



Food for Thought

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*Eighteen Talks
on the Training of the Heart*

by

Ajaan Lee Dhammadharo
(*Phra Suddhidhammaransi Gambhiramedhacariya*)

*Translated from the Thai
by Thanissaro Bhikkhu
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Introduction

This book is an introduction to the Buddhist practice of training the heart. It is taken from the talks of Phra Ajaan Lee Dhammadharo, a teacher in the Thai forest tradition of meditation, and is called *Food for Thought* because it invites the reader to fill in the spaces suggested by the talks—to reflect on how the images and teachings they contain relate to one another and to one's own situation in life.

Two of the talks included here, 'Quiet Breathing' and 'Centered Within,' briefly describe a technique of breath meditation aimed at giving rise to a centered and discerning state of mind. The rest of the talks deal with how to use such a state of mind in dealing with the problems of life: the day-to-day problems of anger, anxiety, disappointment, etc., and the larger problems of aging, illness, and death.

In other words, this is a book concerned less with the techniques of meditation than with its meaning and worth: the questions of why should one train the heart to begin with, what personal qualities are involved in its training, and how to make the best use of it as it becomes trained. Readers interested in more detailed instructions in the techniques of formal meditation can find them in Ajaan Lee's other books—especially *Keeping the Breath in Mind* and *Inner Strength*—although it is wise to reflect on the sorts of questions raised by this book before actually sitting down to the practice.

The talks translated here are actually reconstructions of Ajaan Lee's talks made by two of his followers—a nun, Arun Abhivanna, and a monk, Phra Bunkuu Anuvaddhano—based on notes they made while listening to him teach. Some of the reconstructions are fairly fragmentary and disjointed, and in presenting them here I have had to edit them somewhat, cutting extraneous passages, expanding on shorthand references to points of formal doctrine, and filling in gaps by collating passages from different talks dealing with the same topic. Aside from changes of this sort, though, I have tried my best to convey both the letter and spirit of Ajaan Lee's message.

I have also tried to keep the use of Pali words in the translation to a minimum. In all cases where English equivalents have been substituted for Pali terms, I have chosen to convey the meanings Ajaan Lee gives to these terms in his writings, even when this has meant departing from the interpretations given to these terms by

scholars. A few Pali terms, though, have no adequate English equivalents, so here is a brief glossary of the ones left untranslated or unexplained in this book:

ARAHANT: A person who has gained liberation from mental defilement and the cycle of death and rebirth.

BRAHMA: An inhabitant of the heavens of form and formlessness corresponding to the levels of meditative absorption in physical and non-physical objects.

BUDDHO: Awake; enlightened. An epithet of the Buddha.

DHAMMA (DHARMA): The truth in and of itself; the right natural order of things. Also, the Buddha's teachings on these topics and the practice of those teachings aimed at realizing the true nature of the mind in and of itself.

KAMMA (KARMA): Intentional acts, which create good or bad results in accordance with the quality of the intention. Kamma debts are the moral debts one owes to others for having caused them hardships or difficulties.

NIBBANA (NIRVANA): Liberation; the unbinding of the mind from mental defilement and the cycle of death and rebirth. As this term refers also to the extinguishing of fire, it carries connotations of stilling, cooling, and peace. (According to the physics taught at the time of the Buddha, a burning fire seizes or adheres to its fuel; when extinguished, it is unbound.)

SANGHA: The followers of the Buddha who have practiced his teachings at least to the point of gaining entry to the stream to Liberation. To take refuge in the Buddha, Dhamma, and Sangha means to take them as the guide in one's search for happiness and to make the effort to give rise to their qualities within oneself.

* * *

My hope is that the teachings in this book will serve as more than just food for thought, and that they will inspire you to search for the inner worth and happiness that come with the practice of training the heart.

Thanissaro Bhikkhu

(Geoffrey DeGraff)

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Taking the Long View

August 4, 1957

Most of us tend to concern ourselves only with short, small, and narrow things. For instance, we think that there isn't much to human life—we're born and then we die—so we pay attention only to our stomachs and appetites. There's hardly anyone who thinks further than that, who thinks out past death. This is why we're short-sighted and don't think of developing any goodness or virtues within ourselves, because we don't see the truth and the extremely important benefits we'll gain from these things in the future.

Actually, the affairs of each person are really long and drawn out, and not at all short. If they were short, we'd all know where we came from and how we got where we are. The same would hold true for the future: If our affairs were really a short story, we'd know where we're going and what we'll be after death.

But the truth of the matter is that almost no one knows these things about themselves. The only ones who do know are those whose minds are strong in goodness and virtue, and who have developed purity to the point where they gain the intuitive understanding that enables them to see where they've come from and where they're going. These people have the inner eye, which is why they are able to see things past and future. Sometimes they can see not only their own, but also other people's affairs. This is what makes them realize the hardships and difficulties suffered by human beings and other living beings born into this world. They see the cycle of birth, aging, illness, and death. They see their past lives, both good and bad, and this makes them feel a sense of dismay and dispassion, disenchanted with the idea of ever being born again. As a result, they try to develop their goodness and virtues even further so that they can reduce the number of times they'll have to be reborn. For example, Stream-winners—those who have entered the stream to Liberation (*nibbana*)—will be reborn at most only seven more times and then will never have to be reborn again. Once-returners will be reborn in the human world only once more, while Non-returners will be reborn in the Brahma worlds and gain Liberation there.

As for Stream-winners, even though they have to be reborn, they're reborn in secure places. They aren't reborn in states of deprivation, such as the realms of hungry shades, angry demons, or common animals. They're reborn as human

beings, but as special human beings, not like the rest of us. How are they special? They have few defilements in their hearts, not thick defilements like ordinary people. They have a built-in sense of conscience and scrupulousness. Even though they may do wrong from time to time, they see the damage it does and feel a sense of shame, so that they won't want their various defilements to lead them into doing wrong ever again.

People disenchanted with rebirth make an extra effort to build up their virtues so that they won't have to come back and be reborn. If you want to cut down the number of times you'll take rebirth, you should steadily increase your inner quality and worth. In other words, make your heart clean and bright with generosity, moral virtue, and meditation. Keep your thoughts, words, and deeds at equilibrium, secluded from evil both inside and out. If you have no vices in word and deed, that's called being secluded from outside evil. If your mind is firmly centered in concentration and free from obstructing distractions, that's called being secluded from inside evil. This way you can be at peace and at ease both within and without. As the Buddha said, 'Happy is the person content in seclusion.'

When this kind of seclusion arises in the mind, all sorts of worthwhile qualities will come flowing in without stop. The heart will keep growing higher and higher, until it no longer wants anything at all. If you used to eat a lot, you won't want to eat a lot. If you used to eat in moderation, there'll be times when you won't want to eat at all. If you used to talk a lot, you won't want to talk a lot. If you used to sleep a lot, you'll want to sleep only a little. However you live, the heart will be entirely happy, with no more danger to fear from anyone. This is how you cut down the number of times you'll take rebirth.

* * *

If you see any areas in which you're still lacking in inner worth, you should try to fill in the lack right away. Be steady in your practice of meditation and make your mind clear, free from the distractions that will drag it down into the dirt. Dirt is where animals live—pigs, dogs, ducks, chickens, and cows. It's no place for human beings. If you're really a human being, you have to like living in clean places, free from danger and germs. This is why the Buddha praised seclusion as the wellspring of happiness. So try to find a secluded spot for yourself to stay within the mind, secluded from hindering distractions. Make your mind as bright as a jewel, and don't let temptation come along and try to trade garbage for the good things you've

got. You have to be mindful at all times, so don't let yourself be absent-minded or forgetful.

* * *

If your mind doesn't stay with your body in the present, all sorts of evil things—all sorts of distractions—will come flowing in to overwhelm it, making it fall away from its inner worth, just as a vacant house is sure to become a nest of spiders, termites, and all sorts of animals. If you keep your mind firmly with the body in the present, you'll be safe. Like a person on a big ship in the middle of a smooth sea free from wind and waves: Everywhere you look is clear and wide open. You can see far. Your eyes are quiet with regard to sights, your ears quiet with regard to sounds, and so on with your other senses. Your mind is quiet with regard to thoughts of sensuality, ill will, and harm. The mind is in a state of seclusion, calm and at peace. This is where we'll let go of our sense of 'me' and 'mine,' and reach the further shore, free from constraints and bonds.

An Inner Mainstay

August 28, 1957

Normally, our hearts can hardly ever sit still. They have to think about all kinds of thoughts and ideas, both good and bad. When good things happen, we keep them to think about. When bad things happen, we keep them to think about. When we succeed or fail at anything, we keep it to think about. This shows how impoverished the mind is. When it thinks about things it likes, it develops sensual craving. When it thinks about things that are possible, it develops craving for possibilities. When it thinks about things that are impossible, it develops craving for impossibilities, all without our realizing it. This is called unawareness. It's because of this unawareness that we have thoughts, judgments, and worries that form the wellspring for likes, dislikes, and attachments.

Sometimes the things we think about can come true in line with our thoughts; sometimes they can't. While there's at least *some* use in thinking about things that are possible, we like to go to the effort of thinking about things that are out of the question. I.e., when certain things are no longer possible, we still hold onto them to the point where we feel mistreated or depressed. We keep trying to get results out of things that can no longer be. When our hopes aren't satisfied, we latch onto our dissatisfaction; when they *are* satisfied, we latch onto our satisfaction. This gives rise to likes and dislikes. We latch onto thoughts of the future and thoughts of the past. Most of us, when we succeed at something, latch onto our happiness. When we don't succeed, we latch onto our disappointment. Sometimes we latch onto things that are good—although latching onto goodness leaves us *some* way to crawl along. Sometimes we actually latch onto things that are clearly bad.

This is what made the Buddha feel such pity for us human beings. In what way? He pitied our stupidity in not understanding what suffering is. We know that red ants can really hurt when they bite us, yet we go stick our heads in a red ant nest and then sit around in pain and torment. What good do we get out of it?

When we see good or bad sights with our eyes, we latch onto them. When we hear good or bad sounds with our ears, we latch onto them. When we smell good or bad odors, taste good or bad flavors, feel good or bad sensations, or think good or bad thoughts, we latch onto them—so we end up all encumbered with sights dangling from our eyes, sounds dangling from both of our ears, odors dangling

from the tip of our nose, flavors dangling from the tip of our tongue, tactile sensations dangling all over our body, and thoughts dangling from our mind. This way, sights are sure to close off our eyes, sounds close off our ears, odors close off our nostrils, flavors close off our tongue, tactile sensations close off our body, and thoughts close off our mind. When our senses are completely closed off in this way, we're in the dark—the darkness of unawareness—groping around without finding the right way, unable to go any way at all. Our body is weighed down and our mind is dark. This is called harming yourself, killing yourself, destroying your own chances for progress.

Thoughts are addictive, and especially when they're about things that are bad. We remember them long and think of them often. This is delusion, one of the camp-followers of unawareness. For this reason, we have to drive this kind of delusion from our hearts by making ourselves mindful and self-aware, fully alert with each in-and-out breath. This is what awareness comes from. When awareness arises, discernment arises as well. If awareness doesn't arise, how will we be able to get rid of craving? When awareness arises, craving for sensuality, craving for possibilities, and craving for impossibilities will all stop, and attachment won't exist. This is the way of the Noble Path.

Most of us tend to flow along in the direction of what's bad more than in the direction of what's good. When people try to convince us to do good, they have to give us lots of reasons, and even then we hardly budge. But if they try to talk us into doing bad, all they have to do is say one or two words and we're already running with them. This is why the Buddha said, 'People are foolish. They like to feed on bad preoccupations.' And that's not all. We even feed on things that have no truth to them at all. We can't be bothered with thinking about good things, but we like to keep clambering after bad things, trying to remember them and keep them in mind. We don't get to eat any meat or sit on any skin, and yet we choke on the bones.

'We don't get to eat any meat': This means that we gather up imaginary things to think about, but they don't bring us any happiness. A person who opens his mouth to put food in it at least gets something to fill up his stomach, but a person who clambers around with his mouth open, craning his neck to swallow nothing but air: That's really ridiculous. His stomach is empty, without the least little thing to give it weight. This stands for thoughts that have no truth to them. We keep searching them out, gathering them up and elaborating on them in various ways without getting any results out of them at all, aside from making ourselves restless and

distracted. We never have any time to sit still in one place, and instead keep running and jumping around until the skin on our rears has no chance to make contact anywhere with a place to sit down. This is what is meant by, ‘We don’t get to sit on any skin.’ We can’t lie down, we can’t stay seated—even though our bodies may be seated, our minds aren’t seated there with them. We don’t get to eat any meat and instead we choke on the bones. We try to swallow them, but they won’t go down; we try to cough them up, but they won’t come out.

When we say, ‘We choke on the bones,’ this refers to the various bad preoccupations that get stuck in the heart. The ‘bones’ here are the five Hindrances.

(1) Sensual desire: The mind gets carried away with things it likes.

(2) Ill will: Things that displease us are like bones stuck in the heart. The mind fastens on things that are bad, on things we dislike, until we start feeling animosity, anger, and hatred. Sometimes we even gather up old tasteless bones that were thrown away long ago—like chicken bones that have been boiled to make stock: The meat has fallen off, the flavor has been boiled away, and all that’s left are the hard, brittle bones they throw to dogs. This stands for old thoughts stretching back 20 to 30 years that we bring out to gnaw on. Look at yourself: Your mind is so impoverished that it has to suck on old bones. It’s really pitiful.

(3) Torpor & lethargy: When the mind has been feeding on trash like this, with nothing to nourish it, its strength is bound to wane away. It becomes sleepy and depressed, oblivious to other people’s words, not hearing their questions or understanding what they’re trying to say.

(4) Restlessness & anxiety: The mind then gets irritable and distracted, which is followed by—

(5) Uncertainty: We may decide that good things are bad, or bad things are good, wrong things are right, or right things are wrong. We may do things in line with the Dhamma and not realize it, or contrary to the Dhamma—but in line with our own preconceptions—and not know it. Everything gets stuck in our throat, and we can’t decide which way to go, so our thoughts keep running around in circles, like a person who rows his boat around in a lake for hours and hours without getting anywhere.

This is called harming yourself, hurting yourself, killing yourself. And when we can do this sort of thing to ourselves, what’s to keep us from doing it to others? This is why we shouldn’t let ourselves harbor thoughts of envy, jealousy or anger. If any

of these five Hindrances arise in the heart, then trouble and suffering will come flooding in like a torrential downpour, and we won't be able to hold our own against them. All of this is because of the unawareness that keeps us from having any inner quality as a mainstay. Even though we may live in a seven- or nine-story mansion and eat food at \$40 a plate, we won't be able to find any happiness.

People without any inner quality are like vagrants with no home to live in. They have to be exposed to sun, rain, and wind by day and by night, so how can they find any relief from the heat or the cold? With nothing to shelter them, they have to lie curled up until their backs get all crooked and bent. When a storm comes, they need to scurry to find shelter: They can't stay under trees because they're afraid the trees will be blown down on top of them. They can't stay in open fields because they're afraid lightning will strike. At midday the sun is so hot that they can't sit for long—like an old barefooted woman walking on an asphalt road when the sun is blazing: She can't put her feet down because she's afraid they'll blister, so she dances around in place on her tiptoes, not knowing where she can rest her feet.

This is why the Buddha felt such pity for us, and taught us to find shelter for ourselves by doing good and developing concentration as a principle in our hearts, so that we can have an inner home. This way we won't have to suffer, and other people will benefit as well. This is called having a mainstay.

People with no mainstay are bound to busy themselves with things that have no real meaning or worth—i.e., with things that can't protect them from suffering when the necessity arises. *A person without the wisdom to search for a mainstay is sure to suffer hardships.* I'll illustrate this point with a story. Once there was a band of monkeys living in the upper branches of a forest, each one carrying its young wherever it went. One day a heavy windstorm came. As soon as the monkeys heard the sound of the approaching wind, they broke off branches and twigs to make themselves a nest on one of the bigger branches. After they had piled on the twigs, they went down under the nest and looked up to see if there were still any holes. Wherever they saw a hole, they piled on more twigs and branches until the whole thing was piled thick and high. Then when the wind and rain came, they got up on top of the nest, sitting there with their mouths open, shivering from the cold, exposed to the wind and rain. Their nest hadn't offered them any protection at all, simply because of their own stupidity. Eventually a gust of wind blew the nest apart. The monkeys were scattered every which way and ended up dangling here and there, their babies falling from their grasp, all of them thoroughly miserable from their hardship and pain.

People who don't search for inner worth as their mainstay are no different from these monkeys. They work at amassing money and property, thinking that these things will give them security, but when death comes, none of these things can offer any safety at all. This is why the Buddha felt such pity for all the deluded people in the world, and went to great lengths to teach us to search for inner quality as a mainstay for ourselves.

People who have inner quality as their mainstay are said to be kind not only to themselves but also to others as well, in the same way that when we have a house of our own, we can build a hut for other people to live in, too. If we see that another person's hut is going to cave in, we help find thatch to roof it; make walls for the left side, right side, the front and the back, to protect it from storm winds; and raise the floor to get it above flood level. What this means is that we teach the other person how to escape from his or her own defilements in the same way that we've been able, to whatever extent, to escape from ours. When we tell others to practice concentration, it's like helping them roof their house so that they won't have to be exposed to the sun and rain. Making walls for the front and back means that we tell them to shut off thoughts of past and future; and walls for the left and right means that we tell them to shut off thoughts of likes and dislikes. Raising the floor above flood level means we get them to stay firmly centered in concentration, keeping their minds still with their object of meditation.

Once people have a house with good walls, a sound roof, and a solid floor, then even if they don't have any other external belongings—just a single rag to their name—they can be happy, secure, and at peace. *But if your house is sunk in the mud, what hope is there for your belongings?* You'll have to end up playing with crabs, worms, and other creepy things. Your walls are nothing but holes, so that people can see straight through your house, in one side and out the other. Even from four to five miles away they can see everything you've got. When this is the case, thieves are going to gang up and rob you—i.e., all sorts of bad thoughts and preoccupations are going to come in and ransack your heart.

As for your roof, it's nothing but holes. You look up and can see the stars. Termite dust is going to sift into your ears and eyes, and birds flying past will plaster you with their droppings. So in the end, all you can do is sit scratching your head in misery because you haven't any shelter.

When this is the case, you should take pity on yourself and develop your own inner worth. Keep practicing concentration until your heart matures, step by step. When you do this, you'll develop the light of discernment that can chase the

darkness of unawareness out of your heart. When there's no more unawareness, you'll be free from craving and attachment, and ultimately gain Liberation.

For this reason, we should all keep practicing meditation and set our hearts on developing nothing but inner goodness, without retreating or getting discouraged. Whatever is a form of goodness, roll up your sleeves and pitch right in. Don't feel any regrets even if you ram your head into a wall and die on the spot. If you're brave in your proper efforts this way, all your affairs are sure to succeed in line with your hopes and aspirations. But if evil comes and asks to move into your home—your heart—chase it away. Don't let it stay even for a single night.

* * *

People who like to gather up thoughts, worries, etc., to hold onto are no different from prisoners tied down with a ball and chain. To fasten onto thoughts of the past is like having a rope around your waist tied to a post behind you. To fasten onto thoughts of the future is like having a rope around your neck tied to a door in front. To fasten onto thoughts you like is like having a rope around your right wrist tied to a post on your right. To fasten onto thoughts you don't like is like having a rope around your left wrist tied to a wall on your left. Whichever way you try to step, you're pulled back by the rope on the opposite side, so how can you hope to get anywhere at all?

As for people who have unshackled themselves from their thoughts, they stand tall and free like soldiers or warriors with weapons in both hands and no need to fear enemies from any direction. Any opponents who see them won't dare come near, so they're always sure to come out winning.

But if we're the type tied up with ropes on all sides, nobody's going to fear us, because there's no way we can take any kind of stance to fight them off. If enemies approach us, all we can do is dance around in one spot.

So I ask that we all take a good look at ourselves, and try to unshackle ourselves from all outside thoughts and preoccupations. Don't let them get stuck in your heart. Your meditation will then give you results, your mind will advance to the transcendent, and you're sure to come out winning someday.

Trading Outer Wealth for Inner Wealth

July 1, 1958

Inner wealth, according to the texts, means seven things—conviction, virtue, a sense of conscience, scrupulousness, breadth of learning, generosity, and discernment—but to put it simply, inner wealth refers to the inner quality we build within ourselves. Outer wealth—money and material goods—doesn't have any hard and fast owners. Today it may be ours, tomorrow someone else may take it away. There are times when it belongs to us, and times when it belongs to others. Even with things that are fixed in the ground, like farms or orchards, you can't keep them from changing hands.

So when you develop yourself so as to gain the discernment that sees how worldly things are undependable and unsure, don't let your property—your worldly possessions—sit idle. The Buddha teaches us to plant crops on our land so that we can benefit from it. If you don't make use of your land, it's sure to fall into other people's hands. In other words, when we stake out a claim to a piece of property, we should plant it full of crops. Otherwise the government won't recognize our claim, and we'll lose our rights to it. Even if we take the case to court, we won't have a chance to win. So once you see the weakness of an idle claim, you should hurry up and plant crops on it so that the government will recognize your claim and issue you a title to the land.

What this means is that we should make use of our material possessions by being generous with them, using them in a way that develops the inner wealth of generosity within us. This way they become the kind of wealth over which we have full rights, and that will benefit us even into future lifetimes.

Bodily Debts

September 29, 1958

This body of ours: Actually there's not the least bit of it that's really ours at all. We've gotten it from animals and plants—the pigs, prawns, chickens, fish, crabs, cows, etc., and all the various vegetables, fruits, and grains that have been made into the food we've eaten, which the body has chewed and digested and turned into the blood that nourishes its various parts. In other words, we've taken cooked things and turned them back into raw things: ears, eyes, hands, arms, body, etc. These then become male or female, they're given ranks and titles, and so we end up falling for all of these conventions. Actually these heads of ours are lettuce heads, our hair is pigs' hair, our bones are chicken bones and duck bones, our muscles are cows' muscles, etc. There's not one part that's really ours, but we lay claim to the whole thing and say it's this and that. We forget the original owners from whom we got it all and so become possessive of it. When the time comes for them to come and take it back, we're not willing to give it back, which is where things get messy and complicated and cause us to suffer when death comes near.

If all the various animals we've eaten were to come walking out of each of us right now (here I'm not talking about the really big ones, like cows and steers; say that just all the little ones—the shrimps, fish, oysters, crabs, chickens, ducks, and pigs—came walking out) there wouldn't be enough room for them all in this meditation hall. None of us would be able to live here in this monastery any more. How many pigs, ducks, chickens, and shrimp have each of us eaten? How many bushels of fish? If we were to calculate it all, who knows what the figures would be—all the animals we ourselves have killed for food or that we've gotten from others who've killed them. How do you think these animals won't come and demand repayment? If we don't have anything to give them, they're sure to repossess everything we've got. Right when we're at death's door: That's when they're going to crowd around and demand that we repay our debts. If we don't have anything to give them, they're going to knock us flat. But if we have enough to give them, we'll come out unscathed.

In other words, if we develop a lot of inner goodness, we'll be able to contend with whatever pains we suffer, by giving back the body with good grace—in other words, by letting go of our attachment to it. That's when we'll be at peace. *We should*

realize that the body leaves us and lets us go, bit by bit, every day. But we've never left it, never let it go at all. We're attached to it in every way, just as when we eat food: We're attached to the food, but the food isn't attached to us. If we don't eat it, it'll never cry even once. All the attachment comes from our side alone.

The pleasure we get from the body is a worldly pleasure: good for a moment and then it changes. It's not at all lasting or permanent. Notice the food you eat: At what point is it good and delicious? It looks good and inviting only when it's arranged nicely on a plate. It's delicious only for the brief moment it's in your mouth. After it goes down your throat, what is it like then? And when it gets down to your intestines and comes out the other end, what is it like then? It keeps changing all the time. When you think about this sort of thing, it's enough to make you disillusioned with everything in the world.

Worldly pleasure is good only when it's hot and fresh, like fresh-cooked rice piled on a plate when it's still hot and steaming. If you leave it until it's cold, there's no taste to it. If you let it go until it hardens, you can't swallow it; and if you let it sit overnight, it spoils and you have to throw it away.

As for the pleasure of the Dhamma, it's like the brightness of stars or the color of gold. The brightness of stars is clear and glittering. Whoever sees it feels calmed and refreshed. When depressed people look at the stars, no matter when, their depression disappears. As for the color of gold, it's always gleaming and golden. No matter what the gold is made into, its color doesn't change. It's always gleaming and golden as it always was.

In the same way, the pleasure of the Dhamma is lasting and gives delight throughout time to those who practice it. For this reason, intelligent people search for pleasure in the Dhamma by giving up their worthless, meaningless worldly pleasures, to trade them in for lasting pleasure by practicing meditation until their minds and actions reach the level of goodness, beauty, and purity that goes beyond all action, all suffering and stress.

Nightsoil for the Heart

July 6, 1959

Beautiful things come from things that are dirty, and not at all from things that are pleasant and clean. Crops and trees, for instance, grow to be healthy and beautiful because of the rotten and smelly compost and nightsoil with which they're fertilized. In the same way, a beautiful mind comes from meeting with things that aren't pleasant. When we meet with bad things, the mind has a chance to grow.

'Bad things' here mean loss of wealth, loss of status, criticism, and pain. When these things happen to a person whose mind is rightly centered in concentration, they turn into good things. Before, they were our enemies, but eventually they become our friends. What this means is that when these four bad things occur to us, we can come to our senses: 'Oh. This is how loss of wealth is bad. This is how loss of status, how pain and criticism are bad. This is how the ways of the world can change and turn on you, so that you shouldn't get carried away with their good side.'

When meditators meet with these four kinds of bad things, their minds develop. They become more and more dispassionate, more and more disenchanted, more and more detached from the four opposites of these bad things—wealth, status, pleasure, and praise—so that when these good things happen, they won't be fooled into getting attached or carried away with them and can instead push their minds on to a higher level. When they hear someone criticize or gossip about them, it's as if that person were taking a knife to sharpen them. The more they get sharpened, the more they grow to a finer and finer point.

Loss of wealth is actually good for you, you know. It can teach you not to be attached or carried away with the money or material benefits other people may offer you. Otherwise, the more you have, the deeper you sink—to the point where you drown because you get stuck on being possessive.

Loss of status is also good for you. For instance, you may be a person, but they erase your good name and call you a dog—which makes things even easier for you, because dogs have no laws. They can do what they like without any constraints, without anyone to fine them or put them in jail. If people make you a prince or a duke, you're really in bad straits. All of a sudden you're big: Your arms, hands, feet,

and legs grow all out of size and get in your way wherever you try to go or whatever you do.

As for wealth, status, pleasure, and praise, there's nothing the least bit constant or dependable about them. The more you really think about them, the more disaffected and disenchanted you become, to the point where you find that you're indifferent, neither pleased nor displeased with them. This is where your mind develops equanimity and can become firm in concentration so that it can grow higher and higher in the practice—like the lettuce and cauliflower that Chinese farmers plant in rows: The more they get fertilized with nightsoil, the faster, more beautiful, and more healthy they grow. If they were fed nothing but clean, clear water, they'd end up all sickly and stunted.

This is why we say that when people have developed mindfulness and concentration, they're even better off when the ways of the world turn ugly and bad. If the world shows you only its good side, you're sure to get infatuated and stuck, like a seed that stays buried in its shell and will never grow. But once the seed comes out with its shoot, then the more sun, wind, rain, and fertilizer it gets, the more it will grow and develop—i.e., the more your discernment will branch out into knowledge and wisdom, leading you to intuitive insight and on into the transcendent, like the old Chinese vegetable farmer who becomes a millionaire by building a fortune out of plain old excrement.

The Honest Truth

June 23, 1958; August 23, 1958

When we first meet with the fires of greed, aversion, and delusion, we find them comforting and warm. We're like a person sitting by a fire in the cold season: As he sits soaking up the warmth, he gets more and more sleepy and careless until he burns his hands and feet without realizing it, and eventually falls head-first into the flames.

* * *

The pleasures felt by people in the world come from looking at things only on the surface. Take a plateful of rice, for instance. If you ask people what's good about rice, they'll say, 'It tastes good and fills you up, too.' But the Buddha wouldn't answer like that. He'd answer by talking about rice both when it goes in your mouth and when it comes out the other end. This is why his view of things covered both cause and effect. He didn't look at things from one side only.

The Buddha saw that the ease and happiness of ordinary pleasures is nothing lasting. He wanted an ease and happiness that didn't follow the way of the worldly pleasures that most people want. This was why he left his family and friends, and went off to live in seclusion. He said to himself, 'I came alone when I was born and I'll go alone when I die. No one hired me to be born and no one will hire me to die, so I'm beholden to no one. There's no one I have to fear. In all of my actions, if there's anything that's right from the standpoint of the world, but wrong from the standpoint of the truth—and wrong from the standpoint of my heart—there's no way I'll be willing to do it.'

So he posed himself a question: 'Now that you've been born as a human being, what is the highest thing you want in this world?' He then placed the following conditions on his answer: 'In answering, you have to be really honest and truthful with yourself. And once you've answered, you have to hold to your answer as an unalterable law on which you've affixed your seal, without ever letting a second seal be affixed on top. So what do you want, and how do you want it? You have to give an honest answer, understand? I won't accept anything false. And once you've answered, you have to keep to your answer. Don't be a traitor to yourself.'

When he was sure of his answer, he said to himself, ‘I want only the highest and most certain happiness and ease: the happiness that won’t change into anything else. Other than that, I don’t want anything else in the world.’

Once he had given this answer, he kept to it firmly. He didn’t allow anything that would have caused the least bit of pain or distraction to his heart to get stuck there as a stain on it. He kept making a persistent effort with all his might to discover the truth, without retreat, until he finally awakened to that truth: the reality of Liberation.

If we search for the truth like the Buddha—if we’re true in our intent and true in what we do—there’s no way the truth can escape us. But if we aren’t true to ourselves, we won’t find the true happiness the Buddha found. We tell ourselves that we want to be happy but we go jumping into fires. We know what things are poison, yet we go ahead and drink them anyway. This is called being a traitor to yourself.

* * *

Every person alive wants happiness—even common animals struggle to find happiness—but our actions for the most part aren’t in line with our intentions. This is why we don’t get to realize the happiness we want, simply because there’s no truth to us. For example, when people come to the monastery: If they come to make offerings, observe the precepts, and sit in meditation for the sake of praise or a good reputation, there’s no real merit to what they’re doing. They don’t gain any real happiness from it, so they end up disappointed and dissatisfied. Then they start saying that offerings, precepts, and meditation don’t give any good results. Instead of reflecting on the fact that they weren’t right and honest in doing these things, they say that there’s no real good to the Buddha, Dhamma, and Sangha, that the Buddha’s teachings are a lot of nonsense and lies. But actually the Buddha’s teachings are an affair of the truth. *If a person isn’t true to the Buddha’s teachings, the Buddha’s teachings won’t be true to that person—and that person won’t be able to know what the Buddha’s true teachings are.*

* * *

When we practice virtue, concentration, and discernment, it’s as if we were taking the jewels and robes of royalty and the Noble Ones to dress up our heart and make it beautiful. But if we aren’t true in our practice, it’s like taking robes and jewels and giving them to a monkey. The monkey is bound to get them dirty and tear them to shreds because it has no sense of beauty at all. Whoever sees this kind

of thing happening is sure to see right through it, that it's a monkey show. Even though the costumes are genuine, the monkey inside isn't genuine like the costumes. For instance, if you take a soldier's cap and uniform to dress it up as a soldier, it's a soldier only as far as the cap and uniform, but the monkey inside is still a monkey and not a soldier at all.

For this reason, the Buddha teaches us to be true in whatever we do—true in being generous, true in being virtuous, true in developing concentration and discernment. Don't play around at these things. If you're true, then these activities are sure to bear you the fruits of your own truthfulness without a doubt.

Self-reliance

May 22, 1959

In Christianity they teach that if you've done wrong or committed a sin, you can ask to wash it away by confessing the sin and asking for God's forgiveness. God will then have the kindness to hold back punishment, and you'll be pure. But Buddhism doesn't teach this sort of thing at all. If you do wrong, you are the one who has to correct the error so as to do away with the punishment on your own behalf. What this means is that when a defilement—greed, anger, or delusion—arises in your heart, you have to undo the defilement right there so as to escape from it. Only then will you escape from the suffering that would otherwise come as its natural consequence.

We can compare this to a man who drinks poison and comes down with violent stomach cramps. If he then runs to a doctor and says, 'Doctor, doctor, I've drunk poison and my stomach really hurts. Please take some medicine for me so that the pain will go away,' there's no way that this is going to cure the pain. If the doctor, instead of the sick man, is the one who takes the medicine, the sick man can expect to die for sure.

So I ask that we all understand this point: that we have to wash away our own defilements by practicing the Dhamma—the medicine of the Buddha—in order to gain release from any evil and suffering in our hearts; not that we can ask the Buddha to help wash away our mistakes and sufferings for us. The Buddha is simply the doctor who has discovered the formula for the medicine and prepared it for us. Whatever disease we have, we need to take the medicine and treat the disease ourselves if we want to recover.

The Mind Aflame

July 28, 1959

If the heart doesn't have any inner nourishment, it won't have any strength, because it's hungry and thin. When it doesn't have any nourishment, it goes out eating whatever it can find—bones and old dry skins—without finding any decent food to eat or water to drink at all. This is why it ends up shriveled and dry, because the heart, if it doesn't have any inner goodness, is thin and gaunt, and goes running around all sorts of back alleys, scraping together whatever it can find just for the sake of having something to stick in its mouth. It doesn't get to eat anything good at all, though. It can't find a single thing to give it any flavor or nourishment. But if the heart is strong and well-fed, then whatever it thinks of doing is sure to succeed.

The Buddha saw that we human beings are thin and malnourished in this way, which is why he felt compassion for us. He taught us, 'The mind that goes around swallowing sights, sounds, smells, tastes, and tactile sensations is eating a ball of fire, you know. Not any kind of food.' In other words, 'The eye is burning.' Everything we see with the eye is a form, and each of these forms contains a ball of fire, even though on the outside it's coated to look pretty and attractive. 'The ear is burning.' All the pleasing sounds we search for, and that come passing in through our ears from the day we're born to the day we die, are burning sounds, are flames of fire. The heat of the sun can't burn you to death, but sounds *can* burn you to death, which is why we say they're hotter than the sun. 'The nose is burning.' We've been smelling smells ever since the doctor cleaned out our nose right after birth, and the nature of smells is that there's no such thing as a neutral smell. There are only two kinds: good smelling and foul-smelling. If our strength is down and we're not alert, we swallow these smells right into the mind—and that means we've swallowed a time bomb. We're safe only as long as nothing ignites the fuse. 'The tongue is burning.' Countless tastes come passing over our tongue. If we get attached to them, it's as if we've eaten a ball of fire: As soon as it explodes, our intestines will come splattering out. If we human beings let ourselves get tied up in this sort of thing, it's as if we've eaten the fire bombs of the King of Death. As soon as they explode, we're finished. But if we know enough to spit them out, we'll be safe. If we swallow them, we're loading ourselves down. We won't be able to find any peace whether we're sitting, standing, walking or lying down, because we're on fire

inside. Only when we breathe our last will the fires go out. ‘The body is burning.’ Tactile sensations are also a fire that wipes human beings out. If you don’t have any inner worth or goodness in your mind, these things can really do you a lot of damage.

* * *

Greed, anger, and delusion are like three enormous balls of red-hot iron that the King of Death heats until they’re glowing hot and then pokes into our heads. When greed doesn’t get what it wants, it turns into anger. Once we’re angry, we get overcome and lose control, so that it turns into delusion. We forget everything—good, bad, our husbands, wives, parents, children—to the point where we can even kill our husbands, wives, parents, and children. This is all an affair of delusion. When these three defilements get mixed up in our minds, they can take us to hell with no trouble at all. This is why they’re called fire bombs in the human heart.

But if, when greed arises, we have the sense to take only what should be taken and not what shouldn’t, it won’t wipe us out even though it’s burning us, because we have fire insurance. People without fire insurance are those with really strong greed to the point where they’re willing to cheat and get involved in corruption or crime. When this happens, their inner fires wipe them out. To have fire insurance means that even though we feel greed, we can hold it in check and be generous with our belongings by giving donations, for instance, to the religion. Then even though we may die from our greed, we’ve still gained inner worth from making donations as an act of homage to the Buddha, Dhamma, and Sangha—which is like keeping our insurance payments up. This way, even though our house may burn down, we’ll still have some property left.

Anger. When this defilement really gets strong, it has no sense of good or evil, right or wrong, husband, wives, or children. It can drink human blood. An example we often see is when people get quarreling and one of them ends up in prison or even on death row, convicted for murder. This is even worse than your house burning down, because you have nothing left at all. For this reason, we have to get ourselves some life insurance by observing the five or eight precepts so that we can treat and bandage our open sores—i.e., so that we can wash away the evil and unwise things in our thoughts, words, and deeds. Even if we can’t wash them all away, we should try at least to relieve them somewhat. Although you may still have some fire left, let there just be enough to cook your food or light your home. Don’t let there be so much that it burns your house down.

The only way to put out these fires is to meditate and develop thoughts of good will. The mind won't feel any anger, hatred, or ill will, and instead will feel nothing but thoughts of sympathy, seeing that everyone in the world aims at goodness, but that our goodness isn't equal. You have to use really careful discernment to consider cause and effect, and then be forgiving, with the thought that we human beings aren't equal or identical in our goodness and evil. If everyone were equal, the world would fall apart. If we were equally good or equally bad, the world would have to fall apart for sure. Suppose that all the people in the world were farmers, with no merchants or government officials. Or suppose there were only government officials, with no farmers at all: We'd all starve to death with our mouths gaping and dry. If everyone were equal and identical, the end of the world would come in only a few days' time. Consider your body: Even the different parts of your own body aren't equal. Some of your fingers are short, some are long, some small, some large. If all ten of your fingers were equal, you'd have a monster's hands. So when even your own fingers aren't equal, how can you expect people to be equal in terms of their thoughts, words, and deeds? You have to think this way and be forgiving.

* * *

When you can think in this way, your good will can spread to all people everywhere, and you'll feel sympathy for people on high levels, low levels and in between. The big ball of fire inside you will go out through the power of your good will and loving kindness.

This comes from getting life insurance: practicing tranquility meditation so as to chase the defilements away from the mind. Thoughts of sensual desire, ill will, lethargy, restlessness, and uncertainty will vanish, and the mind will be firmly centered in concentration, using its powers of directed thought to stay with its meditation word—*buddho*—and its powers of evaluation to create a sense of inner lightness and ease. When the mind fills itself with rapture—the flavor arising from concentration—it will have its own inner food and nourishment, so that whatever you do in thought, word, or deed is sure to succeed.

Food for the Mind

July, 1958; August 10, 1957

There are two kinds of food for the mind: the kind that gives it strength and the kind that saps its strength. What this refers to is (1) the food of sensory contact—the contact that takes place at the eye, ear, nose, tongue, body, and intellect. There are six mouthfuls of this kind of food. (2) The food of consciousness, i.e., the consciousness of contact that takes place at each of the six senses. There are six mouthfuls of this kind, too. (3) The food of intention or mental concomitants, i.e., the thoughts that are formed in the heart, leading it to think of the past or future and to know if things are good or bad, pleasant or painful. Once we know that our body and mind depend on these kinds of food, we should use our discernment to reflect on them and evaluate them carefully.

Discernment is what forms the teeth of the mind. When children are small, they need to depend on others to mince or strain their food; but when they grow up, they have their own teeth and don't need to depend on anyone else. If people are really discerning, they don't need to chew coarse food at all. For example, an intelligent hunter, once he's killed an animal, will remove the feathers and wings or cut off the antlers and hooves and take home just the useful part. Then he cuts the meat off in pieces so that it can serve as food. In other words, if he's intelligent, he throws away the inedible parts piece by piece.

In the same way, intelligent people who want the inner quality of dispassion have to take the discernment that comes from concentration and use it to evaluate sights, sounds, smells, tastes, etc., so that these things can serve a purpose and not do them any harm. Whoever eats an entire fish—bones, scales, fins, feces, and all—is sure to choke to death on the bones. For this reason, we have to find a knife and chopping block—in other words, use mindfulness to focus on, say, a visual object, and discernment to consider what kind of object it is. Is it something we should get involved with or not? What kind of benefits or harm will it cause for the mind? If it's a visual object that will cause harm to the mind, you shouldn't get involved with it. *If it's a good-looking object, look for its bad side as well.* Be a person with two eyes. Sometimes an object looks good, but we don't look for its bad side. Sometimes it looks bad, but we don't look for its good side. If something looks

beautiful, you have to focus on its bad side as well. If it looks bad, you have to focus on its good side, too.

If you aren't selective in what you eat, you can ruin your health. Pleasing objects are like sugar and honey: They're sure to attract all sorts of ants and flies. Disagreeable objects are like filth: In addition to carrying germs, they're sure to attract all sorts of other bad things, too, because they're crawling with flies and worms. If we aren't discerning, we'll gobble down the filth together with the worms and smelly parts, and the sugar together with the ants and flies. Your heart is already in poor health, and yet you go gobbling down things that are toxic. When this happens, no one can cure you but you yourself.

For this reason, you have to keep the heart neutral, on the middle path. Don't be pleased by the objects you think are pleasing; don't hate the objects you think are disagreeable. Don't be a person with only one eye or one ear. When you can do this, you're equipped with discernment. You can spit visual objects, sounds, smells, tastes, etc., out of the heart. Once you can see that 'good' has 'bad' hiding behind it, and 'bad' has 'good' hiding behind it—in the same way that the body has both a front and a back—you shouldn't let yourself fall for sights, sounds, smells, etc. You have to consider them carefully.

The mind has two basic sorts of food: good mental states and bad mental states. If you think in ways that are good, you'll give strength to the mind. If you're discerning, you'll get to eat fine food. If you aren't, you'll have to eat crude food—e.g., you'll get a crab, and you'll eat the whole thing raw, without knowing how to boil it and peel away the shell and the claws. The effort of meditation is like a fire; concentration is like a pot; mindfulness, like a chopping block; and discernment, a knife. Intelligent people will use these things to prepare their food so that its nourishment—the nourishment of the Dhamma—will permeate into the heart to give it five kinds of strength:

(1) The strength of conviction.

(2) The strength of persistence: The heart, when we're persistent, is like the wheels of an automobile that keep turning and propelling it toward its goal, enabling us to see the gains that come from our persistence.

(3) The strength of mindfulness: Having mindfulness is like knowing when to open and when to close your windows and doors.

(4) The strength of concentration: Concentration will be firmly established in the mind whether we're sitting, standing, walking, lying down, speaking, or

listening. We can listen without getting stuck on what's said, and speak without getting stuck on what we say.

(5) The strength of discernment: We'll gain wisdom and understanding with regard to all things, so that eventually we'll attain purity of mind—by letting go of all thoughts of past and future, and not being pleased or displeased by any sights, sounds, smells, tastes, etc., at all.

First Things First

October 6, 1958

There are three ways in which people order their priorities: putting the world first, putting themselves first, and putting the Dhamma first.

Putting the world first: There's nothing at all dependable about the affairs of the world. Stop and think for a moment: Ever since you were born, from your first memory up to the present day, what is the best thing that has ever happened in your life? What is the most enjoyable thing? What have you liked the most? If you answer, you have to say that of all the things in the world, only 50 percent are satisfactory; the other 50 are unsatisfactory. But if you asked me, I'd answer that there's nothing satisfactory about the world at all. There's nothing but stress and misery. You get friends and they take advantage of you. You get possessions and you have to worry about them. You get money and you end up suffering for it. The people you work with aren't as good as you'd like them to be. Your family and relatives are nothing but trouble. In short, I don't see anything that really brings a person any real happiness. You get money and it brings trouble. You get friends and they make you suffer. The people you live and work with don't get along smoothly. This is the way it is with the world. For this reason, anyone whose mind runs along in the current of the world is bound for nothing but pain and sorrow. The Buddha taught, 'For the mind not to be affected by the ways of the world is to be serene and free from sorrow: This is the highest good fortune.'

The world has eight edges, and each edge is razor sharp, capable of slicing human beings to bits without mercy. The eight edges of the world are, on the one side, the edge of wealth, the edge of status, the edge of praise, and the edge of pleasure. These four edges are especially sharp because they're things we like. We keep polishing and sharpening them, and the more we do this the sharper they get, until ultimately they turn around and slit our throats.

The other side has four edges too, but actually they're not so sharp, because no one likes to use them. No one wants them, so no one sharpens them, and as a result they're dull and blunt—and like dull knives, they can't kill anyone. These four edges are loss of wealth, loss of status, criticism, and pain. No one wants any of these things, but they have to exist as part of the world.

How are the sharp edges sharp? Take status for an example. As soon as people gain status and rank, they start swelling up larger than they really are. You don't have to look far for examples of this sort of thing. Look at monks. When they start out as ordinary junior monks, they can go anywhere with no trouble at all, along highways and byways, down narrow alleys and back streets, anywhere they like. But as soon as they start getting a little ecclesiastical rank, they start getting abnormally large. The roads they used to walk along start feeling too narrow. They have trouble walking anywhere—their legs are too long and their feet too heavy. Their rears are too large for ordinary seats. (Of course, not all high-ranking monks are like this. You can find ones who don't swell up.) As for lay people, once they're hit by the edge of status, they start swelling up too, to the point where they can hardly move. Their hands get too heavy to raise in respect to the Buddha. Their legs get so big they can't make it to the monastery to hear a sermon or observe the precepts—they're afraid they'd lose their edge. This is how one of the edges of the world kills the goodness in people.

As for the edge of wealth, this refers to money and possessions. As soon as we get a lot, we start getting stingy. We become wary of making too many offerings or of being too generous with others because we're afraid we'll run out of money. This is why rich people tend to be stingy and drown in their wealth. As for poor people, they can give away everything and then work to replace it. They can give offerings and be generous, with rarely any sense of regret. Their arms and legs aren't too big, so they can come to the monastery with no trouble at all.

The edge of pleasure is very sharp, because wherever you get your pleasure, that's where you get stuck. If your pleasure comes from your friends, you're stuck on your friends. If your pleasure comes from your children or grandchildren, you're stuck on your children and grandchildren. If your pleasure comes from eating, sleeping or going out at night, then that's where you're stuck. You're not willing to trade in your pleasure for the sake of inner worth because you're afraid of letting your pleasure fall from your grasp. You can't observe the five or eight precepts because they make you force and deny yourself. If you observe the eight precepts, you can't go see a movie or show and can't sleep on a nice soft mattress. You're afraid that if you miss one evening meal, you'll get hungry or weak. You don't want to sit and meditate because you're afraid your back will hurt or your legs will go numb. So this is how the edge of pleasure destroys your goodness.

As for the edge of praise, this too is razor sharp. When people are praised, they start floating and don't want to come down. They hear praise and it's so captivating

that they forget themselves and think that they're already good enough—so they won't think of making the effort to make themselves better in other ways.

All four of these edges are weapons that kill our goodness. They're like the paint people use on houses to make them pretty: something that can last only a while and then has to fade and peel away. If you can view these things simply as part of the passing scenery, without getting stuck on them, they won't do you any harm. But if you latch onto them as really being your own, the day is sure to come when you'll have to meet with disappointment—loss of wealth, loss of status, criticism, and pain—because it's a law of nature that however far things advance, that 's how far they have to regress. If you don't lose them while you're alive, you'll lose them when you die. They can't stay permanent and lasting.

Once we realize this truth, then when we meet with any of the good edges of the world we shouldn't get so carried away that we forget ourselves; and when we meet with any of the bad edges we shouldn't let ourselves get so discouraged or sad that we lose hope. Stick to your duties as you always have. Don't let your goodness suffer because of these eight ways of the world.

Putting yourself first: This means acting, speaking and thinking whatever way you like without any thought for what's right or wrong, good or bad. In other words, you feel you have the right to do whatever you want. You may see, for instance, that something isn't good, and you know that other people don't like it, but you like it, so you go ahead and do it. Or you may see that something is good, but you don't like it, so you don't do it. Sometimes you may like something, and it's good, but you don't do it—it's good, but you just can't do it.

When you're practicing the Dhamma, though, then whether or not you like something, you have to make yourself do it. *You have to make the Dhamma your life, and your life into Dhamma* if you want to succeed. You can't use the principle of giving priority to your own likes at all.

Putting the Dhamma first: This is an important principle for those who practice. The duties of every Buddhist are (1) to develop virtue by observing the precepts, (2) to center the mind in concentration, and (3) to use discernment to investigate the truth without giving rein to defilement.

The basic level of virtue is to prevent our words and deeds from being bad or evil. This means observing the five precepts: not killing any living beings, not stealing, not engaging in illicit sex, not lying, and not taking intoxicants. These are the precepts that wash away the gross stains on our conduct. They're precepts that

turn us from common animals into human beings and prevent us from falling into states of deprivation and woe.

The intermediate level of virtue turns human beings into celestial beings. This refers to restraint of the senses: keeping watch over the way we react to our senses of sight, hearing, smell, taste, feeling, and ideation so that they don't give rise to bad mental states. This can turn human beings into celestial beings, but even then we haven't escaped from death and rebirth, because when celestial beings run out of merit they have to come back and be reborn as human beings again. They still have to keep swimming around in the cycle of rebirth.

Those who can gain release from all forms of evil, however, won't have to be reborn as animals, human beings, or celestial beings ever again. This refers to people who practice concentration and can abandon all evil in their hearts by developing the stages of absorption (*jhana*) and discernment until they reach the level of Non-returning. When they die, they go to the Brahma worlds, and there they develop their hearts still further, purifying them of all defilements, becoming arahants and ultimately attaining total Liberation.

The basic level of virtue protects our words and deeds from being evil. The intermediate level protects our senses and keeps them clean—which means that we don't let the three defilements of passion, aversion, and delusion be provoked into action by what we see, hear, smell, taste, touch, or think.

As for the highest level of virtue—inner virtue—this means giving rise to Right Concentration within the mind:

(1) On this level, 'not killing' means not killing off your goodness. For instance, if bad thoughts arise and you aren't careful to wipe them out, their evil will come pouring in and your goodness will have to die. This is because your mind is still caught up on good and evil. Sometimes you use good to kill evil. Sometimes you use evil to kill good: This is called killing yourself.

(2) 'Stealing' on this level refers to the way the mind likes to take the good and bad points of other people to think about. This sort of mind is a thief—because we've never once asked other people whether they're possessive of their good and bad points or are willing to share them with us. For the most part, what we take is their old dried up garbage. In other words, we like to focus on their bad points. Even though they may have good points, we don't let ourselves see them. We take our own opinions as our guide and as a result we end up as fools without realizing it.

(3) 'Illicit sensuality' on this level refers to the state of mind that is stuck on sights, sounds, smells, tastes, tactile sensations, and ideas, or that lies fermenting in

greed, anger, and delusion. In other words, the mind is impure and is always involved with sensual objects and moods.

(4) ‘Lying’ on this level means not being true. How are we not true? We come to the monastery but our minds are at home. We listen to the sermon but our hearts are thinking of something else. Our bodies may be sitting in the meditation position, just like the Buddha, but our minds are roaming around through all sorts of thoughts, gnawing on the past, nibbling at the future, not finding any meat at all. This is called lying to yourself and to others as well. How is it lying to others? Suppose you go home and someone asks, ‘Where did you go today?’ and you answer, ‘I went to the monastery to listen to a sermon.’ Actually, your body came, but you didn’t come. Your body listened, but you didn’t listen. This has to be classed as a kind of lying.

(5) ‘Intoxication’ on this level refers to delusion and absentmindedness. If we’re going to contemplate body, feelings, mind, and mental qualities, our minds have to be still and really focused on these things. But if we’re absentminded and forgetful, our minds go down the wrong path, weaving in and out, back and forth like a drunkard. Sometimes we end up falling down in a stupor and lying there on the side of the road. Nothing good will come of it.

Those who are careful to keep their minds firmly centered in concentration and to keep the five precepts on this level pure and whole, though, are said to be developing the highest perfection of virtue—showing respect for the Dhamma above and beyond the world, above and beyond themselves. This is called putting the Dhamma first in a way befitting those who practice it. This is what it means to be a true Buddhist in a way that will eventually lead us to release from all suffering and stress.

Quiet Breathing

Now I'd like to explain a little about how to meditate. Sitting in meditation is a worthwhile activity. The outer part of the activity is to sit in a half-lotus position with your right leg on top of your left leg; your hands palm-up in your lap, your right hand on top of your left. Keep your body erect. Close your eyes, but don't close them off like a person asleep. Your optic nerves have to keep working to some extent or else you'll get drowsy.

These activities are the outer aspects of good meditation, but they aren't what makes the meditation good. You also need to have the right object for the mind to dwell on, and the right intention: the intention to keep the in-and-out breath in mind, to adjust it so that it's comfortable, and to keep the breath and mind together so that they don't slip away from each other. When you can do this properly, you'll gain beneficial results in terms of both body and mind—i.e., the right quality you're looking for, termed 'inner worth', which means a soothing sense of ease, comfort, fullness, and well-being.

When you sit and meditate, keep noticing whether or not your mind is staying with the in-and-out breath. You have to keep mindfulness in charge of the mind. For example, when you breathe in, think *bud*; when you breathe out, think *dho*. *Bud-dho*. Be mindful. Don't let yourself forget or slip away. Put aside all your outside responsibilities and let go of all outside thoughts and perceptions. Keep your mind with nothing but the breath. You don't have to turn your attention to anything else.

Usually when you sit and meditate, though, thoughts of past and future tend to appear and get in the way of the quality of your meditation. Thoughts of this sort—whether they're about things past or yet to come, about the world or the Dhamma—have no good to them at all. They'll simply cause you trouble and suffering. They make the mind restless and disturbed so that it can't gain any peace and calm—because things that are past have already passed. There's no way you can bring them back or change them. Things in the future haven't reached us yet, so we can't know whether or not they'll be in line with our expectations. They're far away and uncertain, so there's no way they'll be any help to our thinking at all.

For this reason, we have to keep hold on the mind to keep it in the present by fixing it on nothing but the breath. To think about the breath is called directed thought, as when we think *buddho* together with the breath—*bud* in, *dho* out, like

we're doing right now. When we start evaluating the breath, we let go of *buddho* and start observing how far the effects of each in-and-out breath can be felt in the body. When the breath comes in, does it feel comfortable or not? When it goes out, does it feel relaxed or not? If it doesn't feel comfortable and relaxed, change it. When you keep the mind preoccupied with investigating the breath, let go of *buddho*. You don't have any need for it. Mindful awareness will fill the body, and the in-breath will start to feel as if it's permeating the body throughout. When we let go of *buddho*, our evaluation of the breath becomes more refined; the movement of the mind will calm down and become concentration; outside perceptions will fall silent. 'Falling silent' doesn't mean that our ears go blank or become deaf. It means that our attention doesn't go running to outside perceptions or to thoughts of past or future. Instead, it stays exclusively in the present.

When we fix our attention on the breath in this way, constantly keeping watch and being observant of how the breath is flowing, we'll come to know what the in-breath and out-breath are like, whether or not they're comfortable, what way of breathing in makes us feel good, what way of breathing out makes us feel good, what way of breathing makes us feel tense and uncomfortable. If the breath feels uncomfortable, try to adjust it so that it gives rise to a sense of comfort and ease.

When we keep surveying and evaluating the breath in this way, mindfulness and self-awareness will take charge within us. Stillness will develop, discernment will develop, knowledge will develop within us.

Centered Within

August 13, 1956

When you sit and meditate, you should keep in mind the factors that make it a worthwhile activity:

- (1) The right object for the mind—i.e., the breath, which is the theme of your meditation.
- (2) The right intention. This means that you focus your mind steadily on what you're doing and nothing else, with the purpose of making it settle down firmly in stillness.
- (3) The right quality—inner worth—i.e., the calm and ease you gain from your practice of concentration.

* * *

To have the right object while you sit and meditate, you should have your mind set on giving your heart solely to the qualities of the Buddha. What this means is that you focus on your in-and-out breathing together with the word *buddho*, without thinking of anything else. This is your object or foundation for the mind. The mental side of the object is the word *buddho*, but if you just think, *buddho*, *buddho*, without joining it up with your breathing, you won't get the results you want, because simply thinking on its own is too weak to have a hold on the mind, and as a result it doesn't fulfill all the factors of meditation. The mind won't be snug enough with its object to stay firmly put in its stillness, and so will show signs of wavering.

Since this is the case, you have to find something to give it some resistance, something for it to hold onto, in the same way that a nail you drive into a board will hold it firmly to a post and not let it move. A mind without something to hold onto is bound not to be snug and firm with its object. This is why we're taught to think also of the breath, which is the physical side of our object, together with *buddho*, thinking *bud* in with the in-breath, and *dho* out with the out.

As for the factor of intention in your meditation, you have to be intent on your breathing. Don't leave it to the breath to happen on its own as you normally do. You have to be intent on synchronizing your thought of the in-breath with the in-breath, and your thought of the out-breath with the out. If your thinking is faster or slower than your breathing, it won't work. You have to be intent on keeping your thinking

in tandem with the breath. If you breathe in this way, this is the intention that forms the act (*kamma*) of your meditation (*kammatthana*). If you simply let the breath happen on its own, it's no longer a theme of meditation. It's simply the breath. So you have to be careful and intent at all times to keep the mind in place when you breathe in, and in place when you breathe out. When you breathe in, the mind has to think *bud*. When you breathe out, it has to think *dho*. This is the way your meditation has to be.

The quality of inner worth in centering the mind comes when you make the body and mind feel soothed and relaxed. Don't let yourself feel tense or constricted. Let the breath have its freedom. Don't block it or hold it, force it or squeeze it. You have to let it flow smoothly and easily. Like washing a shirt and hanging it out to dry: Let the sun shine and the wind blow, and the water will drip away by itself. In no time at all the shirt will be clean and dry. When you meditate, it's as if you were washing your body and mind. If you want the body to feel clean and fresh inside, you have to put it at its ease. Put your eyes at ease, your ears at ease, your hands, feet, arms, and legs all at their ease. Put your body at ease in every way and at the same time don't let your mind get involved in any outside thoughts. Let them all drop away.

* * *

When you wash your mind so that it's clean and pure, it's bound to become bright within itself with knowledge and understanding. Things you never knew or thought of before will appear to you. The Buddha thus taught that the brightness of the mind is discernment. When this discernment arises, it can give us knowledge about ourselves—of how the body got to be the way it is and how the mind got to be the way it is. This is called knowledge of form and name or of physical and mental phenomena.

Discernment is like a sail on a sailboat: The wider it's spread, the faster the boat will go. If it's tattered and torn, it won't catch the wind, and the boat will have to go slowly or might not even reach its goal at all. But if the sail is in good shape, it will take the boat quickly to its destination. The same holds true with our discernment. If our knowledge is only in bits and pieces, it won't be able to pull our minds up to the current of the Dhamma. We may end up sinking or giving up because we aren't true and sincere in what we do. When this is the case, we won't be able to get any results. Our good qualities will fall away and sink into our bad ones. Why will they sink? Because our sails don't catch the wind. And why is that? Because they're torn

into shreds. And why are they torn? Because we don't take care of them, so they wear out fast and end up tattered and torn.

This is because the mind spends all its time entangled with thoughts and ideas. It doesn't settle down into stillness, so its discernment is tattered and torn. When our discernment is in bits and pieces like this, it leads us down to a low level—like a log or post that we leave lying flat on the ground, exposed to all sorts of dangers: Termites may eat it or people and animals may trample all over it, because it's left in a low place. But if we stand it up on its end in a posthole, it's free from these dangers, apart from the minor things that can happen to the part buried in the ground.

The same holds true with the mind. If we let it drift along in its ideas, instead of catching hold of it and making it stand firmly in one place—i.e., if we let it make its nest all the time in concepts and thoughts—it's bound to get defiled and sink to a low level. This is why the Buddha taught us to practice centering the mind in concentration so that it will stand firm in a single object. When the mind is centered, it's free from turmoil and confusion, like a person who has finished his work. The body is soothed and rested, the mind is refreshed—and when the mind is refreshed, it becomes steady, still, and advances to a higher level, like a person on a high vantage point—the top of a mountain, the mast of a boat, or a tall tree—able to see all kinds of things in every direction, near or far, better than a person in a low place like a valley or ravine. In a low place, the sun is visible for only a few hours of the day, and there are corners where the daylight never reaches at all. A mind that hasn't been trained to stand firm in its goodness is sure to fall to a low level and not be bright. But if we train our minds to a higher and higher level, we'll be sure to see things both near and far, and to meet up with brightness.

These are some of the rewards that come from centering the mind in concentration. When we start seeing these rewards, we're bound to develop conviction. When we feel conviction, we become inspired to pull our minds even further—in the same way that a sail that isn't torn can take a boat to its destination without any trouble. This is one point I want to make.

Another point is that discernment can also be compared to an airplane propeller. When we sit here stilling our minds, it's as if we were flying an airplane up into the sky. If the pilot is sleepy, lazy, or in a blur, we're not safe. No matter how fantastic the plane may be, it can still crash us into a mountain or the forest wilds, because the pilot doesn't have any mindfulness or presence of mind. So when we sit meditating, it's like we're flying an airplane. If our mindfulness is weak and our

mind keeps wandering off, our airplane may end up crashing. So we have to keep observing the body to see where at the moment it feels painful or tense; and keep check on the mind to see whether or not it's staying with the body in the present. If the mind isn't with the body, it's as if the pilot isn't staying with his airplane. The Hindrances will have an opening to arise and destroy our stillness. So when we sit and meditate, we have to make sure that we don't get absentminded. We have to be mindful and self-aware at all times and not let the mind slip away anywhere else. When we can do this, we'll develop a sense of comfort and ease, and will begin to see the benefits that come from mental stillness.

This insight is the beginning of discernment. This discernment is like an airplane propeller. The more we practice, the more benefits we'll see. We'll be able to take our plane as high as we want, land it whenever we feel like it, or try any stunts that occur to us. *In other words, when we develop discernment within ourselves we can have control over our mind.* If we want it to think, it'll think. If we don't want it to think, it won't think. We know how to keep our own mind in line. If we can't keep ourselves in line, there's no way we can expect to keep anyone else in line. So if we're intelligent, it's like being a pilot who can keep a plane under his full control. We can keep the mind in line. For example, if it thinks of something bad, we can order it to stop and rest, and the thought will disappear. This is called keeping the mind in line. Or if we want it to think, it will be able to think and to know. Once it knows, that's the end of the matter, and so it will then stop thinking. Whatever we want it to do, it can do for us. According to the Buddha, people like this are called sages because they have discernment: Whatever they do, they really do. They know what is harmful and what isn't. They know how to put a stop to their thinking and as a result they very rarely meet with suffering.

As for stupid people, they simply fool around and drag their feet, pulling themselves back when they should go forward, and forward when they should go back, spending their days and nights thinking about all kinds of nonsense without any substance. Even when they sleep, they keep thinking. Their minds never have any chance to rest at all. And when their minds are forced to keep working like this, they're bound to run down and wear out, and won't give any good results when they're put to use. When this happens, they suffer.

But if we have the discernment to be alert to events, we can let go of what should be let go, stop what should be stopped, and think about what needs to be thought about. We can speak when we should speak, act when we should act—or simply stay still if that's what's called for. People who work day and night without sleeping,

without giving their bodies a chance to rest, are killing themselves. In the same way, thoughts and concepts are things that bring on the end of our life and destroy our mind—because they keep the mind working whether we’re sitting, standing, walking, or lying down. Sometimes, even when we’re just sitting alone, we keep thinking—which means we’re killing ourselves, because the mind never gets a chance to rest. Its strength keeps eroding away; and eventually, when its strength is all gone, its good qualities will have to die.

So when we sit here centering our minds, it’s like eating our fill, bathing ourselves till we’re thoroughly clean, and then taking a good nap. When we wake up, we feel bright, refreshed, and strong enough to take on any job at all.

This is why the Buddha was able to develop such strength of mind that he was able to do without food, for example, for seven full days and yet not feel tired or weak. This was because his mind was able to rest and be still in the four levels of absorption. His concentration was strong and gave great strength to his body, his speech, and his mind. The strength it gave to his body is what enabled him to wander about, teaching people in every city and town throughout Northern India. Sometimes he had to walk over rough roads through destitute places, but he was never tired in any way.

As for the strength of his speech, he was able to keep teaching, without respite, from the day of his Awakening to the day of his final passing away—a total of 45 years.

And as for the strength of his mind, he was very astute, capable of teaching his disciples so that thousands of them were able to become arahants. He was able to convince large numbers of people who were stubborn, proud, and entrenched in wrong views, to abandon their views and become his disciples. His heart was full of kindness, compassion, and sincerity, with no feelings of anger, hatred, or malice toward anyone at all. It was a pure heart, without blemish.

All of these qualities came from the Dhamma he had practiced—not from anything strange or mysterious—the same Dhamma we’re practicing right now. The important thing is that we have to be intent on really doing it if we want to get results. If, when we center the mind, we really do it, we’ll get real results. If we don’t really do it, we’ll get nothing but playthings and dolls. That’s how it is with the practice.

Getting Acquainted Inside

September 28, 1958

The four properties of the body—the way it feels from the inside, i.e., earth (solidity), water (liquidity), wind (motion), and fire (heat)—are like four people. If you keep trying to acquaint yourself with them, after a while they'll become your friends.

At first they aren't too familiar with you, so they don't trust you and will probably want to test your mettle. For instance, when you start sitting in meditation, they'll take a stick and poke you in your legs so that your legs hurt or grow numb. If you lie down, they'll poke you in the back. If you lie on your side, they'll poke you in the waist. If you get up and sit again, they'll test you again. Or they may whisper to you to give up. If you give in to them, the King of Death will grin until his cheeks hurt.

What you have to do is smile against the odds and see things through. Keep talking with all four properties. Even though they don't respond at first, you have to keep talking with them, asking them this and that. After a while they'll give you a one-word answer. So you keep talking and then their answers will start getting longer until you eventually become acquaintances and can have real conversations. From that point they become your friends. They'll love you and help you and tell you their secrets. You'll be a person with friends and won't have to be lonely. You'll eat together, sleep together, and wherever you go, you'll go together. You'll feel secure. No matter how long you sit, you won't ache. No matter how long you walk, you won't feel tired—because you have friends to talk with as you walk along, so that you enjoy yourself and reach your destination before you realize it.

This is why we're taught to practice meditation by keeping mindfulness immersed firmly in the body. Contemplate your meditation themes—body, feelings, mind, and mental qualities—without letting your mind wander astray in outside thoughts and preoccupations. Contemplate the body so as to know how its properties are getting along, where it feels pleasant, painful, or neutral. Notice how the mind moves around in the various things you know until you reach the mental quality that is still, solid, and true.

This way it's like having friends go with you wherever you go and whatever you do. In other words, when the body walks, the mind walks with it. When the body

lies down, the mind lies down with it. When the body sits, the mind sits with it. Wherever the body stops, the mind stops, too. But most of us aren't like this. The body takes two steps, but the mind takes four or five—so how can it *not* get tired? The body lies in a mosquito net surrounded by a railing and seven thick walls, but the mind can still go running outside. When this is the case, where will it get any happiness? It'll have to wander around exposed to the sun, wind, rain, and all sorts of dangers because it has no protection. If there's no concentration to act as a shelter for the heart, it'll always have to meet with misery and pain.

For this reason, you should train your heart to stay firm in concentration and to develop full strength within yourself so that you can be your own person. This way you'll be bound to meet with all things pure and good.

Stop & Think

July 20, 1959

Insight isn't something that can be taught. It's something you have to give rise to within yourself. It's not something you simply memorize and talk about. If we were to teach it just so we could memorize it, I can guarantee that it wouldn't take five hours. But if you wanted to understand one word of it, three years might not even be enough. *Memorizing gives rise simply to memories. Acting is what gives rise to the truth.* This is why it takes effort and persistence for you to understand and master this skill on your own.

When insight arises, you'll know what's what, where it's come from, and where it's going—as when we see a lantern burning brightly: We know that, 'That's the flame... That's the smoke... That's the light.' We know how these things arise from mixing what with what, and where the flame goes when we put out the lantern. All of this is the skill of insight.

Some people say that tranquility meditation and insight meditation are two separate things—but how can that be true? Tranquility meditation is 'stopping,' insight meditation is 'thinking' that leads to clear knowledge. When there's clear knowledge, the mind stops still and stays put. They're all part of the same thing.

Knowing has to come from stopping. If you don't stop, how can you know? For instance, if you're sitting in a car or a boat that is traveling fast and you try to look at the people or things passing by right next to you along the way, you can't see clearly who's who or what's what. But if you stop still in one place, you'll be able to see things clearly.

Or even closer to home: When we speak, there has to be a pause between each phrase. If you tried to talk without any pauses at all, would anyone be able to understand what you said?

This is why we first have to make the mind stop to be quiet and still. When the mind stays still in a state of normalcy, concentration arises and discernment follows. This is something you have to work at and do for yourself. Don't simply believe what others say. *Get so that you know 'Oh! Oh! Oh!' from within, and not just 'Oh? Oh? Oh?' from what people say.* Don't take the good things they say and stick them in your heart. You have to make these things your own by getting them to arise from within you. Spending one dollar of your own money is better than

spending 100 dollars you've borrowed from someone else. If you use borrowed money, you have to worry because you're in debt. If you use your own money, there's nothing to worry about.

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Stopping is what gives rise to strength. If a man is walking or running, he can't put up a good fight with anyone, because the advantage lies with the person standing still, not with the person walking or running. This is why we're taught to make the mind stop still so that it can gain strength. Then it will be able to start walking again with strength and agility.

It's true that we have two feet, but when we walk we have to step with one foot at a time. If you try to step with both feet at once, you won't get anywhere. Or if you try to walk with just one foot, you can't do that either. When the right foot stops, the left foot has to take a step. When the left foot stops, the right foot has to take a step. You have to stop with one foot and step with the other if you're going to walk with any strength because the strength comes from the foot that has stopped, not from the foot taking a step. One side has to stop while the other side takes a step. Otherwise, you'll have no support and are sure to fall down. If you don't believe me, try stepping with both feet at once and see how far you get.

In the same way, tranquility and insight have to go together. You first have to make the mind stop in tranquility and then take a step in your investigation: This is insight meditation. The understanding that arises is discernment. To let go of your attachment to that understanding is release.

So stopping is the factor that gives rise to strength, knowledge, and discernment—the fixed mind that knows both the world and the Dhamma in a state of heightened virtue, heightened consciousness, and heightened discernment leading on to the transcendent.

Heightened Consciousness

June 25, 1959

The Buddha taught, 'The pursuit of heightened consciousness is the heart of the Buddhas' teaching.' Heightened consciousness is a state of mind that lies above and beyond mental defilement. There are two ways it can be reached:

(1) The mind doesn't yet have any heightened inner quality, but we heighten it through our efforts.

(2) The mind has developed the proper inner quality and uses it to keep itself safe, above and beyond defilement.

The first case refers to the state of ordinary people's minds. When they aren't sitting in meditation, their minds aren't in any special state of concentration, so if defilement arises within them, they have to be determined and perceptive—to be aware of the defilement and to make up their minds that they won't let it push them around. This is called Right Resolve. Even though the mind isn't in concentration, this technique can give results.

What this means is that we're alert to what's going on. For example, when we're angry, when we meet with something undesirable, we should be alert to the fact and make ourselves determined that no matter what, we're going to keep the defilement of anger under control by resisting it and putting our better side into play. In other words, when we're angry, we act as if we weren't. Instead of letting the anger overpower the mind, we use our inner goodness to overpower the mind. This is called heightened consciousness. When you meet with something you don't like, don't let the fact that you don't like it show. Instead, act as if you were happy and calm. In other words, put your good side to use. Don't let your bad side show under any circumstances.

If you're circumspect and composed enough to hold the mind in check before it can let its defilements come out in word or deed, if you can force the defilements to stop and can let only your best manners show, you count as having heightened consciousness. You are also a good member of any social group, for you can work toward your own progress and that of the group as a whole.

In the texts, this quality is called composure—a state of mind that lies above the defilements. This is one form of heightened consciousness and is something we

should all try to develop within ourselves as we are able.

The second form of heightened consciousness refers to a mind freed from the Hindrances and trained to a state of Right Concentration. The mind is firmly established in its inner quality. When defilements arise, they can't overpower the mind *because they can't reach in to touch it*, for the mind is protected by its own full measure of inner quality.

I ask that we all aim at making this form of heightened consciousness arise within ourselves by being persistent and persevering in cherishing our own inner goodness—in the same way that when we have good food, we make sure to chase away the flies so that we can enjoy it in good health.

To do this, you have to be observant and make two kinds of effort: the effort to abandon your defilements and the effort to develop your meditation theme, which is the means for wiping out the mental Hindrances. There are five types of Hindrances: sensual desire, ill will, torpor & lethargy, restlessness & anxiety, and uncertainty. As for meditation, there are two ways of practicing it—in series and in isolation—as I'll explain to you now.

(1) To practice in series is to practice by the book: contemplating the unattractiveness of the body, for instance, by following the lists of its parts without skipping over any of them or mixing them up. Whichever theme you choose, you have to understand how the topics are grouped and in what order, so as to deal with them properly. This kind of meditation can give great benefits, but at the same time can cause great harm. For example, if you contemplate the unattractiveness of the body, it can lead to a sense of dispassion, detachment, and calm, but there are times it can also get you into a state where you can't eat or sleep because everything starts seeming filthy and disgusting. This is one way it can be harmful. Or sometimes you may contemplate the body until a mental image arises, but you get frightened and unnerved. In cases like this, you have to try to be up on what's happening so that your theme will help you instead of harming you.

(2) To practice in isolation is to focus on a single refined theme that doesn't have a lot of different features. In other words, you focus on being mindful of the in-and-out breath, without letting your attention slip away. Focus on whatever kind of breathing feels soothing, and the mind will settle down. Try to make the breath more and more refined, all the while keeping the mind gently with the breath, in the same way that you'd cup a bit of fluff in the palm of your hand. Do this until you feel that there's no 'in' or 'out' to the breath at all. The mind doesn't wander around. It's quiet and still, able to cut away thoughts of past and future. At this point it

becomes even more refined, with no restlessness at all. The mind is stable and doesn't change along with its objects. It's firmly set and unwavering to the point where it becomes fixed and strong.

When you can develop your meditation to this point, it will make the mind let go of its attachments and gain conviction and understanding into the truths of inconstancy, stress, and not-self. Your doubts will fall away, and you will know the way of the world and the way of Liberation, without having to ask for confirmation from anyone else. When your knowledge is clear and free from uncertainty, the mind is firm in its own strength. This is when you become your own refuge—when your mind isn't affected by other people or objects and reaches the happiness and ease of heightened consciousness.

Respect for the Truth

There are four kinds of truth in the body of every human being: stress, its cause, its disbanding, and the path to its disbanding. These truths are like gold: No matter whether you try to make gold into a bracelet, a ring, an earring, or whatever, it stays gold in line with its nature. Go ahead and try to change it, but it'll stay as it is. The same holds true with the nature of the body. No matter how wonderful you try to make it, it'll have to return to its normal nature. It'll have to have stress and pain, their cause, their disbanding and the path to their disbanding.

People who don't admit the normal nature of the body are said to be deluded; those who realize its normal nature are said to know. Wise people realize the principles of nature, which is why they don't get caught up in a lot of fuss and confusion. In other words, the body is like an object that originally weighs four kilograms. Even though we may find things to plaster onto it to make it heavier, the plaster will eventually have to fall off and leave us with the original four kilograms. You simply can't escape its original nature.

The stress and pain that occur in line with the principles of nature aren't actually all that troublesome. For example, pain and disease: If we try to fight nature and not let there be disease, or if we want it to disappear right away, sometimes we make the disease even worse. But if we treat the disease without worrying about whether or not it'll go away, it will follow its natural course and go away at its own pace without too much trouble or suffering on our part. This is because the mind isn't struggling to fight nature, and so the body is strong enough to contend with the disease. Sometimes, if we have this attitude, we can survive diseases that otherwise would kill us. But if the mind gets all upset and thrashes around, wanting the disease to go away, then sometimes a small disease can get so bad it'll kill us—like a person with a scorpion sting he thinks is a cobra bite, who gets so frightened and upset that the whole thing gets out of hand. Sometimes we may come down with a disease that ought to finish us off, but the power of the mind is so great that it fights off the pain and the disease goes away.

This is one of the principles of nature—but we shouldn't be complacent about it. If we get complacent, then when the disease comes back it'll be worse than before, because the truth, when you get right down to it, is that no matter what you do, these things can't escape their true nature. When the body's normal nature is to

have pain and stress, then try as you may to make the pain go away, it'll have to return to its true nature. Whether or not you can cure it, the truth is still the truth. In other words, even when you cure the disease, it comes back.

Suppose, for instance, that we feel ill, take some medicine, and feel better. We think the disease has gone away. People of discernment, though, realize that it hasn't gone anywhere. It's simply been suppressed for a while and then it'll have to come back out again. We may think that we've made the disease go away, but the disease is smarter than we are. When it comes back again, it wears a new costume, like actors in a theater troupe: If the public gets tired of one play, they put on another. Otherwise, no one will spend money to watch them perform. In other words, the disease is smart enough to come from a new direction. If it put on the old play, it wouldn't get any reward. At first it came in your stomach, so this time it comes in your leg. You treat it until it goes away, but then it comes back in a new play—in your eye. You treat it in your eye until it goes away, and then it comes back in your ear. So you treat your ear. Wherever it comes, you keep treating it and your money keeps getting spent. As for the disease, it's glad you're fooled. There's only one of it, but it comes in all sorts of disguises. Aging, illness, and death are very smart. They can keep us tied on a short leash so that we can never get away from them. People who don't train their minds to enter the Dhamma are sure to miss this point, but those who train themselves to know the truth of the Dhamma will understand this principle of nature for what it is.

If we don't realize the truth, we lose in two ways. On the one side we lose in terms of the world: We waste our money because we don't realize what's necessary and what isn't, so we get worked up and upset all out of proportion to reality. On the other side, we lose in terms of the Dhamma because our virtue, concentration, and meditation all suffer. Illness makes us lose in these ways because we lack discernment. This is why the Buddha taught us to use our eyes. We live in the world, so we have to look out for our well-being in the world; we live in the Dhamma, so we have to look out for our well-being in the Dhamma. The results will then develop of their own accord. If we use discernment to evaluate things until we know what's necessary and what's not, the time won't be long before we prosper in terms both of the world and of the Dhamma. We won't have to waste money and time, and there won't be any obstacles to our practice.

In other words, when you see that something is true, don't try to get in its way. Let it follow its own course. *Even though the mind doesn't age, grow ill or die, still the body has to age, grow ill and die.* This is a part of its nature you can't fight. When it

gets ill, you take care of it enough to keep it going. You won't be put to difficulties in terms of the world, and your Dhamma practice won't suffer.

The suffering we feel because of these things comes from the cause of stress: delusion, ignorance of the truth. When the mind is deluded, it doesn't know the cause of stress or the path to the disbanding of stress. When it knows, it doesn't get caught up in the natural pain and stress of the body. *Mental suffering comes from the accumulation of defilement, not from aging, illness and death.* Once the stillness of the path arises within us, then aging, illness, and death won't unsettle the mind. Sorrow, despair, distress, and lamentation won't exist. The mind will be separate. We can compare this to the water in the sea when it's full of waves: If we take a dipperful of sea water and set it down on the beach, there won't be any waves in the dipper at all. The waves come from wavering. If we don't stir it up, there won't be any waves. For this reason, we have to fix the mind so that it's steady in its meditation, without letting anything else seep in. It will then gain clarity: the discernment that sees the truth.

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The mental state of the cause of stress leads us to pain; the mental state of the path leads us to happiness. If you don't want stress or pain, don't stay with the flow of their cause. *Mental suffering is something unnatural to the mind.* It comes from letting defilement seep in. Diseases arise in the body, but we let their effects spread into the mind. We have to learn which phenomena die and which don't. If our defilements are thick and tenacious, there'll be a lot of aging, illness and death. If our defilements are thin, there won't be much aging, illness and death.

For this reason, we should build inner quality—awareness of the truth—within ourselves. However far the body is going to develop, that's how far it's going to have to deteriorate, so don't be complacent. The important point is that you develop the mind. If the mind gets developed to a point of true maturity, it won't regress. In other words, if your concentration is strong and your discernment developed, the defilements enwrapping your mind will fall away in the same way as when the flowers of a fruit tree reach full bloom, the petals fall away, leaving the fruit. When the fruit develops till it's fully ripe, the skin and flesh fall away, leaving just the seeds that contain all the makings for a new tree. When the mind is fully developed, then aging, illness, and death fall away. Mental stress and suffering fall away, leaving the mind in Right Concentration.

When Right Concentration is ripe, you'll know the location of what dies and what doesn't. If you want to die, then stay with what dies. If you don't want birth, don't stay with what takes birth. If you don't want aging, don't stay with what ages. If you don't want illness, don't stay with what grows ill. *If you don't leave these things, you have to live with them.* If you leave them, your mind won't age—it won't be able to age; it won't grow ill—it won't be able to grow ill; it won't die; it won't be able to die. If you can reach this point, you're said to have respect for the truth—for the teachings of the Buddha.

Respect for the truth isn't a matter of bowing down or paying homage. It means having a sense of time and place: If something is possible, you do it. If it's not, you don't—and you don't try to straighten it out, either. The defilements of unawareness, craving, and attachment are things that connect us with suffering, so don't let them entangle the mind.

Unawareness is the mental state that is deluded about the past, present, and future. True awareness knows what's past and lets it go; knows what's future and lets it go; knows what's present and doesn't fall for it. It can remove all attachments. Unawareness knows, but it falls for these things, which is why it forms the fuel for suffering. True awareness knows what things are past, present, and future, *but it doesn't run out after them.* It knows but it stays put—quiet and calm. It doesn't waver up or down. It doesn't seep out, and nothing seeps in. The past, the present, and the future it knows in terms of the principles of its nature, without having to reason or think. People who have to reason and think are the ones who don't know. With knowledge, there's no thinking or reasoning, and yet the mind knows thoroughly. This is true awareness. Aging, illness, and death all become an affair of release. In other words, nothing is fashioned in the mind, and when nothing is fashioned, there's no aging, illness, or death.

As for attachment, it catches us and ties us to a stake, like a person being led to his execution with no chance to wiggle free. We're tied with a wire stretching out to the past and future. Craving inches along the wire toward us, rolling his eyes and making horrible faces, so that we worry about the past and future. Behind us he splits into three: craving for sensuality, craving for possibilities, and craving for impossibilities. In front of us, he splits into three—the same three sorts of craving—and in the present he splits into the same three. With nine of them and only one of us, how can we expect to be a match for them? In the end, we're no match at all.

If we practice concentration and develop discernment, though, we'll be able to cut the wire of Death. When the mental state that forms the path arises, our

thoughts of past and future will all disband. This is the disbanding of stress. Attachment and craving won't exist—so where will stress and suffering have a chance to arise? People who have defilements—even if they earn \$3,000 a day—can't keep themselves from falling into hell. But people with no defilements, even if they don't have anything at all, are happy nonetheless—because the mind has enough to eat, enough to drink, enough of everything. It's not poor. When we can think correctly in this way, it's called respect for the Dhamma—and it can make us happy.

* * *

Respect for the Dhamma means taking seriously all the things that come in and out the house of your mind. (1) *The door of the body*: You have to be careful to make sure that none of your actions stray into ways that are harmful. (2) *The door of speech*—the door of the mouth—is very large. The tongue may be only a tiny piece of flesh, but it's very important, because what we say today can keep echoing for an aeon after we die. When the body dies, the time isn't long before there's nothing left of it, and so it's not as important as our speech, for the stone engravings we make with our tongue last a long, long time. For this reason, we should show a great deal of respect for our mouths by saying only things that are worthwhile. (3) *The door of the intellect*: We have to be careful with our thoughts. If something is harmful to us when we think about it, then we shouldn't think about it. We should think only about things that are beneficial and good.

These three doors are always receiving guests into the mind, so we have to pay attention to see who is coming with good intentions and who is coming with bad. Don't let down your guard. Whoever comes with good intentions will bring you happiness and prosperity. As for troublemakers and thieves, they'll rob you and kill you and cause you all sorts of trouble.

As for your eyes, ears, and nose, these are like three windows that you have to be careful about as well. You have to know when to open and when to close them. If you aren't discerning, you may invite thieves into your house to rob and kill you, plundering all the wealth your parents and teachers gave you. This is called being an ingrate—not knowing enough to care for the legacies that others have passed down to you. The legacies of your parents are your life, health, and strength. The legacies of your teachers are all the things they taught to make you a good person. If you leave your thoughts, words, and deeds wide open so that evil can flow into you, evil will keep pouring in, wearing down the health and strength of your body and

mind. This is called having no appreciation for the kindness of your parents and teachers.

Sometimes we don't leave just the doors open—we leave the windows open as well. Lizards, snakes, scorpions, birds, and bats will come in through the windows and take up residence in our house. After a while they'll lay claim to it as theirs—and we give in to them. So they leave their droppings all over and make a mess of the place. If we don't exercise self-restraint, our body and mind are going to be ruined, and this will destroy the wealth our parents and teachers went to such great trouble to give us.

So if anyone tries to come into your house, you have to grill them thoroughly to see what they're up to and what they're coming for—for good or for bad. Look them straight in the eye. In other words, you have to be mindful and reflecting in all your actions. Anything that isn't good you have to drive out of your activities. Even if it would help you financially or make you popular and well-known, don't have anything to do with it. The same holds true with your speech. If something you're about to say will serve a good purpose, then open your mouth and say it. Say what should be said, and don't say what shouldn't. If something serves no real purpose, then no matter how fantastic it may be, don't say it. You have to know how to respond to all the activities that present themselves for you to do. Let in the good ones and drive out the bad.

As for the mind, you have to show restraint with that, too. If a thought will lead to good and happy results, you should let yourself think it. But as for thoughts that will cause harm, don't pull them in. If you go gobbling down everything you like, you're going to die. I.e., (1) your inner quality will deteriorate. (2) The wealth your parents and teachers gave you will disappear.

As for your senses—sight, hearing, smell, taste, feeling—you should show an interest in everything that will benefit you. Drive out what's bad and bring in what's good. When you can do this, it's called showing respect for your parents, your teachers, and yourself as well. Your house will be clean, and you can lounge around in comfort without having to worry about sitting on bird- or bat-droppings.

But if you don't exercise self-restraint, your actions will be defiled, your words will be defiled, so how can your mind live in comfort? Like a filthy house: No guests will want to go into it, and even the owner isn't comfortable there. If you keep your home clean and well-swept, though, it'll be nice to live in, and good people will be happy to come and visit. When good people come and visit, they won't cause you any harm. In other words, the things that come in through the senses are like guests

and they won't cause any harm to the mind. The mind will be good and obedient and will stay put where you tell it to. But even if your couches and chairs are made of marble: If they're dusty and dirty, no guests will want to sit there, and you yourself won't want to, either.

* * *

So if you keep your virtue bright and clear with regard to your senses of sight, hearing, smell, taste, feeling, and ideation, your mind will find it easy to attain concentration. Then even when defilements come to visit you from time to time, they won't be able to do you any harm—because you have more than enough wealth to share with them. If thieves come, you can throw them a hunk of diamond ore and they'll disappear. If aging, illness, and death come begging, you can throw them another hunk, and they'll stop pestering you.

If your old kamma debts come at you when you're poor, they won't get enough to satisfy them, so they'll end up taking your life. But if they come at you when you're rich, you simply share your merit—all the inner wealth you've accumulated—and they'll leave you alone. If your goodness isn't yet full, then evil will have an opening to flow in; but if your hands, feet, eyes, ears, nose, tongue, body, and mind are filled with goodness, evil can't get into you, so you can come out unscathed.

Ultimately, you'll get so rich in inner quality that you can go beyond both good and evil. That's when you can be truly happy and free from danger. So I ask that you all remember this and treat your thoughts, words, and deeds in a way that shows respect for the Dhamma as I've explained it. You'll then meet with the happiness you hope for.

Serving a Purpose

November 4, 1958

My own motto is, ‘Make yourself as good as possible, and everything else will have to follow along in being good.’ If you don’t neglect yourself for the sake of external things, you’ll have to be good. So you shouldn’t neglect yourself. Develop your inner worth to your own satisfaction.

The world says, ‘Don’t worry about whether you’re good or bad, as long as you have money.’ This is just the opposite of the Dhamma, which says, ‘Don’t worry about whether you’re rich or poor, as long as you’re a good person.’

* * *

Your good qualities, if you don’t know how to use them, can hurt you—like money, which is something good but, if you don’t know how to spend it wisely, can lead to your ruin; or like a good sharp knife that, if you don’t know how to use it properly, can do you harm. Say, for instance, that you use the knife to kill someone. When you’re caught, you’ll have to be thrown in jail or executed, which means that you used the knife to kill yourself.

* * *

Each of us has four kinds of valuables: the goodness of our deeds, the goodness of our words, the goodness of our manners, and the goodness of our thoughts. For this reason, we have to care for these valuables as best we can.

Most of us have good things to our name but we hardly ever bring them out to put them to use. Instead, we like to bring out only our worst things to use. In other words, we keep our goodness to ourselves and show only our worst side—like the plates, cups, and saucers in our homes: The good ones we keep in the cupboard, and only the chipped, cracked, and broken ones get put on the table, because we’re afraid the good ones will break. As for our best clothes, we don’t dare use them because we’re afraid they’ll get old, stained, or torn. So we end up keeping them packed away until they get so moldy or moth-eaten that they can’t be worn and have to become rags. As a result, we don’t get any good out of our valuables in line with their worth. In the same way, *if we have any goodness within ourselves but don’t put it to use, it serves no purpose at all, either for ourselves or for others*—like a knife you keep

packed away until it gets rusty: If you finally bring it out to slice some food, the rust will poison you. If you happen to cut your hand or foot with it, you may come down with tetanus and die.

* * *

An intelligent person knows how to use both good and evil without causing harm. Arahants even know how to use their defilements so as to be of benefit. When sages use common language, it can serve a good purpose. But when fools use fine language, it can be bad. If they use bad language; it's even worse. An example of a person who used common language to serve a good purpose is Chao Khun Upali (Siricando Jan). One time he was invited to give a sermon in the palace during the weekly funeral observances for a young prince whose death had caused a great deal of sorrow to the royal relatives. On the previous weeks, some very high-ranking monks from Wat Debsirin had been invited to give sermons and they had all gone on about what a good man the prince had been, and how sad it was that he had come to such an untimely end that prevented him from living on to do more good for the world. This had caused the relatives to cry all the more.

When it came Chao Khun Upali's turn to give a sermon, though, he didn't carry on in the same vein at all. Instead, he started out with the theme of mindfulness of the body, describing the ugliness and foulness of the body, which is full of repulsive and disgusting things: snot, spit, dandruff, sweat, etc., etc. 'When the body dies, there's not one good thing about it,' he said, 'but people sit around weeping and wailing with tears streaming in tracks down their cheeks and mucus running out their noses and dribbling down to their chins. With their faces all in a mess like this, they don't look the least bit attractive.'

This made the relatives who had been crying so embarrassed that they stopped crying immediately, after which they expressed a great deal of admiration for Chao Khun Upali and his sermon. This is why it's said that a person who uses a sharp tongue with skill is a great sage. *If people are wise, then no matter what they say, it serves a good purpose* because they have a sense of time, place, and the people they're talking to. If something will serve a purpose, even if it sounds unpleasant, it should be said. If it won't serve a purpose, even if it sounds pleasant, don't say it.

* * *

The affairs of the religion are an affair of the heart. Don't go looking for them in the dirt or the grass, in temples or in monastery buildings. Although people may do good with their words and deeds, it's still an affair of the world. The affairs of the

religion are quiet and still, without any fuss or bother. They're aimed at a mind that's pure, undefiled, and bright. With goodness, there's no need to do anything much at all. Simply sit still, and there's purity.

Take the example of the little novice with quiet and composed manners who, as he was going out for alms one morning, happened to enter the compound of a stingy moneylender and his wife. Whether or not they would put any food in his bowl, he didn't show the least concern, and he didn't open his mouth to say a word. When he left—his bowl still empty—he went calmly and unhurriedly along his way. The moneylender's wife, seeing him, became curious and trailed him from a distance, until he reached a point where he suddenly had to go to the bathroom. Carefully he put down his bowl and, using his foot, cleared away the leaves to make a little depression in the dirt so that the urine wouldn't flow off anywhere. Then, after looking right, left and all around him to make sure that there wouldn't be anyone walking past, he squatted down to urinate unobtrusively in the proper way. When he had finished, he used his foot to cover the spot with dirt and leaves as it had been before, picked up his bowl and went calmly on his way.

As for the moneylender's wife, who had been watching from a distance, when she saw the manner in which the little novice was acting, the thought occurred to her that he had probably buried something of value. So she stealthily crept to the spot and, using her hand, dug the earth out of the hole buried by the novice and sniffed it to see what it was—and that was when she realized that it was urine. The little novice had taken care of his urine as if it were gold. 'If it were something more valuable than this,' she thought, 'there's no doubt how well he'd care for it. With manners like this, we should adopt him as our foster son. He'd be sure to look after our fortune to make sure that it wouldn't get wasted away.'

She went home to tell her husband who, impressed with her story, had a servant go and invite the novice into their home so that they could inform him of their intentions. The novice, however, declined their offer to make him their heir, and taught them the Dhamma, making them see the rewards of practicing generosity, virtue, and meditation. The moneylender and his wife were deeply moved, overcame their stinginess, and asked to take refuge in the Buddha, Dhamma, and Sangha from that day onward. Eventually, they progressed in virtue, meditation, and right practice to the point where they both gained a glimpse of Liberation. Afterwards, they made a large donation to build a memorial over the spot where the novice had urinated, as a reminder of the goodness that had grown within them from the puddle of urine the little novice had bestowed on them that day.

The affairs of the religion come down to '*sacitta-pariyodapanam*'—making the heart entirely clean, clear and pure. '*Etam buddhana-sasanam*'—this is the heart of the Buddhas' teachings.

Free at Last

July 13, 1958; May 11, 1957;
October 12, 1957

When the heart is a slave to its moods and defilements—greed, aversion, and delusion—it 's like being a slave to poor people, troublemakers, and crooks, all of whom are people we shouldn't be enslaved to. The 'poor people' here are greed: hunger, desire, never having enough. This feeling of 'not enough' is what it means to be poor.

As for aversion, this doesn't necessarily mean out-and-out anger. It also means being grumpy or in a bad mood. If anyone annoys us or does something displeasing, we get irritated and resentful. This is called being a slave to troublemakers.

Delusion means seeing good as evil or evil as good, right as wrong or wrong as right, thinking you're good when you're evil, or evil when you're good. This is called being a slave to crooks.

But if the mind becomes a slave to goodness, this is called being a slave to the Buddha, Dhamma, and Sangha, in which case we're well-off because the Buddha is a kind person. He won't make us work all hours of the day and instead will allow us time to rest and find peace of mind.

But still, as long as we're slaves, we can't say that it's really good, because slaves have no freedom. They still have a price on their heads. Only when we gain release from slavery can we be fully free and happy. So for this reason, be diligent in your work: Meditate a lot every day. You'll profit from it, get to buy yourself out of slavery to the Buddha, Dhamma, and Sangha, and gain Liberation. Don't let there be anyone at all over you giving you orders. That's when it's really ideal.

* * *

Actually, the Buddha never meant for us to take as our mainstay anything or anyone else aside from ourselves. Even when we take refuge in the Buddha, Dhamma, and Sangha, he never praised it as being really ideal. *He wanted us to take ourselves as our refuge.* 'The self is its own mainstay.' We don't have to take our authority from anyone else. We can depend on ourselves and govern ourselves.

We're free and don't have to fall back on anyone else. When we can reach this state, that 's when we'll be released from slavery—and truly happy.

When we're slaves to the Buddha, Dhamma, and Sangha, we're told to be generous, to observe the precepts and to practice meditation—all of which are things that will give rise to inner worth within us. In being generous, we have to suffer and work because of the effort involved in finding wealth and material goods that we then give away as donations. In observing the precepts, we have to forgo the words and deeds we would ordinarily feel like saying or doing. Both of these activities are ways in which we benefit others more than ourselves. But when we practice meditation, we sacrifice inner objects—unskillful thoughts and mental states—and make our minds solid, sovereign, and pure.

This is called paying homage to the Buddha, Dhamma, and Sangha through the practice—which the Buddha praised as better than paying homage with material objects. Even though the Buddha would have benefited personally from the homage shown with material objects, he never praised it as being better than homage shown through the practice, which gives all its benefits to the person who pays the homage. This was the sort of homage that pleased the Buddha, because the practice of training the heart to reach purity is the way by which a person can gain release from all suffering and stress. The Buddha had the kindness and compassion to want to help living beings gain freedom from all forms of suffering, which is why he taught us to meditate, so that we can free our hearts from their slavery to the defilements of the world.

When we become slaves to the religion—to the Buddha, Dhamma, and Sangha—we're still not released from suffering as long as our minds still have worries and concerns. Being a slave to our concerns is like being in debt to them. When we're in debt, we have no real freedom in our hearts. Only when we can find the money to pay off our debts can we be happy, free, and at ease. The more we pay off our debts, the more light-hearted we'll feel. In the same way, if we can let go of our various worries and cares, peace will arise in our hearts. We'll be released from our slavery to craving and defilement, and will find happiness because peace is what brings release from suffering. This is why the Buddha taught us to center our hearts in concentration so as to give rise to stillness, peace, and the inner wealth with which we'll be able to pay off all of our debts. That's when we'll attain happiness and ease. All our burdens and sufferings will fall away from our hearts and we'll enter full freedom.

* * *

The mind has two kinds of thoughts, skillful and unskillful. Unskillful thoughts are when the mind thinks in ways that are bad—with greed, anger or delusion—about things either past or future. When this happens, the mind is said to be a slave to defilement. As for skillful thoughts, they deal in good and worthwhile ways with things future or past. We have to try to let go of both these kinds of thoughts so that they don't exist in the mind if we want to gain release from our slavery.

* * *

If we want to buy ourselves completely out of slavery, we have to farm our four acres so that they bear abundant fruit. In other words, we have to develop the body's four properties—earth, water, fire, and wind—to a point of fullness by practicing meditation and using pure breath sensations to soothe and nourish every part of the body. When the mind is pure and the body soothed, it's like our farm's having plenty of rain and ground water to nourish our crops. I.e., our concentration is solid and enters the first stage of absorption, with its five factors: directed thought, evaluation, rapture, pleasure, and singleness-of-preoccupation. Directed thought is like harrowing our soil. Evaluation is like plowing and scattering the seed. Rapture is when our crops begin to bud, pleasure is when their flowers bloom, and singleness-of-preoccupation is when the fruits develop until they're ripened and sweet—and at the same time, their seeds contain all their ancestry. What this means is that in each seed is another plant complete with branches, flowers and leaves. If anyone plants the seed, it will break out into another plant just like the one it came from.

In the same way, when we center the mind to the point of absorption, we can gain insight into our past—maybe even back through many lifetimes—good and bad, happy and sad. This insight will cause us to feel dismay and dispassion, and to lose taste for all states of being and birth. The mind will let go of its attachments to self, to mental and physical phenomena, and to all thoughts and concepts—past and future, good and bad. It will enter a state of neutral equanimity. If we then work at developing it further, we'll be able to cut away more and more of our states of being and birth. When the mind gains change-of-lineage knowledge, which passes from the mundane over into the transcendent, it will see what dies and what doesn't. It will blossom as *buddho*—the awareness that knows no cessation—bright in its seclusion from thoughts and burdens, from mental effluents and

preoccupations. When we practice in this way, we'll come to the reality of birthlessness and deathlessness—the highest happiness—and on into Liberation.

This is how we repay all our debts without the least bit remaining. As the texts say, 'In release, there is the knowledge, "Released. Birth is no more, the holy life is fulfilled, the task done."'

For this reason, we should be intent on cleansing and polishing our hearts so that they can gain release from their worries and preoccupations, which are the source of pain and discontent. Peace, coolness, and a bright happiness will arise within us, in the same way as when we unshackle ourselves from our encumbering burdens and debts. We'll be free—beyond the reach of all suffering and stress.

*sabbe satta sada hontu
avera sukha-jivino
katam puñña-phalam mayham
sabbe bhagi bhavantu te*

May all beings always live happily,
free from animosity.

May all share in the blessings
springing from the good I have done.