, from stealing, and from engaging in illicit sex. Normalcy in speech is expressed by the precept against lying, which involves refraining not only from lying, but also from divisive tale-bearing, from coarse or abusive speech, and from aimless or idle talk. As for the precept against taking intoxicants, it fits in with the third precept—against illicit sex—in that both deal with forms of intoxication.

The eight precepts are derived from the five—and, like the five, can be divided into two sorts. Seven deal with bodily action: refraining from taking life; from stealing the possessions of others; from any and all sexual intercourse; from taking intoxicants; from eating food during the period from noon until the following dawn; from watching dancing, singing, instrumental music, and other shows, and from using garlands, perfumes, cosmetics, and jewelry; and from using high and luxurious beds and seats.

The precept dealing with speech is to refrain from telling lies—and also from divisive tale-bearing, from coarse or abusive speech, and from aimless or idle chatter, these latter three being conducive to outright lying.

The precepts, whether five or eight, are ultimately two: right normalcy in bodily action and right normalcy in speech. *Sīla*, the Pali word for virtue and precept, literally means normalcy—a quality that can be separated into either five or eight component virtues. The eight *uposatha* precepts do away with more defilements of bodily action than do either the five precepts or the ten guidelines. The bodily actions of a person who observes them weigh lightly, like those of one who is ordained. (Speaking of ordination, for women at least, it would appear that a person who observes the eight precepts does away with more greed, anger, and delusion in terms of bodily action than did the *sikkhamānās* (aspirants to nunhood) of the past. Although as a novice the *sikkhamānā* was expected to observe the ten precepts, still when she was about to be ordained as a nun she had to be strict in observing only the first six.) So whoever observes the eight precepts can be said to lead one form of the holy life—*kāla-brahmacariya*, temporary renunciation—the only difference being that one doesn't have to change one's mode of dress.

It's a rare man or woman who will act in this way. Whoever does can be counted as a person of value, a vessel for what is skillful, into which the practice of concentration (*samādhi*) should be placed.

The ten guidelines, unlike the five and eight precepts, don't have to be taken as vows. Once you understand them, simply go ahead and follow them. Altogether, they are of three sorts; three principles dealing with bodily action, four with speech, and three with the heart. The three principles dealing with bodily action are like those of the five precepts: not taking life, not stealing, and not engaging in illicit sex or taking intoxicants (the last two being counted as one). The four principles dealing with speech are derived from the precept against lying: refraining from lying; from divisive tale-bearing; from coarse or abusive speech; and from idle, aimless, and useless chatter.

The three principles dealing with the heart are: *anabhijjhā*—not coveting the possessions of others; *abyāpāda*—not feeling ill will, i.e. not wanting others to suffer misfortune; and *sammā-dit̥ṭhi*—right view, being convinced that good and evil really exist, and that the pleasure and pain we experience come from our own good and bad actions: Whoever does good will meet with good, whoever does evil will meet with evil.

So altogether there are ten guidelines. These guidelines are termed *kusala kamma* *patha*, skillful policies or clean actions. They are policies that should be adopted and followed—the more constantly, the better. Defilements related to greed will die away; those related to anger and delusion won't have a chance to arise. Greed arises from the thought of coveting—focusing desire on what you want to acquire—which is then expressed as greed in one's thoughts, words, and deeds. One's thoughts thus become restless and disturbed, struggling to the point where they create trouble in thought, word, and deed—a whole pile of unskillfulness and defilement. As for anger, it arises from ill will, which then gives rise to hostility and finally to anger, fury, and violence. One's thoughts, words, and deeds thus become unskillful. Delusion arises from wrong views, from ignorance of right and wrong, good and evil, making one's thoughts, words, and deeds unskillful and defiled.

So you should kill these things off at their source. Kill off covetousness by sharing your possessions with others—with your children, brothers, sisters, relatives, friends, monks, nuns, and recluses—which in the long run will be to your own benefit. This is termed generosity (*dāna*). Kill off ill will by developing thoughts of good will, compassion, empathetic joy, and equanimity; and avoid detrimental actions by observing the precepts (*sīla*). Kill off wrong views by associating with people who are knowledgeable, learning from them so as to develop your own discernment into how to do what is good. This is termed mental development (*bhāvanā*).

These are the techniques for curing greed, anger, and delusion. Covetousness, ill will, and wrong views are the taproots of defilement; greed, anger, and delusion are the crown. The thoughts, words, and deeds that express these qualities form the trunk and branches, and the fruit is pain: the pain of birth, aging, illness, and death; of sorrow, lamentation, pain, distress, and despair. Normally, when we've eaten the flesh of a fruit, if we don't destroy the

seed, it will have a chance to sprout and form another tree. So it is with defilement: If we don't destroy the seed, it'll produce more fruit. Thoughts tainted with clinging: These are the seed. People who don't realize this imagine this fruit to be something tasty and delicious, and so are unwilling to abandon and destroy covetousness, greed, ill will, and wrong views. As a result, they spin around in this cycle in various ways, under the influence of these three sorts of defilement. When these defilements arise in full force, whatever status one may have will be shattered, whatever wealth one has will be lost, the good opinion of others will turn to censure, one's happiness will turn to misery, one's friends will flee, and one's family will fall apart—or even if it doesn't fall apart, it will be pained with sorrow, as if its heart had been scalded with boiling water.

So we should kill off these defilements by being generous with our belongings; by observing the five precepts, the eight precepts, or the ten guidelines; and by practicing concentration to develop the mind, making it firm, unwavering, and still. Once these defilements die, then even if you've never had wealth, you'll be wealthy; even if you've never known happiness, you'll be happy; even if you've never reached heaven, you'll get there; even if you've never reached *nibbāna*, you'll attain it, constant and unchanging, in line with the Buddha's verse on the rewards of the five precepts:

sīlena sugatim yanti

Through virtue they go to heaven.

sīlena bhoga-sampadā

Through virtue wealth is attained.

sīlena nibbutim yanti

Through virtue they go to liberation—
secure happiness, free from all suffering and stress.

tasmā sīlam visodhaye

Thus we should all purify our virtue.

* * *

Question: At what times should the five precepts, the eight precepts, and the ten guidelines be observed?

Answer: The five precepts and ten guidelines should be observed at all times—without any reference to morning, evening, noon, or night—as constant or timeless principles (*nicca-sīla*, *akālika-sīla*). As for the eight uposatha precepts, a pattern has been established—in line with the varying abilities and opportunities of laypeople—of gathering to observe the precepts together once every seven or eight days on the lunar sabbath: the day of the new moon, the full moon, and the eighth day of the waxing and waning moons—altogether four times a month. This pattern is for people who don't have much time or opportunity. If, however, you have plenty of time and opportunity, let your own conviction be your guide. Focus on goodness and not on the calendar, observing the precepts on your own, making whatever day you observe them—no matter what the date or season—your own personal uposatha day.

Someone might object here, saying, “If it isn’t the lunar sabbath, then you can’t say you’re observing the uposatha precepts.”

“If they’re not uposatha precepts, what are they?”

“Just the ordinary eight precepts.”

“Is it good or bad to observe the eight precepts?”

“...Good.”

“And we observe the precepts for the sake of the good, don’t we? So if we’ve hit the good right on the nose, what does it matter if we’ve hit the wrong day?”

Here we should translate the word “*uposatha*.” Literally, it means “approaching respite” from all that is unskillful. So by definition, if there’s no respite from corruption in your actions, then it’s not uposatha day. There’s no way you can guarantee that this or that date is an uposatha day, because “*uposatha*” doesn’t mean the eighth day or ninth day or whatever. Still, the pattern of observing the eight precepts on the lunar sabbath is a good one for people who don’t have much opportunity. But if you do have the opportunity, you shouldn’t limit yourself just to those days, because virtue, by its nature, isn’t too particular about the date.

This being the case, we should set up gradations so that those who feel inspired to practice can do so as they are able:

1. The first group observes the eight precepts on each lunar sabbath during the rainy season: three months, four days a month, thus twelve days. This is termed *mudu*, the weak level.

2. The intermediate level—*majjhima uposatha*—observes the eight precepts on each lunar sabbath, without fail, throughout the year: twelve months, four days a month, thus 48 days a year.

3. The highest level—*ukkatṭha uposatha*—observes the eight precepts on each lunar sabbath, and on the day before and the day after each sabbath, without reference to month or season: twelve months, twelve days a month, thus 144 days a year. This is for people of firm conviction. Or, if you want, you can aim higher than that and observe the eight precepts at all times and in every season, focusing on the quality of virtue itself instead of on the ordinances and conventions of the world—just like the Buddhist nuns who, in our day and times, observe these very same eight precepts.

* * *

Virtue can be established on one of two bases: either through (1) making a vow (*samādāna-virati*), as when we repeat the precepts after a monk or novice (here it is also necessary to learn exactly what vices and misdeeds are forbidden by each of the five or eight precepts); or (2) simply deciding on our own to abstain from a particular vice or misdeed (*sampatta-virati*). In other words, when you want to keep the precepts pure, you can go ahead and decide to refrain from misconduct on your own. Once virtue is established, and you are careful to safeguard it out of a sense of conscience so that it doesn’t lapse, this is termed *samuccheda-virati*: absolute abstinence.

For virtue to be maintained depends on two factors: perseverance and the four sublime attitudes (good will, compassion, empathetic joy, and equanimity).

An example of keeping the precepts through perseverance would be: Suppose you're accustomed to killing animals. If you decide to observe the precepts, you hold off for a day or so, but you have no strong compunctions against taking life, so you depend on a strong sense of perseverance to get you through. Once you get past your self-imposed time limit, you go back to your old ways. Observing the precepts through perseverance in this way means to exercise self-control so as not to commit whatever misdeeds you've been accustomed to.

Question: Is there any merit or skillfulness in observing the precepts in this way?

Answer: There is—as far as that particular day is concerned. Seeing the light every once in a long while is better than never seeing it at all.

To observe the precepts through the sublime attitudes, though, means to wish for the happiness of other living beings, to sympathize with the fact that no one wants to suffer, that we all desire well-being and freedom from harm. Once you realize this and a sense of compassion arises, you wouldn't dare transgress the precepts you've undertaken. Observing the precepts through good will in this way bears powerful rewards.

Whoever puts virtue fully and completely into practice can aspire to any attainment: rebirth as a human being, rebirth in heaven, or *nibbāna*. Such a person can aspire to a beautiful appearance and voice, fragrant aromas, delicious tastes, delicate sensations, and a good heart. To have virtue is to have wealth: The five precepts are equal to 50 pounds of gold bullion; the eight precepts, 80 pounds; the ten guidelines, 100. Actually, moral virtue is something valuable beyond price. Virtue and generosity, taken together, are the qualifying factors for rebirth as a human being and rebirth in heaven. Virtue, generosity, and the development of the mind through meditation are the qualifying factors for *nibbāna*. So we should all try to find the time to perform those actions that will lead to our solid welfare in the coming future.

The Service for the Lunar Sabbath

Before taking the precepts, first pay respect to the Triple Gem—the Buddha, the Dhamma (the Truth he taught), and the Saṅgha (those of his followers who attained that Truth)—

Arahaṃ sammā-sambuddho bhagavā

The Blessed One is Worthy & Rightly Self-awakened

Buddhaṃ bhagavantam abhivādemī

I bow down before the Awakened, Blessed One.

(bow down)

Svākkhāto bhagavatā dhammo

The Dhamma is well-expounded by the Blessed One.

Dhammaṃ namassāmi

I pay homage to the Dhamma
(bow down)

Supaṭipanno bhagavato sāvaka-saṅgho

The Saṅgha of the Blessed One's disciples has practiced well.

Saṅghaṃ namāmi

I pay respect to the Saṅgha.
(bow down)

Now the group will chant the standard morning service. If you don't know it, simply remain silent. When the group has finished, it will chant the request for the precepts in unison. Again, if you don't know it, remain silent. The request for the five precepts is as follows:

Mayaṃ bhante ti-saraṇena saha pañca sīlāni yācāma

Venerable sir, we request the five precepts together with the Triple Refuge.

Dutiyampi mayaṃ bhante... yācāma

A second time....

Tatīyampi mayaṃ bhante... yācāma

A third time....

The request for the eight uposatha precepts:

Mayaṃ bhante ti-saraṇena saha aṭṭhaṅga-samannāgataṃ uposathaṃ yācāma

Venerable sir, we request the eight-factored uposatha observance together with the Triple Refuge.

Dutiyampi mayaṃ bhante... yācāma

A second time....

Tatīyampi mayaṃ bhante... yācāma

A third time....

Then repeat the phrase paying homage to the Buddha:

Namo tassa bhagavato arahato sammā-sambuddhassa (three times)

Homage to the Blessed One, the Worthy One,
the Rightly Self-awakened One.

And then the phrases for taking refuge in the Triple Gem:

Buddhaṃ saraṇaṃ gacchāmi

I go to the Buddha for refuge.

Dhammaṃ saraṇaṃ gacchāmi

I go to the Dhamma for refuge.

Saṅghaṃ saraṇaṃ gacchāmi

I go to the Saṅgha for refuge.

Dutiyampi Buddhaṃ saraṇaṃ gacchāmi

A second time, I go to the Buddha for refuge.

Dutiyampi Dhammaṃ saraṇaṃ gacchāmi

A second time, I go to the Dhamma for refuge.
Dutiyampi Saṅghaṃ saraṇaṃ gacchāmi
 A second time, I go to the Saṅgha for refuge.

Tatiyampi Buddhaṃ saraṇaṃ gacchāmi
 A third time, I go to the Buddha for refuge.
Tatiyampi Dhammaṃ saraṇaṃ gacchāmi
 A third time, I go to the Dhamma for refuge.
Tatiyampi Saṅghaṃ saraṇaṃ gacchāmi
 A third time, I go to the Saṅgha for refuge.

This finished, the monk officiating will say, *Ti-saraṇa-gamaṇaṃ niṭṭhitaṃ* (The taking of the three refuges is now completed). You say, *Āma, bhante* (Yes, sir). Now repeat the precepts after him (translations are given below):

1. *Pāṇātipātā veramaṇi sikkhāpadaṃ samādiyāmi*
2. *Adinnādānā veramaṇi sikkhāpadaṃ samādiyāmi*
3. *Kāmesu micchācārā veramaṇi sikkhāpadaṃ samādiyāmi*
 (If you are taking the eight precepts, replace this with:
Abrahma-cariyā veramaṇi sikkhāpadaṃ samādiyāmi)
4. *Musāvādā veramaṇi sikkhāpadaṃ samādiyāmi*
5. *Surā-meraya-majja-pamādaṭṭhānā veramaṇi sikkhāpadaṃ samādiyāmi*

(If you are taking the five precepts, stop here. If you are taking the eight precepts, continue:)

6. *Vikāla-bhojanā veramaṇi sikkhāpadaṃ samādiyāmi*
7. *Nacca-gīta-vādita-visūka-dassanā mālā-gandha-vilepana-dharaṇa-maṇḍana-vibhūsanatṭhānā veramaṇi sikkhāpadaṃ samādiyāmi*
8. *Uccāsayana-mahāsayanā veramaṇi sikkhāpadaṃ samādiyāmi*

If you are taking the uposatha precepts, the monk will announce the duration of the uposatha period. Repeat after him:

Imaṃ atṭhaṅga-samannāgataṃ
Buddha-paññattaṃ uposathaṃ
Imañca rattiṃ imaṅca divasam
Sammadeva abhirakkhituṃ samādiyāmi

(which means: I undertake to maintain, perfect and pure for today and tonight, this uposatha observance formulated by the Buddha and composed of eight factors.)

The monk will counsel heedfulness and announce the rewards of observing the precepts:

Imāni atṭha sikkhāpadāni accekariṃ ratti-divaṃ uposathasila-vasena sādhuṃ rakkhitaṃ

(These eight training rules are to be well-maintained for the entire day and night of the Uposatha period.)

You say, *Āma bhante* (Yes, sir). The monk will continue:

*Silena sugatim yanti
silena bhoga-sampadā
silena nibbutim yanti
tasmā silam visodhaye*

Through virtue they go to heaven.
Through virtue wealth is attained.
Through virtue they go to liberation.
Thus we should all purify our virtue.
This ends the taking of the precepts.

* * *

The precepts translated are as follows:

1. I undertake the training rule to refrain from taking life.
2. To refrain from stealing.
3. To refrain from illicit sex. (This is for those who are taking the five precepts. The precept, *Abrahma-cariyā*..., for those taking the eight precepts, forbids all forms of sexual intercourse.)
4. To refrain from speaking falsehood.
5. To refrain from taking intoxicants.
6. To refrain from eating food during the period from noon until the following dawn.
7. To refrain from watching shows (e.g., dancing, singing, instrumental music) and from ornamenting the body with flowers, scents, cosmetics, or jewelry.
8. To refrain from using high and luxurious beds and seats. "Luxurious" means having a stuffed cushion or mattress. "High" means more than eight inches high (measuring from the floor to the bottom of the frame). Armchairs and couches with arms, however, even if they are more than eight inches high, are not prohibited by this precept.

* * *

The precepts, whether five or eight, have two foundations. In other words, for them to be broken, they must be transgressed by either (1) the body in conjunction with the mind, or (2) speech in conjunction with the mind. A precept transgressed unintentionally with a bodily action is nevertheless still intact. Say, for instance, you cut a tree or gather flowers to place on an altar, and it so happens that the insects living in the tree or flower stem die. You had no idea they were there in the first place. In this case, your precepts are still intact because you had no intention for them to die. As for verbal actions, suppose that you speak hurriedly, and what you end up saying is different from what you had meant to say, out of either carelessness or inattention. For example, you meant to say three words, but ended up saying four; you meant to tell the truth, but what you actually said was false. Since it was simply a verbal act, and you

didn't have it in mind to speak misleadingly, your five or eight precepts are still intact.

A breach of the ten guidelines can be effected with one of as many as three factors: the body in conjunction with the mind, speech in conjunction with the mind, or the mind acting alone. In other words, a transgression of any sort in thought, word, or deed has to be intentional for there to be a breach in one's virtue, because the intention—the will to abstain (*cetanā-virati*)—forms the essence of virtue. This can be checked against any of the various precepts. Intention is the essence of virtue; aspects of virtue apart from that intention are simply its expressions and transgressions.

The intention that qualifies as virtue is the will to abstain in line with the five or eight precepts. The expressions of virtue are simply the precepts that tell what is forbidden. The transgression of virtue is the act of breaking a precept. Virtue is normalcy. Normalcy and right equilibrium in word and deed is expressed by the five precepts and eight uposatha precepts. Normalcy and right equilibrium in thought, word, and deed is expressed by the ten guidelines.

The statement that intention is the essence of virtue is supported by the passage in the Canon where the Buddha says,

cetanāhaṃ bhikkhave kammaṃ vadāmi

I tell you, monks, that intention is the action.

* * *

Virtue, as practiced by Buddhists in general, can be summarized into three categories: *hīna-sīla*, *gocara-sīla*, and *anagocara-sīla*.

1. *Hīna-sīla* means simply obeying the precepts. For instance, the first precept tells you not to kill, so you hope to gain merit by looking out for the lives of others, not causing them to die. The second precept tells you not to steal, so you hope to get some good out of taking care of the possessions of others, not causing them to disappear. The third precept rules out illicit sex, so you go around hoping for goodness by looking out for other people's spouses and children. The fourth precept rules out lying, so you go around looking after other people's ears by not putting lies in them. The fifth precept rules out alcohol, so you do your part for other people's liquor bottles by not making them go empty. The same holds true for the other precepts. Practicing virtue in this way is tantamount to being a watchman for other people's goods. You put yourself on the level of a slave or hired cowhand. Whether you observe the five or even the eight precepts, this is classed as the lowest level of virtue, or as *sīlabbatupādāna*, attachment to external forms of goodness.

2. *Gocara-sīla* means making sure that the mind occupies itself only with skillful intentions, such as thinking of ways to act that will be skillful and meritorious. Whether your thoughts deal with the past or the future, with visual objects, sounds, smells, tastes, tactile sensations, or ideas, you are careful to keep them in line with skillful intentions, not letting them fall into ways that are not.

3. *Anagocara-sīla* means keeping the mind in the present, not letting it wander among distracting thoughts or perceptions. You are mindful and alert, keeping

watch over the mind so that it stays exclusively in the present. *This* is virtue—when virtue reaches a state of normalcy—the sort of virtue truly worthy of heaven and *nibbāna*.

The virtue that's careful not to break the precepts can counter the cruder forms of greed. The virtue that guards the mind's train of thought, keeping it from traveling in the area of unskillful intentions, can do away with anger. The virtue that enters into the present—i.e., virtue in a state of normalcy—can do away with delusion. Thus we can say that virtue can do away with the cruder forms of defilement, i.e., certain levels of greed, anger, and delusion.

* * *

To continue with the service for the lunar sabbath: Now you have the opportunity to hear a sermon. The request for a sermon is as follows:

*Brahmā ca lokādhipatī saḥampatī
kat'añjali andhivaram ayācatha
santidha sattāpparajakkha-jātikā
desetu dhammaṃ anukampimaṃ pajamī*
(The Brahmā Sahampati, lord of the world,
with hands palm-to-palm before his heart
[approached the Lord Buddha and] requested a blessing:
There are beings here with only a little dust in their eyes.
Please teach the Dhamma out of kindness for them.)

Now compose your thoughts and keep them fixed on absorbing the nourishment of the Dhamma. Once the sermon is finished, you may proclaim yourself to be a lay adherent of the Buddha, as follows:

Ahaṃ buddhañca dhammañca Saṅghañca saraṇaṃ gato
Having gone to the Buddha, Dhamma, and Saṅgha for refuge,
Upāsakattam desesiṃ Bhikkhu-saṅghassa samukkhā
I have declared my adherence in the presence of the Bhikkhu Saṅgha.
Etaṃ me saraṇaṃ khemaṃ Etaṃ saraṇam-uttamaṃ
This is my secure refuge; this, my highest refuge.
Etaṃ saraṇam-āgamaṃ Sabba-dukkhā pamuccaye
This is the refuge, having gone to which,
one is released from all suffering & stress.
Yathā-balaṃ careyyaṃ Sammā-sambuddha-sāsaṇaṃ
I will follow, in line with my strength,
the teachings of the Rightly Self-awakened One
Dukkha-nissaraṇass'eva Bhāgi assaṃ anāgate
So that in the future I will have a share
in the escape from suffering & stress.

(Women should substitute *gatā* for *gato*, *upāsikattaṃ* for *upāsakattaṃ*, and *bhāgini'ssaṃ* for *bhāgi assaṃ*.)

The Pali word for adherent, *upāsaka* (fem., *upāsikā*), literally means “one who is close” to the Buddha, Dhamma, and Saṅgha. There are ten qualities looked for in an adherent: five activities to be refrained from and five qualities to possess.

The five to be refrained from are:

1. selling weapons,
2. selling human beings,
3. selling animals to be killed for food, or the flesh of animals that one has killed oneself,
4. selling intoxicants,
5. selling poison.

The five qualities to possess:

1. conviction,
2. observance of the precepts,
3. belief in nothing but the principle of *kamma*—that those who do good will meet with good, those who do evil will meet with evil,
4. an unwillingness to look for merit in ways excluded by the Buddha’s teachings,
5. performance of merit in ways particular to the Buddha’s teachings.

To possess these qualifications means by definition that one is an adherent to generosity, virtue, and meditation.

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Now that the service is over, you should take the opportunity to develop peace and respite of mind. Don’t let the day go to waste. Take the word *buddho* as your meditation exercise. To be intent on repeating the word *buddho* in your mind is one form of concentration (*samādhi*). Discernment (*paññā*) means thorough comprehension of all fabrications. The value of discernment is that it abandons all forms of defilement. Virtue, concentration, and discernment: These qualities form the heart of the Buddha’s message, which we should all try to develop to the best of our abilities.

Now we will pose a number of questions dealing with virtue and concentration as a way of further elaborating on these topics.

Virtue: Questions & Answers

1. *What are the benefits of observing the precepts? What are the drawbacks of not observing them?*
2. *What is meant by virtue?*
3. *How many kinds of virtue are there?*
4. *What is the essence of virtue?*
5. *What is needed for virtue to be maintained?*

1. To answer the first question: People observing the precepts can perceive the following benefits as far as this lifetime is concerned: They are not distrusted or despised by people at large; they can enter with confidence into the company of sages and people in general. After they die, they are sure to qualify for rebirth on the human plane at the very least. For these reasons, virtuous people are not willing to let their virtue be defiled.

Another answer is that virtuous people are admired throughout the world. Why is this so? Because no one in the world likes abuse, not even the least little bit. Not to mention good people, even thieves and robbers complain about people who have no principles, as when they get together to commit a robbery: The members of the band are sure to find fault with one another because of the hardships involved in what they're doing. Still, they go ahead and do it out of their own ignorance, stupidity, and lack of judgment.

Another answer is that people who observe the precepts work for the prosperity of this world and the next. Most of us overlook this aspect of virtue. Wrong looks right to us, and we think that observing the precepts retards progress, that people who observe the precepts are old-fashioned and behind the times, or that the precepts make it impossible to earn a living. All of these views have no basis in truth. Exactly how do the precepts retard progress? Consider this carefully: The nature of the world is that not a single person likes to suffer. Even common animals don't set their sights on pain. So to protect your virtues means to protect the world and to help it advance, not to ruin it. When the Buddha established the precepts, he did so not merely in line with his own opinions, but rather in line with the ways and opinions of people throughout the world. How can we know that this is so? We needn't ask the Buddha himself; we can consider the matter on our own:

(a) Take a simple example, like killing: Fishermen make their living by killing, and some of them end up making money by the fistfuls from it. Still, they complain about the hardships of their work and sometimes they even fall in the ocean and drown. The fact that they complain about their work shows they don't like it. As for the fish, they don't like it either. Even gnats and mosquitoes don't like being abused. So why do we abuse them? Because we haven't associated with wise people. We see the harm and the pain, we complain about it, yet we still go ahead and do it out of our own darkness and delusion. This is one example to show that the Buddha established the precepts in line with the views of the world.

Example (b): Stealing. Is there anyone in the world who likes it? If the world liked stealing, there probably wouldn't be laws forbidding it—and what human society doesn't have such laws? The fact that we have these laws shows that we don't like stealing. Even things about to be stolen don't like to have people steal them. Animals, for instance, when they're cornered by thieves, will try to run away. Thieves and robbers usually complain that their work is hard—always having to lurk and keep out of sight, going without food and sleep. The fact that they complain shows that they don't like their work. So why do they do it? Because they haven't associated with wise people. Wrong looks right to them because of their own darkness and delusion.

Example (c): Illicit sex. Who in the world likes it? Go ask those who do it, and they'll complain that they suffer from it. Ask those who are done to, and they'll complain that they suffer from it and don't like it. Sometimes they end up killing themselves. This shows that the world doesn't care for it. So why do people do it? Because they haven't associated with wise people. Wrong looks right to them, and so they bring about the ruin of the world. They get fined or put in jail, and get into difficulties with their families, knocking one another over the skull just for the fun of it. To do wrong in this way will bring tears to a parent's eyes and ears, and trouble to the hearts of the authorities. These are things that bring about the ruin of the world.

Example (d): Lying. Is there anyone in the world who likes it? When a person is lying, he has to be wary out of fear that others will find him out. When he's about to lie, he suffers in trying to figure out how to express his thoughts. Once he's lied, he suffers out of fear that no one will believe him. A person who is lied to has to question and cross-examine, out of fear that what he's heard may not be true. Even small children don't like to be lied to. Say that a child is crying for its mother, and its father lies to it, saying, "There—your mother's coming." When it doesn't see its mother, it'll cry without stopping. Why? Because it can't trust its father. But not to mention human beings, even animals don't like to be lied to. Say that we take some cooked rice and lure a dog with it. Once it sees the rice, it'll think we're going to feed it, so it comes prancing up with its tail wagging—but instead of feeding it, we take the rice and run off. If we do this three or four times, after that it probably won't come because it knows we're lying. This shows that no one likes lies. So why do people lie? Because they haven't associated with wise people. Wrong looks right to them, and so they cause the world to degenerate.

Example (e): Alcohol. There is no one who likes the drinking of alcohol. People who brew it complain of their difficulties: that it's a losing business, that they're afraid they'll be seen by the police or cheated by their customers. People who drink alcohol complain that it makes them dizzy, or that it eats up their salaries and leaves them poor. I have yet to hear anyone extol drinking as a way to health, wealth, and happiness. If people who drink really thought it were good, they probably wouldn't come back to drinking plain old water or eating plain old food again. Once people get drunk, they start acting rowdy and ugly in ways that people in general don't admire. Even their own families get disgusted with them, and they themselves complain that they're in debt or don't have enough money to spend, which shows that they themselves don't like or admire their habit.

In some places the government, acting out of concern for the public well-being, has established laws to prevent the damages that come from the drinking of alcohol. (I personally have wondered whether the money the government makes from taxing alcohol is enough to cover the damages caused by people who drink. I doubt that it is, but this is simply my own opinion. You might want to consider the matter for yourself. One common example is when people get together to drink—either legal whiskey or bootleg—and get to talking: One bottle of whiskey, and maybe one of them ends up killed. The pittance the

government gets from the bottle of whiskey is probably nowhere near enough to pay for the costs of tracking down the guilty parties in a case like this.)

Thus the Buddha saw the harm in this sort of behavior: that it causes the world to degenerate and hampers people from making a living. A drunk person, for instance, can't do any steady labor. All he can do is brag. I don't mean to be critical here, but it's something I've often seen. For instance, when a farmer has his neighbors over to help harvest his rice, they'll make plenty of noise, but when you go to take a look at their work, you'll find the rice scattered all over the place.

Once I came across a well dug at a crazy angle, but when I peered down at the water, it looked clean and fresh. So I said to the owner, "The water looks good. Why didn't you do a good job of digging the well? Was it because you ran into a rock? Or a tree root? When was it dug? Who dug it? Did you do it yourself, or hire someone to do it for you?"

So the owner answered, "I had some friends over to help dig it."

"How did you get them to dig so deep? It must have cost a lot of money."

"I served whiskey until we were all good and drunk, and then we got down to digging the well, which is why it ended up so crooked."

This goes to show how liquor can spoil a job.

All of the examples I've mentioned here—brief, but enough to serve as food for thought—show that the world doesn't like these things, that they cause damage and loss, putting money, labor, and people to waste. And this goes to show that the Buddha forbade these things in line with the views of the world. Not one of the precepts runs counter to those views. This being so, which one of the precepts retards progress or creates trouble?

Then why don't people perceive this? Because they haven't associated with wise people, and so wrong looks right to them. They go counter to the world, and suffer for it. The Buddha taught in line with the aspirations of the world, for the progress of people and nations. If people were truly to abstain in line with the precepts, life on earth would be happy in the visible present.

This ends the discussion of the first topic, the benefits and drawbacks of observing and not observing the precepts.

2. The second question—"What is meant by virtue?"—can be answered as follows: The Pali word for virtue, *sila*, means normalcy. "Normalcy" refers to a lack of deviation in thought, word, and deed, while "lack of deviation" refers to the act of not doing evil with one's deeds, not speaking evil with one's words, and not thinking evil with one's thoughts: in other words, abstaining from three types of harmful bodily action, four types of harmful speech, and three types of harmful thought. The three bodily actions to be avoided are taking life, stealing, and taking intoxicants and engaging in illicit sex. To avoid these things, not letting the body deviate in their direction, is for the body to be in a state of normalcy. The four types of speech to be avoided are lies, divisive tale-bearing, coarse and abusive speech, and idle, aimless chatter. To keep one's speech from deviating in the direction of these things is for speech to be in a state of

normalcy. For thought to be in a state of normalcy means (a) not coveting the belongings of others, (b) not feeling ill will toward those people or living beings whose actions are displeasing, and (c) viewing things rightly: seeing that all living beings fare according to their actions—those with good intentions will meet with good, those with evil intentions will meet with evil—and that no one aspires to suffering. Once you see things in this way, maintain this viewpoint. Don't let it deviate into ways that are wrong.

To keep one's thoughts, words, and deeds in a state of normalcy and equilibrium like this is what is meant by virtue. The word "equilibrium" here, though, doesn't rule out all action; it rules out only the types of action that cause one's words and deeds to move in ways that are wrong. Apart from such deviations, whoever has the energy to perform work of whatever sort in making a living is free to do so, because the precepts of the Buddha aren't lazy precepts or faint-hearted precepts, down-and-out or bump-on-the-log precepts—i.e., precepts that don't let you do anything at all. That's not the sort of thing the Buddha taught. As for speech, whoever has anything to say that is free from harm is free to go ahead and say it. The precepts of the Buddha aren't mute precepts or dumb precepts; they're precepts that let you speak what is proper. And as for the mind, whoever has ideas that will lead to knowledge or ingenuity in making a living is free to think them through. The Buddha didn't forbid this sort of thinking. He forbade only those things that are harmful, because the basic principle of virtue in Buddhism is to abstain from what is evil or corrupt in thought, word, and deed, and to develop what is upright and honest in thought, word, and deed. This shows that the Buddha taught to abstain from those things that ought to be abstained from, and to do those things that ought to be done. This point is substantiated by such factors of the noble path as right action and right livelihood. But most of us believe that to maintain the precepts confines you to a monastery and prevents you from making a living or even wiggling a finger. This belief is wrong: counter to the Buddha's teaching and detrimental to the progress of the world.

To maintain the precepts—to be virtuous—means to keep one's words and deeds in a state of normalcy. Whatever work virtuous people perform is pure. The wealth they obtain as a result isn't easily wasted. Whatever virtuous people say—no matter how much they speak—won't grate on the ears of their listeners. It can bring fortune their way, as well as leaving the ears of their listeners soothed. Whatever virtuous people contemplate, if it's a difficult job, it will become easier; if it's an object to be made, it may become beautiful, all because of the very principles of virtue. Most of us, though, tend to be too contemptuous of virtue to put it to use in our work and activities, which is why we act as a deadweight and can't keep up with the progress of the world.

A person whose thoughts, words, and deeds are not governed by virtue is like a person covered with germs or soot: Whatever work he or she touches is soiled and will rarely succeed in its aims. Even if it does succeed, its success quickly falls into ruin. The same holds true for speech: A person whose speech isn't consistently virtuous will usually be distrusted and despised by his listeners. If he tries to talk them out of their money, it will come with difficulty; once he

gets it, it won't stay with him for long. And so it is with the mind: If a person doesn't have virtue in charge of his heart, his thinking is darkened. Whatever projects he contemplates will succeed with difficulty and—even if they do succeed—will be neither good nor lasting.

People who want to keep their thoughts, words, and deeds in a state of normalcy have to be mindful in all they do—sitting, standing, walking, and lying down—so they can know they haven't done anything evil. A person who isn't mindful in his actions is like a person without any clothes: Wherever he goes, he offends people. There's even the story of the man who was so absent-minded that he went out wearing his wife's blouse and sarong, which goes to show what happens to a person who isn't mindful in his actions.

A person who isn't mindful in his speaking makes a mess of his words. He's like a rice pot without a lid: When the water boils, it'll overflow and put out the fire. A person who isn't mindful in his speaking—talking until his saliva turns to foam—is sure to harm himself. A person who isn't mindful in his thinking—thinking endlessly of how to make money, of how to get rich, until he loses touch with reality—is bound to do himself harm. Some people think so much that they can't eat or sleep, to the point where they damage their nerves and become mentally unbalanced, all because they think too much. Their thinking has nothing to act as a basis, nothing to keep it in check.

Thus people who lack mindfulness can harm themselves, in line with the fact that they are at the same time people without virtue.

This ends the discussion of the second topic.

3. The third question—"How many kinds of virtue are there?"—can be answered as follows: To divide them in precise terms, there are five kinds, corresponding to the five precepts, the eight precepts, the ten guidelines, the ten precepts, and the 227 precepts. To divide them in broad terms, there are two: The virtues for laypeople on the one hand, and for monks and novices on the other.

From another standpoint, there are three: those dealing with bodily action, those dealing with speech, and those dealing with the mind.

From another standpoint, there are two: primary virtues (*ādi-brahma-cariya-sikkhā*), i.e. the five basic precepts that have to be studied and observed first, such as the precepts against taking life; and then, once these are mastered, the next level: mannerly behavior (*abhisamācāra*) dealing with personal conduct in such areas as having one's meals, etc.

From still another standpoint, there are two sorts of virtue: mundane (*lokiya*) and transcendent (*lokuttara*). Transcendent virtues can be either the lay virtues or the virtues for monks. If a person, lay or ordained, has attained true normalcy of mind, his or her virtues are transcendent. The virtues of a person who has yet to attain the normalcy of stream-entry, though—no matter whether that person is a layperson or a monk, strict in observing the precepts or not—are merely mundane. Mundane virtues are by nature inconstant, sometimes pure and sometimes not; some people who observe them go to heaven, others who do go to hell. The transcendent virtues, however, are constant and lead straight to

nibbāna. They are virtues that can rule out rebirth in the four realms of deprivation (*apāya-bhūmi*).

The virtues of a person who has reached the transcendent level are the genuine virtues taught by the Buddha, which are nobler and more valuable than all other virtues. The mundane virtues, even the 227 precepts of a monk, are no match in quality for the five or eight virtues of a lay stream-enterer: That's how valuable the transcendent virtues are. Why is it that a stream-enterer's virtues are constant, while those of ordinary run-of-the-mill people aren't? Because stream-enterers have shed self-identity views (*sakkāya-diṭṭhi*) once and for all through the power of discernment. What does their discernment come from? From having developed concentration, making the mind firm to the point where discernment arises and washes self-identity views away for good. They've seen the harm that comes from being deluded about the mind and body, and can realize that these things aren't the self. They've investigated the body until they've seen that it's nothing but the four physical properties (*dhātu*), that they didn't bring it with them when they came and won't take it with them when they go. Thus they are able to let it go, without attachment or false assumptions.

(a) If we view the body as our own, we become possessive of it and are unwilling to expend it in ways that are skillful. We get stuck on the level of physical pleasure—and that pleasure is what kills off our merit and skillfulness. When physical pain arises, that pain is what kills off the skillfulness we should attain. This can be classed as a form of *pāṇātipāta* (taking life): using pleasure and pain to kill off the merit and skillfulness that living beings are looking for. This is one aspect of self-identity view that stream-enterers have abandoned.

(b) *Adinnādāna*: Stream-enterers don't cling to the body as being their own, because they've realized that it's nothing but a compound of the four physical properties, that these properties are part and parcel of the world and can't be taken from it. As a result, they don't try to cheat or swindle the world by laying claim to its properties as being their own, and in this way they abandon another aspect of self-identity view.

(c) *Kāmesu micchācāra*: Stream-enterers have seen the harm that comes from sensual preoccupations—sights, sounds, smells, flavors, tactile sensations, and ideas. Whatever is right to indulge in, they indulge in; whatever isn't, they don't. This means that they don't misconduct themselves with regard to sensual matters. Thus they abandon another aspect of self-identity view.

(d) *Musāvāda*: Stream-enterers have seen the absolute truth that doesn't lie. In other words, they've seen the four noble truths and so have abandoned another aspect of self-identity view.

(e) *Surāmeraya*: Stream-enterers are not intoxicated or heedless with regard to sights, sounds, smells, flavors, tactile sensations, or ideas. Thus they abandon another aspect of self-identity view.

This is called virtue on the level of discernment. Once this level is reached, the more common forms of virtue become constant and lasting, because self-identity view has been shed through the power of discernment. As for *silabbata-parāmāsa* ("groping" with regard to habits and practices), stream-enterers no longer grope

in their behavior, because they've seen for sure that it's right. And as for *vicikicchā* (uncertainty), they've abandoned all doubts concerning the value of their discernment, their way of life, and their path of practice: They no longer wonder as to whether they're right or wrong. Once they can do this, they set themselves apart from mundane virtues. Mundane virtues are inconstant because they lack discernment. Why do they lack discernment? Because we don't practice concentration in the heart, and so we take stubborn possession of the body, latching on to it and wrongly assuming it to be the self, to the point where even the slightest touch from mosquitoes or horseflies, sun or rain, can cause our goodness to wither and die.

Transcendent virtues are thus supreme; mundane virtues are not yet lasting. As to whether virtue will be transcendent or mundane, the matter lies entirely with the heart.

A dull-witted heart, lacking discernment,
latches on to the body,
but once it dies, it doesn't get to eat the meat
or sit on the skin.
It'll choke on the bones.
Lacking training, it lies sunk in pain.

But a trained heart gives rise to discernment,
lets go of the body,
discards it at death without regret.
Having seen the truth,
it's called noble, supreme.

This ends the discussion of the third topic.

4. To answer the fourth question—"What is the essence of virtue?"—we first have to distinguish the essence of virtue, the intention to abstain (*cetanā-virati*), from the expressions of virtue, which are of three kinds: *sampatta-virati*, *samādāna virati*, and *samuccheda-virati*. These three are called expressions of virtue because they follow on the precepts.

Sampatta-virati means to restrain one's behavior on one's own, without taking a spoken vow—for example, going out into the wide open fields or into the forest and seeing an animal that would be good to kill, but not killing it, for fear of the doing evil; or seeing another person's belongings that would be good to take, but not taking them, for fear of doing evil.

Samādāna-virati means to take the precepts as a spoken vow—either on one's own or repeating them after another person—and then being careful not to violate them.

Samuccheda-virati means to keep one's precepts pure and unblemished, regardless of whether or not one has taken them as vows.

For these expressions of virtue to be pure or impure depends on a number of minor factors arising from the exercise of thought, word, and deed that either run counter to these expressions (thus blemishing them) or are careful to follow them (thus keeping them pure).

As for the essence of virtue—“essence” here meaning the chief agent or determining factor—the essence is the heart that wills to abstain from harm in thought, word, or deed—the five forms of harm, the eight, the ten, or what-have-you—and is mindful to keep the mind in check in a state of normalcy. Thus there are two kinds of virtue: pure virtue, i.e., spotlessness in thought, word, and deed; and blemished virtue, i.e., virtue torn into pieces or cut into holes. For example, to observe two precepts but to break three that come in succession, is virtue torn into pieces. If the precepts that are broken don’t come in succession, this is called stained virtue or virtue cut into holes.

This is how to develop a bad character. People of bad character do have virtue, but they don’t take care of it. They don’t make the effort to maintain the precepts in their thoughts, words, and deeds, and so let evil come flowing in through them. Stained virtue, torn virtue, and virtue cut into holes: Even though these are classed as evil, they’re still better than having no virtue at all. To have torn virtue is better than having no virtue to tear, just as wearing torn clothes is better than wearing no clothes at all. Everyone born has virtue built into them; the only exceptions are those who have died.

If this is the case, why do we have to observe precepts? To observe precepts means that we take the virtue we already have and cleanse it, not that we go gathering the virtues that grow on monks and novices.

We’ve already seen that virtue means a mind with sound intentions; blemished virtue means a mind with unsound intentions. This is enough to show that all of us in the world have virtue, because who doesn’t have a mind? Even crazy people have minds. The only person without a mind is a corpse. Any and every human being who breathes in and out has virtue, the only difference being whether or not that virtue is pure. As the Buddha said to his followers,

cetanāhaṃ bhikkhave kammaṃ vadāmi

I tell you, monks, that intention is the action.

An evil intention blemishes virtue. A good intention to abandon evil helps keep it pure. This ends the discussion of the fourth topic.

5. The fifth question—“What is needed for virtue to be maintained?”—can be answered as follows: Virtue here means purity of virtue. For purity to be firm and lasting depends on the support of causal factors, just as a newborn child depends on the support of its parents to survive and grow. If its parents feed it plenty of food, it will escape from the dangers of malnutrition and grow to be healthy and strong; if they underfeed it, it’ll become thin and frail. In the same way, for virtue to be maintained depends on our being mindful and alert: These two qualities are the guardians of purity. At the same time, we have to nourish virtue and give it food. If it isn’t fed, it’ll wither away and die. Even if it has mindfulness and alertness watching over it, it can never grow plump, just as a child who has parents but isn’t fed is sure to waste and wither away. For virtue to grow strong requires food, and the food of virtue is:

a. *mettā*—good will, love for oneself and all others, hoping that all living beings will be happy;

b. *karuṇā*—compassion for oneself and others, wanting us all to escape from suffering;

c. *muditā*—empathetic joy, ungrudging delight in the goodness of all living beings;

d. *upekkhā*—equanimity, letting go in those cases where we should remain indifferent, being unruffled—neither pleased nor upset—where we are no longer able to be of help, as when seeing an executioner beheading a criminal who has broken the law.

These four sublime attitudes are the food of virtue.

Mindfulness is the father,
alertness, the mother,
and the “immeasurables” are the food.

Whoever can do this will have virtues that are fat and strong. In other words, when good will, compassion, empathetic joy, and equanimity are expressed in thought, word, and deed, then virtue will be firm and lasting and will head straight toward *nibbāna*. This translates as fat virtues, plump virtues, rich virtues, the virtues taught by the Buddha Gotama. Whoever can't do this will end up with poor virtues, sickly virtues, orphaned virtues, withered-and-wasting-away virtues.

To have virtue is to have character,
to have character is to have wealth,
to have wealth is to be happy;
the happiness of virtue is something supreme.

Virtue is an adornment that can be worn by people of every variety. Young and old alike are attractive when wearing it, for no matter who wears it, it never looks incongruous or out-of-place, unlike external ornaments. External ornaments look good only in the right circumstances, but virtue can be worn at all times. Whoever can maintain virtue will escape from danger and animosity in this life and the next. For this reason, people of discernment are careful to safeguard their virtue. People without discernment go looking for chains: golden chains for snaring their wrists, ankles, necks, and earlobes. Even if they watch after them carefully and wear them only on the right occasions, they still can't escape from harm—as when a thief rips off the chains, tearing their ears, scraping the skin from their arms and legs. Consider, then, just how much good comes from external adornment.

As for virtue, when it encircles our thoughts, encircles our words, and encircles our deeds, who can destroy it, what thief can steal it, what fires can burn it away? After we die, we'll enjoy ourselves in heaven, as guaranteed by the verse,

silena sugatim yanti silena bhoga-sampadā
silena nibbutim yanti

The attainment of heaven, wealth and nibbāna all depend on virtue.

silam loke anuttaram

Virtue is unexcelled in the world.

candanādinariṃ gandhānariṃ sīla-gandho anuttaro

Among all scents, such as sandalwood, the scent of virtue is supreme.

sīlo rahado akuddamo

Virtue is like a limpid pool.

sukham yāva jarā sīlaṃ

Virtue brings happiness to the end of old age.

sīlaṃ yāva jarā sādhu

Virtue is good to the end of old age.

Thus all who aspire to goodness that is limpid and pure should be diligent in nourishing their virtues to the full with the four sublime attitudes. Having done this, whoever then aspires to the middle part of the path—concentration—will attain quick results.

This ends the discussion of the fifth topic.

Concentration: Questions & Answers

1. *How does one go about practicing concentration?*
2. *What benefits come from practicing it?*
3. *How many kinds of concentration are there?*
4. *What is needed for concentration to be maintained?*
5. *What is the essence of concentration?*

1. The first question—“How does one go about practicing concentration?”—can be answered as follows: The first step is to kneel down with your hands palm-to-palm in front of your heart, and sincerely pay respect to the Triple Gem, saying as follows:

Arahaṃ sammā-sambuddho bhagavā

Buddhaṃ bhagavantam abhivādemi (bow down)

Svākkhāto bhagavatā dhammo

Dhammaṃ namassāmi (bow down)

Supaṭipanno bhagavato sāvaka-saṅgho

Saṅghaṃ namāmi (bow down)

Then showing respect with your thoughts, words, and deeds, pay homage to the Buddha:

Namo tassa bhagavato arahato sammā-sambuddhassa (three times)

And then take refuge in the Triple Gem:

Buddhaṃ saraṇaṃ gacchāmi

Dhammaṃ saraṇaṃ gacchāmi
Saṅghaṃ saraṇaṃ gacchāmi

Dutiyampi Buddhaṃ saraṇaṃ gacchāmi
Dutiyampi Dhammaṃ saraṇaṃ gacchāmi
Dutiyampi Saṅghaṃ saraṇaṃ gacchāmi

Tatīyampi Buddhaṃ saraṇaṃ gacchāmi
Tatīyampi Dhammaṃ saraṇaṃ gacchāmi
Tatīyampi Saṅghaṃ saraṇaṃ gacchāmi

Make the following resolution: “I take refuge in the Buddha, the Pure One, completely free from defilement; and in his Dhamma—doctrine, practice, and attainment; and in the Saṅgha, the four levels of his noble disciples, from now until the end of my life.” Then formulate the intention to observe the five, eight, or ten precepts—according to how many you are normally able to observe—expressing them in a single vow. For those observing the five precepts:

Imāni pañca sikkhāpadāni samādiyāmi (three times)

For those observing the eight precepts:
Imāni aṭṭha sikkhāpadāni samādiyāmi (three times)

For those observing the ten precepts:
Imāni dasa sikkhāpadāni samādiyāmi (three times)

For those observing the 227 precepts:
Parisuddho ahaṃ bhante parisuddhoti maṃ
buddho dhammo saṅgho dhāretu

Now that you have professed the purity of your thoughts, words, and deeds toward the qualities of the Buddha, Dhamma, and Saṅgha, bow down three times and sit down. Place your hands palm-to-palm in front of your heart, steady your thoughts, and develop the four sublime attitudes: good will, compassion, empathetic joy, and equanimity. To spread these thoughts to all living beings without distinction is called the immeasurable sublime attitude. A short preliminary Pali formula for those who have trouble memorizing is:

“*Mettā*”—thoughts of good will (good will and benevolence for oneself and others, hoping for their welfare),

“*Karuṇā*”—thoughts of compassion (for oneself and others),

“*Muditā*”—thoughts of empathetic joy (taking delight in one’s own goodness and that of others),

“*Upekkhā*”—thoughts of equanimity (imperturbability with regard to those things that should be let go).

This finished, sit in a half-lotus position, right leg on top of the left, your hands placed palm-up on your lap, right hand on top of the left. Keep your body straight and your mind, firm and unwavering, on the task before you. Raise your hands in respect, palm-to-palm in front of the heart, and think of the

qualities of the Buddha, Dhamma, and Saṅgha: *buddho me nātho, dhammo me nātho, saṅgho me nātho* (The Buddha, Dhamma, and Saṅgha are my mainstay). Then repeat, *buddho buddho, dhammo dhammo, saṅgho saṅgho*. Return your hands to your lap, and repeat one word—*buddho*—over and over in your mind, at the same time focusing on your in-and-out breath until your mind settles down into oneness.

These are the beginning steps in practicing concentration. If your persistence doesn't go slack, the desired results will appear in your heart. For people who are really intent, even just this is enough to start seeing results. Those who don't see results either aren't intent on what they're doing or, if they are intent, aren't doing it right. If you're intent and you do it right, you're sure to reap rewards in proportion to the strength of your persistence.

This ends the discussion of the first topic.

2. To answer the second question—"What benefits come from practicing concentration?"—A person who practices concentration benefits in the following ways:

a. The heart of a person who practices concentration is radiant, steady, and fearless. Whatever projects such a person may contemplate can succeed because the mind has a solid footing for its thinking. Whatever worldly work such a person may undertake will yield results that are substantial, worthwhile, and long lasting.

b. Whoever has trained the mind to be steady and firm in concentration will be solid from the standpoint both of the world and of the Dhamma. A solid heart can be compared to a slab of rock: No matter whether the wind blows, the rain falls or the sun shines, rock doesn't waver or flinch. To put it briefly: the eight chains, i.e., the eight ways of the world (*lokadhamma*)—gain and loss, status and loss of status, praise and criticism, pleasure and pain—can't shackle the heart of a person who has concentration. The five weevils, i.e., the five hindrances (*nīvaraṇa*)—sensual desires, ill will, drowsiness, restlessness, and uncertainty—can't bore into such a person's heart.

c. A heart made firm in concentration is like a tree with solid heartwood—Indian rosewood or teak—which, once it has died, is of use to people of ingenuity. The goodness of people who have trained their hearts in concentration can be of substantial use, even after they've died, both to themselves and to those surviving, an example being the Buddha who—even though he has nibbāna-ed—has set an example that people still follow today. A person who practices concentration is like someone with a home and family; a person without concentration is like a vagrant with no place to sleep: Even though he may have belongings, he has nowhere to keep them.

A person with a mind made firm in concentration, though, has a place for his belongings. In other words, all major and minor acts of merit and skillfulness come together in a mind that has concentration. A person without concentration is like a softwood tree with a hollow trunk: Poisonous animals, like cobras or crocodile birds, will come and make their nests in the hollow, laying their eggs

and filling the hollow with their urine and dung. When such a tree dies, there's no use for it as firewood. In the same way, the heart of a person who hasn't practiced concentration is a nest of defilements—greed, aversion, and delusion—which cause harm and pain for the body. When these people die, they are of no use except as food for worms or fuel for a pyre.

d. A person without concentration is like a boat without a dock or a train without a station: The passengers are put to all sorts of hardships.

Concentration is not something exclusive to Buddhism. Even in mundane activities, people use concentration. No matter what work you do, if you're not intent on it, you won't succeed. Even our ordinary everyday expressions teach concentration: "Set your heart on a goal." "Set your mind on your work." "Set yourself up in business." Whoever follows this sort of advice is bound to succeed.

But apart from mundane activities, whoever comes to put the Buddha's teachings into practice is sure to perceive the great worth of concentration. To be brief: It forms the basis for discernment, which is the central principle in the craft taught by the Buddha, the craft of the heart. "Discernment" here refers to the wisdom and insight that come only from training the heart. People who haven't practiced concentration—even if they're ingenious—can't really be classed as discerning. Their ingenuity is nothing more than restless distraction—an example being the person who thinks to the point where his nerves break down, which goes to show that his thoughts have no place to rest. They run loose, with no concentration.

People with responsibilities on the level of the world or of the Dhamma should train their hearts and minds to be concentrated. Then when the time comes to think, they can put their thinking to work. When the time is past, they can put their thinking away in concentration. In other words, they have a sense of time and place, of when and where to think. People without concentration, who haven't developed this sense, can wear out their minds; and when their minds are worn out, everything breaks down. Even though they may have the energy to speak and act, yet if their minds are exhausted, they can't accomplish their purpose. Most of us use our minds without caring for them. Morning, noon, and night; sitting, standing, walking, and lying down, we don't rest for a moment. We're like a man who drives a car or a boat: If he doesn't let it rest, he's headed for trouble. The boat may rust out or sink, putting all that iron to waste, and when this happens, he's in for a difficult time. When a person's mind hasn't been developed in concentration, it can create difficulties for its owner's body, as well as for the bodies of others.

Thus the Buddha saw that concentration can be of value on the level of the world and on the level of the Dhamma, which is why he taught it in various ways to the people of the world. But some people are deaf, i.e., they can't understand what concentration is about; or else they're blind, i.e., they can't stand to look at the example of those who practice, and so they become detractors and faultfinders, bearing ill will toward those who practice.

Those of us who hope to secure ourselves—on either the level of the world or the level of the Dhamma—should thus give firm support to the message of

the Buddha. We shouldn't claim to be his followers simply because we've been ordained in his order or have studied his teachings, without putting those teachings into practice. If we let ourselves be parasites like this, we'll do nothing but cause Buddhism to degenerate.

Thus people who train their minds to attain concentration are of use to themselves and to others; people who don't train their minds to attain concentration will cause harm to themselves and to others. To attain concentration is like having a strategic fortress with a good vantage point: If enemies come from within or without, you'll be able to see them in time. The discernment that comes from concentration will be the weapon enabling you to wage war and destroy defilement. Whatever is worthwhile, you will keep in your heart. Whatever is harmful, you will throw out. The discernment that comes from concentration will enable you to tell which is which.

These, then, are the benefits reaped by those who practice concentration, and the drawbacks suffered by those who don't.

This ends the discussion of the second topic.

3. To answer the third question:

a. There are two kinds of concentration, general (*sādharaṇa*) and exclusive (*asādharaṇa*). General concentration refers to the type of mental training found throughout the world and not restricted to any particular religion, Buddhism, Christianity, Islam, or Hinduism. All of these religions are based on concentration, which can thus be called "general concentration." Exclusive concentration is a type of concentration specifically Buddhist and not shared by other religions. When practiced, it gives rise to the transcendent states: the paths, their fruitions, and *nibbāna*. Thus it can be called "exclusive concentration."

General and exclusive, though can be understood in still another sense: General concentration means concentration that can be focused on any of your postures—sitting, standing, walking, or lying down. Exclusive concentration has nothing to do with your posture, but is done exclusively in the heart: You focus attention solely on the in-and-out breath, without getting involved in actions or speech; your attention is directed solely to the activities of the mind.

b. With regard to its levels, there are three kinds of concentration: momentary (*khaṇika*), threshold (*upacāra*), and fixed (*appanā*).

Momentary concentration can arise when you're intent on your work or when you see a visual object, hear a sound, smell an aroma, taste a flavor, when the body comes into contact with a tactile sensation, or a mental notion arises to the mind—as when you become firm in your repetition of *buddho*. When the mind becomes still for a moment under conditions like these, this is classed as momentary concentration. Momentary concentration is like a person diving down into a pond and then climbing up on to the bank when he resurfaces.

Threshold concentration: When you practice mindfulness immersed in the body (*kāyaḡatāsati*), mentally scrutinizing the parts of the body until you are struck by the fact that they are filthy and repulsive, simply compounds of the four physical properties of earth, water, fire, and wind: Thinking in this way is

termed *vitakka*, or directed thought; to know in this way is termed *vicāra*, or evaluation. The mind will then come to a halt, still and at ease for a short period, and then withdraw, like a person who dives down into a pond, resurfaces, and then swims around for a while before climbing up on to the bank. This is called threshold concentration because it comes on the verge of fixed penetration.

Fixed penetration: The mind is steady and firmly concentrated—paying no attention at all to sights, sounds, smells, tastes, or tactile sensations—being completely absorbed in a single mental notion. It takes shelter in a subtle preoccupation (*ārammaṇa*), and so is able to hide away from the five hindrances, although it can't yet kill them off absolutely. Even so, this is still termed fixed penetration because it can be entered for long periods of time, like a person who dives down to the bottom of a pond, resurfaces, and then swims around in all four directions, i.e., the four levels of *jhāna*.

All three of these levels of concentration are classed as general. They're practiced all over the world. The only form of concentration particular to Buddhism is transcendent concentration. Viewed from this standpoint, the forms of concentration are only two: mundane and transcendent. Mundane concentration is further divided into two sorts: that which is accompanied by the hindrances, and that which is accompanied by the discernment of liberating insight (*vipassanā*). Transcendent concentration is also divided into two sorts: that which has abandoned the five lower fetters (*saṅgyojana*) but is still accompanied by a number of the hindrances; and that which is accompanied by the realization of liberating insight, eradicating all the hindrances.

The three levels of concentration (momentary, threshold, and fixed) form the basis of discernment. Both mundane and transcendent discernment have to depend on one or another of these three levels of concentration, but concentration is not what constitutes Awakening. Awakening is accomplished by discernment. If discernment is lacking, no amount of concentration, however great, can lead to Awakening.

Once you have attained concentration, discernment can arise in dependence on one of two factors: an experienced friend makes a suggestion that sparks a realization of the opening leading on to discernment; or external events—sights, sounds, smells, tastes, or tactile sensations—strike the mind, which stirs for a moment and sets out to scrutinize them (this is called *vitakka* and *vicāra*) so as to ferret out an understanding in line with their truth. If you see that any of these two kinds of events give beneficial results, then fix your attention on them and keep after them, using the power of your discernment and ingenuity to gain true insight into their nature. But if you see that your discernment is still no match for them, focus back on the original object of your concentration. If you focus back and forth in this manner, you'll give rise to liberating insight; and once you've given rise to liberating insight, you will attain transcendent discernment, the understanding that will enable you to abandon once and for all your self-identity views.

Transcendent concentration derives its name from the discernment it gives rise to: The discernment itself is what constitutes Awakening. But for

discernment to be effective in line with the aims of the Buddha’s teachings, it requires the back-up and support of concentration.

This ends the discussion of the third topic.

4. The fourth question—“What is needed for concentration to be maintained?”—can be answered as follows: Concentration means for the mind to be firmly intent on a single preoccupation, but for the mind to be firm, it needs a footing to hold on to. In general, if your mind lacks a solid footing, nothing you attempt will succeed. Just as the body needs a shelter as a basis for its well-being, and speech needs a listener as a basis for being effective, in a similar way, the mind—if it’s to become trained and firm in concentration—needs a *kammaṭṭhāna*: an assignment or exercise. A *kammaṭṭhāna* is like medicine or food. To know the theme of your exercise is enough to start getting results in your practice of concentration.

Here we’ll first divide the exercises into two categories: external and internal. External exercises deal with sights, sounds, smells, tastes, tactile sensations, and ideas; the internal exercises deal with the five aggregates (*khandha*): physical phenomena (*rūpa*), feelings (*vedanā*), labels (*saññā*), mental fabrications (*saṅkhāra*), and consciousness (*viññāṇa*). If you’re alert and discerning, both categories—external as well as internal—are enough to achieve concentration unless you neglect to treat them as exercises. If you attend to them, they are all you need to attain concentration. But beginners, whose powers of discernment are still weak, should start first with the internal exercises. Start out by studying the body—“physiology from the inside”—by scrutinizing the four properties of earth, water, fire, and wind. People whose powers of discernment have been sufficiently developed can then give rise to concentration using any of the themes of meditation, whether internal or external.

The internal exercises should be done as follows: Focus on the properties of earth, water, fire, and wind that appear in the body. Don’t let your thoughts wander outside. Focus exclusively on your own body and mind, fixing your attention first on five examples of the earth property: *kesā*—hair of the head; *lomā*—hair of the body; *nakhā*—nails; *dantā*—teeth; *taco*—skin, which wraps up the body and bones. Scrutinize these five parts until you see that they are unattractive, filthy, and repulsive, either with regard to where they come from, where they are, their color, their shape, or their smell.

If, after focusing your thoughts in this way, your mind doesn’t become still, go on to scrutinize five examples of the water property: *pittariṇ*—gall, bitter and green; *semhariṇ*—phlegm, which prevents the smell of digesting food from rising to the mouth; *pubbo*—pus, decayed and decomposing, which comes from wounds; *lohitaṇ*—blood and lymph, which permeate throughout the body; *sedo*—sweat, which is exuded whenever the body is heated. Scrutinize these things until you see that—with regard to origin, location, color, smell and the above-mentioned aspects—they are repulsive enough to make your skin crawl. Focus on them until you’re convinced that that’s how they really are, and the mind should settle down and be still.

If it doesn't, go on to examine four aspects of the fire property: the heat that keeps the body warm; the heat that inflames the body, making it feverish and restless; the heat that digests food, distilling the nutritive essence so as to send it throughout the body (of the food we eat, one part is burned away by the fires of digestion, one part becomes refuse, one part feeds our parasites, and the remaining part nourishes the body); the heat that ages the body and wastes it away. Consider these four aspects of the fire property until you see them in terms of three characteristics, i.e., that they are inconstant (*aniccā*), stressful (*dukkham*), and not-self (*anattā*).

If the mind doesn't settle down, go on to consider the six aspects of the wind property: the up-going breath sensations, the down-going breath sensations, the breath sensations in the stomach, the breath sensations in the intestines, the breath sensations flowing throughout the entire body, and the in-and-out breath. Examine the wind property from the viewpoint of any one of the three characteristics, as inconstant, stressful, or not-self. If the mind doesn't develop a sense of dismay and detachment, gather all four properties together—earth, water, fire and wind—and consider them as a single whole: a physical phenomenon. That's all they are, just physical phenomena. There's nothing of any substance or lasting worth to them at all.

If this doesn't lead to a sense of dismay, go on to consider mental phenomena (*nāma*), which are formless: *vedanā*—the experiencing of feelings and moods, likes and dislikes; *saññā*—labels, names, perceptions; *saṅkhāra*—mental fabrications; and *viññāṇa*—consciousness.

Once you understand what these terms refer to, scrutinize the feelings that appear in your own body and mind. In other words, observe the mental states that experience moods and feelings, to see at which moments there are feelings of pleasure, pain, or neither pleasure nor pain. Be aware that, "Right now I'm experiencing pleasure," "Right now I'm experiencing pain," "Right now I'm experiencing a feeling that's neither pleasure nor pain." Be constantly aware of these three alternatives (the feeling that's neither pleasure nor pain doesn't last for very long). If you're really mindful and observant, you'll come to see that all three of these feelings are, without exception, inconstant, stressful, and not-self; neither long nor lasting, always shifting and changing out of necessity: sometimes pleasure, sometimes pain, sometimes neutral, sometimes a lot, sometimes a little, never satisfying your wants or desires. Once you see this, let go of them. Don't fasten on to them. Fix your mind on a single preoccupation.

If your mind still isn't firm, though, scrutinize mental labels next. What, at the moment, are your thoughts alluding to: things past, present, or future? Good or bad? Keep your awareness right with the body and mind. If you happen to be labeling or alluding to a feeling of pleasure, be aware of the pleasure. If pain, be aware of the pain. Focus on whatever you're labeling in the present, to see which will disappear first: your awareness or the act of labeling. Before long, you'll see that the act of labeling is inconstant, stressful, and not-self. When you see this, let go of labels and allusions. Don't fasten on to them. Fix your mind on a single preoccupation.

If your mind still isn't firm, go on to scrutinize mental fabrications: What issues are your thoughts fabricating at the moment: past or future? Are your thoughts running in a good direction or bad? About issues outside the body and mind, or inside? Leading to peace of mind or to restlessness? Make yourself constantly alert, and once you're aware of the act of mental fabrication, you'll see that all thinking is inconstant, stressful, and not-self. Focus your thoughts down on the body and mind, and then let go of all aspects of thinking, fixing your attention on a single preoccupation.

If the mind still doesn't settle down, though, scrutinize consciousness next: What, at the moment, are you cognizant of—things within or without? Past, present, or future? Good or bad? Worthwhile or worthless? Make yourself constantly self-aware. Once your mindfulness and alertness are constant, you'll see immediately that all acts of consciousness are fleeting, stressful, and not-self. Then focus on the absolute present, being aware of the body and mind. Whatever appears in the body, focus on it. Whatever appears in the mind, focus on just what appears. Keep your attention fixed until the mind becomes firm, steady, and still in a single preoccupation—either as momentary concentration, threshold concentration, or fixed penetration—so as to form a basis for liberating insight.

Thus for concentration or steadiness of mind to arise in a fully developed form and to be firmly maintained depends on the sort of internal exercises mentioned here, dealing with the body, feelings, labels, mental fabrications, and acts of consciousness. These are the foods of concentration. The four frames of reference (*satipaṭṭhāna*) are its guardian nurses. Whoever wants his or her concentration to be strong should nourish it well with this food. Once the mind has been properly nourished and put into shape, it can then be put to effective use.

This ends the discussion of the fourth topic.

5. The fifth question—"What is the essence of concentration?"—can be answered as follows: Concentration means for the mind to be firmly intent. To be firmly intent can mean either (a) intent on a mental prop or preoccupation, which is termed *appanā jhāna*, fixed absorption; or (b) intent exclusively on the mind itself, which is termed *appanā citta*, the fixed mind. The mind that's intent forms the essence of concentration.

If we were to put this another way, we could make a distinction between *cetanā samādhi*, concentration intent on concentration, and *cetanā-vīraṭi samādhi*, concentration intent on abstinence. In *cetanā samādhi*, the mind has cut itself off from external preoccupations through the power of concentration. In *cetanā-vīraṭi samādhi*, the mind is set on finding a technique for letting go of all preoccupations, both within and without. *Cetanā samādhi* means to be focused directly on the mind. In other words, the mind doesn't think of using any other way to straighten itself out. Simply focusing down is enough to repress the defilements, because we all are bound to have defilements intermixed in our minds, and the very mind that has defilements can cure the mind of its

defilements, without having to look for any other means—just like using heat to cure heat, cold to cure cold, or wind to cure wind.

For example, suppose a man is slightly singed by a small flame, but then is burned by a glowing ember or lantern flame: The pain from the first burn will disappear. Or suppose you feel a little chilly and have to wrap yourself up in a blanket: If you then get exposed to a bitter cold winter wind, you'll feel that the slight chill you had earlier didn't warrant getting wrapped up in a blanket at all. As for an example of wind curing wind: Suppose a person suffers a slight disorder of the internal wind element, causing him to yawn or belch a little bit. If he then suffers a violent disorder of the wind element, causing cramps in a part of his body, his yawning or belching will immediately disappear. In the same way, the mind can use defilement to suppress defilement. This is called *cetanā samādhī*. In *cetanā-virati samādhī*, though, the mind has to search for strategies both within and without, using a good preoccupation to cure a bad one, such as making reference to the ten themes for recollection (*anussati*).

The mind is what is intent; the intent mind forms the essence of concentration. The term "fixed mind" (*appanā citta*) refers to the mind that is resilient, firm, and uninfluenced by its preoccupations. In fixed penetration or fixed absorption, though, the mind is firmly implanted in its preoccupation, but is still in bad straits because it doesn't yet know the true nature of that preoccupation. It can't yet let it go. For the mind to let go of its preoccupations, you have to use discernment to keep after it, safeguarding it so that it doesn't move in line with them. Only then will the mind be on the verge of purity, in line with the statement, "The mind, when disciplined by discernment, is freed from all mental effluents."

For the mind to arrive at these two forms of concentration—which we have termed *cetanā samādhī* and *cetanā-virati samādhī*—it must first be disciplined by virtue. Concentration then disciplines discernment; discernment disciplines virtue; discernment disciplines concentration; discernment disciplines the mind. Once we are able to follow through with this, we are bound to see the true essence of concentration. Most of us, though, simply use virtue to discipline concentration, and concentration to discipline discernment, without using discernment to discipline the mind, which is why we get attached to our own views and our own way of doing things. This is called self-identity view (*sakkāya-ditṭhi*), the way of viewing things that leads us to latch on to them as belonging to us or as being the self. We don't let go and so get stuck on virtue, or stuck on concentration, or infatuated with our own discernment. We are drowned in a flood of views and opinions (*ditṭhi ogha*) simply because we don't know what lies at the essence of concentration.

To be able to know, we have to vary our practice slightly, by cleansing virtue so as to foster concentration, cleansing concentration so as to foster discernment, cleansing discernment so that our views are right, and then using that discernment to cleanse virtue and concentration once more. Once virtue and concentration have been made pure, we don't need to use discernment to cleanse them any further. We simply practice them as a matter of course, and use discernment to cleanse directly at the mind. The aspects of virtue and

concentration that are connected with groping at habits and practices will disappear, leaving just discernment working at cleansing the mind until it is steady and firm—but not firm in the preoccupations of concentration, though; firm in the preoccupations of discernment.

If we were to classify the mind at this stage, it is *appanā citta*, the fixed mind. As for concentration, it is momentary concentration. Momentary concentration is the basis for the tempered discernment of liberating insight. The mind can't stay long with any preoccupations, for it is constantly wiping them out, like the bubbles formed by rain on the surface of a lake: As soon as they appear, they vanish flat away, like a sea without the striking of waves. When discernment is tempered through the power of a fixed mind, the preoccupations of momentary concentration constantly disband and disappear, not letting the heart get caught up on them. This is termed release (*vimutti*): The mind is freed from all preoccupations, among them the effluents of sensuality, becoming, views, and unawareness. It becomes a mind beyond all effluents. Thus it is said,

*khīṇā jāti vusitaṃ brahmacariyaṃ
katarāṃ karaṇiyaṃ
nāparaṃ itthattāyāti pajānātīti*

which means, “The noble disciple discerns that birth is ended, the holy life completed, the task done. There is nothing further to be done for the sake of this world.”

So ultimately, when the practice of concentration reaches the true essence of the mind, discernment is attained.

This ends the discussion of the fifth topic.

The issues discussed here
people of wisdom should chew over well.
Chew them up fine
so they don't stick in your throat.
If they aren't well-chewed, they'll have no flavor.
If you chew them well, you'll know their taste.
Like eating:
If you have no teeth, you'll waste away.
If you don't crack open the Dhamma,
you'll end up in doubt
and won't get out and away from stress.
If you don't get release,
you'll only get to heaven.

The worthiness of our own actions
is what counts
both in the Dhamma and in the world.
So inspect this
and yourself,
thoroughly.

With this, *Training in Virtue* is completed.

Phra Ajaan Lee Dhammadharo

THE FOREST TEMPLE
SHRIMP CANAL
CHANTHABURI

PART II

The Craft of the Heart

When I first became aware of the conflicting views held by people who practice—and of how ill-informed they are—I felt inspired by their desire to learn the truth, but at the same time dismayed over their views: right mixed with wrong, some people saying that the paths and fruitions leading to *nibbāna* still exist, others maintaining that they have passed away and can no longer be attained. This latter belief is a particular cause for dismay, because a desire for the paths and fruitions leading to *nibbāna* is what has led us all to submit ourselves to the practice of the Buddha's teachings in the first place. If we don't have such a desire, we aren't likely to be especially sincere in our practice; and if we aren't sincere, our practice will be in vain as far as the benefits the Buddha intended for us are concerned, because the Buddha's sole purpose in teaching was to liberate living beings from suffering and stress. If we were to worm our way in as parasites on his religion, it would run counter to his compassionate intentions toward us. Ordinarily, each and every one of us aims for what is good, so we should take an interest in whatever factors may lead to release from suffering and stress. Don't let the Buddha's teaching pass you by in vain.

By and large, from what I've seen of people who practice, a great many of them train themselves in ways that mix right with wrong, and then set themselves up as teachers, instructing their pupils in line with their various theories about *jhāna*, concentration, *nibbāna*, and the stream leading to it. The lowest level are those who get so caught up with their own views and opinions that their teachings turn into wrong views—saying, for example, that we don't have enough merit to practice, that we've been born too late for the paths and fruitions leading to *nibbāna* and so have to give up our practice. (Opinions of this sort run the gamut from crude to middling to subtle.)

But no matter what level a person may know, if he doesn't know the hearts and minds of others, he'll have great difficulty in making his teachings effective and beneficial. Even though he may have good intentions, if he lacks knowledge of those he is teaching, progress will be difficult. The Buddha, whenever he taught, knew the capabilities and dispositions of his listeners, and the level of teaching for which they were ripe. He then tailored his teachings to suit their condition, which was why he was able to get good results. Even though he had a lot of seed to sow, he planted it only where he knew it would bear fruit. If he saw that the soil was barren or the climate harsh, he wouldn't plant any seed at all. But as for us, we have only a fistful of rice and yet we cast it along a mountain spine or in the belly of the sea, and so get either meager results or none at all.

Thus in this book, I have included teachings on every level—elementary, intermediate, and advanced—so that the reader can conveniently pick out the teachings appropriate for his or her own level of attainment.

In practicing meditation, if you direct your mind along the right path, you'll see results in the immediate present. At the same time, if you lead yourself astray, you'll reap harm in the immediate present as well. For the most part, if meditators lack the training that comes from associating with good people who are truly expert and experienced, they can become deluded or schizoid in a variety of ways. How so? By letting themselves get carried away with the signs or visions that appear to them, to the point where they lose sense of their own bodies and minds. Playing around with an external *kasīṇa* is a special culprit in this regard. Those who lack sufficient training will tend to hallucinate, convinced of the truth of whatever they focus on, letting themselves get carried away by what they know and see until they lose touch with reality, making it difficult for any sort of discernment to arise. For this reason, in this guide I have taught to focus exclusively on the body and mind, the important point being not to fasten on or become obsessed with whatever may appear in the course of your practice.

There are a wide variety of meditation teachers who deviate from the basic principles taught by the Buddha. Some of them, hoping for gain, status, or praise, set up their own creeds with magical formulae and strict observances, teaching their students to invoke the aid of the Buddha. (Our Lord Buddha isn't a god of any sort who is going to come to our aid. Rather, we have to develop ourselves so as to reach his level.) Some teachers invoke the five forms of rapture, or else visions of this or that color or shape. If you see such and such vision, you attain the first level of the path, and so on until you attain the second, third, and fourth levels, and then once a year you present your teacher with offerings of rice, fruit, and a pig's head. (The Buddha's purpose in spreading his teachings was not that we would propitiate him with offerings. He was beyond the sway of material objects of any sort whatsoever.) Once the pupils of such teachers come to the end of their observances, they run out of levels to attain, and so can assume themselves to be Buddhas, private Buddhas, or noble disciples, and thus they become instant arahants. Their ears prick up, their hair stands on end, and they get excited all out of proportion to any basis in reality.

When you study with some teachers, you have to start out with an offering of five candles and incense sticks, or maybe ten, plus so-and-so many flowers and so-and-so much puffed rice, on this or that day of the week, at this or that time of day, depending on the teacher's preferences. (If you can afford it, there's nothing really wrong with this, but it means that poor people or people with little free time will have trouble getting to learn how to meditate.) Once you finish the ceremony, the teacher tells you to meditate *arahantī*, *arahantī*, or *buddho*, *buddho*, until you get the vision he teaches you to look for—such as white, blue, red, yellow, a corpse, water, fire, a person, the Buddha, a noble disciple, heaven, hell—and then you start making assumptions that follow the drift of the objects you see. You jump to the conclusion that you've seen something special or have attained *nibbāna*. Sometimes the mind gathers to the point where you sit still, in a daze, with no sense of alertness at all. Sometimes you experience a bright light and lose your bearings. Or else pleasure arises and you become attached to the pleasure, or stillness arises and you become attached to the stillness, or a vision

or a color arises and you become attached to that. (All of these things are nothing more than *uggaha nimitta*.)

Perhaps a thought arises and you think that it's insight, and then you really get carried away. You may decide that you're a stream-enterer, a once-returner, or an arahant, and no one in the world can match you. You latch on to your views as correct in every way, giving rise to pride and conceit, assuming yourself to be this or that. (All of the things mentioned here, if you get attached to them, are wrong.) When this happens, liberating insight won't have a chance to arise.

So you have to keep digging away for decades—and then get fixated on the fact that you've been practicing a full twenty years, and so won't stand for it if anyone comes along and thinks he's better than you. So, out of fear that others will look down on you, you become even more stubborn and proud, and that's as far as your knowledge and ingenuity will get you.

When it comes to actual attainment, some people of this sort haven't even brought the Triple Gem into their hearts. Of course, there are probably many people who know better than this. I don't mean to cast aspersions on those who know.

For this reason, I have drawn up this book in line with what I have studied and practiced. If you see that this might be the path you are looking for, give it a good look. My teacher didn't teach like the examples mentioned above. He taught in line with what was readily available, without requiring that you had to offer five incense sticks or ten candles or a pig's head or puffed rice or flowers or whatever. Whether you were rich or poor, all he asked was that you have conviction in the Buddha and a willingness to practice his teachings. If you wanted to make an offering, some candles and incense as an offering to the Triple Gem would do—one candle if you had one, two if you had two; if you didn't have any, you could dedicate your life instead. Then he would have you repeat the formula for taking refuge in the Triple Gem as in the method given in this book. His approach to teaching in this way has always struck me as conducive to the practice.

I've been practicing for a number of years now, and what I've observed all along has led me to have a sense of pity, both for myself and for my fellow human beings. If we practice along the right lines, we may very likely attain the benefits we hope for quickly. We'll gain knowledge that will make us marvel at the good that comes from the practice of meditation, or we may even see the paths and fruitions leading to *nibbāna* in this present life—because *nibbāna* is always present. It lacks only the people who will uncover it within themselves. Some people don't know how; others know, but aren't interested—and have mistaken assumptions about it to boot: thinking, for example, that *nibbāna* is extinct, doesn't exist, can't be attained, is beyond the powers of people in the present day; saying that since we aren't noble disciples, how could we possibly attain it. This last is especially deluded. If we were already good, already noble disciples, what purpose would we have in going around trying to attain *nibbāna*?

If we don't despise the Buddha's teachings, then we can all practice them. But the truth of the matter is that though we worship the Dhamma, we don't practice the Dhamma, which is the same as despising it. If we feel well-enough

situated in the present, we may tell ourselves that we can wait to practice the Dhamma in our next lifetime, or at least anytime but right now. Or we may take our defilements as an excuse, saying that we'll have to abandon greed, anger, and delusion before we can practice the Buddha's teachings. Or else we take our work as an excuse, saying that we'll have to stop working first. Actually, there's no reason that meditation should get in the way of our work, because it's strictly an activity of the heart. There's no need to dismantle our homes or abandon our belongings before practicing it; and if we did throw away our belongings in this way, it would probably end up causing harm.

Even though it's true that we love ourselves, yet if we don't work for our own benefit—if we vacillate and hesitate, loading ourselves down with ballast and bricks—we make our days and nights go to waste. So we should develop and perfect the factors that bring about the paths and fruitions leading to *nibbāna*: virtue, concentration, and discernment. If you're interested, then examine the procedures explained in the following sections. Pick out whichever section seems to correspond to your own level and abilities, and take that as your guide.

As for myself, I was first attracted to the Buddha's teachings by his statement that to lay claim to physical and mental phenomena as our own is suffering. After considering his teaching that the body is *anattā*—not-self—I began to be struck by a sense of dismay over the nature of the body. I examined it to see in what way it was not-self, and—as far as my understanding allowed—the Buddha's teaching began to make very clear sense to me. I considered how the body arises, is sustained and passes away, and I came to the conclusion that:

(1) it arises from *upādāna*—clinging through mistaken assumptions—which forms the essence of *kamma*.

(2) It is sustained by nourishment provided by our parents; and since our parents have nothing of their own with which to nourish us, they have to search for food—two-footed animals, four-footed animals, animals in the water, and animals on land—either buying this food or else killing it on their own and then feeding it to us. The animals abused in this way are bound to curse and seek revenge against those who kill and eat them, just as we are possessive of our belongings and seek revenge against those who rob us.

Those who don't know the truth of the body take it to be the self, but after considering the diseases we suffer in our eyes, ears, nose, tongue, and throughout the various parts of the body, I concluded that we've probably been cursed by the animals we've eaten, because all of these parts come from the food we've made of their bodies. And so our body, cursed in this way, suffers pain with no recourse for begging mercy. Thus, victim to the spirits of these animals, we suffer pains in the eyes, pains in the ears, pains in the nose and tongue and throughout the body, until in the end we have to relinquish the whole thing so they can eat it all up. Even while we're still living, some of them—like mosquitoes and sand flies—come and try to take it by force. If we don't let go of our attachments to the body, we're bound to suffer for many lives to come. This is one reason why I felt attracted to the Buddha's teachings on not-self.

(3) The body passes away from being denied nourishment. The fact that this happens to us is without a doubt a result of our past actions. We've probably been harsh with other living beings, denying them food to the point where they've had to part with the bodies they feel such affection for. When the results of such actions reach fruition, our bodies will have to break up and disband in the same way.

Considering things in this manner caused me to feel even more attracted to the practical methods recommended by the Buddha for seeing not-self and letting go of our clinging assumptions so that we no longer have to be possessive of the treasures claimed by ignorant and fixated animals. If we persist in holding on to the body as our own, it's the same as cheating others of their belongings, turning them into our own flesh and blood and then, forgetting where these things came from, latching on to them as our very own. When this happens, we're like a child who, born in one family and then taken and raised in another family with a different language, is sure to forget his original language and family name. If someone comes along and calls him by his original name, he most likely won't stand for it, because of his ignorance of his own origins. So it is with the body: Once it has grown, we latch on to it, assuming it to be the self. We forget its origins and so become drugged, addicted to physical and mental phenomena, enduring pain for countless lifetimes.

These thoughts are what led me to start practicing the teachings of the Buddha so as to liberate myself from this mass of suffering and stress.

Thus those of us who are still undeveloped and at a tender age should practice the Dhamma in line with the strength of their understanding.

If there is anything defective or incomplete in what I have written, or if there are any passages that don't rest well on your ears, please make corrections in line with the aims of the Blessed One, the Lord Buddha.

How to Practice Concentration

The first step is to kneel down with your hands palm-to-palm in front of your heart and sincerely pay respect to the Triple Gem, saying as follows:

Arahaṃ sammā-sambuddho bhagavā
Buddhaṃ bhagavantam abhivādemi (bow down)

Svākkhāto bhagavatā dhammo
Dhammaṃ namassāmi (bow down)

Supaṭipanno bhagavato sāvaka-saṅgho
Saṅghaṃ namāmi (bow down)

Then, showing respect with your thoughts, words, and deeds, pay homage to the Buddha:

Namo tassa bhagavato arahato sammā-sambuddhassa (three times)

And then take refuge in the Triple Gem:

Buddhaṃ saraṇaṃ gacchāmi
Dhammaṃ saraṇaṃ gacchāmi
Saṅghaṃ saraṇaṃ gacchāmi

Dutiyampi Buddhaṃ saraṇaṃ gacchāmi
Dutiyampi Dhammaṃ saraṇaṃ gacchāmi
Dutiyampi Saṅghaṃ saraṇaṃ gacchāmi

Tatīyampi Buddhaṃ saraṇaṃ gacchāmi
Tatīyampi Dhammaṃ saraṇaṃ gacchāmi
Tatīyampi Saṅghaṃ saraṇaṃ gacchāmi

Make the following resolution: “I take refuge in the Buddha, the Pure One, completely free from defilement; and in his Dhamma—doctrine, practice and attainment; and in the Saṅgha, the four levels of his noble disciples, from now until the end of my life.” Then make the following vow:

Etena sacca-vajjena hotu me jayamaṅgalaṃ

which means, “By making this vow of truth, may the good fortune of victory be mine.” Bow down once. This ends the step of taking refuge.

The next step is to take the precepts—five, eight, or ten—and abstain from the five, eight, or ten forms of harm. If you already understand the precepts, you can formulate the intention to observe them using a single vow. For those observing the five precepts:

Imāni pañca sikkhāpadāni samādiyāmi (three times)

For those observing the eight precepts:

Imāni aṭṭha sikkhāpadāni samādiyāmi (three times)

For those observing the ten precepts:

Imāni dasa sikkhāpadāni samādiyāmi (three times)

For those observing the 227 precepts:

Parisuddho ahaṃ bhante parisuddhoti maṃ
buddho dhammo saṅgho dhāretu

If you know what is forbidden by the precepts, you can take them on your own and then go ahead and abandon any form of behavior that runs counter to the five, eight, ten or 227 precepts you’ve taken. Once you’ve examined your precepts to see that they’re pure, examine your heart. Once you see that it has entered the sphere of virtue and the Triple Gem, you should recollect the virtues of the Buddha, Dhamma, and Saṅgha—both mentally and out loud—so as to nurture a sense of conviction in the heart.

The Recollection of the Virtues of the Buddha: Repeat the following passage from the Canon, at the same time nurturing a sense of conviction:

Itipi so bhagavā araham sammā-sambuddho, vijjā-caraṇa-sampanno sugato lokavidū, anuttaro purisa-damma-sārathi satthā deva-manussānaṃ buddho bhagavāti

(He is indeed the Blessed One, worthy and rightly self-awakened, consummate in knowledge and conduct, one who has gone the good way, knower of cosmos, the unexcelled trainer of those who can be taught, teacher of human and divine beings, awakened, blessed.)

Then showing respect with body, speech and mind, pay homage to the virtues of the Buddha, saying, “I now ask to pay homage through practice to the three virtues of the Buddha: discernment, purity, and compassion. I ask to pay homage through practice in thought, word, and deed, without being negligent, as far as my alertness and abilities will allow, now and in the time to come. May the virtues of the Buddha appear in my life and heart: *Buddhaṃ jīvitaṃ yāva nibbānaṃ saraṇaṃ gacchāmi*—I go to the Buddha as life and refuge until reaching *nibbāna*.” (bow down).

The Recollection of the Virtues of the Dhamma: Repeat the following passage from the Canon, at the same time nurturing a sense of conviction:

Svākkhāto bhagavatā dhammo, sandiṭṭhiko akāliko ehipassiko, opanayiko paccattaṃ veditaṃ viññūhiti

(The Dhamma well-expounded by the Blessed One is visible here and now, timeless, inviting all to come and see, pertinent, to be seen by the observant for themselves.)

Then showing respect with body, speech, and mind, pay homage to the virtues of the Dhamma, saying, “I now ask to pay homage through practice to the virtues of the three forms of the Dhamma: doctrine, practice, and the attainment that appeared in the Buddha. I ask to pay homage through practice in thought, word, and deed, without being negligent, as far as my alertness and abilities will allow, now and in the time to come. May the virtues of the Dhamma appear in my life and heart: *Dhammaṃ jīvitaṃ yāva nibbānaṃ saraṇaṃ gacchāmi*—I go to the Dhamma as life and refuge until reaching *nibbāna*.” (bow down).

The Recollection of the Virtues of the Saṅgha: Repeat the following passage from the Canon, at the same time nurturing a sense of conviction:

*Supaṭipanno bhagavato sāvaka-saṅgho,
uju-paṭipanno bhagavato sāvaka-saṅgho,
ñāya-paṭipanno bhagavato sāvaka-saṅgho,
sāmicī-paṭipanno bhagavato sāvaka-saṅgho,
yadidaṃ cattāri purisa-yugāni aṭṭha
purisa-puggalā, esa bhagavato sāvaka-saṅgho,
āhuneyyo pāhuneyyo dakkhiṇeyyo añjali-karaṇīyo,
anuttaraṃ puññakkhettaṃ lokassāti*

(The community of the Blessed One’s disciples who have practiced well... who have practiced uprightly... who have practiced methodically... who have

practiced masterfully—the four pairs, the eight types of noble ones: That is the community of the Blessed One’s disciples, worthy of gifts, worthy of hospitality, worthy of offerings, worthy of respect, the unexcelled field of merit for the world.)

“I now ask to pay homage through practice to the virtues of the Saṅgha—eight when counted individually, four when counted in pairs—in whomever they have arisen. I ask to pay homage through practice in thought, word, and deed, without being negligent, as far as my alertness and abilities will allow, now and in the time to come. May the virtues of the Saṅgha appear in my life and heart: *Saṅgham jvitam yāva nibbānam saraṇam gacchāmi* —I go to the Saṅgha as life and refuge until reaching *nibbāna*.” (bow down).

Now sit down, place your hands palm-to-palm in front of your heart, steady your thoughts, and develop the four sublime attitudes: good will, compassion, empathetic joy, and equanimity. To spread these thoughts to all living beings without distinction is called the immeasurable sublime attitude. A short Pali formula, for those who have trouble memorizing, is:

“*Mettā*”—thoughts of good will

“*Karuṇā*”—thoughts of compassion

“*Muditā*”—thoughts of empathetic joy

“*Upekkhā*”—thoughts of equanimity

This finished, sit in a half-lotus position, right leg on top of the left, with your hands placed palm-up on your lap, right hand on top of the left. Keep your body straight and your mind, firm and unwavering, on the task before you. Raise your hands in respect, palm-to-palm in front of the heart, and think of the qualities of the Buddha, Dhamma, and Saṅgha: *Buddho me nātho, dhammo me nātho, saṅgho me nātho* (The Buddha, Dhamma, and Saṅgha are my mainstay). Then repeat, *Buddho buddho, dhammo dhammo, saṅgho saṅgho*. Return your hands to your lap and repeat one word—*Buddho*—over and over in your mind, at the same time making yourself conscious of your in-and-out breath.

These are the beginning steps in practicing concentration. If you’re steady and persistent, the desired results will appear in your heart. For people who are really intent, even just this is enough to start seeing results. But by and large, most meditators want to know the results before they’ve assembled the causes. Yet even if you know about the results in this way, they’re nothing more than concepts or names, and so there’s nothing extraordinary about them. So at this point I’ve given just the preliminary steps. Discussions have been saved for the following sections. If they were included in this section, beginners would be overwhelmed and wouldn’t be able to pick out what they needed. Thus people who are intent on practicing should make a note of just this much to begin with. Then if anything arises in the course of your practice, you can refer to the discussions given below.

On Taking Refuge in the Triple Gem

The Triple Gem is a potent refuge for those who have firm faith in it and make it arise in their thoughts, words, and deeds—i.e., for those who make the virtues of the Buddha, Dhamma, and Saṅgha actually appear in their hearts. Most people at present take refuge only in the shadow of the Buddha, by worshipping a Buddha image. The Dhamma they take refuge in is simply the thought of the scriptures, with hardly any notion of practicing to the point of attainment. The Saṅgha they take refuge in is simply the sight of shaven heads and yellow robes. If this is the extent of our refuge, it won't be able to protect us from falling into the realms of deprivation. Thus those who really believe in the Triple Gem should make its qualities reach their hearts if their faith is to be firm and not blind.

Most people at present tend to overlook the virtues of the Triple Gem because their ears are pricked for the latest news of amulets and protective charms. At the drop of a hat, they forget the Triple Gem, their eyes light up, their hair stands on end, and they get all excited like the rabbit who went running around because he thought the sky was falling.

Those who have firm and proper faith in the Triple Gem, though, will truly be able to ward off the dangers that cause them worry and dread. In terms of the future, those who have brought the qualities of the Triple Gem firmly into their hearts will have a superior refuge that will absolutely insure them against rebirth in any of the four realms of deprivation, as stated in the verse from the Mahāsamaya Sutta that reads: "Those who have reached the refuge of the Buddha (in the virtues of their hearts) will not go to the realms of deprivation (i.e., rebirth as a denizen of hell, as a hungry shade, a demon, or a common animal). When they have abandoned the human body, they will fill the ranks of the gods."

If we are truly convinced of the Triple Gem, we shouldn't give credence to external objects that are assumed to be sacred without any basis in reason. If we close our eyes and simply follow the crowd, we could very well make our inner refuge in the Triple Gem corrode away. Our hearts will have no principles to serve as a firm foundation and so will be prey to doubts and distraction, easily deceived and led astray.

Those who depend on the Triple Gem as their refuge will be gentle in word and deed. Their thoughts will refer to their refuge as a constant theme, at the same time pondering the truth of their condition: "We are born because of our actions, live because of our actions, die because of our actions. If we do good we will meet with good; if we do evil, we will meet with evil. No one else can come and provide for our fate." When we develop this theme constantly, convinced of its truth, it is as if we were repeating an invincible protective spell. This qualifies as one kind of foundation that Buddhism provides for the heart.

On the Four Immeasurable Sublime Attitudes

Mettā: Develop thoughts of love and good will, hoping for your own happiness and that of others. This is like a fortress wall or a cardinal point.

Karuṇā: Develop thoughts of compassion toward yourself and others, aiming at helping yourself and others gain release from all forms of suffering and pain. This is another wall or cardinal point.

Muditā: Develop thoughts of empathetic joy, taking delight in the happiness you experience and in that experienced by others. This is another fortress wall or cardinal point.

Upekkhā: Develop equanimity, keeping your mind unruffled when your activities or those of others fail or lead to trouble in ways that are beyond your power to help. Keep watch over your mind to prevent it from being upset or defiled in any way. This doesn't mean being cold or hard-hearted. If you can be of help, you should offer what help you can. Develop equanimity only in those cases that are beyond help.

For these sublime attitudes to be fully developed, they must pervade your thoughts, words, and deeds. Only then will they be effective. Good will expressed in your deeds is like a wall one league thick; good will expressed in your words is still another league; good will expressed in your thoughts is still another league: altogether, three leagues thick. With compassion another three leagues, empathetic joy another three, and equanimity still another, you have a wall twelve leagues thick. When your thoughts, words, and deeds are protected on all sides in this manner, what do you have to fear?

This, of course, is simply an analogy. If you actually develop these qualities within yourself, you will see for yourself exactly how valuable they are. When your heart is free from fear, it will be able to reach concentration quickly and easily.

On Radiating the Sublime Attitudes

If you want to, you can radiate thoughts of good will, etc., in extended form, either in Pali or in translation. Your thoughts should be directed in two directions: inwardly and outwardly.

Inwardly: Radiating good will, compassion, and empathetic joy to yourself means to do no evil, to take pity on yourself by abandoning evil, and to be appreciative of the aims of virtue and morality. To develop equanimity toward yourself means to be unruffled when the occasion calls for it. For instance, when you're ill and have done all you can to treat the illness, you should then limit your attention to the goodness in the heart.

Outwardly: To radiate thoughts of good will, etc., to others can be done in two ways: (a) radiating such thoughts specifically to those you know and love—your parents, teachers, relatives, and close friends; and (b) radiating such thoughts in general to all living beings of all kinds, without specifying anyone in particular: seeing that we are all alike in having bodies and minds and in feeling pain, and so

radiating thoughts of good will throughout the three realms—the sensual realm, the realm of form, and the realm of formlessness—without making distinctions or drawing lines. To radiate good will in this way is very powerful and gives the mind enormous strength.

The extended formula, in Pali and in translation, is as follows:

Ahaṃ sukhito homi (May I be happy.)
Niddukkho homi (May I be free from stress and pain.)
Avero homi (May I be free from animosity.)
Abyāpajjho homi (May I free from oppression.)
Aniḅho homi (May I be free from trouble.)
Sukhī attānaṃ pariharāmi (May I look after myself with ease.)

Once you feel complete good will toward yourself, you should share these feelings, spreading them to all others in general:

(Mettā)

Sabbe sattā sukhītā hontu (May all living beings be happy.)
Sabbe sattā averā hontu (May all living beings be free from animosity.)
Sabbe sattā abyāpajjhā hontu (May all living beings be free from oppression.)
Sabbe sattā aniḅhā hontu (May all living beings be free from trouble.)
Sabbe sattā sukhī attānaṃ pariharantu (May all living beings look after themselves with ease.)

(Karuṇā)

Sabbe sattā sabba-dukkhā pamuccantu (May all living beings be freed from all suffering.)

(Muditā)

Sabbe sattā laddha-sampattito mā viḅacchantu (May all living beings not be deprived of the good fortune they have attained.)

(Upekkhā)

*Sabbe sattā kammaṣṣakā kamma-dāyādā kamma-yonī kamma-bandhū kamma-
paṭisaraṇā*

(All living beings are owners of their actions, are heirs to their actions, born of their actions, related through their actions, and live dependent on their actions.)

Yaṃ kammaṃ karissanti kalyāṇaṃ vā pāpakaṃ vā tassa dāyādā bhaviṣṣanti
 (Whatever they do, for good or for evil, to that will they fall heir.)

This ends the formula for radiating the four sublime attitudes. To spread these thoughts without specifying this or that particular person is called developing the quality of immeasurability (*appamañña dhamma*).

If you have trouble memorizing the extended formula, you can reduce it to:

“*Mettā*”—thoughts of good will
 “*Karuṇā*”—thoughts of compassion
 “*Muditā*”—thoughts of empathetic joy
 “*Upekkhā*”—thoughts of equanimity

Or if you want, you can simply express these thoughts in your own words.

On the Rewards of the Four Immeasurables

The four immeasurable sublime attitudes are genuinely worth developing because they are qualities that soothe the hearts of living beings in general throughout the world—our parents, relatives, friends, companions, and all living beings of every sort. In addition, when the sublime attitudes are truly present in the heart, they can bring absolute respite from enmity, fear, and animosity. Thus the Buddha taught his followers: “Monks, when the release of the mind (from enmity, fear, and animosity) through good will is cultivated, developed, practiced often, used as a vehicle (leading to the desired goal), used as a foundation, nurtured unceasingly, made habitual, and constantly brought to mind, eleven rewards can be expected: One sleeps with ease, wakes with ease, and dreams no evil dreams. One is dear to human beings, dear to non-human beings, guarded by deities, and untouched by fire, poison, and weapons. One’s mind is easily concentrated and one’s complexion bright. One dies unconfused and—if penetrating no higher—is reborn in the Brahmā worlds.”

When a person acts, speaks, and thinks with good will, it soothes his or her own heart and is conducive to release from suffering. Those who develop these qualities as a constant practice will have the power to soothe the hearts of other living beings through the power of their good will. Thus to develop these qualities in thought, word, and deed is a genuine necessity for those who practice concentration.

In some places this practice is recommended only for those who are prone to anger. But as far as we are concerned here, you should practice this step first no matter what your disposition. If you *are* prone to anger, this practice will make it that much easier for you to concentrate your mind.

The four sublime attitudes have been compared to the four faces of Brahmā surveying the four directions, or to fortress walls on all four sides of the heart. Whoever develops them will free the heart from fear and danger.

The development of the four sublime attitudes is especially beneficial in connection with the performance of meritorious acts. You should give alms with an attitude of good will, observe the precepts with an attitude of good will, and practice meditation with an attitude of good will. When done in this way, your skillful activities will bring powerful rewards. Thoughts of good will are like clean drops of rain falling from the sky, refreshing and nourishing the grasses and trees. Such thoughts are desired by all human races. Thus if you hope to develop merit, you should examine your heart at all times to see whether or not it feels good will, so that whatever merit you may perform in thought, word, or deed will be truly conducive to future happiness.

The crucial element lies with the heart: If the heart lacks good will, you'll have a hard time protecting your words and deeds; but if the heart is truly benevolent, your words and deeds are bound not to be defiled. If words and deeds are defiled, though, they won't suffer the consequences of their defilement. The heart will. The heart is what reaps the results of all good and evil. This being the case, your next step should be to practice concentration so as to develop the heart.

On Practicing Concentration

Concentration should be practiced in a systematic and orderly way. The Buddha thus set down a civilized and flexible pattern of four postures, in line with what he himself had practiced: sitting meditation, standing meditation, walking meditation, and meditation lying down. When you practice concentration in any of these four postures, you are said to develop skillfulness through meditation. The Pali word for meditation—*bhāvanā*—literally means to develop what is good and worthwhile within the heart. Meditation is a duty for all Buddhists, lay as well as ordained. The skillfulness arising from meditation is the exclusive possession of those who do it. Those of us who believe in the doctrine, its practice, and the resulting attainments, should thus practice accordingly.

Sitting: Here we will review the basic method once more: Begin by formulating the intention to observe perfectly the five, eight, ten, or 227 precepts, in line with your position and abilities. Once you see that your virtues are pure, sit in a half-lotus position with your right leg on top of your left. Hold your hands palm-to-palm in front of your heart and call to mind the virtues of the Buddha, Dhamma, and Saṅgha as your refuge. Repeat the formula for the four sublime attitudes, then *Buddho me nātho, dhammo me nātho, saṅgho me nātho*, then *Buddho buddho, dhammo dhammo, saṅgho saṅgho*. Lower your hands to your lap and silently repeat a single word—*buddho*—in conjunction with your in-and-out breath as your mind's preoccupation.

Limit your attention to the body. Don't pay attention to anything outside. Focus on the physical properties present in the body—the properties of earth, water, wind, and fire—and then let go of these aspects, bringing your attention to the breath, coordinating *buddho* with its in-and-out movements. Make yourself fully aware. Only if you don't let your attention wander will you be true to the word "*buddho*," because "*buddho*" means one who is awake, mindful, and alert.

Standing: Meditate in the same way as above, simply changing the posture. Stand in a way that is composed and self-possessed, keeping your body erect and your mind firmly mindful of what you're doing. Place your hands down before you, your right hand covering your left. You may keep your eyes closed or leave them open, as you like. Focus your mind on *buddho*, keeping your attention restricted to the body and to your sense of immediate awareness until your mind is firmly established.

Walking: Walking meditation, termed *caṅkama*, is done as follows: Decide on a path as long, short, broad, or narrow as you like, making it level and even, with no ups or downs, so as not to interfere with your walking. You can walk fast or slowly, taking short steps or long, whichever is most comfortable. Hold your head on an even keel, neither lowered nor tilted back, and keep your gaze on the path before you. Place your hands down in front of you, as in the standing posture, and meditate in the same way as in the postures already mentioned.

Lying down: Lie on your right side, your right hand pillowing your head, your left arm placed straight down the side of your body. Don't curl up, lie on your stomach, or lie on your back: Lie on your right side. This is the posture of a noble person, brave, victorious, and virtuous; not the posture of a miserable person at his wits' end. Once you're in position, keep your mind on the repetition of your meditation word as in the other postures.

On the Four Postures

The purpose of meditating in four postures is simply to provide rest and relief for the body. The actual meditation exercise is always kept the same. No matter what the posture, don't let go of your original theme. Keep watch over your mind at all times.

Beginners, though, should devote most of their time to two postures: sitting and walking. Meditate in these two postures as much and as often as possible, and concentration will come easily. As for the other two postures, they aren't very conducive to collecting the mind. When you lie down, concentration can easily turn into sleep. When you stand, the mind has trouble settling snugly down. But once you're skilled and find that the posture is no obstacle in reaching concentration, there's nothing against your dividing your time in a balanced way among all four postures. And if you can meditate with every breath, so much the better.

Lying on the right side is called *siha-sayāsa*, the position of a reclining lion. Lying on the left side is called *kāma-bhogin*, the position of a person intent on sensual pleasure. To lie on one's stomach is called *tiracchāna-sayāsa*, the posture of dogs and other common animals. It's also called *moha-kiriyā*, an attitude expressing dullness and delusion. To lie on one's back is called *peta-sayāsa*, the posture of hungry shades, the posture of the dead, the attitude of a loser, of one who has let all his defenses down. A person who falls asleep in this position tends to let his mouth fall open, to breathe heavily, and to snore. Strictly speaking, though, none of these postures is ruled out. You can shift around as you like, to relieve feelings of weariness. But when you decide to meditate in earnest, you should return to the correct posture, establish mindfulness and then watch over the mind to keep it firm and uncompromising until it reaches concentration.

* * *

The techniques mentioned so far can lead the mind to any of the three levels of concentration: momentary, threshold, or fixed penetration. Concentration is a

tool for overcoming the defilements termed the five hindrances (*nivaraṇa*). The hindrances are the true enemies of concentration. They keep blocking the mind, preventing it from settling down and getting firmly established. When any one of them arises, the mind is unable to see the Dhamma. The fact that they act as obstacles, obstructing the mind from attaining the good, is why they are called the enemies of concentration.

The Five Hindrances

1. *Kāma-chanda*: sensual desires; an attraction to sensual objects. For the mind to be attracted to sensual objects, a sensual defilement such as passion must first arise within the mind, followed by longing, and then the sense of attraction for a sensual object. In other words, the mind longs for and falls for forms, sounds, smells, tastes, tactile sensations, and ideas, any of which can be either skillful or not.

2. *Byāpāda*: ill will. The mind formulates a desire for forms, sounds, smells, tastes, tactile sensations, or ideas, but is then thwarted and so feels ill will toward whomever it finds disagreeable. Thoughts of ill will are classed as a form of wrong view and wrong resolve, and thus are a hindrance.

3. *Thīna-middha*: torpor, drowsiness, depression, lethargy. Once this overcomes the mind, it prevents the mind from doing good and thus is a hindrance.

4. *Uddhacca-kukkucca*: mental restlessness and anxiety. The mind lets its attention stream out to take hold of external objects because it doesn't know the true nature of the senses and their objects or the techniques for holding its attention on a single meditation theme. This mental state arises from sensual desire in that the mind forms a desire that is then unfulfilled, and so it becomes anxious and restless.

5. *Vicikicchā*: uncertainty, indecision, a lack of conviction. The mind has doubts about its objects, unable to decide whether they are good or bad, right or wrong. Assuming right to be wrong, and wrong to be right, it is unable to come to a firm decision.

* * *

Techniques for dealing with the hindrances are as follows:

1. Sensual desires can be dealt with in three ways (taking sexual lust as an example):

a. Examine the object of your desires until you see that it's inconstant (*aniccam*), continually prey to disease (*dukkham*)—examine it until you see all the way to the fact that it's not your self or anyone else's (*anattā*). Even if you were to gain the object of your desires, you wouldn't hold any rights over it. Someday it would be sure to throw you away and leave you.

b. If the desire remains active, then focus on the repulsive aspects of the object, the aspects that are unappealing, filthy, and disgusting. See that it is full of disgusting things and is a dwelling place for worms and other parasites. No

matter how you try to dress up the body, you can't escape from its repulsiveness.

c. If the desire persists, then consider the true nature of the body until the mind realizes that it is just a compound of physical properties into which a deluded mind has strayed and taken up temporary residence, like a hermit crab moving from shell to shell: nothing with any truth or fidelity. Then forcibly focus the mind on a single meditation object until concentration of one level or another arises, and the desire will fade or disappear.

2. Ill will arises or becomes active when mindfulness is weak and you react unwisely or unthinkingly to whatever shows resistance to the will, giving rise to anger, thoughts of revenge, and ill will. When this happens, the following methods should be used to allay such thoughts:

a. *Mettā-nimitta-uggaha*: Give rise to thoughts of good will, either toward specific people or to all living beings in general.

b. *Mettā-bhāvanānuyoga*: Be intent on developing and radiating thoughts of good will, hoping for your own happiness and that of others.

c. *Kammassakata paccavekkhanatā*: Consider the principle of *kamma*, that all living beings are possessors of their actions and will meet with good or evil according to their actions. Make yourself see that ill will is a bad action and, since it's bad, who in the world would want it?

d. *Paṭisaṅkhāna-bahulatā*: Be increasingly circumspect and astute in applying and using these various techniques.

e. *Kalyāṇa-mittatā*: Associate with virtuous people who are kind and considerate.

f. *Sappāya-kathā*: Be careful to speak and think only of those topics—such as the development of good will—that are congenial and useful to yourself and to those around you.

g. *Sacca-dama*: Make the resolution that you will keep your attention focused on your own faults—in thought, word, and deed—and not on the faults of others. Keep your attention right at the heart, with the realization that ill will arises at the heart and so will have to be cured at the heart.

Each of these seven techniques can work very well in shaking off thoughts of ill will.

3. Torpor and lethargy can be overcome in the following ways:

a. *Atibhojanā-nimittakatā*: Don't eat heavily.

b. *Iriyāpatha-samparivatta-gahatā*: Maintain a proper balance among your postures of sitting, standing, walking, and lying down.

c. *Ālokasaññā-manasikāra*: Create in your mind an image of bright light appearing right before you.

d. *Abbhokāsa-vāsa*: Look for a place to stay out in the open air or in the forest, away from human habitation.

e. *Kalyāṇa-mittatā*: Associate with well-behaved friends in the holy life who aren't given over to lethargy or drowsiness. If you can associate with someone who has attained *jhāna*, so much the better.

f. *Sappāya-kathā*: Think and speak only of congenial topics—making the resolution, for instance, to observe the ascetic practices and perform other similar acts of good.

Torpor and lethargy can be overcome absolutely, once and for all, only with the attainment of the path to arahantship, but we have to start overcoming them step by step right from the beginning of our practice, using the above methods.

4. Restlessness and anxiety can be dealt with using the following methods:

a. *Bahussutā*: Make a habit of reading books and listening to others talk about the practice.

b. *Pariṇipucchā*: Make a habit of asking questions about what you have learned and experienced, and then put the answers into practice.

c. *Vinaya-pakataññutā*: Be knowledgeable and scrupulous concerning the precepts and practices you have undertaken.

d. *Vuddha-sevitā*: Associate with those who are mature in their virtue and circumspect in their knowledge and behavior.

e. *Kalyāṇa-mittatā*: Associate with friends you admire.

f. *Sappāya-kathā*: Speak of matters that put your mind to rest, e.g., of what is right and wrong.

Restlessness and anxiety are abandoned once and for all only with the attainment of the path to arahantship, but we have to start overcoming them step by step right from the start.

5. Uncertainty can be dealt with using the following methods:

a. *Bahussutā*: Make yourself well-read and well-informed concerning the practice.

b. *Pariṇipucchā*: Make a habit of asking questions of those who are experienced.

c. *Vinaya-pakataññutā*: Be expert with regard to the precepts and practices you have undertaken.

d. *Adhimokkha-bahulatā*: Work on increasing your enthusiasm for what is good.

e. *Kalyāṇa-mittatā*: Associate with good people.

f. *Sappāya-kathā*: Speak only of topics that will allay your uncertainty. For instance, discuss the virtues of the Triple Gem. (Uncertainty concerning the Triple Gem is abandoned once and for all with the first attainment of the stream to *nibbāna*.)

* * *

What all this comes down to is that the five hindrances all disappear when you focus on the body to the point where it becomes clear, and focus on the mind to the point where it becomes firm and resolute—because the hindrances arise right at the body and mind, and where they arise is where they should be dispersed.

The hindrances are an intermediate level of defilement. Only when the mind attains concentration to counter them are they overcome. They are also called the direct enemies of concentration. The indirect enemies are the five forms of

rapture (*pīti*), the meditation syllable, and visions—both those that arise on their own (*uggaha nimitta*) and those that are brought under the control of the mind (*paṭibhāga nimitta*). These phenomena, if you are wise to them, can foster the paths and fruitions leading to *nibbāna*. But if you aren't wise to them, you're bound to get wrapped up in them, and they will then turn into enemies of right concentration and discernment.

These are the intermediate enemies of concentration. The subtle enemies are the ten corruptions of insight (*vipassanūpakkilesa*). If, when any of these arise, your mindfulness and discernment are weak, you're bound to misconstrue them. You then let yourself get taken in and carried away by them, to the point where they seem unassailable in one way or another, finally leading you to believe that you have become an arahant. If you aren't wise to these things, you're bound to fall for them and won't be able to attain the highest form of good. For this reason, you should let go of all such knowledge in line with its true nature. Keep your powers of circumspection in firm place. Don't let these enemies come in and overcome your mind.

These various enemies will be discussed below, following the discussion of concentration, because they arise as phenomena following on the practice of concentration. Actually though, they're already present in the mind, but we're not aware of them until the mind is made firm. Once the mind attains concentration, they are bound to appear in one form or another, either as visions or as intuitions. And once they appear, we tend to get all excited and pleased, because we think that something new has happened. But if we understand that they've been there in the mind all along, we won't get carried away by them—or feel excited, pleased, or upset—and so they won't cause our concentration to deteriorate.

Before we make the mind firm in concentration, we first have to learn about the meditation exercises, because they are the objects of concentration. And before we learn about the exercises, we have to acquaint ourselves with our own propensities, because these propensities are like the factors causing a disease. The exercises are like the medicine for curing the disease.

The Six Propensities

1. *Rāga-carita*: a propensity to passion and longing.
2. *Dosa-carita*: a propensity to irritation and aversion.
3. *Moha-carita*: a propensity to delusion and superstition.
4. *Vitakka-carita*: a propensity to excessive thought and worry.
5. *Saddhā-carita*: a propensity to gullibility and snap judgments.
6. *Buddhi-carita*: a propensity to curiosity and reasoning things through.

These six propensities are associated with different thoughts and preoccupations—and the truth of the matter is that all of these propensities exist full-blown in the heart of every person. The nature of the mind, as long as it's still deluded, is to range around in these areas. We differ only in that our minds

2. *Vipassanā-kammaṭṭhāna*: insight meditation—techniques for developing discernment.

The objects of tranquility meditation, according to the authors of the various commentaries, number up to forty. But although they are many, they all fall into one of two classes—

a. *Rūpa-kammaṭṭhāna* : exercises dealing with physical phenomena;

b. *Arūpa-kammaṭṭhāna* : exercises dealing with non-physical phenomena.

“Physical phenomena” refers primarily to those phenomena that appear in one’s own body and in the bodies of others, i.e., the four basic properties of earth, water, fire, and wind, which taken together make up the physical body. Anything, though, that appears to the eye is made up of these four properties, and so belongs in this class as well.

“Non-physical phenomena” refers to those things that are sensed via the heart and do not appear to the eye, i.e., the four types of mental events (*nāma-dhamma*): *vedanā*—the experiencing of feelings pleasant, painful, or neutral; *saññā*—the act of labeling or identifying forms, sounds, smells, tastes, tactile sensations, good, and evil; *saṅkhāra*—mental fabrication, the forming of thoughts that are good, bad, or neutral; *viññāṇa*—consciousness of what appears to the senses of sight, hearing, smell, taste, touch, and ideation.

So, simply speaking, we have (a) the body and (b) the mind, or—as they are called in Pali—form and name (*rūpa-dhamma, nāma-dhamma*).

Methods for Attaining Tranquility

Use the body as a theme for attaining tranquility as follows: Focus on the properties of earth, water, fire, and wind that appear in the body. Don’t let your thoughts wander outside. Focus exclusively on your own body and mind, fixing your attention first on five examples of the earth property: *kesā*—hair of the head; *lomā*—hair of the body; *nakhā*—nails; *dantā*—teeth; *taco*—skin, which wraps up the body and bones. Scrutinize these five parts until you see that they are unattractive, filthy, and repulsive, either with regard to where they come from, where they are, their color, their shape, or their smell.

If, after focusing your thoughts in this way, your mind doesn’t become still, go on to scrutinize five examples of the water property: *pittari*—gall, bitter and green; *semham*—phlegm, which prevents the smell of digesting food from rising to the mouth; *pubbo*—pus, decayed and decomposing, which comes from wounds; *lohitarī*—blood and lymph, which permeate throughout the body; *sedo*—sweat, which is exuded whenever the body is heated. Scrutinize these things until you see that—with regard to origin, location, color, smell, and the above-mentioned aspects—they are repulsive enough to make your skin crawl. Focus on them until you’re convinced that that’s how they really are, and the mind should settle down and be still.

If it doesn’t, go on to examine four aspects of the fire property: the heat that keeps the body warm; the heat that inflames the body, making it feverish and restless; the heat that digests food, distilling the nutritive essence so as to send it

throughout the body (of the food we eat, one part is burned away by the fires of digestion, one part becomes refuse, one part feeds our parasites, and the remaining part nourishes the body); the heat that ages the body and wastes it away. Consider these four aspects of the fire property until you see them in terms of three characteristics, i.e., that they are inconstant (*aniccari*), stressful (*dukkham*), and not-self (*anattā*).

If the mind doesn't settle down, go on to consider the six aspects of the wind property: the up-going breath sensations, the down-going breath sensations, the breath sensations in the stomach, the breath sensations in the intestines, the breath sensations flowing throughout the entire body, and the in-and-out breath. Examine the wind property from the viewpoint of any one of the three characteristics, as inconstant, stressful, or not-self. If the mind doesn't develop a sense of dismay and detachment, gather all four properties together—earth, water, fire, and wind—into a single point and make that the object of your mental exercise.

All of the physical phenomena mentioned here should be examined in a way that makes the heart dismayed and detached. In other words, make yourself see these phenomena as disgusting and repulsive, or as inconstant, stressful, and not-self, not “me” or “them.” When you see things in this way to the point where the mind settles down and becomes firmly concentrated, this is called the development of tranquility (*samatha bhāvanā*).

All of the techniques mentioned here are for making the mind firm and still, and for strengthening your mindfulness. When you examine the aspects of the body in this way, you should refrain from repeating your meditation word. Only when the mind becomes malleable and calm should you focus on the most important aspect of the body—the in-and-out breath—together with the word *buddho*, so as to make the mind concentrated in a single place. Or, if you are more skilled at another meditation theme, focus on whatever is most convenient for you—but don't focus on any object outside the body, and keep watch over the mind so that it doesn't drag any outside matters in. Even if thoughts do arise, don't go latching on to their contents. If they're thoughts that won't aid in calming the mind, suppress them—and even once they're suppressed, you have to keep up your guard.

As for the four physical properties, when you've perceived any one of them clearly, you've perceived them all, because they all share the same characteristics.

Once you see that the mind has firmly settled down, you can stop your mental repetition and then fix your attention on the real culprit: The mind itself. When you fix your attention on the mind, keep everything focused down on your present awareness. Consider it in terms of the three characteristics—inconstancy, stress, and “not-selfness”—until the mind becomes dismayed and detached and reverts to its conditioning factor (*bhavaṅga*), i.e., its underlying state of becoming, which in this case is either the level of sensuality or the level of form. (See ‘On the Mind's Levels of Becoming,’ below.)

This is experienced in a variety of ways, either suddenly or gradually. The mind may enter this state for only a moment and then retreat, or else may stay there for a while. It may or may not be aware of what's happening. If your

mindfulness is weak, your mind will lose its bearings. If a vision arises, you may latch on to it. You may lose all sense of where you are and what you're meditating on. If this happens, your concentration becomes *moha samādhi*, *micchā samādhi*, or *micchā vimutti*—i.e., deluded concentration, wrong concentration, or wrong release. So when the mind reaches this level of tranquility, you should be especially careful to keep your alertness always strong. Don't lose track of your body and mind.

By and large, when the mind reaches this level, it's apt to lose its bearings and perceive visions. Perhaps we may decide beforehand that we want to see a vision, and so when the desired vision arises we feel pleased, latch on to it, and drift along after it. If this happens, we miss out on the level of concentration that's truly resolute, strong, and discerning—simply because a vision got in the way, preventing insight from arising. So for this reason, you should let go of your visions and make the mind firmly set, not letting it be swayed by anything at all.

Mental Phenomena as a Theme of Meditation

Anything not visible to the eye but experienced as a sensation of the mind is termed non-physical (*arūpa*). To use these sensations as a basis for tranquility meditation, we must first divide them into types, i.e., *vedanā*—the experiencing of feelings or moods, likes and dislikes; *saññā*—labels, names, mental allusions; *sankhāra*—mental fabrications; and *viññāṇa*—consciousness.

Once you understand what these terms refer to, scrutinize the feelings that appear in your own body and mind. In other words, observe the mental states that experience moods and feelings, to see at which moments there are feelings of pleasure, pain, or neither pleasure nor pain. Be aware that, "Right now I'm experiencing pleasure," "Right now I'm experiencing pain," "Right now I'm experiencing a feeling that's neither pleasure nor pain." Be constantly aware of these three alternatives (the feeling that's neither pleasure nor pain doesn't last for very long). If you're really mindful and observant, you'll come to see that all three of these feelings are, without exception, inconstant, stressful, and not-self; neither long nor lasting, always shifting and changing out of necessity: sometimes pleasure, sometimes pain, sometimes neutral, sometimes a lot, sometimes a little, never satisfying your wants or desires. Once you see this, let go of them. Don't fasten on to them. Fix your mind on a single preoccupation.

If your mind still isn't firm, though, scrutinize mental labels next. What, at the moment, are your thoughts alluding to: things past, present, or future? Good or bad? Keep your awareness right with the body and mind. If you happen to be labeling or alluding to a feeling of pleasure, be aware of the pleasure. If pain, be aware of the pain. Focus on whatever you're labeling in the present, to see which will disappear first: your awareness or the act of labeling. Before long, you'll see that the act of labeling is inconstant, stressful, and not-self. When you see this, let go of labels and allusions. Don't fasten on to them. Fix your mind on a single preoccupation.

If your mind still isn't firm, go on to scrutinize mental fabrications: What issues are your thoughts fabricating at the moment: past or future? Are your thoughts running in a good direction or bad? About issues outside the body and mind, or inside? Leading to peace of mind or to restlessness? Make yourself constantly alert, and once you're aware of the act of mental fabrication, you'll see that all thinking is inconstant, stressful, and not-self. Focus your thoughts down on the body and mind, and then let go of all aspects of thinking, fixing your attention on a single preoccupation.

If the mind still doesn't settle down, though, scrutinize consciousness next: What, at the moment, are you cognizant of—things within or without? Past, present, or future? Good or bad? Worthwhile or worthless? Make yourself constantly self-aware. Once your mindfulness and alertness are constant, you'll see immediately that all acts of consciousness are fleeting, stressful, and not-self. Then focus on the absolute present, being aware of the body and mind. Whatever appears in the body, focus on it. Whatever appears in the mind, focus on just what appears. Keep your attention fixed until the mind becomes firm, steady, and still in a single preoccupation—either as momentary concentration, threshold concentration, or fixed penetration.

These three levels of concentration are the results of the exercises you have done. Sometimes concentration arises from considering the body, sometimes from considering feelings, mental labels, mental fabrications, or consciousness. It all depends on which theme causes you to develop a sense of dismay and detachment.

All the techniques listed here are simply for you to choose from. Whichever method seems most suited to you is the one you should take. There's no need to practice them all.

The two basic themes for tranquility meditation mentioned above—physical phenomena and mental phenomena—are also called the five aggregates (*khandha*). Even though the five aggregates cover a wide variety of phenomena, they all come down to the body and mind. You have to keep your attention firmly established on the body so as to know its nature, and firmly established at the mind until you know your own mind thoroughly. If you don't bring things together in this way, you won't know the taste of concentration and discernment. Just like food: If you don't bring it together to your mouth and stomach, you won't know its taste or gain any nourishment from it at all.

Once you've gained concentration—no matter what the level—the important point is to be continually observant of your own mind. Be constantly mindful and continually alert. When you can maintain alertness on the level of momentary or threshold concentration and can keep track of these two levels so as to keep them going, they will gain strength and turn into fixed penetration, the level of concentration that's resolute, strong, and endowed with clear discernment.

When intuitive discernment arises, you will see how this one mind can take on birth in various levels of becoming, knowing that, 'Now the mind is on the sensual level—now on the level of form—now on the formless level.'

On the Mind's Levels of Becoming

1. A mind whose underlying preoccupation is coupled with sadness or pain is bound for rebirth in the four realms of deprivation.
2. A mind whose underlying preoccupation is coupled with a low level of pleasure and happiness is bound for rebirth on the human level.
3. A mind whose underlying preoccupation is coupled with a stronger level of pleasure and happiness is bound for rebirth in the heavenly realms.
4. A mind whose underlying preoccupation is coupled with the level of pleasure and happiness that arises from concentration—i.e., the strong sense of rapture that arises from *jhāna*—is bound for rebirth in the Brahmā worlds on the level of form.
5. A mind whose underlying preoccupation is coupled with a subtle level of equanimity, with no form appearing as the sign or focal point of concentration, is bound for rebirth in the Brahmā worlds on the formless level.

Thus the differing levels of tranquility can lead to different results.

All of this refers to the aspects of the mind that arise, decay, and disappear. These aspects arise through the power of two levels of concentration.

Two Levels of Concentration

1. Momentary concentration: the act of the mind's growing still for a moment, like a person walking along: One foot takes a step while the other foot stops still for a moment before taking the next step.

2. Threshold concentration: the act of the mind's settling down deeper than that, like a person walking along who meets with something and stops to look for a moment—with neither foot taking a step—before he resumes walking.

These two types of concentration are not without their dangers or enemies. If you're not proficient enough at them, they may deteriorate—or you may get hooked on them. The dangers that arise in the wake of these types of concentration are (a) growing attached to the meditation syllable, having no sense of when to stop repeating it; (b) being taken in by the five forms of rapture; (c) playing around with visions and signs that appear, regarding them as especially true or potent.

All of these phenomena, if you're wise to them, can help lead to the paths and fruitions leading to *nibbāna*. If you aren't wise to them and become attached to them as something special, the mind is sure to fall for the various forms of rapture and to start drifting astray. You might start behaving under the influence of what you see in your meditation or intimate to others that you have invincible powers or clairvoyant abilities. All of this can destroy your concentration. Your mindfulness and self-restraint will become weak and you'll drift along under the influence of whatever occurs to the mind—self-indulgent, dreaming, and drifting. These phenomena thus become your enemies, killing off the level of

concentration that's resolute and endowed with the discernment capable of seeing through all three levels of becoming.

This is why the above phenomena are termed enemies. When we begin meditating, though, we have to start out by clinging to these very same enemies. But in clinging to them, don't be complacent, because they're only a path. Ordinarily, when we walk along a path, we don't have to pull it up and carry it along behind us. We just leave it where it is. In the same way, the meditation syllable, rapture, and visions are things we have to pass through, but not that we have to latch on to—thinking, for instance, that we've already reached the goal.

On the Meditation Syllable

The meditation syllable used as a preliminary basis for concentration—*buddho*, *araham* or whatever—is something that eventually should be let go of. Once you see that the mind is firm, mindful, and ready to investigate, stop the repetition and fix your attention solely on the awareness of the knowing mind.

The Five Forms of Rapture

1. Minor rapture (*khuddakā pīti*): Your hair stands on end, and tears come to your eyes, either with or without your being aware of the fact. This happens, not through a sense of sadness, but through a feeling of pleasure, fullness, and satisfaction in a skillful preoccupation.

2. Momentary rapture (*khaṇikā pīti*): A shiver runs through the body, and a feeling of satisfaction appears for a flash in the heart, like a flash of lightning or the flicker of lightning bugs.

3. Recurrent rapture (*okkantikā pīti*): A stronger sense of thrill comes over the body, like waves washing over a shore.

4. Transporting rapture (*ubbegā pīti*): A sense of transporting joy comes welling up through the body to the point where you lose control and start acting or speaking in various ways. For instance, sitting in concentration, you may suddenly raise your hands in adoration or bow down. If the feeling grows really strong, you may not be conscious of what you're doing. You may start speaking, the words coming out on their own without any forethought on your part.

5. Pervading rapture (*pharaṇā pīti*): A flush or tingling sensation spreads through and permeates the body. Sometimes the body itself seems to grow and swell, or else to become very small.

When any one of these forms of rapture arises, you should keep your mindfulness firm. Don't let the mind be overcome by it. Keep your mind strong and unaffected. Don't lose your sense of your body and mind. Keep your words and actions firmly under control. Don't act under the influence of the feeling. If the sense of rapture comes in a gentle form, well and good; but if it comes in a strong form, and you let the mind be overcome by it, you can easily get hooked. Don't go assuming that you've gained this or reached that, because all of these

feelings are inconstant, stressful, and not-self. If you get fixated on them, the mind won't be able to attain good concentration. If you fall for them, they'll become enemies of your concentration and discernment.

Two Kinds of Vision

1. Acquired images (*uggaha nimitta*): Sometimes when the mind settles down, a vision of one sort or another may appear—a lump or a cloud of black, red, or white, etc.; a vision of one's own body or of a person acting in one way or another; a vision of the Buddha or of one of the noble disciples, or of heaven or hell—there's no end to what may appear. In short, when we sit with our eyes closed meditating, whatever images arise in the mind are classed as acquired images. If we see a good one, we tend to assume that it's a sign that we've attained a good level, and so we fasten on to it. If we see an unpleasant one, we tend to become fearful or upset.

So we should make ourselves wise to the fact that there is no truth to these visions. They're simply illusions, deceiving the heart. They come under the characteristics of being inconstant, stressful, and not-self. Their nature is to arise and then pass away. To latch on to them and take them seriously is a form of defilement and attachment, called *nimittupādāna*, clinging to signs. So if a vision arises, you should leave it alone. Keep conscious of your own body and mind.

Actually, these visions don't come from anywhere other than your own heart. To fall for them is like being duped by your own reflection. Just as when a bird is eating food and we show it its reflection in a mirror, it'll open its beak—out of greed or envy—and try to steal the food in its reflection's beak, dropping the food in its own beak, so it is with acquired images: If we latch on to them and take them seriously, good concentration and discernment will drop from our grasp.

This being the case, we should leave these visions alone. If we start making assumptions based on them, they will turn into a form of attachment and so become our enemies. If an ugly or frightening image arises, we may get unnerved. So no matter what sort of image arises, don't get involved in it. Remind yourself that there's nothing constant or dependable about it, that it's simply a camp-follower of defilement, attachment, and unawareness. Visions of this sort have also been termed *kilesa-māra*, the demons of defilement, tempting the mind to become fixated on their contents.

The important point is not to bring them into the mind, because our purpose in meditating is to train the mind to be pure. We're not trying to "get" anything at all. Focus on the body and mind, see your own body and mind, keep knowing until you know that you're free from defilement, suffering, and stress: Once you truly know in this way, you're on the right track. Everything else, you should let pass. Don't fasten or dwell on it.

2. Divided images (*paṭibhāga nimitta*): This means that you separate the image from the mind and the mind from the image so as to see the true nature of the image as inconstant, stressful, and not-self. If you can't separate things in this

way and instead get caught up in playing along with the vision, your mind will go astray from good concentration.

If you really want to know the mind, you have to get the mind out of the vision and the vision out of the mind. And before you can do this, you have to consider the vision from the standpoint of the three characteristics, as inconstant, stressful, and not-self. For instance, the various visions that appear can be small, large, broad, narrow, bright, murky, near, or far. This shows that they're inconstant. So separate the mind from them. The mind will then be freed from them, and you should then return your attention exclusively to the body and mind as before. As your powers of mindfulness become firmer and stronger, mindfulness will turn into fixed penetration. And when fixed penetration acquires enough power, you will be ready for the exercises of insight meditation.

Not everyone experiences visions of this sort. Some people have a lot of them; others never have any at all, or at most only rarely, because they're things that are inconstant and undependable. If the power of your tranquility is strong, there tend to be a lot of them. If the power of your insight is strong, they most likely won't appear. At any rate, the important point is that if you're constantly aware of your body and mind, you're on the right track. If you can be aware to the point where you know that your mind is released from its mass of defilements, so much the better.

Even if you don't experience visions, concentration still has its rewards. Even the lower levels of concentration—momentary concentration and threshold concentration—are enough to provide a basis for the arising of insight.

Jhāna

The highest level of concentration—fixed penetration—follows on threshold concentration. If mindfulness and alertness arise while you are in threshold concentration, they turn it into *jhāna*.

Jhāna means focusing the mind, making it absorbed in a single object, such as the form of the body. If you want *jhāna* to arise and not deteriorate, you have to practice until you are skilled. Here's how it's done: Think of a single object, such as the breath. Don't think of anything else. Practice focusing on your single object. Now add the other factors: *Vitakka*—think about the object; and *vicāra*—evaluate it until you arrive at an understanding of it, e.g. seeing the body as unclean or as composed of impersonal properties. The mind then becomes light; the body becomes light; both body and mind feel full and refreshed: This is *pīti*, rapture. The body has no feelings of pain, and the mind experiences no pain: This is *sukha*, pleasure and ease. This is the first level of *rūpa jhāna*, which has five factors: singleness (*ekaggatā*), directed thought, evaluation, rapture, and pleasure.

When you practice, start out by focusing on a single object, such as the breath. Then think about it, adjusting and expanding it until it becomes dominant and clear. As for rapture and pleasure, you don't have to fabricate them. They arise on their own. Singleness, directed thought, and evaluation are the causes; rapture and pleasure, the results. Together they form the first level of *jhāna*.

As you become more skilled, your powers of focusing become stronger. The activities of thought and evaluation fade away, because you've already gained a certain level of understanding. As you focus in on the object, there appears only rapture—refreshment of body and mind; and pleasure—ease of body and mind. Keep focusing in on the object so that you're skilled at it. Don't withdraw. Keep focusing until the mind is firm and well-established. Once the mind is firm, this is the second level of *rūpa jhāna*, in which only rapture, pleasure, and singleness remain.

Now focus on the sense of rapture associated with the grosser physical body. As the mind becomes more and more firm, it will gain release from the symptoms of rapture, leaving just pleasure and singleness. This is the third level of *rūpa jhāna*.

Then continue focusing in on your original object. Don't retreat from it. Keep focused on it until the mind attains *appanā jhāna*, absolutely fixed absorption, resolute and unwavering. At this point, your sense of awareness becomes brighter and clearer, causing you to disregard the grosser sense of the form of the body and to focus instead on the subtler sense of the body that remains. This leaves only singleness of preoccupation, the mind being unconcerned and unaffected by any external objects or preoccupations. This is the fourth level of *rūpa jhāna*, composed of singleness of preoccupation and equanimity.

When you become skilled and resolute at this stage, your concentration gains the strength that can give rise to the skill of liberating insight, which in turn is capable of attaining the noble paths and fruitions. So keep your mind in this stage as long as possible. Otherwise it will go on into the levels of *arūpa jhāna*, absorption in formless objects.

If you want to enter *arūpa jhāna*, though, here is how it's done: Disregard the sense of the form of the body, paying no more attention to it, so that you are left with just a comfortable sense of space or emptiness, free from any sensation of constriction or interference. Focus on that sense of space. To be focused in this way is the first level of *arūpa jhāna*, called *ākāsānañcāyatana jhāna*, absorption in the sense of unbounded space. Your senses—sight, hearing, smell, taste, touch, and ideation—feel spacious and clear, with no physical image acting as the focal point of your concentration. If your powers of discernment are weak, you may mistake this for *nibbāna*, but actually it's only a level of *arūpa jhāna*.

Once you know and see this, go on to the next level. Let go of the sense of space and emptiness, and pay attention to whatever preoccupation is left—but attention on this level is neither good and discerning, nor bad and unskillful. It's simply focused on awareness free from activities. This level is called *viññāṇañcāyatana jhāna*, absorption in the sense of unbounded consciousness. If you aren't discerning, you may mistake this for *nibbāna*, but it's actually only a level of *arūpa jhāna*.

Once you know this, make your focus more refined until you come to the sense that there is nothing at all to the mind: It's simply empty and blank, with nothing occurring in it at all. Fix your attention on this preoccupation with "Nothing is happening," until you are skilled at it. This is the third level of *arūpa*

jhāna, which has a very subtle sense of pleasure. Still, it's not yet *nibbāna*. Instead, it's called *ākiñcaññāyatana jhāna*, absorption in the sense of nothingness.

Now focus on the subtle notion that says there's nothing at all, until it changes. If you don't withdraw, but keep focused right there, only awareness will be left—but as for awareness on this level, you can't really say that it knows and you can't say that it doesn't. You can't say that it's labeling anything and you can't say that it's not. You can't yet decide one way or another about your preoccupation. The mind's powers of focused investigation at this point are weakened, because an extremely refined sense of pleasure has arisen. You haven't searched for its causes and, when you're in this state, you can't. So you fall into the fourth level of *arūpa jhāna*: *neva-saññā-nāsaññāyatana jhāna*, absorption in the sense of neither perception nor non-perception, a state in which you can't say that there's any act of labeling left, and you can't say that there's not.

So when the mind changes from one of these stages of awareness or points of view to another, keep close track of it. Be circumspect and fully aware of what it's doing and where it's focused, without letting yourself get caught up with the refined sense of pleasure that appears. If you can do this, you'll be able to let go of all *saṅkhāra dhamma*: all things fabricated and conditioned.

The four levels of *arūpa jhāna* are nothing other than the mind dwelling on the four types of mental phenomena (*nāma*). In other words, the mind starts out by getting caught up with a sense of pleasure and well-being that isn't focused on any object or image, but is simply an empty, spacious feeling (*vedanā*). This is the first level of *arūpa jhāna*. On the second level, the mind is caught up with the act of consciousness (*viññāṇa*). It's focused on an empty sense of awareness as its object—simply the act of consciousness happening over and over continuously, without end. This is called absorption in the sense of unbounded consciousness, i.e., being stuck on the act of consciousness. On the third level of *arūpa jhāna*, the mind is caught up with the act of mental fabrication (*saṅkhāra*), which merely arises and passes away. Nothing, nothing at all appears as an image, and the mind simply notices this over and over again. This is called absorption in the sense of nothingness, i.e., being stuck on mental fabrication. On the fourth level of *arūpa jhāna*, the mind is caught up with the act of labeling (*saññā*), seeing that it can't say that there is a label for what it has just experienced or is now experiencing, and it can't say that there isn't. Thus it falls into absorption in the sense of neither perception nor non-perception.

All four levels of *arūpa jhāna* have a sense of pleasure and well-being as their common basis. Beginning with the first level, there is an extremely fine and subtle sense of pleasure, but your understanding of it isn't true. What this means is that you can't yet let go of your understanding of it. You simply remain focused and absorbed in it, without thinking or evaluating to find out its causes. The mind at this point doesn't feel inclined to think or evaluate because the sense of pleasure is relaxed and exquisite beyond measure.

So if you want to gain release from all suffering and stress, you should practice focusing from one level of *arūpa jhāna* to another, in and out, back and forth, over and over, until you are skilled at it. Then investigate, searching for the causes and underlying factors until you can know that, "Here the mind is

stuck on the act of labeling—here it is stuck on the act of mental fabrication—here it is stuck on the act of consciousness.”

Consciousness is the underlying factor for name and form, or physical and mental phenomena. Physical and mental phenomena, by their nature, contain and cover each other. Once you understand this, focus on the form of the body. Evaluate it back and forth so that it becomes more and more refined until the mind is absolutely firm, absorbed in a single preoccupation, either on the sensual level [a sensory image of the body], on the level of form [the internal sense of the form of the body], or on the formless level. Keep the mind fixed, and then examine that particular preoccupation until you see how it arises and passes away—but don’t go assuming yourself to be what arises and passes away. Keep the mind neutral and unaffected, and in this way you will be able to know the truth.

The way in which the four levels of *rūpa jhāna* and the four levels of *arūpa jhāna* are fashioned can be put briefly as follows: Focus on any one of the four properties making up the sense of the form of the body (earth, water, fire, and wind). This is *rūpa jhāna*. The one object you focus on can take you all the way to the fourth *jhāna*, with the various levels differing only in the nature of the act of focusing. As for *arūpa jhāna*, it comes from *rūpa jhāna*. In other words, you take the sense of physical pleasure coming from *rūpa jhāna* as your starting point and then focus exclusively on that pleasure as your object. This can also take you all the way to the fourth level—absorption in the sense of neither perception nor non-perception—with the various levels differing only in the way you label and experience that pleasure. Or, to put it in plain English, you focus (1) on the body and (2) on the mind.

Rūpa jhāna is like a mango; *arūpa jhāna*, like the mango’s taste. A mango has a shape, but no one can see the shape of its taste, because it’s something subtle and refined. This is why people who don’t practice in line with the levels of concentration go astray in the way they understand things. Some people even believe that death is annihilation. This sort of view comes from the fact that they are so blind that they can’t find themselves. And when they can’t find themselves, they decide that death is annihilation. This is like the fool who believes that when a fire goes out, fire has been annihilated. Those who have looked into the matter, though, say that fire hasn’t been annihilated, and they can even start it up again without having to use glowing embers the way ordinary people do.

In the same way, a person’s mind and body are not annihilated at death. Take a blatant example: When a man dies and is cremated, people say that his body no longer exists. But actually its elements are still there. The earth is still earth just as it always was; the water is still water; the fire is still fire; and the wind, still wind. Only their particular manifestations—hair, nails, teeth, skin, flesh, etc.—have disappeared. What we supposed them to be has vanished, but the nature of the primal elements hasn’t. It’s there as it always was. People who have fallen for their supposings are sure to be shocked at death; those who have seen the truth, see death as nothing strange. It’s simply a change in the manifestations of the elements.

Our fear of death is based on our assumption that the body is ours. When it dies, and we feel that it's been annihilated, this only increases our fears, all because we don't know the truth of the body. And if we don't know the truth even of this crude body, we're ripe for all sorts of wrong views, such as the view that death is annihilation. If death is annihilation, then there are no heavens, no hells, no Brahmā worlds and no *nibbāna*. And if this is true, then the Buddha was even stupider than we are, because pleasure in the present life is something everyone knows enough to search for—even common animals know enough to look for food. So why would the Buddha have to exert himself to the point of sacrificing his life and mind for the sake of teaching other people?

People who believe that death is annihilation, who from birth have been led by necessity to search for a living from their environment, are like a person blind from birth who—when he gets older and his parents or friends take him by the hand and lead him into a cave—won't know whether he's in the cave or outside of the cave, because he can't see. And when he can't see, he'll think that everywhere is probably dark without exception. Even if they tell him that in-the-cave is dark and outside-of-the-cave is bright, he won't believe them, all because of his own darkness. In the same way, people believe that the body and mind are annihilated at death and that there are no heavens, hells, Brahmā worlds, or *nibbāna*, all because of their own darkness. Their knowledge hasn't penetrated into the real nature of birth and death. They see others speaking of the practice of virtue, concentration, *jhāna*, and discernment for the sake of ending becoming and birth, and they smile to themselves. "What a bunch of fools," they say. But actually they're the fools without their knowing it.

Those who have seen that death has to be followed by rebirth have seen that if defilement, craving, and unawareness still entwine the heart, rebirth will be endless. People who can't see this are bound to believe that everything is annihilated at death.

Our Lord Buddha was a sage, a man of wisdom endowed with virtue, concentration, and discernment. He was able to see that there is no annihilation—just like the expert surveyor who can look at a mountain spring and know that there's gold in the mountain.

"Look," he tells some farmers. "There's gold in the spring."

They go and look, but they don't see any signs of gold. All they see is water gushing out of the mountain. "That guy is lying," they think. "He must be out of his mind. He looks at spring water and sees gold."

But what's really wrong is that they don't know his craft. Those who see that death has to be followed by rebirth as long as there is unawareness (*avijjā*) in the heart are like the expert surveyor. Those who believe that death is annihilation are like the farmers who know nothing of the craft of searching for gold.

Those who want to see clearly into the nature of birth and death will first have to learn the craft of the heart. Directed thought, evaluation, rapture, pleasure, and singleness: These form the first skill in the Buddha's craft. To focus in until only rapture, pleasure, and singleness are left is the second skill. To focus in until only pleasure and singleness are left is the third skill. To focus in until only equanimity and singleness are left is the fourth. When you've reached this

point, you've mastered all the skills offered in that particular school, i.e., you've mastered the body; you've seen that it's just a matter of physical properties, unclean and repulsive, inconstant, stressful, and not-self. Some people, on reaching this point, don't continue their studies, but set themselves up in dubious professions, claiming to have special powers, to be fortune-tellers, or to know magical incantations, using their skills to make a living under the sway of delusion.

Those, however, who have the necessary funds—namely, conviction in the paths and fruitions leading to *nibbāna*—will go on to study in another school, *arūpa jhāna*, focusing directly in on the mind. For example: Right now, what are you thinking? Good thoughts or bad? When you have the mindfulness and alertness to know that a thought is bad, stare it down until it disappears, leaving only good thoughts. When a good thought arises, there's a sense of ease and well-being. Focus in on that sense of well-being. Don't withdraw. If you're going to think, think only of that sense of well-being. Keep focusing until you are skilled at staying with that sense of well-being, to the point where, when you withdraw, you can focus right back in on it. This very sense of well-being is the basis for all four levels of *arūpa jhāna*. They differ only in their viewpoints on it. Once you've focused on this same sense of well-being firmly enough and long enough to go through the first, second, third, and fourth levels of *arūpa jhāna*, you should then go back and review all the skills you've mastered from the very beginning, back and forth, until they become *appanā jhāna*, fixed absorption, firm and fully mastered.

Rūpa jhāna, once mastered, is like being a government official who works and earns a salary. *Arūpa jhāna*, once mastered, is like being a retired official receiving a pension from the government. Some people, when they've finished government service, simply curl up and live off their pensions without using their skills to provide themselves with any further benefits. This is like people who master *rūpa jhāna* and *arūpa jhāna* and then don't use their skills to gain the further benefits of the transcendent.

If you do want to gain those benefits, though, here's how it's done: Focus your powers of investigation back on your primal sense of the body and mind until liberating insight arises. The insight that acts as a stairway to the transcendent level is based on *jhāna* at the level of fixed penetration, focusing the mind resolutely to reach the first level of *rūpa jhāna*. Those people who have a good deal of discernment will—once the mind has attained concentration for only a short while—focus directly in on mental phenomena. In other words, they'll focus on the mind and investigate its preoccupation until they clearly see the true nature of physical and mental phenomena. The state of mind that clings to physical and mental phenomena will vanish, and while it is vanishing the "state of mind changing lineage (*gotarabhū citta*)" is said to arise. When the mind can know that "mundane mental states are like this" and "transcendent mental states are like that," that's called *gotarabhū-ñāṇa*, change-of-lineage knowledge, i.e., comprehension of *nibbāna*.

Here we're talking about people who are inclined to focus primarily on the mind, who tend to develop insight meditation more than tranquility meditation

and are not expert in focusing on the body. Their Awakening is termed release through discernment (*paññā-vimutti*). Although they don't develop all of the mundane skills that come along with concentration—i.e., they don't master all of the three skills, the eight skills, or the four forms of acumen—they still master the one crucial skill, the knowledge that does away with the mental effluents (*āsavakkhaya-ñāṇa*).

Those who tend more toward tranquility meditation, though, are in no great hurry. They develop all the levels of *jhāna*, going back and forth, again and again, until they're expert in both *rūpa jhāna* and *arūpa jhāna*. Then they return to the fourth level of *rūpa jhāna* and focus strongly on it, taking the features of *rūpa jhāna* as their object—their *uggaha nimitta*—and then manipulating them back and forth (*paṭibhāga nimitta*) to the point where their powers of mindfulness and alertness are firm. They focus until their minds are neutral and still, steady with a single object, uninvolved with any outside preoccupations. They will then be able to identify exactly how the features of *rūpa jhāna* and *arūpa jhāna* differ—and will realize that the fourth level of *rūpa jhāna* is the crucial one, giving the mind strength in a variety of ways.

When you reach this point, focus on the fourth level of *rūpa jhāna*. Keep the mind neutral and still, constantly focused on a single object. Focus on one spot as your frame of reference (*satipaṭṭhāna*), i.e., on the subtle sense of the body at this level, in and of itself. When you are strongly focused, a sense of brightness will develop, and a variety of amazing skills—either mundane or transcendent, depending in part on the power of your *jhāna*—will arise in the mind.

The knowledge and skills arising from *jhāna* can free you from all suffering and stress. But most of us, by and large, don't think of looking for these skills. We're interested only in those skills and forms of knowledge that will keep us tied to suffering and stress on and on through time. So those who aim for well-being that's clear and clean should train their minds to give rise to *jhāna*, which is one of the treasures of the noble ones.

The four levels of *rūpa jhāna* and the four levels of *arūpa jhāna*, taken together, are called the eight attainments (*samapatti*), all of which come down to two sorts: mundane and transcendent. In mundane *jhāna*, the person who has attained *jhāna* assumes that, 'This is my self,' or 'I am that,' and holds fast to these assumptions, not giving rise to the knowledge that lets go of those things in line with their true nature. This is classed as *sakkāya-diṭṭhi*, the viewpoint that leads us to self-identity view, the feeling that, 'This is me,' or 'This is mine.' This in turn leads to *silabbata-parāmāsa*, attachment to our accustomed practices, i.e., seeing *jhāna* as something of magical potency, that whatever we set our minds on attaining will have to come true. As for our doubts (*vicikicchā*) about the Buddha, Dhamma, and Saṅgha, these haven't been cleared up because we've been deflected, deluded by the things that occur on this level, and haven't gotten any further.

Thus whoever attains *jhāna* without abandoning the three fetters (*saṅgyojana*) is practicing mundane *jhāna*. Mundane *jhāna*, unless you're really expert at it, is the easiest thing in the world to lose. It's always ready to deteriorate at the slightest disturbance from sights, sounds, smells, tastes, tactile sensations, and ideas—

unless you're really proficient at it. Sometimes you may be sitting in *jhāna* and then, when you get up and walk away, it's gone.

As for transcendent *jhāna*: When you've attained *rūpa jhāna* and *arūpa jhāna*, you go back to examine the various levels until you are expert at them and then develop insight meditation so as to see mundane *jhāna* for what it really is. In other words, you see that the preoccupations of both *rūpa jhāna* and *arūpa jhāna* are inconstant, stressful, and not-self. Once this knowledge arises, you are able to let go of the various preoccupations of *jhāna*; and once the mind is set loose from *rūpa jhāna* and *arūpa jhāna*, it enters the transcendent level; the stream to *nibbāna*. It cuts the three fetters—self-identity view, grasping at practices and habits, and uncertainty—and is headed straight for *nibbāna*. When you have cut the three fetters, your *jhāna* is transcendent *jhāna*; your virtue, concentration, and discernment are all transcendent.

Once you have mastered these two modes of *jhāna*, they will give rise to the various abilities, mundane or transcendent, taught by Buddhism that differ from worldly skills in that they can arise only after the attainment of *jhāna*. Among these skills are the three skills (*vijjā*), the eight skills, and the four forms of acumen (*paṭisambhidā-ñāṇa*).

The Three Skills

1. *Pubbenivāsānussati-ñāṇa*: the ability to remember past lives.
2. *Cutūpapāta-ñāṇa*: the ability to know where living beings are reborn after death.
3. *Āsavakkhaya-ñāṇa*: the ability to do away entirely with the effluents of defilement.

1. The ability to remember past lives: First you have to be proficient in all four frames of reference (*satipaṭṭhāna*). Once your mindfulness is strong, you will know the truth of the body in the present. That is, you keep focusing on the body as it appears in the present until there appears the subtle image of the body that is constantly arising and falling away. You will then be able to know not only the present, but also the past and future of the body. With regard to the past, you will know back to the day it was conceived in your mother's womb. What it was like after the first day, the seventh day, one month, three months, seven months, nine... what it looked like, how it lived, what sort of food it consumed; and then as it grew one year, two, three, four, five all the way to the present: You'll be able to know the truth of the body. As for the future, you'll know how the body will change if you live to the age of thirty, forty, eighty, all the way to the day you die. If your knowledge on this level becomes great mindfulness, you will be able to remember back one lifetime, ten lifetimes, one hundred, one thousand... depending on the power of your knowledge. As for the mental phenomena you experienced in past lives, you will be able to know them as well, just as you can know the body.

2. The ability to know where living beings are reborn after death: First you have to be proficient in knowing the movements of your own mind in the

present. Sometimes it takes on the characteristics of a mind in the realms of deprivation, sometimes the characteristics of a human mind, a heavenly mind or a Brahmā mind. Once you know your own crude and subtle mental states in the present, and your knowledge is truly strong, you will be able to see—via the inner eye, not the outer eye—exactly how well or badly different living beings fare when they die and are reborn.

3. The knowledge that does away with the effluents of defilement: This means clear knowledge of the four noble truths—the ability to comprehend stress (*dukkha*) as arising from craving (*taṇhā*); the ability to comprehend what will put an end to craving, i.e., identifying the path (*magga*), and then developing the path until the disbanding of stress (*nirodha*) occurs. You will have clear vision of all four truths, doing away with defilement, craving, views, and conceits through the power of your discernment. The knowledge that does away with mental effluents forms the essence of liberating insight (*vipassanā-ñāṇa*).

The Eight Skills

1. *Vipassanā-ñāṇa*: clear insight into the elements (*dhātu*), the aggregates (*khandha*), and the sense media (*āyatana*).
2. *Manomayiddhi*: the ability to project mind-made images.
3. *Iddhividhi*: supernormal powers.
4. *Dibba-sota*: clairaudience, the ability to hear sounds near and far.
5. *Cetopariya-ñāṇa*: knowledge of the thoughts and minds of others.
6. *Dibba-cakkhu*: clairvoyance, the ability to see without opening your eyes.
7. *Pubbenivāsānussati-ñāṇa*: knowledge of past lives.
8. *Āsavakkhaya-ñāṇa*: knowledge that does away with mental effluents.

1. *Vipassanā-ñāṇa*: This refers to clear insight into the six elements—the properties of earth, water, fire, wind, space, and consciousness—perceiving their true nature, e.g., seeing them as equal in terms of three characteristics—constancy, stress, and “not-selfness”; seeing them merely as fabrications; knowing them with regard to all three time periods—past, present and future: what they have been, what they will be, and what they are at the moment. Only when your insight into these matters is absolutely clear does it qualify as *vipassanā-ñāṇa*.

The aggregates cover the same range of phenomena as the elements but simply classify them in a different way: body, feelings, mental labels, mental fabrications, and consciousness. These aggregates can be reduced to two—physical and mental phenomena—and these in turn can be redivided into six: the senses (sight, hearing, smell, taste, touch, ideation) and their corresponding objects. These are termed sense media (*āyatana*).

In short, clear insight into the elements, aggregates, and sense media forms the first of the eight skills.

2. *Manomayiddhi*: This refers to the ability to make images of yourself or of others appear to other people. These images can appear in whatever manner you want them to, without your having to make a move. This skill depends on

being able to manipulate the four physical properties, focusing on them with the power of *jhāna* and the determination of the mind to make them appear any way at all.

3. *Iddhividhi*: Examples of supernormal powers are the ability to make a crowd of people appear to be only a few people, or a few people appear to be a crowd; the ability to walk through fire, on water, or through the dark as if walking in bright light; the ability to make the body appear small, tall, short, dark, fair, old, young, etc.; the ability to affect the weather, causing rain, wind, fire, earthquakes, etc. All of this can be accomplished through the power of *jhāna*.

4. *Dibba-sota*: the ability to hear sounds no matter how near or far—the voices of human beings, the voices of heavenly beings, or whatever other sound you may focus on hearing.

5. *Cetopariya-ñāṇa*: the ability to know the thoughts of others—good or bad, crude or refined, hating you or meaning you well. Whatever another person may be thinking will appear clearly to you.

6. *Dibba-cakkhu*: the ability to see far things as near, and to see anything clearly—no matter what, whether people or objects—without having to open your eyes.

7. *Pubbenivāsānussati-ñāṇa*: the ability to remember previous lives.

8. *Āsavakkhaya-ñāṇa*: the knowledge that drives such defilements as passion, aversion, and delusion out of the heart. (These last two skills are explained under the three skills above.)

The Four Forms of Acumen

1. *Attha-paṭisambhidā*: acumen with regard to meaning.

2. *Dhamma-paṭisambhidā*: acumen with regard to mental qualities.

3. *Nirutti-paṭisambhidā*: acumen with regard to linguistic conventions.

4. *Paṭibhāṇa-paṭisambhidā*: acumen with regard to expression.

1. Acumen with regard to meaning means knowing how to explain the Buddha's shorter teachings in detail and how to draw out the gist of a detailed teaching so that listeners will have a correct understanding in line with the Buddha's aims. Even if you may have a lot to say, you get to the point; even if you have only a little to say, you don't leave out anything important. Wrong words you can turn into right ones, and explanations that are correct but crude you can make more subtle without leaving anything out.

2. Acumen with regard to mental qualities means knowing how to distinguish skillful qualities from unskillful ones, establishing the first as good, which ought to be followed, and the second as evil, which ought to be avoided. You know how to explain their various levels, classifying the unskillful as common, intermediate, and subtle, and then know which skillful qualities are suitable for countering each sort: Virtue does away with common defilements; concentration does away with intermediate defilements; and discernment, subtle defilements. This is knowledge *about* mental qualities, on the level of theory. The next step is to practice and to develop virtue to do away with the roots of

unskillfulness, the more common forms of greed, aversion, and delusion; to develop concentration to do away with intermediate defilements, the hindrances; and discernment to do away with the subtle defilements, ignorance and the fetters (*saṅgyojana*).

Acumen with regard to mental qualities thus means to distinguish the various types of qualities and then to put the skillful qualities into practice until the supreme quality—*nibbāna*—is attained. Simply knowing about the skillful qualities, but not developing them, runs counter to the Buddha's reasons for teaching about them in the first place.

3. Acumen with regard to linguistic conventions refers to the ability to know the individual with whom you are speaking (*puggalaññutā*), and how to speak with different types of people so as to be in keeping with their knowledge and background (*parisaññutā*). You know that you have to speak this way with that lay person, and that way with this; that this group of monks and novices has to be addressed in such and such a way, in line with their various backgrounds. You know how to make people understand in their own language—how to speak with farmers, merchants, and kings, varying your language so as to fit the person you are speaking to. This form of acumen, contrary to what people normally believe, doesn't refer to the ability to speak the external language of birds or mice or what-have-you. Even if we could speak their language, what good would it do for them? If anyone can actually speak these languages, good for them. The Buddha's main interest, though, was probably in having us know how to speak with people in a way that our words will meet their needs. Only those who have this ability qualify as having acquired this form of acumen.

4. Acumen with regard to expression refers to being quick-witted in discussing the Dhamma and its meaning, knowing how to put things in an apt way so as to keep ahead of your listeners. This doesn't mean being devious, though. It simply means using strategy so as to be of benefit: putting common matters in subtle terms, and subtle matters in common terms; speaking of matters close at hand as if they were far away, of far away matters as if they were close at hand, explaining a base statement in high terms or a high statement in base terms, making difficult matters easy, and obscure matters plain. You know the right word to cut off a long-winded opponent, and how to put things—without saying anything false or dubious—so that no one can catch you. To be gifted in expression in this way means not to be talkative, but to be expert at talking. Talkative people soon run themselves out; people expert at talking never run out no matter how much they have to say. They can clear up any doubts in the minds of their listeners, and can find the one well-chosen word that is worth more than a hundred words.

The skills classed as the four forms of acumen refer only to the skills of this sort that come from the practice of tranquility and insight meditation.

The three skills, the eight skills, and the four forms of acumen arise only in the wake of *jhāna*. When classed according to level, they are two: *sekha-bhūmi*, i.e., any of these skills as mastered by a stream-enterer, a once-returner, a non-returner, or by a person who has yet to attain any of the transcendent levels; and *asekha-bhūmi*, any of these skills as mastered by an arahant.

The only one of these skills that's really important is *āsavaakkhaya-ñāṇa*, the knowledge that does away with the mental effluents. As for the others, whether or not they are attained isn't really important. And it's not the case that all noble ones will attain all of these skills. Not to mention ordinary people, even some arahants don't attain any of them with the single exception of the knowledge that does away with mental effluents.

To master these skills, you have to have studied tranquility and insight meditation under a Buddha in a previous lifetime.

This ends the discussion of *jhāna*.

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At this point I would like to return to the themes of insight meditation, because some people are bound not to be expert in the practice of *jhāna*. Even though they may attain *jhāna* to some extent, it's only for short periods of time. Some people, for example, tend to be more at home investigating and figuring out the causes and effects of physical and mental phenomena, developing insight in terms of the three characteristics of inconstancy, stress, and "not-selfness," practicing only a moderate amount of *jhāna* before heading on to the development of liberating insight.

Liberating insight can be developed in either of two ways: For those experts in *jhāna*, insight will arise dependent on the fourth level of *rūpa jhāna*; for those not expert in *jhāna*, insight will arise dependent on the first level of *jhāna*, following the practice of threshold concentration. Some people, when they reach this point, start immediately investigating it as a theme of insight meditation, leading to complete and clear understanding of physical and mental phenomena or, in terms of the aggregates, seeing clearly that form, feelings, mental labels, mental fabrications, and consciousness are inherently inconstant, stressful, and not-self, and then making this insight strong.

If this sort of insight becomes powerful at the same time that your powers of mindfulness and alertness are weak and slow acting, though, any one of ten kinds of misapprehension can occur. These are called *vipassanūpakkilesa*, the corruptions of insight. Actually, they are nothing more than by-products of the practice of insight, but if you fall for them and latch on to them, they become defilements. They can make you assume wrongly that you have reached the paths, fruitions, and *nibbāna*, because they are defilements of a very subtle sort. They are also termed the enemies of insight. If your mindfulness isn't equal to your powers of discernment, you can get attached and be led astray without your realizing it, believing that you have no more defilements, that there is nothing more for you to do. These ten defilements are extremely subtle and fine. If you fall for them, you're not likely to believe anyone who tells you that you've gone wrong. Thus you should know about them beforehand so that you can separate the mind from them when they arise. But before discussing them, we should first discuss the exercises for insight meditation, because the corruptions of insight appear following on the practice of the exercises.

Exercises for Insight Meditation

These are techniques for giving rise to knowledge and insight, via the mind, into the natural workings of physical and mental phenomena, as expressed in terms of the five aggregates, seeing them as naturally occurring conditions—inherently inconstant, stressful, and not-self—these three characteristics being the focal point of insight meditation.

If we've come to the topic of insight, why are we referring again to the five aggregates, inconstancy, stress, not-selfness, etc.? Weren't these already covered under tranquility meditation?

The answer is that although insight meditation deals with the same raw material as tranquility meditation—i.e., form and formless objects, or in other words, physical and mental phenomena—it gives rise to a more refined level of knowledge and understanding. The treatment of the five aggregates and the three characteristics on the level of tranquility meditation is very crude. The understanding it gives of how the five aggregates are inconstant, stressful, and not-self is not very clear, simply enough to make the mind settle down to the point where it's ready for the practice of insight meditation. Once we reach the level of insight, though, our understanding of how the five aggregates are inconstant, stressful, and not-self become clearer and more distinct. We can make the following comparison: The understanding gained on the level of tranquility meditation is like cutting down the trees in a forest but not yet setting them on fire. The understanding gained on the level of insight meditation is like taking the trees and burning them up. The forest in the second case is much more open and clear—even though it's the same forest. This is how the levels of understanding gained in tranquility and insight meditation differ.

To develop insight, you first have to distinguish the five aggregates: physical phenomena, feelings, mental labels, mental fabrications, and consciousness. Once you have them distinguished, start out by focusing on and considering all physical phenomena, whether past—those that have occurred beginning with your conception as an embryo in your mother's womb; present; or future—those that will continue to occur until the day you die; internal—the phenomena of the eye, ear, nose, tongue, and body, together with the visions that appear through the power of the mind; or external—sights, sounds, smells, tastes, and tactile sensations: Focus on examining all these forms down to a single point—that they are *all* inconstant, stressful, and not-self. They arise momentarily and then pass away, never satisfying the desires of those who want them, never offering anything of any substance or worth. This holds true equally for any and all things composed of the physical properties.

This is the exercise dealing with physical phenomena.

As for feelings, start out by distinguishing two sorts: external and internal. External feelings arise when the eye comes into contact with a visible object, the ear comes into contact with a sound, the nose comes into contact with an aroma, the tongue comes into contact with a flavor, or when tactile sensations—heat, cold, etc.—come into contact with the body. All five of these categories are

classed as external feelings. If the mind is displeased, a bad mood is experienced; if the mind is neither pleased nor displeased, a neutral mood is experienced: For the mind to experience any of these moods is classed as internal feeling. Focus on examining both internal and external feelings—past, present, or future—down to a single point: the fact that they are all inconstant, stressful, and not-self. By nature they arise only to pass away.

This is the second exercise.

As for mental labels, there are two sorts, external and internal. External labeling refers to the act of identifying visual objects, sounds, smells, tastes, tactile sensations, and ideas when they come into the range of the senses. Internal labeling refers to the act of identifying pleasant, painful, or neutral moods as they are felt by the heart. Once you can make this distinction, focus on examining all acts of labeling—past, present, or future, internal or external—down to a single point: the fact that they are all inconstant, stressful, and not-self. By nature they arise only to pass away.

This is the third exercise.

As for fabrications, these should first be divided into two sorts: *upādiṇṇaka-saṅkhāra*, those that are dependent on the power of the mind for their sustenance; and *anupādiṇṇaka-saṅkhāra*, those that are not. Mountains, trees, and other inanimate objects fabricated by nature are examples of the second category; people and common animals are examples of the first.

Fabrications dependent on the power of the mind for their sustenance are of two sorts: external and internal. ‘External’ refers to the compound of the four physical properties fashioned into a body through the power of *kamma*. ‘Internal’ refers to the fabrication of thoughts—either good (*puññābhisaṅkhāra*), bad (*apuññābhisaṅkhāra*), or neither good nor bad (*aneñjābhisaṅkhāra*)—in the mind.

Focus on examining all fabrications—past, present, or future, internal or external—down to a single point, in terms of the three characteristics, as follows:

*aniccā vata saṅkhārā
uppāda-vaya-dhammino
uppajjitvā nirujjhanti...*

‘How inconstant (and stressful) are fabrications! Their nature is to arise and decay. Arising, they disband...’ They are all bound to be inconstant, stressful, and not-self.

This is the fourth exercise.

As for consciousness, this should first be divided into two sorts: internal and external. Internal consciousness refers to the act of being clearly aware that, ‘This is a pleasant feeling—this is a painful feeling—this is a neutral feeling,’ as such feelings are experienced in the heart. External consciousness refers to being clearly aware by means of the eye, ear, nose, tongue, and body whenever visual objects, sounds, smells, tastes, and tactile sensations come into range and the mind reacts with notions of liking, disliking, or being neutral. Focus on examining all acts of consciousness down to the three characteristics: Whether

past (beginning with the ‘connecting consciousness (*paṭisandhi viññāṇa*)’ that gives rise to birth), present, or future, internal or external, all are inconstant, stressful, and not-self. There’s nothing permanent or lasting to them at all.

When you consider these themes until you see them clearly in any of these ways, you are developing the insight that forms the way to the paths and fruitions leading to *nibbāna*.

Thus the exercises of tranquility and insight meditation give rise to different levels of sensitivity and understanding, even though they deal with the very same raw material. If you truly desire to gain release from suffering and stress, you should begin studying your own aggregates so as to give rise to tranquility and insight. You may assume that you already know them, yet if you can’t let them go, then you don’t really know them at all. What you know, you say you don’t know; what you don’t know, you say you do. The mind switches back and forth on itself, and so always has itself deceived.

Knowledge on the level of information—labels and concepts—is inconstant. It can always change into something else. Even people outside of the religion can know the aggregates on that level—all they have to do is read a few books and they’ll know. So those who really want to know should start right in, probing down into the aggregates until they perceive clearly and truly enough to let go. Only then will they be genuine experts in the religion.

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Now we will discuss the stages of liberating insight, dealing first with the seven stages of purification, since these form their basis.

The Seven Stages of Purification

1. Purification of virtue (*sīla-visuddhi*): Cleanse your virtues—in thought, word, and deed—in line with your station in life, so that they are pure and spotless, free from all five ways of creating animosity, such as taking life, stealing, etc.

2. Purification of consciousness (*citta-visuddhi*): Make the mind still and resolute, either in momentary concentration or threshold concentration, enough to form a basis for the arising of insight.

3. Purification of view (*ditṭhi-visuddhi*): Examine physical and mental phenomena, analyzing them into their various parts, seeing them in terms of the three characteristics—as inconstant, stressful, and not-self.

4. Purification by overcoming doubt (*kaṅkhā-vitarāṇa-visuddhi*): Focus on the causes and conditions for physical and mental phenomena, seeing what causes them to arise when it arises, and what causes them to disappear when it disappears. Examine both these sides of the question until all your doubts concerning physical and mental phenomena—past, present, and future—vanish together in an instant. The mind that can see through the preoccupation with which it is involved in the present is much more subtle, resolute, and firm than it has ever been before, and at this point any one of the ten corruptions of

insight—which we referred to above as enemies of insight—will arise. If your powers of mindfulness, concentration, and discernment aren't equally fast, they can lead you to jump to false conclusions, causing you to latch on to these defilements as something meaningful and thus going astray, falling away from the highest levels of truth. The enemies of insight are:

a. Splendor (*obhāsa*): an amazingly bright light, blotting out your surroundings—e.g., if you're sitting in a forest or patch of thorns, they won't exist for you—bright to the point where you get carried away, losing all sense of your body and mind, wrapped up in the brightness.

b. Knowledge (*ñāṇa*): intuition of an amazing sort, which you then latch on to—either to the knowledge itself or to the object known—as beyond refutation. Perhaps you may decide that you've already reached the goal, that there's nothing more for you to do. Your knowledge on this level is true, but you aren't able to let it go in line with its true nature.

c. Rapture (*pīti*): an exceedingly strong sense of rapture and contentment, arising from a sense of seclusion for which you have been aiming all along. Once it arises, you are pleased and overjoyed to the point where you latch on to this mood and lose sense of your body and mind.

d. Serenity (*passaddhi*): an extreme sense of mental stillness, in which the mind stays motionless, overwhelmed and addicted to the stillness.

e. Bliss (*sukha*): a subtle, exquisite sense of pleasure, arising from a sense of mental solitude that you have just met for the first time and that the mind relishes—the pleasure at this point being exceedingly subtle and relaxed—to the point where it becomes addicted.

f. Enthusiasm (*adhimokkha*): a strong sense of conviction in your knowledge, believing that, 'This must be the paths, fruitions, and *nibbāna*.'

g. Exertion (*paggaha*): strong and unwavering persistence that comes from enjoying the object with which the mind is preoccupied.

h. Obsession (*upatthāna*): Your train of thought becomes fixed strongly on a single object and runs wild, your powers of mindfulness being strong, but your powers of discernment too weak to pry the mind away from its object.

i. Equanimity (*upekkhā*): The mind is still and unmoving, focused in a very subtle mental notion of equanimity. Not knowing the true nature of its state, the mind relishes and clings to it.

j. Satisfaction (*nikanti*): contentment with the object of your knowledge, leading to assumptions of one sort or another.

These ten phenomena, if you know them for what they are, can form a way along which the mind can stride to the paths and fruitions leading to *nibbāna*. If you fasten on to them, though, they turn into a form of clinging and thus become the enemies of liberating insight. All ten of these corruptions of insight are forms of truth on one level, but if you can't let go of the truth so that it can follow its own nature, you will never meet the ultimate truth of disbanding (*nirodha*). For the mind to let go, it must use discerning insight to contemplate these phenomena until it sees that they are clearly inconstant, stressful, and not-self. When it sees clearly with no clinging to any of these phenomena,

knowledge will arise within the mind that these things are not the path to the goal. Once this awareness arises, the mind enters the next level of purification:

5. Purification through knowledge and vision of what is and is not the path (*maggāmagga-ñānadassana-visuddhi*): Now that this realization has arisen, look after that knowing mind to keep it securely in the mental series leading to insight. The discernment of insight will arise in the very next mental moment, forming a stairway to the great benefits of the transcendent, the reward coming from having abandoned the ten corruptions of insight. Liberating insight will arise in the following stages:

The Nine Stages of Liberating Insight

a. Contemplation of arising and passing away (*udayabbayānupassanā-ñāṇa*): seeing the arising of physical and mental phenomena together with their falling away.

b. Contemplation of dissolution (*bhaṅgānupassanā-ñāṇa*): seeing the falling away of physical and mental phenomena.

c. The appearance of dread (*bhayatūpaṭṭhāna-ñāṇa*): seeing all fabrications (i.e., all physical and mental phenomena) as something to be dreaded, just as when a man sees a deadly cobra lying in his path or an executioner about to behead a criminal who has broken the law.

d. Contemplation of misery (*ādinavānupassanā-ñāṇa*): seeing all fabrications as a mass of pain and stress, arising only to age, sicken, disband, and die.

e. Contemplation of disgust (*nibbidānupassana-ñāṇa*): viewing all fabrications with a sense of weariness and disenchantment with regard to the cycle of birth, aging, illness, and death through the various way-stations in the round of wandering on; seeing the pain and harm, feeling disdain and estrangement, with no longing to be involved with any fabrications at all. Just as a golden King Swan—who ordinarily delights only in the foothills of Citta Peak and the great Himalayan lakes—would feel nothing but disgust at the idea of bathing in a cesspool at the gate of an outcaste village, in the same way the arising of insight causes a sense of disgust for all fabrications to appear.

f. The desire for freedom (*muñcitukamyatā-ñāṇa*): sensing a desire to escape from all fabrications that appear, just as when a man goes down to bathe in a pool and—meeting a poisonous snake or a crocodile—will aim at nothing but escape.

g. Reflective contemplation (*paṭisaṅkhānupassanā-ñāṇa*): trying to figure out a way to escape from all fabrications that appear, in the same way that a caged quail keeps looking for a way to escape from its cage.

h. Equanimity with regard to fabrications (*saṅkhārupekkhā-ñāṇa*): viewing all fabrications with a sense of indifference, just as a husband and wife might feel indifferent to each other's activities after they have gained a divorce.

i. Knowledge in accordance with the truth (*saccānulomika-ñāṇa*): seeing all fabrications—all five aggregates—in terms of the four noble truths.

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All of these stages of insight are nothing other than the sixth level of purification:

6. Purification through knowledge and vision of the way (*paṭipadā-ñāṇadassana-visuddhi*): At this point, our way is cleared. Just as a man who has cut all the tree stumps in his path level to the ground can then walk with ease, so it is with knowledge on this level: We have gotten past the corruptions of insight, but the roots—*avijjā*, or unawareness—are still in the ground.

The next step is to develop the mind higher and higher along the lines of liberating insight until you reach the highest plane of the mundane level leading to the noble paths, beginning with the path opening on to the stream to *nibbāna*. This level is termed:

7. Purification of knowledge and vision (*ñāṇadassana-visuddhi*): At this point, devote yourself to developing and reviewing the stages of liberating insight through which you have passed, back and forth, until you become confident in them, so that each stage leads on to the next, from the very beginning all the way to knowledge in accordance with the truth and back, so that your perception in terms of the four noble truths is absolutely clear. If your powers of discernment are relatively weak, you will have to review the series three times in immediate succession before change-of-lineage knowledge (*gotarabhū-ñāṇa*, knowledge of *nibbāna*) will arise as the result. If your powers of discernment are moderate, change-of-lineage knowledge will arise after you have reviewed the series twice in succession. If your powers of discernment are tempered and strong, it will arise after you have reviewed the series once. Thus the sages of the past divided those who reach the first noble path and fruition into three sorts: Those with relatively weak powers of discernment will have to be reborn another seven times; those with moderate powers of discernment will have to be reborn another three or four times; those with quick powers of discernment will have to be reborn only once.

The different speeds at which individuals realize the first path and its fruition are determined by their temperaments and propensities. The slowest class are those who have developed two parts tranquility to one part insight. The intermediate class are those who have developed one part tranquility to one part insight. Those with the quickest and strongest insight are those who have developed one part tranquility to two parts insight. Having developed the beginning parts of the path in different ways—here we are referring only to those parts of the path consisting of tranquility and insight—they see clearly into the four noble truths at different mental moments.

In the end, it all comes down to seeing the five aggregates clearly in terms of the four noble truths. What does it mean to see clearly? And what are the terms of the four noble truths? This can be explained as follows: Start out by fixing your attention on a result and then trace back to its causes. Focus, for instance, on physical and mental phenomena as they arise and pass away in the present. This is the truth of stress (*dukkha-sacca*), as in the Pali phrase,

*nāma-rūpaṃ aniccaṃ,
nāma-rūpaṃ dukkhaṃ,
nāma-rūpaṃ anattā:*

‘All physical and mental phenomena are equally inconstant, stressful, and not-self.’ Fix your attention on their arising and changing, seeing that birth is stressful, aging is stressful, illness and death are stressful; sorrow, lamentation, pain, distress, and despair are stressful; in short, the five aggregates are stressful. What is the cause? When you trace back to the cause for stress, you’ll find that craving for sensual objects—sights, sounds, smells, tastes, tactile sensations and ideas—is one cause, termed sensual craving (*kāma-taṇhā*). Then focus in on the mind so as to see the intermediate-level cause and you’ll see that ‘At this moment the mind is straying, wishing that physical and mental phenomena—form, feelings, labels, fabrications, and consciousness—would be in line with its wants.’ This wish is termed craving for becoming (*bhava-taṇhā*). Focus in again on the mind so as to see the subtle cause and you’ll see that, ‘At this moment the mind sways, wishing that physical and mental phenomena wouldn’t change, that they would stay under its control.’ This wish is termed craving for no becoming (*vibhava-taṇhā*), i.e., craving for things to stay constant in line with one’s wishes.

These three forms of craving arise when the mind is deluded. Focus in and investigate that deluded mental state until you can see that it’s inconstant, stressful, and not-self. Tap Craving on his shoulder and call him by name until, embarrassed and ashamed, he wanes from the heart, in line with the teaching: ‘The lack of involvement with that very craving, the release from it, the relinquishing of it, the abandonment of it, the disbanding of it through the lack of any remaining affection: This is the disbanding of stress.’

The mind that switches back and forth between knowing and being deluded is all one and the same mind. Craving lands on it, not allowing it to develop the path and gain true knowledge, just as flocks of birds landing on a tall, unsteady, tapering tree can cause it to shudder and sway and come crashing down. Thus the noble disciples have focused on craving and discarded it, leaving only *nirodha*, disbanding. The act of disbanding can be divided into two—the disbanding of physical and mental phenomena; or into three—the disbanding of sensual craving, craving for becoming, and craving for no becoming; or into four—the disbanding of feelings, labels, fabrications, and consciousness of various things. Add the disbanding of forms to the last list and you have five. We could keep going on and on: If you can let go, everything disbands. What this means simply is that the heart no longer clings to these things, no longer gives them sustenance.

Letting go, however, has two levels: mundane and transcendent. Mundane letting go is only momentary, not once-and-for-all, and so the disbanding that results is only mundane. It’s not yet constant. As for the path of practice, it’s not yet constant either. It’s the noble eightfold path, all right, but on the mundane level. For example:

1. Mundane right view: You see into stress, its causes, its disbanding, and the path to its disbanding, but your insight isn’t yet constant—for although your

views are correct, you can't yet let go. This is thus classed as mundane right view.

2. Mundane right resolve: Your resolve is to renounce sensual pleasures, not to feel ill will, and not to cause harm. These three resolves are correct, but they're not yet constant. You haven't yet freed yourself in line with them. This is thus classed as mundane right resolve.

3. Mundane right speech: right speech is of four types—refraining from lies, from divisive tale-bearing, from coarse and abusive speech, and from idle, aimless chatter. You know that these forms of speech are to be avoided, but you still engage in them out of absent-mindedness. This is thus classed as mundane right speech.

4. Mundane right action: Your activities aren't yet constantly right. Sometimes you act uprightly, sometimes not. This is classed as mundane right action.

5. Mundane right livelihood: Your maintenance of right livelihood by way of thought, word, and deed isn't yet constant. In other words, it's not yet absolutely pure—in some ways it is, and in some it isn't. Thus it is termed mundane right livelihood.

6. Mundane right effort: Right effort is of four types—the effort to abandon evil that has already arisen, to avoid evil that hasn't, to give rise to the good that hasn't yet arisen, and to maintain the good that has. Your efforts in these four directions aren't yet really consistent. Sometimes you make the effort and sometimes you don't. This is thus termed mundane right effort.

7. Mundane right mindfulness: Right mindfulness is of four types—being mindful of the body, feelings, the mind, and mental qualities. When you aren't consistent in staying mindful of these frames of reference—sometimes keeping them in mind, sometimes not—your practice is classed as inconstant. This is thus termed mundane right mindfulness.

8. Mundane right concentration: Right concentration is of three sorts—momentary concentration, threshold concentration, and fixed penetration. If these can suppress unskillful mental qualities for only certain periods of time, they're classed as inconstant: sometimes you have them and sometimes you don't. This is thus termed mundane right concentration.

These eight factors can be reduced to three: virtue, concentration, and discernment—i.e., inconstant virtue, inconstant concentration, inconstant discernment—sometimes pure, sometimes blemished. These in turn reduce ultimately to our own thoughts, words, and deeds. We're inconstant in thought, word, and deed, sometimes doing good, sometimes doing evil, sometimes speaking what is good, sometimes speaking what is evil, sometimes thinking what is good, sometimes thinking what is evil.

When we want to make the path transcendent, we have to bring the principles of virtue, concentration, and discernment to bear on our thoughts, words, and deeds, and then focus on cleansing those thoughts, words, and deeds so that they're in line with the principles of virtue, concentration, and discernment to the point where we attain a purity that is radiant and lasting. Only then can the path become transcendent.

The results of each path, whether mundane or transcendent, follow immediately on the practice of the path, just as your shadow follows immediately upon you.

To return to the discussion of the mundane path: Although the mundane path is said to have eight factors, this eightfold path—as it's put into practice by people in general—forks into two: eight right factors and eight wrong, making a sixteen-fold path. This is why regress is possible. What this comes down to is the fact that virtue, concentration, and discernment aren't in harmony. For example, our virtue may have right view and our concentration wrong view, or our discernment may have right view and our virtue and concentration wrong view. In other words, our words and deeds may be virtuous, but our thoughts—overpowered by the hindrances—may not reach singleness; or the mind may reach stillness, but without being able to let go of its preoccupations with the elements, aggregates, or sense media. Sometimes our discernment may have right view, but we haven't abandoned unvirtuous actions. We know they're harmful and we're able to abstain for a while, but we still can't help reverting to them even though we know better. This is why we say the mundane path has sixteen factors, eight right and eight wrong, sometimes turning this way and sometimes that.

If, however, you really decide to train yourself and then watch over mundane right view so as to keep it right without letting the wrong path interfere—so that your virtue, concentration, and discernment are in harmony—in other words, they all have right view—then this very same mundane path, once it is made constant and consistent, will become transcendent, leading to the stream to *nibbāna*. Once you reach the transcendent level, the path has only eight factors: Your virtue, concentration, and discernment all have right view in terms of your thoughts, words, and deeds. In this way they transcend the mundane level. The mundane level is inconstant: inconsistent, undependable, dishonest with itself. One moment you do good; the next evil. Then after you've regressed, you progress again. If you were to classify people of the mundane level, there are four sorts:

1. Some people have done evil in the past, are doing evil in the present, and will continue doing evil in the future.
2. Some people have done evil in the past, but are doing good in the present, and aren't willing to abandon their goodness in the future.
3. Some people have done good in the past, are doing good in the present, but will give it up in the future.
4. Some people have done only good in the past, are keeping it up in the present in all their actions—i.e. virtue, concentration, and discernment are constantly with them—and they plan to keep on doing good into the future.

So there's nothing constant about people on the mundane level. They're greedy, they're rich. They do both good and evil. Two hands aren't enough for them; they have to carry their goods on a pole over the shoulder, with one load on the front end and another on the back. Sometimes the back load—the past—is good, but the front load—the future—is evil. Sometimes the front load is good

and the back load evil. Sometimes the front and back loads are both evil, but the person in the middle is good. Sometimes all three are good. When we're loaded up like this, we're not balanced. One load is heavy and the other one light. Sometimes we tip over backwards, and sometimes fall flat on our face—back and forth like this, from one level of becoming to the next. This is how it is with virtue, concentration, and discernment on the mundane level. There's no telling where they'll lead you next. So once you've come to your senses, you should start right in keeping careful watch over the mundane path so that you can bring mundane virtue, concentration, and discernment into line with the transcendent.

Turning the Mundane Path into the Transcendent Path

The path of the noble ones—beginning with the path to stream entry—is to take the mundane eightfold path and bring it to bear on the five aggregates—form, feelings, labels, fabrications, and consciousness—or, in short, to bring it to bear on physical and mental phenomena. Focus on these phenomena with the discernment of right view until you see them all in terms of the three characteristics, i.e., until you see all physical and mental phenomena arising and disbanding in the present as inconstant, stressful, and not-self. You see with the eye of intuitive knowledge, the eye of discernment, the eye of cognitive skill, the eye of Dhamma. Your vision is true and correct. It's right view, the path in harmony, with no admixture of wrong view at all. Your vision of physical phenomena is correct in line with virtue, concentration, and discernment; your vision of mental phenomena is correct in line with virtue, concentration, and discernment. Your right view traces things first forward and then back. You have an adamant sword—liberating insight—slashing back and forth. You are engaged in focused investigation: This is what forms the path.

You fix your attention on the noble truths as two: cause and effect. When your mind is absolutely focused and fixed on examining cause and effect, that's the path to stream-entry. Once you have gained clear insight into cause and effect through the power of your discernment, making the heart radiant and bright, destroying whatever mental and physical phenomena are fetters (*saṅyojana*), the opening to *nibbāna* will appear. If your powers of discernment are weak, your mind will then return to its dependence on mental and physical phenomena, but even so, it will no longer be deceived or deluded by them, for it has seen their harm. It will never again dare grab on to the three fetters that it has been holding for so long.

Those who reach this stage have reached the transcendent—the path and fruition of stream entry—and form one class of the noble disciples.

There are nine transcendent qualities—four paths, four fruitions, and one *nibbāna*: the path to stream entry and the fruition of stream entry; the path to once-returning and the fruition of once-returning; the path to non-returning and the fruition of non-returning; the path to arahantship and the fruition of arahantship; all of which come down to the one *nibbāna*, which makes nine. The term *lokuttara dhamma*—transcendent qualities—means superior qualities, special

and distinct from mundane qualities, reaching a “world” above and beyond all worlds, destined to go only higher and higher, never to return to anything low.

The word *magga*, or path, refers simply to the way leading to *nibbāna*. It’s called the *ariya magga*, the path free from enemies, because it’s the path that Death cannot trace. It’s called the eightfold path because on the transcendent level it has abandoned the eight wrong factors of the mundane path, leaving only the eight right: right view and right resolve, which compose right discernment, let us gain insight into physical and mental phenomena that arise and disband in the present in terms of the three characteristics, so that we let go of them completely with no remaining doubts about the Dhamma we have seen. As for right speech, right action, and right livelihood, our words and deeds reach purity, free from the fetter of self-identity view. And as for right effort, right mindfulness, and right concentration, we reach the level of mind that is firm and imperturbable. Our thoughts, words, and deeds are free from groping with regard to habits and practices, and are truly in keeping with *nibbāna*, not side-tracking or going slack the way the actions of ordinary people do.

People who have attained the fruit of stream entry have the following characteristics: They have firm conviction in the virtues of the Triple Gem. The quality of generosity and relinquishment is a regular feature in their hearts. They are not complacent and never give rein to the power of delusion. They are firmly and joyfully dedicated to the cause of their own inner purity. They love virtue more than life itself. They have no intention of doing any of the baser forms of evil. Although some residual shoddy qualities may still be remaining in their hearts, they never let these unskillful qualities ever again come to the fore.

The stream they have entered is that leading to *nibbāna*. They have abandoned the three lower fetters once and for all.

1. Self-identity view (*sakkāya-dīṭṭhi*): They have uprooted the viewpoint that once caused them to identify physical and mental phenomena as being the self.

2. Uncertainty (*vicikicchā*): They have uprooted all doubt and indecision concerning the nature of physical and mental phenomena, and all doubt concerning the Buddha, Dhamma, and Saṅgha. If anyone were to come and say that there is no Awakening, that the practice of virtue, concentration, and discernment doesn’t lead to the paths, fruitions, or *nibbāna*, they wouldn’t believe that person’s words, because they have seen for certain, with their own discernment, that the paths and their fruitions are unrelated to time (*akālika*) and can be known only personally, within (*paccattam*).

Their conviction is firm
and free from indecision.

Their vision is sure.

3. Groping at habits and practices (*śilabbata-parāmāsa*): They have uprooted all unreasonable beliefs concerning physical and mental phenomena, both within and without. They are no longer groping in their habits, manners, or practices. Everything they do is done with a reason, not out of darkness or ignorance. They are convinced of the principle of *kamma*. Their concern for their own

thoughts, words, and deeds is paramount: Those who do good will meet with good, those who do evil will meet with evil.

People who have reached stream entry have faith in the virtues of the Buddha, Dhamma, and Saṅgha that have appeared within them. They are no longer groping in their virtue. Their virtues are pure and free from defilement. They have cut off the three fetters with regard to physical and mental phenomena—right at their own thoughts, words, and deeds—through the practice of virtue, concentration, and discernment acting in concert. What this means is that they have made a focused examination back and forth, over and over, through the power of their own discernment. They have traced the path back and forth, cutting away at the grasses and weeds. One mental moment they trace things forward, and the next moment they trace them back. In other words, they focus on the phenomenon of arising and passing away, and then are able to know through the discernment of liberating insight that there in the midst of physical and mental phenomena exists something that isn't subject to arising and passing away.

The path to stream entry is the act of focusing on physical and mental phenomena, back and forth. When events are traced back and forth—sometimes two times in succession, sometimes three, depending on the power of one's discernment and insight—physical and mental phenomena disband and change-of-lineage knowledge arises in the same instant, enabling one to see the quality within one that isn't subject to arising or passing away. This is the opening onto *nibbāna*, appearing sharp and clear through the power of one's own discernment, bringing with it the fruition of stream entry, the state of being a noble disciple in the Buddha's teaching. One's fetters are absolutely severed, once and for all. Having seen the pain and harm coming from the actions that lead to the realms of deprivation, one is now freed from them and can breathe with ease.

Such people have received a treasure: They have attained transcendent discernment and seen *nibbāna* for sure. They are like a traveler who has seen a palace of gold in the distance: Although he hasn't yet reached it, he is bound to think of it at all times. Stream-enterers have already gone three leagues (*yojana*) on the way, with only seven leagues left to go. Whoever has the chance to see or know such people, help them, or associate with them, is truly fortunate.

There are three classes of stream-enterer: *ekabijin*, those who will be reborn only once more; *kolaṅkola*, those who will be reborn three or four more times; and *sattakkhattu-parama*, those who will be reborn seven more times.

Why are there three? Because the natural propensities of each individual determine the way he or she pursues the path. The first group is comprised of those with a propensity to aversion. They tend to develop insight meditation more than tranquility meditation, reaching Awakening quickly with few of the mundane skills or powers. The second group is comprised of those with a propensity to passion. This group develops insight and tranquility in equal measure, reaching Awakening at a moderate rate, along with a moderate number of mundane powers and skills. The third group consists of those with a propensity to delusion. They tend to develop tranquility in large measure, with very strong powers in the direction of *jhāna*, before going on to develop insight

meditation. They attain Awakening along with a large number of powers and skills. When they reach the transcendent level, they tend to have mastered the three skills, the six forms of intuitive power (*abhiññā*), and the four forms of acumen.

But if these three propensities exist in everyone, why do we now assign them to different individuals? Because the moment you are about to know the truth, you focus on the good and bad features of a particular mental state and attain Awakening then and there. In some cases the state is passion, in some cases aversion, and in some cases delusion. Once you have focused on knowing a particular state and know its truth for what it is, then that truth will place you in a particular class.

Those who reach this stage are headed straight for the higher paths and fruitions culminating in *nibbāna*. People who have attained stream entry have their virtue completely developed. They don't have to worry about virtue any longer. They no longer have to look out for their virtues, for they've been a slave to virtue long enough. From now on the quality of their virtue will look out for them, safeguarding them from the four realms of deprivation. What this means is that their vices have been tamed, and so they no longer have to worry about keeping them in line. They still have to work at concentration and discernment, though. They've wiped out the cruder forms of unskillful behavior, but the medium and subtle forms—which are to be wiped out by the higher paths, beginning with the path to once-returning—still remain.

The Path to Once-Returning

The path to once-returning takes the fruition of stream entry as its basis. In other words, those who are to attain the state of once-returning bring their previous activity in making the mundane path transcendent to bear on the five aggregates, reducing the aggregates to two classes—physical phenomena and mental phenomena—and then making a focused investigation of both through the power of intuition or liberating insight in this manner:

Right view: They contemplate physical and mental phenomena until they see them clearly as inconstant, stressful, and not-self. Once they see clearly, they become uncomplacent. They set their thoughts on doing away with desire for physical and mental phenomena. They want to withdraw themselves from these things because they have seen their harm. This is right resolve.

Right speech on this level refers to the inner verbal fabrication of *vitakka* and *vicāra*, thinking and evaluating, searching rightly for the causes and conditions of physical and mental phenomena. (As for external speech, that was made pure with the attainment of stream entry, so there is no need to mention it on this level.)

Right action on this level is nothing other than the activity of focusing on physical and mental phenomena so as to give rise to tranquility and insight.

Right livelihood here refers to the act of choosing, say, a physical phenomenon as an object for the mind's activity—this is termed *vitakka*—and

then examining and evaluating it—this is *vicāra*—with discernment. Once you learn its truth, this leads to mental pleasure. Your focused examination of physical and mental phenomena is right, and the state of your mind is right. This thus counts as right livelihood.

Right effort refers to the effort of focusing and examining for the sake of shedding your preoccupations—physical and mental phenomena—through the power of the corresponding level of liberating insight, making the appropriate effort without being complacent.

Right mindfulness means being mindful of the behavior of physical and mental phenomena as they arise and disband, without getting distracted, at the same time maintaining alertness—in short, being mindful and alert with regard to your body and mind in all your activities, taking the body in and of itself and the mind in and of itself as your frames of reference in a way that leads directly to concentration.

Right concentration here refers to the mind's being focused exclusively and steadily on physical and mental phenomena, not fixing its attention on anything else. Its activity centers constantly on a single preoccupation, which it examines in terms of liberating insight. This type of concentration, termed *appanā citta*, the fixed mind, differs in no way at all from the activity of discernment, searching for the causes and conditions of physical and mental phenomena in terms of *saccānulomika-ñāṇa*, knowledge in accordance with the four noble truths.

When all aspects of the noble path are right, in terms of bodily, verbal, and mental fabrication, the entire path converges in a single mental instant. Focus the mind in that instant and see the truth of physical and mental phenomena. Physical and mental phenomena will disband and won't appear as a focal point for the mind. The mind will escape from its shackles as thoughts of passion, aversion, and delusion disappear. But only three fetters have been broken, just as in stream entry. Passion, aversion, and delusion have merely been weakened.

This is the fruition of once-returning. Those who reach this level are destined to be reborn only once more. They have completely developed virtue and one aspect of concentration, but they still have to work on the higher aspects of concentration, along with the higher aspects of discernment, because these have been only partially developed. Discernment is still weak. It has cut away only the twigs and branches, while the roots are still intact. Still, people who have reached this level have seen *nibbāna* appear close at hand.

The Path to Non-Returning

The path to non-returning takes the fruition of once-returning as its basis. In other words, those who are to attain the state of non-returning gather all eight factors of the noble path and bring them to bear on physical and mental phenomena as before. They then make a focused examination in terms of the discernment of liberating insight. What this means is that right view and right resolve are brought together at the same point and applied to physical and

mental phenomena so as to see such phenomena in terms of the three characteristics. This is termed right discernment.

Right speech, right action, and right livelihood are brought together at the same point: The mind's normal state is now that of being focused at the level of physical and mental phenomena. The activity on this level is reduced to two sorts: "bodily action," i.e., the act of focusing the mind on the behavior of physical phenomena; and "speech," the mind's inner dialogue, directed thought and evaluation (*vitakka, vicāra*) focused on the behavior of fabrications. Bodily activity is in a state of normalcy; mental activity is in a state of normalcy: Thus we can say that heightened virtue (*adhisīla*) has been established.

As for right effort, right mindfulness, and right concentration: The mind makes a persistent, unwavering examination of physical and mental phenomena, resolutely intent on them as its single preoccupation. Once the qualities of virtue, concentration, and discernment are gathered together and brought to bear on physical and mental phenomena, use the power of discernment to make a focused examination back and forth: This is termed the path to non-returning. When physical and mental phenomena disband and disperse from the primal heart, the fourth and fifth fetters—*kāma-rāga*, passion and delight for physical and mental phenomena caused by the power of sensual defilement; and *paṭigha*, mental irritability and resistance caused by aversion for physical and mental phenomena—are absolutely abandoned. Once these two qualities have been shed from the heart through the discernment of liberating insight, this is termed the fruition of non-returning. Non-returners have thus put behind them once and for all the rocky, five-league trail composed of self-identity view, uncertainty, groping at habits and practices, sensual passion, and irritation. Never again will they have to be reborn in any of the sensual worlds.

Forsaking these things forever,
they savor the fruit of non-returning,
earning the title, "noble one."

According to the Canon, non-returners are of five sorts. After they pass away from the human world, they will appear in the five Pure Abodes, the highest of the Brahmā worlds, there to attain the path and fruition of arahantship, never again to return to the sensual plane. Non-returners have only a little work left to do. Their virtue is completely developed into heightened virtue (*adhisīla*); their training in concentration is also complete, so that they no longer have to work at it. The only thing left for them to develop is discernment. Everything else they simply maintain. They are noble disciples who are genuinely close to *nibbāna*.

The Path to Arahantship

The path to arahantship takes the fruition of non-returning as its basis. In other words, those who are to become arahants gather all eight factors of the noble path and bring them to bear as before on physical and mental phenomena, but now they deal with a level of these phenomena more subtle than before,

converged into a single point. Once these people have gathered the factors of the path at the level of physical and mental phenomena, they make a focused examination, back and forth, using the discernment of liberating insight, bringing this subtler level of physical and mental phenomena into a single point as stress, the cause of stress, the path, and disbanding, all four noble truths gathered into one. They focus on seeing how stress is one with the cause of stress, how the cause of stress is one with the path, how the path is one with the disbanding of stress. Once they have seen things rightly in this way, they make an investigation in terms of the three characteristics:

*nāma-rūpaṃ aniccaṃ,
nāma-rūpaṃ dukkhaṃ,
nāma-rūpaṃ anattā:*

“Physical and mental phenomena are inconstant, physical and mental phenomena are stressful, physical and mental phenomena are not-self.” To investigate in this way is termed the path to arahantship.

Once clear insight arises right at the heart, physical and mental phenomena disband simultaneously with right view, and in that instant one reaches the ultimate quality—the Unconditioned—that knows no arising or passing away. The ten fetters are shattered without leaving a trace. Starting with the sixth fetter, these are:

6. Passion for form (*rūpa-rāga*): attachment to the sense of form; contentment, for example, with the objects that can act as the basis of *rūpa jhāna*.

7. Passion for formless phenomena (*arūpa-rāga*): attachment to non-physical phenomena: contentment, for example, with feelings and moods of pleasure and well-being that one has previously experienced.

8. Conceit (*māna*): construing oneself to be this or that. Arahants have put such assumptions aside. (They don’t assume themselves.)

9. Restlessness (*uddhacca*): obsessive, excessive thinking.

10. Unawareness (*avijjā*): delusion, dullness, ignorance, immersed in physical and mental phenomena.

All ten of these fetters have been dispersed from the heart of an arahant.

To make a focused investigation using the power of one’s discernment, seeing the disbanding and dissolution of physical and mental phenomena in the same terms as all fabricated things, i.e.,

*sabbe saṅkhārā aniccā,
sabbe saṅkhārā dukkhā,
sabbe dhammā anattā:*

“All fabrications (physical and mental phenomena) are inconstant, all fabrications are stressful, all phenomena (physical and mental phenomena) are not-self;” to focus on these things as the basic danger in all three levels of becoming; to see the three levels of becoming as masses of burning embers, incinerating all those who are engrossed in them; to bring virtue, concentration, and discernment together to bear in this way exclusively on physical and mental

phenomena: This is the path to arahantship. And at that very moment physical and mental phenomena disband along with the noble path—i.e., right view—and the ten fetters are shattered: This is the fruition of arahantship.

The tasks of virtue, concentration, and discernment are completed, the teachings of the Lord Buddha fulfilled. There is no longer any attachment to the paths or their fruitions, nor is there any attachment to the Unconditioned. All that remains is what is there on its own: disbanding. That is to say, mental states involved with the five aggregates have disbanded; mental states involved with virtue, concentration, and discernment have disbanded—because when virtue, concentration, and discernment converge on the level of physical and mental phenomena the first time, the first noble attainment is reached; the second time, the second attainment is reached; the third time, the third; and the fourth time, the fourth. When the qualities of virtue, concentration, and discernment are brought together in fully mature form, the mind is released from physical and mental phenomena through the power of discernment, in line with the teaching,

*paññāya paribhāvitaṃ cittaṃ
sammadeva āsavehi vimuccati:*

“When the mind has been matured through discernment, it gains complete release from all mental effluents.” The mind is able to let go of physical and mental phenomena. Physical and mental phenomena are not the mind; the mind isn’t physical and mental phenomena. The mind isn’t virtue, concentration, and discernment.

sabbe dhammā anattā:

The mind doesn’t identify any quality as itself, or itself as any of these qualities. It simply is—deathlessness. This is called disbanding because passion, aversion, and delusion have disbanded completely. There is no more becoming for the mind, no more birth, no more involvement with the elements, aggregates, and sense media, and—unlike ordinary run-of-the-mill people—no longer any intoxication with any of these things. As a passage in the Canon puts it:

mada-nimmadano—no longer intoxicated with the three levels of becoming;
pipāsa-vinayo—no longer thirsting for sensual pleasures;
ālaya-samugghāto—involvement with the aggregates has been uprooted,
leaving the aggregates free to follow their own natural state;
vattūpacchedo—the cycle through the three levels of becoming has been cut
absolutely;
taṇhakkhayo—craving is done with;
virāgo—passion is done with;
nirodho—unawareness has disbanded without leaving a trace;
nibbāna—the mind is freed from its shackles and bonds.

The Deathless is reached. Birth, aging, illness, and death are eliminated. Ultimate, unchanging ease is attained. The aggregates disband without leaving a trace, in line with the synopsis of dependent co-arising: “Simply with the

disbanding of this unawareness—with no trace of remaining passion— fabrications disband ... consciousness (at the six senses) disbands... physical and mental phenomena disband... the six sense media disband... sensory contacts disband... the three kinds of feeling disband... the three kinds of craving disband... the four kinds of clinging disband... becoming disbands... birth disbands... aging, death, sorrow, lamentation, pain, distress, and despair all disband and no longer appear as stress.”

The mind is Dhamma, released from effluents, because it has gained insight into all fabrications. It is totally released from all unawareness, craving, and clinging, and has cut all ten fetters. This is the fruition of arahantship. Those who have reached this level have completed the religion. They have no more defilements or cravings; no one has anything further to teach them. Even the Buddha himself doesn't have it within his power to formulate any further instructions for them. This is why they are said to have completed the religion. If you were to describe their virtues, they would be infinite.

(What I have said here has some of my own views intermingled, so use your discernment to evaluate it.)

People who have reached the fruit of arahantship are classified into four groups:

1. *Sukha-vipassako*: those who have gained “dry” release through the power of insight, having developed the bare minimum of concentration before attaining the knowledge that does away with mental effluents (*āsavakkhaya-ñāṇa*) and gaining release. They have no other powers or skills.
2. *Tevijjo*: those who have attained the three skills—
 - a. *Pubbenivāsānussati-ñāṇa*: the ability to remember their own past lives.
 - b. *Cutūpapāta-ñāṇa*: the ability to see living beings as they pass from death to rebirth.
 - c. *Āsavakkhaya-ñāṇa*: the knowledge that does away with the effluents of defilement.
3. *Chalābhiñño*: those who have attained the six intuitive powers—
 - a. *Iddhividhi*: the ability to display supernormal powers.
 - b. *Dibba-sota*: clairaudience.
 - c. *Cetopariya-ñāṇa*: the ability to know the thoughts of others.
 - d. *Pubbenivāsānussati-ñāṇa*: the ability to remember previous lives.
 - e. *Dibba-cakkhu*: clairvoyance.
 - f. *Āsavakkhaya-ñāṇa*: the ability to do away with mental effluents.
4. *Paṭisambhidappatto*: those who have mastered the four forms of acumen—
 - a. *Attha-paṭisambhidā*: acumen with regard to meaning.
 - b. *Dhamma-paṭisambhidā*: acumen with regard to mental qualities.

- c. *Nirutti-paṭisambhidā*: acumen with regard to linguistic conventions.
- d. *Paṭibhāṇa-paṭisambhidā*: acumen with regard to expression.

These are the different classes of arahants. It's not the case that they are all alike. Those who have attained release through dry insight have developed insight meditation more than tranquility. Those who attain the three skills have developed tranquility and insight in equal measure. Those who attain the six intuitive powers have developed two parts tranquility to one part insight. Those who attain the four forms of acumen have developed three parts tranquility to one part insight. This is why they differ from one another. (Tranquility here refers to the eight levels of *jhāna*). If you want detailed discussions of these various attainments, see the discussions of the three skills, the eight skills, and the four forms of acumen given after the section on *jhāna*. The skills mentioned on this level, though, are all transcendent, and are completely apart from the corresponding mundane skills.

Saṅgaha-Diṭṭhi

Now I would like to describe the virtues of the arahants, those who have clearly known the world and have abandoned the world once and for all. Though their aggregates (physical and mental activities) may still appear to the world, they are pure aggregates, absolutely free from both good and evil, because the mind doesn't claim possession of them. The mind is released from the behavior of the aggregates. The ten fetters have been disbanded completely and no longer entangle the heart, which is why this state is called *nibbāna*: liberation. The mind is radiant and clear; passion, aversion, and delusion can no longer cloud it. It has reached the radiance of the primal nature of the heart, to which nothing else can compare.

Once this radiance is realized, it obliterates the radiance of all three levels of the world, so that no state of becoming appears at all. As long as the mind has yet to gain release from defilement, it is bound to regard the three worlds of becoming as radiant and pleasurable. Once the mind reaches stream entry, the radiance of the three levels of the world begins to darken and dim. When it reaches the level of once-returning, that radiance appears even dimmer; and on the level of non-returning, it appears dimmer yet, although it is still there. When arahantship is reached, the radiance of the three levels of the world is so dim that it has virtually vanished. When virtue, concentration, and discernment are gathered at the mind, and unawareness disbands along with the higher levels of the noble path, the world doesn't appear at all. You can't tell what features, colors, or shapes it has, or even where it is. There is only the pure brilliance of *nibbāna*. All the worlds are dissolved in the moments of the path and fruition of arahantship. This brilliance is something always truly there, but we don't see it because of our own darkness and delusion.

This very brilliance, though, can obliterate the darkness of the world so that only *nibbāna* will appear. The radiance of *nibbāna* obliterates the radiance of the

world just as the light of the sun, which illumines the world of human beings and common animals, and which—when it spreads its full radiance—obliterates the light of the stars appearing in the sky at night. Another comparison is the light of the candle, which in the darkness appears bright to our eyes: If a burning kerosene lantern is brought near the candle, the candle's light will appear to dim. If the lantern's light is really brilliant, the light of the candle won't even appear. If we aren't observant, we may think that the candle isn't shedding any light at all, but actually it's giving off as much light as before, only now no one pays it any attention. So it is with the mind that has reached radiant *nibbāna*, which obliterates the light of the sun and moon, and wipes from the heart the glittering appeal of heaven and the Brahmā worlds. This is why *nibbāna* is said to be zero or empty: None of the three worlds appears as a preoccupation of the heart; the heart no longer entangles itself. It zeroes itself from the world, i.e., it no longer takes part in birth, aging, illness, and death.

Nibbāna is something genuine and unchanging. It knows nothing of deterioration. It always stays as it is. As long as there is birth, aging, illness, and death, there will always be *nibbāna*, because birthlessness comes from birth, and deathlessness lies buried in the very midst of dying. The problem, then, lies with those who don't lay the groundwork for realizing *nibbāna*. *Nibbāna* doesn't vacillate back and forth, but most people who practice virtue, concentration, and discernment do. Just like a man who is going to walk to a city but, when he gets halfway there, turns back; he goes again and then turns back again. Normally he should reach the city in thirty days, but if he walks back and forth like this even for three years, he'll never get there. And when he doesn't reach the city, if he were then to go telling people that it doesn't exist, he would be making a serious mistake.

So it is with people who practice virtue, concentration, and discernment in half measures, back and forth, and—when they don't gain Awakening—go telling others that *nibbāna* is null and void, that it no longer exists because the Buddha took it with him a long time ago when he died. This is very wrong. We can make a comparison with a field where our parents have raised rice and always gotten a good crop. If they die, and our own laziness fills their place so that we don't do the work, we're bound to go hungry. And once we're hungry, can we then say that our parents took the rice or the field with them? In the same way, *nibbāna* is there, but if we don't assemble the causes for realizing it and then go denying its existence, you can imagine for yourself how much harm we're doing.

If we haven't yet reached or realized *nibbāna*, there's nothing extraordinary about it. But once we have actually come close to *nibbāna*, the world will appear as if full of vipers and masses of fire. The palaces and mansions of heavenly beings, if you can see them, will look like the hovels of outcastes. You won't be attracted to living in them, because you've already known *nibbāna*.

Nibbāna is nothing else but this ordinary heart, freed from all the effluents of defilement so that it reaches its primal nature. The primal nature of the heart is something that doesn't take birth, age, grow ill, or die. What takes birth is the act of falling for preoccupations. The heart's nature is clear and shining, but

unawareness keeps it clouded and opaque. Yet even on the physical level—to say nothing of the heart—if someone were to come along and say that the water in the ocean is clear by nature, that a person with any intelligence could see the ocean floor, you’d have a hard time trying to find anyone to believe him. But what he says is true. There are plenty of reasons why we can’t see the ocean floor—the dust and minute particles floating in the water, the wind and the sea creatures that interact with the water—but if you could get someone to eliminate these factors so that there would be nothing but the nature of the water, it would be crystal clear. You could tell at a glance how deep or shallow the ocean was without having to waste your time diving and groping around. So it is with the heart: If our hearts are still ignorant, we shouldn’t go groping elsewhere for *nibbāna*. Only if we cleanse our own hearts will we be able to see it.

People who meditate are by and large extremely prone to conjecture and speculation, judging *nibbāna* to be like this or that, but actually there’s nothing especially deep, dark, or mysterious about it. What makes *nibbāna* seem mysterious is our own lack of discernment. *Nibbāna* is always present, along with the world. As long as the world exists, there will always be *nibbāna*. But if no one explores the truth of *nibbāna*, it will appear mysterious and far away. And once we give rise to our own misunderstandings, we’re bound to start using concepts and fabrications to come up with ideas that *nibbāna* is like this or like that. We may decide that *nibbāna* is extinguished; that *nibbāna* is null and void; that *nibbāna* has no birth, aging, illness, or death; that *nibbāna* is the self; or that *nibbāna* is not-self.

Actually, each of these expressions is neither right nor wrong. Right and wrong belong to the person speaking, because *nibbāna* is something released, untouched by supposing. No matter what anyone may call it, it simply stays as it is. If we were to call it heaven or a Brahmā world, it wouldn’t object, just as we suppose names for “sun” and “moon”: If we were to call them stars or clouds or worlds or jewels, whatever they really are stays as it is; they aren’t transformed by our words. At the same time, they themselves don’t announce that they are sun or moon or anything. They are *ṭhiti-dhamma*—they simply are what they are.

So it is with the pure heart that we call *nibbāna*. No matter what we call it, it simply stays as it is. Thus we say that with *nibbāna* there’s no right and no wrong. Right and wrong belong to the person speaking. People who don’t know the truth drag out their right and wrong to talk about. *Nibbāna* is something known exclusively through the heart. Words and deeds aren’t involved. Our talking is merely a matter of the path. The result, once attained, is something completely apart. We thus call it release (*vimutti*) because it’s released from supposing, attaining a nature that is pure heartwood: the heart that neither spins forward nor back, the heart that attains a quality that doesn’t develop or deteriorate, come or go. It stays as it is—what we suppose as *ṭhiti-dhamma*, free from the germs of defilement—our very own heart, as it reaches the heart’s primal nature.

Actually, the heart is pure by nature, but various moods and objects—various preoccupations—are mixed up with it. Once these preoccupations are cleaned out, there you are: *nibbāna*. To awaken to *nibbāna* is nothing other than knowing

how this one heart takes its preoccupations as itself. The heart by nature is one, but if it hasn't been trained by discernment, it tends to go streaming toward preoccupations, both within and without, and then we say that this state of mind differs from that state of mind, and so they begin to multiply until they're so many that we give up trying to look after them all. They seem many because we count each preoccupation as a state of the mind itself. The problem is that we listen to the teachings of the ancient philosophers without understanding their meaning, and so think that the mind is many.

To understand how the mind is one but has many names, take a simple comparison: Suppose a person has many jobs. Sometimes he sells, so he's called a merchant. If he also grows rice, he's called a farmer. If he works for the King, he's called a government official. If he acquires rank, he's called by his rank. Actually he's only one person, and none of his titles are wrong. They've been given to him simply in line with the jobs he does. But anyone who didn't understand would think that this man was an awful lot of people.

Another comparison: When a person is born, we call it a baby. When it gets older, we call it a child. When it gets still older, we call it a young man or a young lady, and when its hair gets gray and its teeth break, we call it Grandma or Gramps. What gives rise to all these names? One and the same person. So it is with the mind that is supposed to be many. We don't understand what the words are supposed to mean, so we go groping around after our own shadows. When this is the case, we find it hard to practice. We don't understand the states of mind that have been supposed into being, and so don't see the mind that is released from supposing.

When the mind is said to have many states, this is what is meant: Sometimes the mind takes on passion; this is called *sarāga-citta*, a passionate mind. Sometimes it takes on irritation and aversion; this is called *sadosa-citta*, an angry mind. Sometimes it takes on a deluded state as itself; this is called *samoha-citta*, a deluded mind. These states are all on the bad side, and are termed *akusala-citta*, unskillful mental states. As for the good side: *vitārāga-citta*, the mind has reached satisfaction and so its desires fade; *vitadosa-citta*, the mind has had enough and so its anger and ill will disappears; *vitamoha-citta*, the mind is bright and so withdraws from its dullness, just as the sun or moon withdraws from an eclipse and is bright and clear. These are termed *kusala-citta*, skillful mental states.

Some people at this point think that these six mind states are six minds. The true nature of the mind, though, is one. To count six minds is to count the preoccupations; the primal mind is radiant. We take a few things to be many and so end up poor, just as when a foolish or poor person thinks that a thousand baht is a lot of money. An intelligent or rich person, though, realizes that it's just a little: You can spend it all in two days. A fool, however, would think that a thousand baht would make him rich and so he'll have to continue being poor. So it is if we see our one mind as many: We'll have to be poor because we'll be at our wits' end trying to train it.

The nature of the mind that's clear and one is like clean, clear water mixed with different colors in different bottles. We may call it red water, yellow water, green water, etc., but the water itself is still clear as it always was. If a fool comes

along and falls for the colors, he wants to taste them all. He may drink five bottles, but they'll all be just like the first. If he knows beforehand that it's all the same water, he won't feel any desire to waste his time drinking this or that bottle. All he has to do is taste one bottle and that'll be enough. So it is with the mind: If we realize that the mind is in charge and is the determining factor in all things skillful and unskillful and in the paths and fruitions leading to *nibbāna*, we won't feel any desire to go saying that the mind is like this or like that. The mind seems to be many because it gets entangled in various preoccupations, and when these preoccupations dye the mind, we count them as our own mind.

The pure nature of the heart and mind is like the sun, which shines every day without fail throughout the year but is concealed by clouds during the rainy season. Those who don't know its nature then say that the sun isn't shining. This is wrong. Their vision can't penetrate the clouds and so they find fault with the sun. They suppose that the darkness of the clouds belongs to the sun, get stuck on their own supposings, and so don't reach the truth. The true nature of the sun is always bright, no matter what the season. If you don't believe me, ask an airplane pilot. If you go up past the clouds in an airplane on a dark rainy day, you'll know whether the sun is in fact dark or shining.

So it is with the mind: No matter how it may be behaving, its nature is one—radiant and clear. If we lack discernment and skill, we let various preoccupations come flowing into the mind, which lead it to act—sometimes skillfully and sometimes not—and then we designate the mind according to its behavior.

Because there is one mind, it can have only one preoccupation. And if it has only one preoccupation, then there shouldn't be too much difficulty in practicing so as to know its truth. Even though the mind may seem to have many preoccupations, they don't come all at once in a single instant. They have to pass by one at a time. A good mood enters as a bad one leaves; pleasure enters, pain leaves; ingenuity enters, stupidity leaves; darkness enters, brightness leaves. They keep trading places without let-up. Mental moments, though, are extremely fast. If we aren't discerning, we won't be able to know our own preoccupations. Only after they've flared up and spread to affect our words and deeds are we usually aware of them.

Normally this one mind is very fast. Just as when we turn on a light: If we don't look carefully, the light seems to appear, and the darkness to disperse, the very instant we turn on the switch. This one mind, when it changes preoccupations, is that fast. This one mind is what leads to various states of being because our preoccupations get into the act so that we're entangled and snared.

It's not the case that one person will have many minds. Say that a person goes to heaven: He goes just to heaven. Even if he is to go on to other levels of becoming, he has to pass away from heaven first. It's not the case that he'll go to heaven, hell, the *Māra* worlds, and the *Brahmā* worlds all at the same time. This goes to show that the mind is one. Only its thoughts and preoccupations change.

The preoccupations of the mind come down simply to physical and mental phenomena that change, causing the mind to experience birth in various states of becoming. Because the mind lacks discernment and doesn't know the true nature of its preoccupations, it gropes about, experiencing death and rebirth in the four

modes of generation (*yonī*). If the mind has the discernment to know its preoccupations and let go of them all without trace, leaving only the primal nature of the heart that doesn't fall for any preoccupation on the levels of sensuality, form, or formlessness, it will be able to gain release from suffering and stress. "Once the mind is fully matured by means of virtue, concentration and discernment, it gains complete release from the effluents of defilement."

Khandha-kāmo—desire for the five aggregates is over and done with. *Bhava-kāmo*—desire for the three levels of becoming (the sensual plane, the plane of form, and the plane of formlessness) disbands and disperses. The three levels of becoming are essentially only two: the aggregate of physical phenomena, which includes the properties of earth, water, fire, and wind; and the aggregates of mental phenomena, which include feelings, perceptions, fabrications, and consciousness—in short, the phenomena that appear in the body and heart or, if you will, the body and mind. Physical phenomena are those that can be seen with the eye. Mental phenomena are those that can't be seen with the eye but can be sensed only through the heart and mind.

Once we can boil these things down and then separate them out again, we'll come to see the truth of the aggregates: *They* are stress, *they* are the cause of stress, *they* are the path. Once we understand them correctly, we can deal with them properly. Whether they arise, fade, or vanish, we won't—if we have any discernment—latch on to them with any false assumptions. The mind will let go. It will simply know, neutral and undisturbed. It won't feel any need to worry about the conditions or behavior of the aggregates, because it sees that the aggregates can't be straightened out. Even the Buddha didn't straighten out the aggregates. He simply let them go, in line with their own true nature.

The heart is what creates the substance of the aggregates. If you try to straighten out the creations, you'll never be done with them. If you straighten out the creator, you'll have the job finished in no time. When the heart is clouded with darkness and delusion, it creates aggregates or physical and mental phenomena as its products, to the point where the birth, aging, illness, and death of the aggregates become absolutely incurable—unless we have the wisdom to leave them alone in line with their own true nature. In other words, we shouldn't latch on to them.

This is illustrated in the Canon, where the Buddha says in some passages that he is free from birth, aging, illness, and death. If we read further, though, we'll notice that his body grew old, ill and then died; his mental activity ended. What this shows, however, is that the aggregates should be left alone. Whatever their true nature may be, don't try to resist it or go against it. Keep your mind neutral and aware. Don't go latching on to the various preoccupations that arise, age, grow ill, and vanish, as pertaining to your self. If you can do this, you're practicing correctly. Aim only at the purity of the one heart that doesn't die.

The heart clouded with dullness and darkness lacks a firm base and so drifts along, taking after the aggregates. When they take birth, it thinks that it's born along with them; when they age, it thinks that it's aged along with them; when they grow ill and disband, it gets mixed up along with them and so experiences stress and pain, its punishment for drifting along in the wake of its supposings.

If the mind doesn't drift in this way, there is simply the disbanding of stress. The cause of stress and the path disband as well, leaving only the nature that doesn't die: *buddha*, a mind that has bloomed and awakened. For the mind to bloom, it needs the fertilizer of virtue and concentration. For it to awaken and come to its senses, it needs discernment. The fertilizer of concentration is composed of the exercises of tranquility and insight meditation. The mind then gains all-around discernment with regard to the aggregates—seeing the pain and harm they bring—and so shakes itself free and keeps its distance, which is why the term “arahant” is also translated as “one who is distant.” In other words, the mind has had enough. It has had its fill. It's no longer flammable, i.e., it offers no fuel to the fires of passion, aversion, and delusion, which are now dispersed once and for all through the power of transcendent discernment.

This is the supreme *nibbāna*. Birth has been absolutely destroyed, but *nibbāna* isn't annihilation. *Nibbāna* is the name for what still remains: the primal heart. So why isn't it called the heart? Because it's now a heart with no preoccupations. Just as with the names we suppose for “tree” and “steel”: If the tree is cut, they call it “lumber.” If it's made into a house, they call it “home.” If it's made into a place to sit, they call it a “chair.” You never see anyone who would still call it a “tree.” The same with steel: Once it's been made into a car or a knife, we call it a “car” or a “knife.” You never see anyone who would still call it a “steel.” But even though they don't call it a steel, the steel is still there. It hasn't run off anywhere. It's still steel just as it always was.

So it is with the heart when the expert craftsman, discernment, has finished training it: We call it *nibbāna*. We don't call it by its old name. When we no longer call it the “heart,” some people think that the heart vanishes, but actually it's simply the primal heart that we call *nibbāna*. Or, again it's simply the heart released, untouched by supposing. No matter what anyone may call it, it simply stays as it is. It doesn't take on anyone's suppositions at all. Just as when we correctly suppose a diamond to be a diamond: No matter what anyone may call it, its real nature stays as it is. It doesn't advertise itself as a diamond. It simply is what it is.

The same with the heart: Once it gains release, it doesn't suppose itself to be this or that. It's still there. It hasn't been annihilated. Just as when we call a diamond a diamond, it's there; and when we don't call it anything, it's still there—it hasn't vanished or disappeared—so it is with the heart that is *nibbāna*: It's there. If we call it a sun, a moon, heaven, a Māra world, a Brahmā world, earth, water, wind, fire, woman, man, or anything at all, it's still there, just as before. It hasn't changed in any way. It stays as it is: one heart, one Dhamma, no longer taking in the germs of defilement.

This is why the truest name to suppose for it is release. What we call heart, mind, intellect, form, feeling, labels, mental fabrications, consciousness: All these are true as far as supposing goes. Wherever supposing is, there release can be found. Take a blatant example: the five aggregates. If you look at their true nature, you'll see that they've never said, “Look. We're aggregates,” or “Look. We're the heart.” So it is with the heart that's *nibbāna*, that has reached *nibbāna*: It

won't proclaim itself as this or that, which is why we suppose it to be release. Once someone has truly reached release, that's the end of speaking.

The mouth is closed,
closed—the world, the ocean of wandering on,
fabrications, this mass of suffering and stress—
leaving, yes, the highest, most exalted ease,
free from birth, aging,
illness, and death.

This is called *nirāmisā-sukha*, pleasure not of the flesh. Pleasures of the flesh are dependent on defilement, craving, conceits, and views, and are unable to let go of the elements, aggregates, and sense media. As these pleasures of the flesh ripen, they can bring pain, just as ripe fruit or cooked rice are near to turning rotten and moldy, or as ripening bananas cause their tree to come crashing down so that only birds and crows will eat them. So it is with the heart: When it enters into its various preoccupations and takes them as belonging to itself, it's bound for pain and suffering. Just as when an unwary traveler leaves the road to enter the shade of a bael tree with ripening fruits: If the wind blows, the ripe fruits are bound to drop on his head, giving him nothing but pain; so it is with the heart: If it doesn't have a Dhamma to give it shelter, it's bound to be beaten and trampled by suffering and pain. (The wind blowing through the bael tree stands for the eight ways of the world (*loka-dhamma*). The bael tree stands for the body, and the branches for the senses. The fruits are visual objects, sounds, smells, tastes, tactile sensations, and ideas, which drop on the heart stupid enough to sit preoccupied with this mass of elements, aggregates and sense media.)

People of wisdom are those who search for the highest form of pleasure—free from defilement, craving, conceits, and views—by cleansing the heart of all its bad preoccupations. This is the deathless *nibbāna*, which the Buddha praised:

nibbānaṃ paramaṃ sukhaṃ:
Nibbāna is the ultimate ease.

nibbānaṃ paramaṃ suññaṃ:
Nibbāna is the ultimate emptiness (i.e., empty of defilement; free from preoccupations; uninvolved with elements, aggregates, sense media, passion, aversion, and delusion; free from the lineage of unawareness and craving: This is the way in which *nibbāna* is "empty," not the way ordinary people conceive it).

nibbānaṃ paramaṃ vadanti buddhā:
Those who know say that *nibbāna* is the ultimate.

taṅhāya vipphānena nibbānaṃ iti vuccati:
Because of the complete abandonment of craving, it is called *nibbāna*.

akiñcanaṃ anādānaṃ etaṃ dīpaṃ anāparaṃ
nibbānaṃ iti naṃ brūmi jarā-maccu-parikkhayaṃ

Free from entanglements, free from attachments (that fasten and bind), there is no better island than this. It is called *nibbāna*, the absolute end of aging and death.

nibbānaṃ yogakkhemaṃ anuttaraṃ:

Nibbāna is the unexcelled relief from the yoke
(of preoccupations).

etaṃ santaṃ etaṃ paṇitaṃ yadidaṃ sabba-saṅkhāra-samatho sabbūpadhi-paṭinissaggo taṇhakkhayo virāgo nirodho nibbānaṃ:

This is peace (from the coupling of preoccupations), this is exquisite: i.e., the stilling of all fabrications, the relinquishment of all mental paraphernalia, the ending of craving, the fading of passion (for attractions), disbanding (of the darkness of unawareness), *nibbāna*.

We who say we are Buddhists, who believe in the teachings of the Lord Buddha—theory, practice, attainment, paths, fruitions, and *nibbāna*—should search for techniques to rectify our hearts through the practice of tranquility and insight meditation, at the same time nurturing:

conviction—in the theory, practice, and attainment taught by the Buddha;
persistence—in persevering with virtue, concentration, and discernment until they are complete;

mindfulness—so as not to be complacent or careless in virtue, concentration, and discernment;

concentration—so as to make the mind resolute and firm, giving rise to
discernment right within our hearts.

The discernment that comes from the six teachers—i.e., from the senses of sight, hearing, smell, taste, touch, and ideation—is inconstant and may leave us free to do evil again. But the discernment that comes from a mind centered in concentration is capable of doing away with the defilements lying within. So by all means we should show respect for the virtues of the Triple Gem by putting them into practice so that we can taste the nourishment of the Buddha's teachings. Don't be like the ladle that mingles with the curry but never knows the curry's taste. We've mingled ourselves with Buddhism, so we should learn its taste. Don't be like the frog sitting among the lotuses who never gets to know their scent. It sits there pissing, its eyes all bright and wide open. A bee comes past and it jumps—Kroam!—into the water: stupid, even though its eyes are open. We human beings can really be ignorant, even when we know better.

* * *

We have discussed the wisdom that comes from meditation, from the beginning to the end of the exercises of tranquility and insight.

uttamaṃ:

These exercises are superlative and supreme strategies for lifting yourself across the ocean of the world, the swirling flood of rebirth.

sammā-paṭirasassādaṃ paṭṭhayante:

You who are wisely intent on the savor of right attainment, who desire the happiness of *nibbāna*, should devote yourselves to the practices mentioned above. Don't let yourselves grow weary, don't let yourselves be faint in the practice of these two forms of meditation.

They are ornaments,

the highest adornment for the heirs of the Buddha's teaching, and are truly worthy of constant practice.

They will form an island,

a shore, a refuge and a home for you. Even if you aren't yet in a position to break through to the paths and fruitions leading to *nibbāna* in this lifetime, they will form habits and conditions leading to progress in the future, or may help you escape the torments of the realms of deprivation; they will lead you to mundane happiness and relief from the dread of sorrow. But if your perfections are fully developed, you will gain

the heartwood of release—

release from the five temptations of mortality (*Māra*), release from the range of birth, aging, illness, and death, reaching *nibbāna*, following the custom of the noble ones.

May people of judgment consider carefully all that has been written here.

In conclusion, may all those who read this, take it to heart and put it into practice meet only with happiness and joy, free from danger and fear. May you grow day and night in the practice of the Buddha's teachings, in peace and well-being.

saṅgaha-dīṭṭhi:

Views have been included
without alluding to any claims.

Phra Ajaan Lee Dhammadharo

THE FOREST TEMPLE
SHRIMP CANAL
CHANTHABURI

Glossary

This glossary contains Pali terms that aren't translated when they first appear in the text, as well as terms that require further background explanation even when they are. *Dhātu* in particular is discussed at length because an acquaintance with traditional Thai physics is needed to understand a number of similes given in the text, even though they don't explicitly refer to the term.

Some Pali terms carry a weight of associations that can't be borne by single English equivalents. In some such cases, where the terms form the connecting thread in the discussion (e.g., *sammati*, *ārammaṇa*), I have used a single equivalent throughout the text, and have given a variety of readings here which—if the reader feels inclined—can be read into the text in place of the equivalents used. In other cases (e.g., *nirodha*) I have used a number of different equivalents in the text, as called for by the context, all of which have been gathered here so that the reader will see that they are meant to be related.

In choosing English equivalents for the Pali terms used in this book, I have been guided primarily by the meanings Ajaan Lee himself gives to those terms—either directly, through the way he explains and defines them; or indirectly, through the way he uses them. Some of these meanings differ from those generally accepted at present, in which cases it is up to the reader to discover which interpretations are best by experimenting to see which are most useful in practice.

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abhiññā: Intuitive powers that come from the practice of concentration: the ability to display psychic powers, clairvoyance, clairaudience, the ability to know the thoughts of others, recollection of past lifetimes, and the knowledge that does away with mental effluents (see *āsava*).

anattā: Not-self.

anicca(ṃ): Inconstant, unstable, impermanent.

anussati: Recollection as a meditation exercise. Strictly speaking, there are seven themes recommended for recollection: the virtues of the Buddha, of the Dhamma, and of the Saṅgha; moral virtue; generosity; the qualities that lead to rebirth as a heavenly being; and the peace of nibbāna. (This last topic is for those who have already experienced a glimpse of nibbāna, but have not yet attained arahantship.) In addition, the following practices are also sometimes classed as “*anussati*”: mindfulness of death, mindfulness of breathing, and mindfulness immersed in the body.

apāya-bhūmi: Realm of deprivation; the four lower states of existence: rebirth in hell, as a hungry shade, as an angry demon, or as a common animal. In Buddhism, none of these states are regarded as eternal conditions.

arahant: A person who has abandoned all ten of the fetters that bind the mind to the cycle of rebirth (see *saṁyojana*), whose heart is free of mental effluents (see *āsava*), and is thus not destined for future rebirth. As this word bears a resemblance to the Pali word for “distant” (*ara*), it is sometimes translated as “one far from evil.” An epithet for the Buddha and the highest of his noble disciples.

ārammaṇa: Preoccupation; object or issue of the mind or will; anything the mind takes as a theme or prop for its activity.

āsava: Mental effluent or fermentation—sensuality, becoming, views, and unawareness.

avijjā: Unawareness; ignorance; counterfeit knowledge; not seeing things in terms of the four noble truths.

āyatana: Sense medium. The inner sense media are the sense organs—eyes, ears, nose, tongue, body, and intellect. The outer sense media are their respective objects.

brahmā: “Great One”—an inhabitant of the heavens of form or formlessness.

buddho (buddha): Awake; enlightened.

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

dhātu: Element; property; potential. In the Pali Canon this word occurs primarily in discussions of the causes of activity, in which it forms the ultimate precondition underlying the causal chain leading to the activity in question. The arousal or irritation of the *dhātu* is what causes the activity to take place. Thus on the psychological level, the properties of sensuality, anger, or delusion in a person’s mind are the basic conditions underlying unskillful action on his or her part. On the level of nature at large, phenomena such as windstorms, fires, floods, and earthquakes are explained as resulting from the arousal of the properties of wind, fire, and water. Such disorders cease when the disturbed property grows calm. Thus, for instance, when the fire property runs out of sustenance to cling to, it grows calm and the individual fire goes out. On the level of the human body, diseases are explained as resulting from the aggravation of any of these properties, all of which permeate the entire body. For example, in Thai medicine, belching, fainting, cramps, convulsions, and paralysis are associated with disorders of the internal wind element.

All of this explanation may make the notion of *dhātu* seem rather foreign, but when used as an object of meditation, the four physical *dhātu* are simply a way of viewing the body in impersonal, purely physical terms. They are experienced as

the elementary sensations and potentials—warmth, movement, etc.—that permeate and make up the internal sense of the body (see *rūpa*). Thus the meditation exercise of spreading the breath throughout the body is simply the feeling of linking the sensations of the in-and-out breath with the subtle sense of motion that permeates the body at all times. The six *dhātu*—the four physical *dhātu* plus space and consciousness—constitute the elementary properties or potentials that underlie the experience of physical and mental phenomena.

dukkha(m): Stress; suffering; pain; discontent.

jhāna: Meditative absorption in a single object, notion or sensation (see *rūpa*).

kamma (karma): Intentional acts that result in states of being and birth. The law of *kamma* is the principle that a person's own intentional acts influence the good and evil that he or she meets with.

kaṣiṇa: An object stared at with the purpose of fixing an image of it in one's consciousness and then manipulating the image to make it fill the totality of one's awareness.

khandha: Component parts of sensory perception; physical and mental phenomena as they are directly experienced: *rūpa* (see below); *vedanā*—feelings of pleasure, pain, or neither pleasure nor pain that result from the mind's interaction with its objects; *saññā*—labels, concepts, perceptions; *saṅkhāra* (see below); and *viññāṇa*—consciousness, the act of noticing sense data and ideas as they occur.

lokadhamma: Worldly phenomena—gain, loss, status, loss of status, praise, criticism, pleasure, and pain.

māra: Temptation; mortality. The five forms in which temptation appears, deflecting the practitioner from the path, are as: defilement, the vicissitudes of the *khandhas*, fear of death, habitual urges & tendencies, and as deities.

nibbāna (nirvāṇa): Liberation; the unbinding of the mind from greed, anger, and delusion, from physical sensations and mental acts. As the term is used to refer also to the extinguishing of a fire, it carries connotations of stilling, cooling, and peace. (According to the physics taught at the time of the Buddha, the property of fire exists in a latent state to a greater or lesser degree in all objects. When activated, it seizes and sticks to its fuel. When extinguished, it is “unbound.”)

nimitta: Mental sign or image; theme of concentration. *Uggaha nimitta* refers to any image that arises in the course of meditation. *Paṭibhāga nimitta* refers to the mental manipulation of the image.

nirodha: Disbanding; cessation; dispersal; stopping (of stress and its causes).

paññā: Discernment; wisdom.

rūpa: The basic meaning of this word is “appearance” or “form.” It is used, however, in a number of different contexts, taking on different shades of meaning in each. In lists of the objects of the senses, it is given as the object of the

sense of sight. As one of the *khandhas*, it refers to physical phenomena or sensations (visible appearance or form being the defining characteristics of what is physical). This is also the meaning it carries when opposed to *nāma*, or mental phenomena. The act of focusing on the level of physical and mental phenomena (literally, form and name) means focusing on the primary sensation of such phenomena in and of themselves, before the mind elaborates them further. In the list, “*kāma, rūpa, arūpa*”—the types of object that the mind can take as its preoccupation and the states of becoming that result—*kāma* refers to images derived from the external senses, *rūpa* to the internal sense of the form of the body, and *arūpa* to strictly mental phenomena. This last sense of *rūpa* is also what is meant in the term “*rūpa jhāna*.”

samādhi: Concentration; the act of centering the mind on a single object.

sammatti: In Thai, the primary meaning of this word is “supposing,” which is how it is translated here, but it also conveys the meaning of convention (i.e., usages which are commonly designated or agreed upon), make-believe, and conjuring into being with the mind.

saṅkhāra: Fabrication—any force or factor that fabricates things, the process of fabrication, and any fabricated thing that results; anything conditioned, compounded, or fashioned by nature, whether on the physical or the mental level. In some contexts this word is used as a blanket term for all five *khandhas*. As the fourth *khandha*, it refers specifically to the fabrication of urges, thoughts, etc., within the mind.

saṅyojana: Fetters that bind the mind to the cycle of rebirth—self-identity views, uncertainty, grasping at habits & practices; sensual passion, irritability; passion for form, passion for formless phenomena, conceit, restlessness, and unawareness.

sati: Mindfulness; the ability to keep something in mind; powers of reference and retention.

satipaṭṭhāna: Frame of reference; establishing of mindfulness—body, feelings, mind, and mental qualities, viewed in and of themselves.

upādāna: Clinging; attachment; sustenance for becoming and birth—clinging to sensuality, to views, to habits & practices, and to theories of the self.

uposatha: Observance day, corresponding to the phases of the moon, on which Buddhist laypeople gather to listen to the Dhamma and observe the eight precepts.

vicāra: Evaluation; investigation. A factor of *rūpa jhāna*.

vimutti: Release; freedom from the suppositions and fabrications of the mind.

vipassanā: Liberating insight; clear intuitive understanding of how physical and mental phenomena are caused and experienced, seeing them as they are, in and of themselves, arising and passing away: inconstant, stressful, and not-self.

vitakka: Thinking about an object; keeping an object in mind. A factor of *rūpa jhāna*.

yoni: Mode of generation. In the Pali Canon, four modes of generation are listed: birth from a womb, birth from an egg, birth from moisture, and spontaneous appearance (this last refers to the birth of heavenly beings).

If anything in this translation is inaccurate or misleading, I ask forgiveness of the author and reader for having unwittingly stood in their way. As for whatever may be accurate, I hope the reader will make the best use of it, translating it a few steps further, into the heart, so as to attain the truth at which it points.

The translator

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*sabbe sattā sadā hontu
averā sukha-jīvino
katarī puñña-phalārī mayharī
sabbe bhāgī bhavantu te*

May all beings always live happily,
free from animosity.
May all share in the blessings
springing from the good I have done.