
Undaunted

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THE BUDDHA'S TEACHINGS
ON AGING, ILLNESS, DEATH,
& THE DEATHLESS

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"'The world is swept away. It does not endure'…

"'The world is without shelter, without protector'…

"'The world is without ownership. One has to pass on, leaving everything behind'…

"'The world is insufficient, insatiable, a slave to craving.'" — MN 82

"Before my self-awakening, when I was still just an unawakened Bodhisatta, being subject myself to birth, sought what was likewise subject to birth. Being subject myself to aging… illness… death… sorrow… defilement, sought (happiness in) what was likewise subject to aging… illness… death… sorrow… defilement.

"The thought occurred to me, 'Why do I, being subject myself to birth, seek what is likewise subject to birth? Being subject myself to aging… illness… death… sorrow… defilement, why do I seek what is likewise subject to aging… illness… death… sorrow… defilement? What if I, being subject myself to birth, seeing the drawbacks of birth, were to seek the unborn, unexcelled rest from the yoke: unbinding? What if I, being subject myself to aging… illness… death… sorrow… defilement, seeing the drawbacks of aging… illness… death… sorrow… defilement, were to seek the aging-less, illness-less, deathless, sorrow-less, unexcelled rest from the yoke: unbinding?'

"So, at a later time, while still young, a black-haired young man endowed with the blessings of youth in the first stage of life—and while my parents,

unwilling, were crying with tears streaming down their faces—I shaved off my hair & beard, put on the ochre robe, and went forth from the home life into homelessness." — *MN 26*

Introduction

The Buddha's Dhamma—his teaching—is primarily focused on the question of how not to suffer from aging, illness, and death.

It answers this question by offering practical advice on two levels:

(1) how to experience aging, illness, and death without suffering from them; and

(2) how to find a dimension where aging, illness, and death are never experienced ever again.

As we will see, the two answers are closely related.

Some people, especially in the West, will be surprised to learn that these issues are the Dhamma's central focus. After all, questions of aging, illness, and death deal with what will happen in the future, whereas modern versions of Buddhism focus almost exclusive attention on the present moment. In fact, modern Buddhism could, with little exaggeration, be called the cult of the here and now. It extols the present moment on two levels: as the exclusive focal point for the practice—the means to the goal—and as the goal itself. Meditation practice is portrayed as a means for keeping the mind fully alert to the present. Once this skill is mastered, you've arrived at the goal: The ability to stay fully in the present is all that's needed to live life without suffering.

In this view of the Dhamma, questions of how to prepare for the inevitable aging, illness, and death of the body are usually put off to the side, on the grounds that they're distractions from the real work at hand. When these questions *are* addressed, they're often treated as if they were of interest only for people who are already old or sick, who should take the lessons for how to dwell easefully in the present moment and adjust them to fit their particular needs. Next to nothing is said about finding a dimension where aging, illness, and death don't occur at all.

As for the question of what happens after death, it's often treated as illegitimate or in bad taste: There's no way anyone can know the answer to that question, we're told, so it shouldn't even be asked. Some teachers

go so far as to teach that it's best left as a mystery. The most that anyone can do is to stay mindfully alert, open to the wonder of the unknown in the present moment, all the way up to the moment of death. After that, who knows? You're on your own.

But when we look at the Buddha's early teachings, we'll see that this state of affairs is very ironic, in that it has its priorities backwards. And it's worse than ironic. It's a serious mistake on two levels.

The first mistake concerns the primary motivation of the *bodhisatta*—the young Buddha-to-be—for finding the Dhamma in the first place. When he left home in his late twenties to go into the wilderness, it wasn't to rest in the present moment under a tree. He left home to answer his questions about the problems of aging, illness, and death. Even as an alive and healthy young person, he saw that these problems colored his entire existence: Any answer to the question of how best to live your life would require answering the question of what happens at death. That way, you would know how much energy you have to devote to preparing for death, and how much can be devoted to enjoying the here and now. Any search that didn't aim at finding what might lie beyond the reach of aging, illness, and death was, in his eyes, an ignoble search. As far as he was concerned, only a search that aimed at the deathless deserved to be called noble (MN 26).

So the problems of aging, illness, and death were the initial inspiration for his search for awakening. It was because of these three facts of life that he looked for the Dhamma to begin with. His defiant desire to triumph over them—to see what course of action *(kamma)* would lead to what didn't age, grow ill, or die—is what kept him on the path, undaunted, despite repeated missteps and hardships.

When, on the night of his awakening, he was able to settle his mind in right concentration, he used the power of his concentration as a tool for gaining knowledge. The first questions he wanted answered were questions of aging and death: Is there survival after death? If so, what was it like and how does it happen? To what extent do one's actions influence the process of rebirth, and to what extent is the process beyond one's control? And because aging and death follow inevitably on birth,

can the process be put to an end, so that birth would no longer take place?

He kept pursuing these questions without getting waylaid by other issues or giving up on his search for knowledge. In fact, it was because he remained focused on these issues that he found an answer that brought him what he was looking for: direct knowledge of total *nibbāna*, unbinding—freedom from aging, illness, and death, once and for all.

The answers he gained on the night of his awakening formed the framework of the Dhamma he later taught. And here again, the primary emphasis was on birth, aging, and death.

The two Dhamma teachings he talked about most in connection with his awakening were the four noble truths and dependent co-arising. We'll examine these teachings in more detail in Chapter One, but here it's enough to note that each of these teachings explains the causes for suffering, and the actions through which suffering can be ended by putting an end to the causes. In each case, when the Buddha explained what he meant by suffering, the first examples he listed were birth, aging, and death. In highlighting them, he was announcing to his listeners that the Dhamma didn't shy away from the big questions of life. These were themes to which he would return again and again throughout his teaching career to his very last day.

So we owe the Dhamma both to the facts of aging, illness, and death, and to the bodhisatta's audacious desire to gain total release from them. When he later taught meditation in a way that focused primarily on the present moment, it wasn't to exalt the present moment as apart from time or as an end in itself. It was to see how the present moment connected with the past and the present, and to gain mastery over the processes of the mind occurring here and now that would determine the extent to which one would suffer from birth, aging, illness, and death. This means that he recommended using the present moment—together with the past and future—as means to a higher end, for developing skills that would, ideally, lead to a dimension that lay outside of past, present, and future entirely.

This relates to the second mistake in the modern interpretation of the Dhamma. If we regard the Dhamma simply as a means for accepting the

present moment—learning to live comfortably in the present as things change with the passage of time—we're not benefiting fully from what the Dhamma has to offer. Some people claim that they don't need to know how to die; they want to know how to live their life—as if death were not a part of life, and as if the fact of death didn't raise questions about what kind of life is the wisest life to live. From the Buddha's point of view, though, trying to avoid those questions is to bury your head in the sand.

The Dhamma faces those questions head on. In answering them, it provides a framework for deciding what are the wisest and most worthwhile things to do with your life as a whole: which actions will be skillful in bringing long-term happiness, and which will bring long-term suffering and harm. As you go through life, calculating which actions are worth doing and which ones are not, you'll want to know what counts as skillful, and how long "long-term" actually is.

For instance, if you believe that actions can have an impact on future rebirths, your calculations will be very different from what they would be if you believed that actions gave no results, or gave results that went no further than this lifetime. In giving clear answers to these larger questions, the Dhamma offers much more than a guide to the present. It explains how to recognize past mistakes so that you can learn from them, and how to plan for a satisfactory future.

In providing this framework, the Dhamma gives you standards for deciding which kinds of actions will be skillful and which ones won't. As the Buddha said, the primary duty of any responsible teacher is to provide a student both with the confidence that there are such things as skillful and unskillful actions, and with standards for recognizing, in any given situation, which is which. Any interpretation of the Dhamma that neglects this framework—or treats the issue of what happens at death as a mystery—counts as irresponsible. It leaves the student without proper guidance in fully preparing for what will inevitably happen as aging, illness, and death come rolling in.

The fact that someday you'll have to deal with these things in future present moments—perhaps sooner than you might expect—adds urgency to how you approach the present moment right now. To prepare for the

time when these inevitabilities arrive, you have to develop skills that do much more than provide ease and acceptance of whatever is present. You need to learn more than just how to feel okay about yourself. You'll require skills that will stand you in good stead when you can no longer stay in this body. This means that you'll have to raise your standards for what counts as "okay" in your meditation.

It's like learning a foreign language. If you think that you might someday make a short visit to Thailand, you'll approach learning Thai much more casually than you would if you knew that, at any moment, you'll be forced to emigrate and live there for the rest of your life. In the same way, if your motivation for inhabiting the present moment is simply to find a measure of peace, you'll approach it much more casually than if you knew that your mastery of the mind's habits, as they play out in the present moment, will determine how well you'll handle the choices forced on you at the moment of death.

Take, for instance, the issue of craving. In the course of his awakening, the Buddha discovered a long list of mental actions that lead to suffering, in which craving plays a dominant role. People who teach ease in the present moment as the Buddhist goal have defined this craving simply as the desire for things to be different from what they are, on the grounds that this desire prevents the mind from being fully present and at ease right now. As a result, they teach that acceptance, contentment, equanimity, and patience are medicines strong enough to counteract the causes of suffering.

But even though acceptance, contentment, equanimity, and patience are virtues in some instances, they can actually stand in the way of developing other skills you need to deal with the cravings that will arise at death. The Buddha saw that those cravings fell into three types, and any of the three will come on raw and in full force when you realize that you can no longer stay in this body. He also saw that if you cling to any of these cravings, they'll take you to a new rebirth, in the same way that a fire burning a house, if it latches on to the wind, will be carried to a neighboring house and continue burning there. Blind as the wind, craving can be wildly unpredictable as to where it will take you.

The technical names of those three cravings are sensuality-craving, becoming-craving, and non-becoming-craving.

Sensuality refers to the mind's fascination with planning sensual pleasures. In the Buddha's analysis, we're often more attached to our fantasies about sensual pleasures than we are to the pleasures themselves. Thoughts of food, for instance, can entertain you for hours, whereas the amount of time the food is actually in your mouth can be very short. At the moment of death, the mind will easily focus on the fear that it can no longer engage in sensual fantasies, so it'll latch on to any opportunity to continue pursuing them. If you're in pain, and you have no experience in the higher pleasures of intense concentration, you'll see sensuality as your only escape from pain. If you're really desperate, you'll take whatever pleasure you can get, no matter how coarse or at what price.

Becoming is a sense of identity in a world of experience. Becomings exist on two scales. There are becomings on the macro scale, such as the fact that you now have the identity of a human being in the human world. There are also becomings on the micro scale. These occur exclusively in the mind when you focus on a desire and, as a result, there appears in the mind an image of the world in which that desire might be fulfilled, and your identity as a being in that imagined world. The type of identity you assume—to obtain the desired object and to enjoy it—will be shaped by the desire that forms the kernel of that particular becoming. Becomings of this sort occur in the mind countless times in the course of even a day. And, especially at the moment of death, they'll act as openings to becomings on the macro scale in which you can take a new birth.

When, at that moment, your identity in this world is threatened, along with all the pleasures you've been able to find here, there will be a strong craving to continue becoming—to be somebody somewhere—unless the mind has been thoroughly trained. Here again, if you fear annihilation, you'll latch on to any opportunity for becoming, regardless of the cost. And a craving that's willing to pay any cost can lead you to pay very dearly.

Non-becoming is the annihilation of one's identity. It's possible that after a life of disappointments, together with all the pain and hardships that accompany the dying process, the craving for total oblivion could become strong at the moment of death. But the bodhisatta discovered that this type of craving still dealt in terms of "self" and "world," the basic terms of becoming: the "me" who wants oblivion, and the world you want to run away from. For that reason, instead of putting an end to becoming, this type of craving would lead to an oblivious new becoming that would last for a while—maybe even a long while—and then on to further becomings.

This means that the craving for non-becoming would not put an end to aging and death. Instead, it would simply keep the process going.

This presented the bodhisatta with a dilemma. He saw that the cravings that lead to suffering, if you cling to them, all lead to becoming. Becoming, in turn, is the underlying condition for birth. Once there's birth, then aging and death will have to follow. So, to put an end to aging and death, you have to put an end to birth. This will require finding a path to the end of becoming that doesn't involve either craving for becoming or craving for non-becoming.

We'll explore the Buddha's resolution of this dilemma in Chapter One, but here it's enough to note that it involves, not trying to destroy becoming, but simply withdrawing from your identity in whatever becoming you're inhabiting, at the same time learning to observe the processes that shape becoming and keep it in existence. When you look at the steps in these processes as nothing more than events, appearing and disappearing, you see that they could not possibly lead to anything of real or lasting value. As you develop dispassion for them, you no longer engage in them or try to identify with them. Becomings that have already formed will have nothing to keep them going; new becomings won't have a chance to arise. This is how becoming—followed by birth, aging, and death—is brought to an end.

To take this approach requires tools more powerful than acceptance, contentment, equanimity, and patience. It requires very sharp discernment, which in turn has to be based on strong concentration. As the Buddha noted, if you simply develop equanimity without strong

effort, the mind will never get rightly concentrated (AN 3:103). The discernment you need to put an end to craving won't have a chance to arise.

This means that, in focusing on the present moment to develop the skills needed to overcome craving, you have to be motivated by more than a simple desire to accept whatever arises. At the same time, you can't rest content with whatever peace you can find in the present. You need to be more heedful than that: seeing that the dangers of aging, illness, and death could come at any moment, but realizing that they can be avoided if you develop the discernment that will help you to succeed in negotiating the challenges they'll bring.

We'll discuss this discernment in more detail in Chapter One. There we'll pinpoint the principles that the Buddha learned on the night of his awakening that explain what happens both before and during the moment of death. When we understand these principles, we'll see why the best way to prepare for the realities of aging, illness, and death involves both planning for the future and focusing on present events in the mind. Then, in the remainder of the book, we'll focus on the Buddha's detailed recommendations for how to act while being mindful of this dual focus, so that you'll know how to decide for yourself with confidence which actions are worth pursuing, and which ones are not.

Some people have asked how anyone can possibly know what happens after death, and so have labeled the Buddha's teachings on this subject pure speculation. They have also asked how any human being could possibly discover a dimension free from the conditions of aging, illness, and death. These questions, though, come from a poorly examined assumption about what a human being *is*—a being limited by space, time, culture, and the constraints of the body—and then from that assumption draw conclusions about what such a being can *know*.

The Buddha, however, took the opposite tack. Rather than start with a definition of what a human being is, he explored what a human being can *do*—and then know based on those actions. On the night of his awakening, he discovered that it was possible to act in a way that led to an experience of a deathless dimension. As he later said, if you define yourself, you limit yourself (SN 23:2; SN 22:36). So instead of teaching

a doctrine of what a human being is, he taught a path of practice that, he said, lies within capabilities of what a human being can do, and would lead anyone who followed it to the same experience.

This statement is both a promise and a challenge. This book is for those who don't want to be limited by preconceived notions of what they are, and who feel inspired by the Buddha's promise and challenge to see if they, too, can benefit from the path of practice he taught.

This path is more daunting than the path that takes ease in the present moment as its goal, and for that reason it requires conviction. After all, the Buddha's claim to knowledge is not proof enough for others that he really knew—and he realized that. That's why he told his listeners that conviction in his awakening was one of the attitudes necessary for following the path.

It's needed because, as he himself noted, there's no way for you to really know the truth of what he learned about the power of human action to see what happens at death or to reach the deathless until you've followed the path and seen that it actually does lead you to genuine knowledge of these things. But, at the same time, you won't be able to follow the path unless you're convinced that it's worth the effort. If you waited for an empirical proof of these truths before you were willing to practice, you'd die first. What you need are good working hypotheses that you're willing to test.

After all, *any* position you might take on these issues would have to be a working hypothesis. The belief that death is followed by annihilation is no less an article of faith than the belief that it's followed by rebirth. No one who has yet to see the deathless can rightly claim knowledge as to whether it does or doesn't exist. And because you're always choosing how to act, you need working hypotheses as to how the results of your actions will play out in any event. So as long as you have to formulate working hypotheses about the nature of action, if you want to put an end to suffering, you need to adopt hypotheses that allow the idea of a path of action to the end of suffering to make sense. This is where conviction comes into Buddhist practice: when you're convinced that the hypotheses proposed by the Buddha make sense and are worth testing.

The Buddha never tried to offer his listeners an empirical proof for his discoveries on rebirth, kamma, and the deathless. As he said, even though a person could demonstrate that these principles are reasonable, that's no proof that they're true. For instance, one of the basic principles of his teaching on kamma is that you have freedom to choose a course of action in the present moment and that it will give some of its results in the present moment. Even though the principle is reasonable, there's no empirical way, prior to awakening, to prove whether that freedom is true or false. However, the Buddha did offer what might be called pragmatic proofs for accepting his teachings on rebirth, kamma, and the deathless as working hypotheses.

Those pragmatic proofs come in two forms: The first is based on the observation that if you believe that your choices are real—for instance, you're not being forced to act by an occult power or brute physical processes—and that they'll have long-term consequences, you'll be more likely to act in skillful, harmless ways. Your behavior will be more honorable. If, on the other hand, you don't believe that your choices are real and consequential, you'll tend to be more careless in how you treat yourself and others. If you care about finding a path to the end of suffering, you'd want to choose the assumption that would inspire you to be more careful in your actions.

The second type of pragmatic proof is based on the principle that if you don't know if a desirable goal is possible, and reasonable people are telling you that it is, you could either (1) adopt the assumption that it's not, which would effectively close off any path leading there, or you could (2) adopt the assumption that it is, and at least keep the possibility open. Again, if you care about finding a path to the end of suffering, the second assumption is the one you have to adopt. You wouldn't want to close off such a desirable possibility out of sheer ignorance.

Both of these sorts of pragmatic proofs are presented as wagers—as is any teaching on the question of whether choice is real and the deathless is possible. In fact, because we're constantly acting and making choices, we're making wagers all the time as to what assumptions to adopt about how far the consequences of our actions will go and what sorts of happiness lie within our powers.

As the Buddha himself noted, if you have conviction in his awakening and act on that conviction, you're making a safe bet. If it turns out that the principles of rebirth, kamma, and the deathless are not true, then at the very least you can enjoy a clear conscience, because you've learned to behave in compassionate and honorable ways. When reflecting on your behavior, you have solid reasons for self-esteem. And, of course, if it turns out that the discoveries of his awakening *are* true, then you've found an undying happiness.

So conviction, in the Buddha's sense of the term, is not blind faith. It's the act of adopting reasonable working hypotheses that open the possibility of long-term happiness and ultimately the deathless.

Now, the path to the deathless may seem daunting. Many people, on learning what it entails, can easily wonder if they're up for the challenge. But as the Pali Canon—the oldest extant record of the Buddha's teachings—reports, people from all walks of life—young, old, sick, healthy, religious seekers, householders, and even criminals—have followed the path all the way to awakening.

As Ven. Ānanda, one of the Buddha's disciples, said, the proper response to learning that others have found full awakening is: "Then why not me?" (AN 4:159) The compilers of the Canon frequently described the Buddha's teaching style as one of "instructing, urging, rousing, and encouraging"—in other words, one part information to three parts encouragement. I hope that this book will not only instruct you, but also encourage you to urge, rouse, and encourage yourself in following, undaunted, the path to the deathless.

How to Read this Book

As we will see, the Buddha's recommended approach for gaining victory over aging, illness, and death was to develop strength of heart and strength of mind. The Pali Canon lists many types of mental strength, but two of its lists stand out. In the first, the strengths are:

conviction,
persistence,
mindfulness,

concentration, and
discernment.

In the second, the strengths are:

conviction,
shame,
compunction,
persistence, and
discernment.

Given the overlap between the two lists, this yields seven strengths in all. These seven strengths will form the basic structure for Chapter Four, devoted to issues around aging; Chapter Five, devoted to issues around illness; Chapter Six, devoted to issues around death; Chapter Seven, devoted to advice for those who are caring for people who are ill or dying; and Chapter Eight, devoted to advice for those who are grieving from the aging, illness, or death of a loved one.

However, of the two lists of strengths, the first one is more prominent in the Canon, and is treated as more fundamental. It's included in a set of teachings called the Wings to Awakening *(bodhi-pakkhiya-dhamma),* which the Buddha identified as his most central teachings.

This first list provides the general framework for the introductory chapters.

Conviction is defined as conviction in the truth of the Buddha's awakening. For this reason, Chapter One discusses the central discoveries of that awakening, how the Buddha arrived at them, and how they apply in general to questions of aging, illness, and death.

The remaining four strengths are developed through meditation. Thus Chapter Two discusses how, in terms of theory, the insights the Buddha gained in his awakening shaped the way he taught meditation. Chapter Three then discusses how these theoretical principles actually play out in the practice of meditation to develop persistence, mindfulness, concentration, and discernment.

If you find the history and theory in the first two chapters too distant or abstract, you may want to start with Chapter Three, because—as I

note there—the practice of meditation is central to all the Buddha's other instructions for how best to approach aging, illness, and death. The next three chapters should be read consecutively because the issue of physical weakness, treated in most detail in connection with aging in Chapter Four, is also involved in confronting illness and death. Similarly, the issue of pain, treated in most detail in connection with illness in Chapter Five, is also involved in confronting death, the topic of Chapter Six.

As for the discussion in Chapter Seven—which touches both on how a caregiver should encourage a patient in developing the seven strengths, and on how the caregiver will benefit from developing those strengths him or herself—this assumes knowledge of the previous three chapters.

As does Chapter Eight, which treats the issue of how best to deal with grief when a loved one has grown old or sick or has died. This chapter shows how to apply the first four strengths to dealing with the symptoms of grief, and all seven strengths to effecting a total cure.

If you start with Chapter Three, then once you're familiar with the practical discussions in the later parts of the book, you may find yourself better prepared to tackle the more theoretical discussions in Chapters One and Two. That way, you'll have a larger framework for understanding where the practical instructions come from. This framework will then help give you a better sense of how you can adapt the practical instructions so that they best fit with the specifics of your particular case, while at the same time staying true to the principles of what the Buddha taught.

"Then, monks, being subject myself to birth, seeing the drawbacks of birth, seeking the unborn, unexcelled rest from the yoke, unbinding, I reached the unborn, unexcelled rest from the yoke: unbinding. Being subject myself to aging… illness… death… sorrow… defilement, seeing the drawbacks of aging… illness… death… sorrow… defilement, seeking the aging-less, illness-less, deathless, sorrow-less, unexcelled rest from the yoke, unbinding, I reached the aging-less, illness-less, deathless, sorrow-less, unexcelled rest from the yoke: unbinding. Knowledge & vision arose in me: 'Unprovoked is my release. This is the last birth. There is now no further becoming.'" — MN 26

CHAPTER ONE

Lessons from the Awakening

On the night of his awakening, the bodhisatta gained three knowledges that led to his total release:

- knowledge of his own past lives;
- knowledge of how all beings die and are reborn in line with their *kamma* (a word meaning "action," better known now in its Sanskrit form, *karma);* and
- knowledge of how to end the mental qualities that he called *āsavas*, or effluents: tendencies that bubble up in the mind and flow out, leading to further rebirth. These tendencies are three: sensuality, becoming, and ignorance.

When these effluents were gone from his mind, the bodhisatta—now the Buddha—experienced the deathless, to which he later gave many names, the best known being *nibbāna (nirvāṇa):* unbinding. This was his awakening.

The fact that these knowledges led to the deathless was the Buddha's guarantee of their truth—a guarantee that he couldn't share with anyone else, aside from teaching the path of practice that had led him to an experience of the deathless, so that they could try that path and gain the same results for themselves.

All three of the knowledges taught the Buddha important lessons about what happens in the course of aging, illness, and death, and how best to train the mind so as not to suffer from these things. So it's good to look at each knowledge in detail. As we will see, what was distinctive about the Buddha's awakening was not only what he learned from these knowledges, but also how he interpreted and used what he had learned. He profited greatly from these knowledges because he persistently approached them asking the right questions.

He began his inquiry by focusing on the issue of what happens at death, as others had done before him. However, he was able to awaken to the deathless because he kept focused on the topic of what to do so as not to suffer from death, where previous meditators had allowed themselves to get sidetracked by other concerns. Here again, we can see how we owe the Dhamma to the bodhisatta's unrelenting desire not to suffer from death ever again.

The First Knowledge

The first knowledge, of his own past lives, stretched back in time through many eons as the cosmos expanded and contracted, again and again. In the case of each lifetime, he knew his name, clan (species or level of being), appearance, food, experience of pleasure or pain, and the manner of his death.

The Buddha later illustrated this knowledge with a simile:

> *"It was as if a man were to go from his home village to another village, and then from that village to yet another village, and then from that village back to his home village. The thought would occur to him, 'I went from my home village to that village over there. There I stood in such a way, sat in such a way, talked in such a way, and remained silent in such a way. From that village I went to that village over there, and there I stood in such a way, sat in such a way, talked in such a way, and remained silent in such a way. From that village I came back home.'"*— DN 2

The fact that the bodhisatta gained this knowledge on the night of his awakening is sometimes dismissed as a mere holdover from his culture, on the assumption that everyone in India at the time believed in rebirth. But that assumption is false. The question of whether death was followed by rebirth or by annihilation was hotly debated at the time. Even among those who taught rebirth, there was disagreement as to whether you changed or stayed the same from one birth to the next. Some brahmans, for instance, taught that members of each caste would stay in that caste from one life to the next: Brahmans would always be

brahmans; people in lower castes would always have to serve them; animals would always be animals for them to use.

The bodhisatta's first knowledge indicated otherwise. He had changed radically from one birth to the next, taking on identities in many levels of the cosmos, not only on the human level, but also on levels much higher and lower. This had happened so many times, he later noted, that it would be hard for him to meet someone who had not been his mother, father, sister, brother, daughter, or son in the course of that long, long time (SN 15:14–19). Thinking of this, he added, was enough to give rise to a desire for release from the whole process.

The Second Knowledge

The bodhisatta's second knowledge was knowledge of beings passing away and being reborn in line with their actions. The Buddha's simile for this knowledge is this:

> *"It was as if there were a tall building in the central square (of a town), and a man with good eyesight standing on top of it were to see people entering a house, leaving it, walking along the street, & sitting in the central square. The thought would occur to him, 'These people are entering a house, leaving it, walking along the streets, & sitting in the central square.'"* — DN 2

This second knowledge was directly related to the first but, like the first, is sometimes dismissed on the mistaken grounds that it was simply a holdover from the culture in which the bodhisatta grew up. Both knowledges have also been dismissed as being irrelevant to the real essence of the Buddha's awakening, which came in the third knowledge. This, too, is false.

Actually, the first two knowledges were intimately connected with the third. What the bodhisatta saw in his first knowledge inspired him to pursue a line of inquiry that led, step by step, through the second knowledge and then to the knowledge that brought about his awakening.

After he gained insight into his own previous lifetimes in the first knowledge, the next question was: If your identity changes from one life

to the next, what determines the changes?

This, too, was a controversial issue in the bodhisatta's time. Although those of his contemporaries who assumed rebirth gave many answers to this question, the most interesting ones were based, not on speculation, but on the meditative experiences of previous teachers. The Buddha later noted that he was not the first to gain knowledge of rebirth or of beings passing away and being reborn. Other teachers had gained those knowledges, too, but his second knowledge differed from theirs in two important respects: On the one hand, it was more extensive and detailed; on the other, he approached it asking different questions.

In terms of extension: Their knowledge stretched back at most 40 eons of cosmic expansion and contraction, whereas his stretched back for many more. For this reason, he was able to see larger patterns that they had missed.

For instance, he saw beings at the top levels of the cosmos whose lifespan lasted many hundreds of eons. As a result, he could see how even the highest gods passed away and were reborn, whereas people before him couldn't. This showed him that none of the beings at the top were eternal supreme beings in charge of determining how the cosmos would evolve or who would be reborn where.

He also saw that there was no discernable beginning point for transmigration—or as he said at another time, that such a beginning point couldn't even be conceived. The processes by which beings went from one lifetime to another had been going on for an immeasurably long time, serving no overarching purpose or divine plan.

In terms of detail: Some teachers, when gaining knowledge of this sort, saw cases where people did good and then in the following lifetime were reborn in a good destination, whereas other people did evil and in the following lifetime were reborn in a bad destination. As a result, those teachers taught the power of action as a deterministic rule. If you killed, stole, engaged in illicit sex, told lies, or took intoxicants, they said, your fate for the next lifetime was sealed: You'd have to go to a bad destination, such as hell or an animal realm. If you abstained from those activities, again, your next lifetime was totally determined: You'd have to go to a good destination, such as the human or the heavenly worlds.

Other teachers, though, on gaining this sort of knowledge, saw other cases where people did good and then, in the next lifetime, were reborn in a bad destination; and cases where people did evil and were reborn in a good destination. As a result, those teachers claimed that your actions were powerless to take you to a good or bad rebirth. Instead, they taught that rebirth was determined by a creator god, by impersonal fate, or by pure serendipity (AN 3:62).

The bodhisatta, however, was able to examine the actions of beings in much greater detail, and he found that a handful of actions was not enough to determine your next rebirth, but that your larger history of actions, both past and present, did play a role in determining the next rebirth. People who did good actions and were reborn in a bad destination either had done bad actions further in the past, or bad actions in the meanwhile before death, or—at the moment of death—adopted wrong view. Conversely, those who did bad actions and were reborn in a good destination either had done good actions further in the past, or good actions in the meanwhile before death, or at the moment of death adopted right view.

At the same time, when a person did a cluster of good actions in this lifetime and was reborn in a good destination, it wasn't exclusively because of those actions. It was also through the combined effects of actions before and after that, along with the act of maintaining right view at death. Similarly, when a person did bad actions in this lifetime and was reborn in a bad destination, it was through the combined power of those actions plus previous and subsequent bad actions and the act of maintaining wrong view at death (MN 136).

As a result, the Buddha taught that actions *tended* to give results in line with their quality—skillful actions tended to give good results, and unskillful actions tended to give bad—but the way these tendencies interacted to produce results was so complex that you'd go insane if you tried to trace them all out. Still, the important lesson was that there was no need to trace them out anyhow: Just keep acting on right view and skillful intentions, and good results would be sure to come at some point or another.

The Third Knowledge

The Buddha's autobiographical accounts of his awakening state that he went straight from the second knowledge to the third—knowledge of the ending of the effluents. This knowledge involved seeing the four noble truths and experiencing total release from birth, aging, and death.

The Buddha later described this knowledge as follows:

> *"It was as if there were a pool of water in a mountain glen—clear, limpid, & unsullied—where a man with good eyesight standing on the bank could see shells, gravel, & pebbles, and also shoals of fish swimming about & resting, and it would occur to him, 'This pool of water is clear, limpid, & unsullied. Here are these shells, gravel, & pebbles, and also these shoals of fish swimming about & resting.'"*—*DN 2*

> *"When the mind was thus concentrated, purified, & bright, unblemished, free from defects, pliant, malleable, steady, & attained to imperturbability, I inclined it to the knowledge of the ending of effluents. I discerned, as it had come to be, that 'This is stress… This is the origination of stress… This is the cessation of stress… This is the way leading to the cessation of stress… These are effluents… This is the origination of effluents… This is the cessation of effluents… This is the way leading to the cessation of effluents.' My heart, thus knowing, thus seeing, was released from the effluent of sensuality, the effluent of becoming, the effluent of ignorance. With release, there was the knowledge, 'Released.' I discerned that 'Birth is ended, the holy life fulfilled, the task done. There is nothing further for this world.'"* — *MN 4*

The simile for this knowledge suggests that it was purely a matter of seeing the four truths, but SN 56:11 tells us that it also involved completing the duties appropriate to each truth: comprehending stress, abandoning its origination, realizing its cessation, and developing the path to its cessation.

The Buddha's autobiographical accounts don't explain how the second knowledge was related to the third, or why he succeeded in stepping

from the second to the third when other meditators prior to him had failed.

Other passages in the Canon, however, give some idea of the steps in between. These steps are good to know, because they provide practical pointers for how anyone should approach issues related to one's own birth, aging, and death.

The first point to note relates to the questions the bodhisatta asked of the second knowledge. There were meditators in his time who, seeing that beings were reborn on many different levels of the cosmos, became obsessed with the question of what in each being remained the same throughout the many changes of rebirth. Was there a self? Was there no self? One school in particular taught that the self and the cosmos were eternal and unchanging—your inner essence always stayed the same—and that any apparent changes were actually unreal. As the Buddha later noted, teachers in this school tended to get entangled in debate with those who argued, either on the basis of their meditative experiences or through logic, that the self was not eternal or didn't even exist. He called the entanglements on both sides of this issue a thicket, a writhing, and a fetter of views (DN 1; MN 2).

As he saw it, all those meditators made the mistake of asking the wrong questions, such as: "Was I in the past? What was I in the past? Will I be in the future? What will I be in the future? Do I exist now? Do I not exist now? What am I?" Instead, the proper questions to ask concerned what to do to put an end to suffering (MN 2). Seeing the mistakes made by previous meditators, the bodhisatta didn't let the second knowledge divert him from his original question: What could be done to put an end to birth, aging, and death?

On seeing the power of action in determining a person's death and rebirth, he focused not on *who* was doing the actions, but on the nature of *action itself*. In particular, one point that he had seen in his second knowledge that previous meditators had overlooked in theirs—the power of one's views at the moment of death to support or counteract the results of past actions—seems to have caught his attention. It would have suggested two things to him:

One, mental actions had the power to overcome the results of physical and verbal actions.

Two, the present moment was shaped not only by past actions but also, and more radically, by present ones. This is true not only at death, but also at any point in life.

These two realizations combined into one: a realization of the power of present-moment mental actions.

That's why, in the third knowledge, he focused on mental actions in the present moment to see how they influenced birth, aging, and death, and to test whether that influence could be manipulated to bring birth, aging, and death to a halt. An important part of his inquiry was that he didn't examine those actions in the context of who was doing them or where. After all, "who" and "where" are issues of becoming, which, as we've noted, is a sense of identity functioning in a world of experience. Once you commit to these terms, it's hard to get out of becoming. Instead, the bodhisatta looked simply for causal relations among actions in and of themselves. This was a key not only to understanding those actions, but also to developing dispassion for them. That would bring them to an end.

As he later stated (SN 12:65), when he looked for the causes of aging and death, he traced them down through the following sequence of actions, called dependent co-arising *(paṭicca samuppāda):*

birth, which took place in states of

becoming—a sense of identity in a world of experience. This identity, as we've noted, can be either in the scale of the world at large—on the cosmic levels of sensual, form, or formless worlds—or on the same levels within the mind. In fact, as the Buddha discovered, becoming on the external scale came from becomings on the internal scale. These becomings were based on

clinging: desire and passion for any of the five aggregates of form, feeling, perceptions, thought-fabrications, or sensory consciousness. These aggregates could be clung to in any of four ways: in their role of fashioning sensual fantasies, views of the

world, habits and practices, or doctrines of the self. These four types of clinging, in turn, were based on the three types of *craving* (for sensuality, becoming, and non-becoming), which were based on *feeling*—pleasure, pain, neither pleasure nor pain. Feeling was based on *sensory contact*. Contact was based on *the six senses* of sight, hearing, smell, taste, bodily contact, and ideation. These senses in turn were based on having a conscious body, which the Buddha called *name-and-form*. "Form" here covers the body as sensed from within, in elemental terms of energy, warmth, coolness, and solidity. "Name" covers mental acts: feelings, perceptions—the mind's labels for things—intentions, acts of attention, and contact among mental acts and the body. Both name and form were dependent on *consciousness* at the eye, ear, nose, tongue, body, and mind. These acts of consciousness were dependent on acts of *fabrication*, which included bodily fabrication, the in-and-out breath; verbal fabrication, directed thought and evaluation (your inner conversation, in which you focus on a topic and then ask questions and make comments on it); and mental fabrication, feelings and perceptions.

The bodhisatta went down this sequence of actions first by directly experiencing the action, then by looking for its origination, in other words, the internal act that was causing it. Then he looked for its cessation as its origination ceased, all the while following the path of practice that would lead to its cessation by developing dispassion for the action.

When he applied this way of looking to fabrications, fabrications ceased, causing the remaining actions in the sequence to cease as well. That was what opened the way to release into the deathless: an awareness beyond the six senses, an unconditioned truth, happiness, and total freedom from all the constraints of space and time.

This experience is what made him the Buddha, the Awakened One.

It also taught him many things. The most obvious lesson was that the sequence of causes leading to aging, illness, and death was very complex. Notice, for example, how often feelings and perceptions keep reappearing in the sequence. This creates many feedback loops among these actions. For our purposes, though, some of the Buddha's most important lessons were fairly straightforward and direct.

• He noted that suffering first appeared in the sequence of dependent co-arising, not with birth, aging, or death, but with clinging. This means that aging and death don't constitute suffering in and of themselves. They count as suffering only if they're approached with clinging. Because the immediate cause for clinging is craving, the Buddha in his first discourse identified craving as the cause of suffering, and dispassion for craving as the cessation of suffering.

• To develop dispassion for craving, the bodhisatta's way of looking at the sequence of actions leading up to craving—without reference to who was doing them or where—was precisely the right approach. That's because views about the nature of the self and the world were two of the objects of clinging leading to becoming. If they formed the framework for the questions you asked in analyzing these actions, that would mean analyzing the actions from within the framework of a self-identity. That wouldn't allow for dispassion to arise: Either you'd cling to these actions as you or yours if you wanted them to stay, or you'd try to push them away from you if you didn't like them. In other words, you'd stay stuck in the double bind formed by craving for becoming and craving for non-becoming. Only by getting outside of the framework of "self" and "world" can you develop the necessary dispassion that allows for the sequence leading to suffering to cease on its own.

The Buddha had a name for this approach of fostering dispassion for the events leading up to craving by looking at the events in and of themselves: He called it *seeing what has come to be as come to be (bhūtaṁ bhūtato passati)*. As we have already noted, this approach avoided the double bind by entirely avoiding the two main terms of becoming: (a) an identity in (b) a world of experience.

The Buddha saw that this approach also helped to undercut any concepts that would develop into any sense of "self" or "world." If you

stayed focused on the steps in the origination leading up to the experience of the six senses—which he equated with the world—the idea of the non-existence of the world wouldn't occur to you. If you stayed focused on the passing away of those steps, the idea of the existence of the world wouldn't occur to you. All you would see would be stress arising and stress passing away (SN 12:15). Watching that stress without reference to the existence or non-existence of any essence lying behind it, you'd see no reason to feel any passion for it. That's one of the ways in which this mode of seeing can lead to dispassion and so to release.

• The Buddha also noted that the sequence leading to suffering didn't begin with sensory contact. In other words, the road to suffering doesn't begin with disagreeable sights, sounds, etc. Instead, it begins with actions in body and mind *prior* to sensory contact, which can lead to suffering even around pleasant sensory contacts. These prior actions include intentions, which the Buddha identified as the essence of kamma; attention, the way you frame questions to decide what's worth paying attention to and what's not; perceptions, the labels you apply to sensory contact; and the three types of fabrication, which the Buddha treated as synonymous with intention.

• Also, the Buddha noted that the relations among the actions in the sequence didn't all necessarily happen in the present moment. In some cases, they included actions from the past. This is most obvious in the case of the six senses: Many of the phenomena you experience at the senses are not the result of what you're doing right now. You might be thinking perfectly skillful thoughts, but negative phenomena can still come at you from outside. Still, those phenomena are directly related to your actions in that you should regard the six senses as the results of old kamma (SN 35:145). In other words, if you want to gain release, you have to see what comes through the senses as originating from your own past actions.

This raises an important point. Given that present intentions can play a role in at least two points of the sequence prior to this old kamma—at *fabrications* and *name*—your experience of your present kamma, regardless of whether you're fully alert to it, forms a necessary

precondition for your experience of your past kamma. There have to be intentions in the present moment for you to experience the results of old intentions at the senses.

That's why release is possible. When present kamma ceases at the moment of awakening, your experience of the senses—past kamma as it would play out in the present moment—also stops. When the Buddha experienced this cessation, that was what guaranteed the truth of what he had learned about the power of actions in his previous knowledges: Present mental kamma is freely chosen, and it's a necessary prerequisite for any experience of the world of the senses.

This is also why, when the Buddha taught meditation, he focused on understanding and developing dispassion for intentions in the present moment. And as we will see, this is precisely why this sort of meditation is an important part of preparing for death.

• In his later teachings, the Buddha noted that the proper contemplation of the sequence of events leading to craving fell into three steps: dispassion, cessation, and relinquishment. The reason for the first two steps is fairly obvious: Because the sequence of dependent co-arising is normally driven by your own passion for the actions in the sequence, the fact that you develop dispassion for them will lead to their cessation. When, through dispassion, you stop doing the actions, the subsequent actions will all cease.

The need for the further step of relinquishment, though, is not so obvious, but it has to do with the knowledge used to induce dispassion. Even though that knowledge avoids the terms of becoming, it still makes use of acts of intention, perception, and attention, which of course are sub-factors of "name" in dependent co-arising. Only when those skillful acts of intention, perception, and attention are also relinquished can the entire sequence come to an end.

As the Buddha later noted, awakening to the end of suffering can happen in stages. Some people, on experiencing the deathless, cling to the act of discerning it, which means that their relinquishment isn't yet total. Still, the fact that they have seen the deathless cuts through a number of the mind's fetters, guaranteeing that they will be reborn no more than seven more times, and never below the human level.

Meanwhile, they will have to develop further concentration and discernment in order for their relinquishment to be all-around—to the point where they can develop the discernment that cuts through clinging to the deathless and to any lingering clinging to discernment itself.

This is why the Buddha later compared his path of practice to a raft that you bind together from sticks and branches on this side of the river to get to the other side. The sticks and branches stand for the factors in the sequence of action that, when used properly, can function as the path. While you're crossing the river, you have to hold on tightly to the raft. But when you get to the other side, you have to let it go if you're going to continue on your way.

• In seeing that the entire sequence of actions leading to suffering began with the arising of fabrications and ceased when fabrications ceased, the Buddha realized that he had affirmed the power of the mind: It wasn't simply a side-effect of physical processes, as some of his contemporaries had claimed. It wasn't a passive observer of the passing show. It was the motive force for all experience—or, as he later put it, "Phenomena are preceded by the heart, ruled by the heart, made of the heart" (Dhp 1–2).

The nature of this power was purposeful. This is why the sequence began with fabrication, which as the Buddha noted, acts "for the sake of" something (SN 22:79). The idea of doing something "for the sake of" something implies a desire to achieve an aim. It also implies a sense of means and ends, cause and effect: The act of fabrication is the cause or means, and the end to which it aimed is the envisioned effect.

This power can be used skillfully for a truly desirable purpose or unskillfully for a deceptively desirable one. If the power of the mind couldn't be used for different purposes, its power wouldn't be real, for it would make no difference. Seeing that it did make a difference—a vast difference—the Buddha was able to affirm not only that its power was real, but also that it could be used for the highest purpose: bringing suffering to an end.

By combining these two dualities inherent in the power of the mind—cause and effect, skillful and unskillful—the Buddha arrived at the

framework for the insight that lay at the heart of his third knowledge, which he later called the four noble truths:

1) The suffering of birth, aging, and death—the deceptively desirable effect—consists of the five clinging-aggregates.
2) The origination of suffering—the unskillful cause of the deceptively desirable effect—is craving of three sorts: craving for sensuality, craving for becoming, and craving for non-becoming, or annihilation.
3) The cessation of suffering—the truly desirable effect—comes with dispassion for the three types of craving.
4) The skillful path of practice leading to that desirable effect consists primarily of acts of right perception, intention, and attention. Right perception and attention he identified as right view; right intention he split into right resolve, right speech, right action, right livelihood, right effort, right mindfulness, and right concentration, yielding the noble eightfold path.

As we noted above, each of these four truths carries a duty: Suffering is to be comprehended until there is no passion, aversion, or delusion around it (SN 22:23). Its origination is to be abandoned, its cessation realized, and the path to its cessation developed until it, too, can be abandoned.

Realizing that he had completed all four of these duties, the Buddha knew that he was now fully awakened. He had uprooted the causes for any further rebirth. Even though he would have to experience the aging, illness, and death of this, his last body, the mind would never have to suffer again.

The Causal Pattern

On the days following his awakening, the Buddha reflected again and again on the sequence of actions he had pursued in the third knowledge (Ud 1:1–3). From his awakened perspective, he added two more points to the sequence.

• First, noting that the sequence ended when he brought knowledge to the factor of fabrications, he added one more action to the beginning

of the sequence leading to suffering: The fabrications that tend toward suffering are dependent on *ignorance*, not seeing things in terms of the four noble truths. It's because of this ignorance that the mind misuses its power, fabricating experiences for the sake of happiness, without realizing that it's actually creating suffering. Because the Pali word for ignorance, *avijjā*, can also mean lack of skill, this ignorance has a practical dimension, which is not abandoned until the duties with regard to the four noble truths have been fully mastered. In other words, you not only have to *know about* the four noble truths, you also have to *know how* to complete the duties related to them.

• The Buddha's other addition to the sequence was in articulating the basic causal pattern underlying the relationships among all the factors in the sequence. He called the pattern "this/that conditionality" *(idappaccayatā)*. The "this/that" in the name indicates that the causal factors are all events immediately present to your awareness—events you can point to directly as "this" or "that." There's no need to infer causal factors behind the scenes.

He expressed the pattern as follows:

> *[1] "When this is, that is.*
>
> *[2] "From the arising of this, that arises.*
>
> *[3] "When this isn't, that isn't.*
>
> *[4] "From the cessation of this, that ceases."* —Ud 1:1

This formula is actually the intersection of two pairs of principles working together. The first pair, 1 and 3, describes causality in the present moment: "When this is, that is. When this isn't, that isn't." The result arises simultaneously with the cause, and when the cause disappears, the result disappears immediately.

The second pair, 2 and 4, describes causality over time: "From the arising of this, that arises. From the cessation of this, that ceases." The cause may appear and disappear at one point in time, but the result can come and go either right away or much later.

An example of the first kind of causality would be sticking your finger into a fire. You don't have to wait until your next lifetime to experience

the result. You'll feel the pain right away.

An example of the second type of causality would be planting a seed in a field. You won't get a mature plant immediately. It'll take time, well after you stopped the action of planting the seed, and perhaps not even in this lifetime.

Sensory experience consists of the combination of these two principles. At any one moment in time, the results of some past actions will be ripening. Because actions can ripen at widely varying rates—think of corn plants and redwood trees—those results could be coming from many actions spread widely over time, ranging from earlier in this lifetime to many lifetimes ago. You also have your present actions—your present intentions—along with some of the results of those present actions.

This means that sensory experience is shaped to some extent by past actions, but also by present actions. In fact, the present actions are actually the most important ones to attend to because, as we've noted, the experience of present intentions is a necessary condition for experiencing the results of past intentions. Your present intentions shape how you'll experience the results of past intentions as they ripen. Without present intentions, there can be no experience of any kammic results at all, present or past.

Also, the present moment is precisely where you have freedom of choice. Your past actions are like raw material for the present moment, and your present actions are the act of shaping that raw material into an experience. As when you prepare food: Past actions are like the ingredients, inedible in their raw form, that are currently available to you; present actions are your freely chosen decisions to turn those ingredients into food you can eat. The freedom of your choices, though, can either be expanded or limited by the range of your cooking skills. If you're a skilled cook, you can make good food even out of bad ingredients. If you're a poor cook, you can turn even good ingredients into a miserable meal.

The Buddha placed great importance on the fact that you have freedom of choice in the present moment. Without that freedom, he said, the idea of a path of practice to the end of suffering would make no

sense: If you weren't free to choose your actions, you wouldn't be free to choose such a path. The range of choices available to you at any given moment may be limited by the opportunities provided by your past kamma, but you're always free to choose a skillful course of action that will be conducive, one way or another, to the path to the end of suffering.

Our Lessons

Even though the Buddha's primary focus on the night of his awakening was on the problem of death, we can draw lessons that apply not only to the problem of our own death, but also to problems of our own aging and illnesses. These lessons fall into three main groups: those based on what he saw, those based on what he did, and those based on what he deduced from what he had done.

What he saw. Because death is not the end, we have to prepare for death in such a way that, at the very least, good opportunities for rebirth will be available to us, and craving at the moment of death won't pull us astray.

This means preparing for death in two ways. The first is through skillful acts in thought, word, and deed that will create openings for rebirth in the higher realms. The second is through training the mind in conviction, persistence, mindfulness, concentration, and discernment so that it can have some control over its cravings and clingings, even in the face of pain and expulsion from the body. This, of course, means training in meditation. Because craving comes ultimately from fabrications done in ignorance, a primary focus of meditation will be to bring knowledge and skill to the processes of fabrication. When that skill is fully mastered, the processes leading to craving and suffering disband. Meanwhile, though, as we develop that skill through conviction, we take the factors that ordinarily would lead to craving and turn them into a path to the end of craving.

Because craving is immediately conditioned by feeling, one of the main functions of meditation will be to learn how to endure pain without succumbing to unskillful cravings. This means that meditation will be a good preparation not only for death, but also for the pains of illness.

The fact that consciousness and other mind states are not necessarily dependent on the body means that strength of mind does not have to depend on strength of body. This fact opens the opportunity for the mind to stay strong not only at the moment of death, but also when the body is weakened by aging and illness.

However, even though it's wise to prepare for a good rebirth, the prospects for future suffering are still there even if you've lived a good life and learned to meditate tolerably well. Past bad kamma may interfere or distract you at the moment of death, a lapse in mindfulness may cause you to adopt wrong view, and even if you do make it to a good destination after death, there's no guarantee that you'll take a good rebirth when you later pass away from there. Even devas, at death, can fall straight to the lower realms.

For this reason, it's wise to train the mind in how to watch mental and physical actions "as they have come to be"—in other words, without any reference to who is doing them or in what world, but simply as part of a causal chain of events. This can lead to a sense of dispassion for them, opening the way to a first glimpse of the deathless, which will guarantee that you won't ever again be reborn in a lower level of the cosmos. It can further open the way to full awakening to the deathless, guaranteeing that you won't ever have to be reborn at all.

What he did. For the sake of going beyond rebirth entirely, the bodhisatta showed how to use two frameworks in investigating the mind:

First, as in the first two knowledges, you look at actions in the context of self and world, to motivate yourself to want to develop skillful actions, confident that you are capable of doing so and will benefit when you do.

Then, when you've developed the factors of the noble eightfold path, and especially right mindfulness and right concentration, you adopt the second framework: You drop all reference to self and world—the narratives of your life, of who did what to whom—and look at mental and physical actions in and of themselves with the purpose of developing dispassion for them. This perspective keeps these processes from leading to craving, either for becoming or for non-becoming. When the terms

basic to becoming don't occur to the mind, dispassion for the whole process is easier to develop, and further becomings can be avoided.

The Buddha noted that the sequence of actions leading to craving can be cut at any point by bringing knowledge to that particular action and to its originating factors. In his meditation instructions, though, he tended to focus attention on two main areas: *feeling*, because it's the factor in the sequence immediately prior to craving; and the factors of *fabrication* and *name-and-form*, because they lie at the beginning of the sequence, prior to sensory contact.

Right concentration is the ideal state of mind for observing both of these areas: The various levels of right concentration are defined, in part, by their feeling-tone, and they're composed of the actions contained in the factors of fabrication and name-and-form. For example, you can pay attention to the in-and-out breath, intending to maintain your focus there, all the while using perceptions to direct your inner conversation around the breath. In this way, right concentration provides a stable foundation for watching these factors of name and form in action, in and of themselves, so as to give rise to dispassion for them. This is why meditation is a necessary tool for cutting through any unskillful states of becoming that might develop in the course of aging, illness, and death.

What he deduced. The fact that actions originating in the mind follow the double causal principle that the Buddha deduced from his awakening—this/that conditionality—is what makes preparation for aging, illness, and death both possible and wise.

• Because actions are real and give real results in shaping your experience, even at death and into future lifetimes, you have the power to approach aging, illness, and death with skill.

• Because your actions give results over time, you can act right now to prepare for your future aging, illness, and death.

• Because you're free to choose your actions in the present moment, you can actually choose how to prepare. You're not fated to suffer.

• Because those actions can give results right now, you can learn how not to suffer even as aging, illness, and death are happening right now.

In the case of illness, the double causal principle means that an illness might be the result of past actions or of present actions, or a combination of both. This means that in some cases—illnesses caused by present actions—meditation and/or medication can actually cure the illness by changing what you're doing right now. In other cases—illnesses caused primarily by past actions—you may not be able to cure the illness, but you can still train the mind not to suffer from it.

As for death, your past actions may place limitations on the states of rebirth open to you, but if your state of mind in the present is strong, you may be able to overcome those limitations. At the very least, if you maintain right view and act on it, you can open the way to a good rebirth in spite of past bad kamma.

• Because your experience of the present depends on present actions, if you learn the skill of bringing all actions to cessation and relinquishment, you can escape all suffering and stress, and not have to be reborn at all.

That, in outline form, covers the main lessons that can be drawn from the Buddha's awakening and applied to issues of your own aging, illness, and death. The remaining chapters in this book, drawing both on the Pali Canon and on the teachings of the Thai Wilderness ajaans, will provide more detail in how these lessons can best be mastered and put to good use.

Phenomena
are preceded by the heart,
ruled by the heart,
made of the heart.

If you speak or act
with a corrupted heart,
then suffering follows you—
as the wheel of the cart,
the track of the ox
that pulls it.

Phenomena
are preceded by the heart,
ruled by the heart,
made of the heart.

If you speak or act
with a calm, bright heart,
then happiness follows you,
like a shadow
that never leaves. — *Dhp 1–2*

"From ignorance as a requisite condition come fabrications.

"From fabrications as a requisite condition comes consciousness.

"From consciousness as a requisite condition comes name-&-form.

"From name-&-form as a requisite condition come the six sense media.

"From the six sense media as a requisite condition comes contact.

"From contact as a requisite condition comes feeling.

"From feeling as a requisite condition comes craving.

"From craving as a requisite condition comes clinging/sustenance.

"From clinging/sustenance as a requisite condition comes becoming.

"From becoming as a requisite condition comes birth.

"From birth as a requisite condition, then aging & death, sorrow, lamentation, pain, distress, & despair come into play. Such is the origination of this entire mass of stress & suffering." — *AN 10:92*

CHAPTER TWO

Meditation in Theory

Although the Buddha's recommendations for how not to suffer from aging, illness, and death involve much more than meditation, still the practice of meditation is the centerpiece of his approach. Meditation develops the powers of the mind, such as conviction, persistence, mindfulness, concentration, and discernment. These powers then provide insights *into* the mind. Combined, the powers and the insights underlie every other skill the Buddha taught.

Unfortunately, there are many misunderstandings about what Buddhist meditation is and what it's supposed to do.

As we noted in the preceding chapter, we suffer because we're ignorant of what the mind is doing to cause suffering, and we'll be able to end suffering only when we bring knowledge to what we're doing. "What we're doing" is detailed in the factors listed in dependent co-arising, so it only stands to reason that meditation will have to bring knowledge to those factors.

That means that the processes of meditation itself will have to be explained in line with those factors, too. The mind, when it's doing meditation, follows the same causal principles as it does when it's creating suffering. In other words, it follows the pattern of this/that conditionality. It uses the same sorts of mental events—such as intentions, acts of attention, and perceptions—even though it's using them more skillfully.

Yet many of the most common ways in which meditation is explained are based on a different understanding of the mind that has nothing to do with dependent co-arising. As you meditate, you're told that you're doing something that's different from what you're supposed to be watching. This means that, in explanations of that sort, many of the factors of dependent co-arising are kept in the dark. This would get in the way of following meditation all the way to the goal.

As we noted in Chapter One, the final stages of meditation involve not only developing dispassion for the fabrications leading to suffering and bringing about their cessation. They also involve relinquishing the fabrications that have gone into developing the factors of the path, including concentration and discernment. If you don't learn to see these factors as types of fabrication—and as entailing stress—you won't be prepared to relinquish them. That will stand in the way of total release that can come only with total, all-around knowledge leading to totally letting go.

So before discussing how to practice meditation, we'll first have to shed some light on the Buddha's explanations of meditation, to show what meditation is and is not, and how it does, in fact, fall in line with his explanation of the factors of dependent co-arising. Only when you understand what you're doing in line with those factors will you be able to gain genuine all-around insight into them.

We'll center our discussion of the Buddha's own statements about meditation on three topics:

(1) the problem that meditation is supposed to solve,
(2) its general approach for solving it, and
(3) what the solution looks like when it's attained.

To cover these points, this chapter will focus on the theory behind meditation; the next chapter will discuss specific steps in how to practice it.

Many of the misunderstandings around meditation have arisen from the cult of the here and now. Admittedly, it's true that the present moment is the primary focus of meditation. When the Buddha taught his followers to stay mindful of death, he praised those who understood this to mean that they should pay attention to the present moment to see what they could do there to prepare for death. The misunderstandings come, though, when teachers go into detail on what you should expect to find when you look into the present moment and what you should try to do about it. These misunderstandings are directly related to the kind of attention you're expected to pay.

One common approach advocates what it calls "bare attention." The theory behind bare attention is based on these premises:

1. The problem: When you look into the present moment, you'll see that it arises fully formed from past causes and conditions over which you have no present-moment control. The problem is that you add your own opinions on top of what is already fully formed. As you approach the present in line with narratives dealing with what you've experienced in the past and what you want out of the future, you find it unsatisfactory. Through the craving and clinging with which you obscure the present, you want it to be other than what it is. This is why you suffer.

This view of the present moment depicts it as similar to a TV showing a single channel: You have no control over what the channel is going to broadcast. If you're dissatisfied with the programs, you can yell at the TV, but that won't change the show. You'll succeed only in getting yourself upset to no purpose.

2. The solution is to approach the present moment with bare attention. This is a level of attention free of judgments, free of references to past and future, free from preferences and reactivity. It simply accepts the constant flow of change in the present, in line with the true nature of reality, defined in terms of what the commentaries to the Pali Canon call the three "characteristics" of inconstancy, stress, and not-self. In other words, you accept that the TV is limited in what it can show you, so you learn to watch it without passing judgment on the shows, finding a modicum of peace in simply watching the play of colors and shapes on the screen. Sometimes this practice of bare attention is called mindfulness practice, sometimes it's called insight practice.

3. The goal is a state of mind where acceptance becomes established as an all-pervading state of equanimity that affirms the truth of the three characteristics as an accurate description of reality. As a result, the mind abandons all resistance to change. It's content simply to watch the passing show of the six senses without pinning hopes on any particular outcome.

Most bare-attention schools don't encourage calling this state of acceptance into question, or reflecting on the choices that the mind is

making to be choiceless in this way.

The premises of the bare-attention approach can be critiqued from many angles, but here it's enough to point out that the Buddha never taught bare attention. If you reflect back on the factors of dependent co-arising discussed in the preceding chapter, you can understand why. In that analysis, attention occurs as one of the sub-factors of name-and-form. It, in turn, is conditioned by other factors coming under "name"—such as perception and intention—all of which are also conditioned by the three types of fabrication. An act of attention conditioned by so many factors can't help but be colored by them, and so can't legitimately be called "bare." And any method that discourages looking into the conditions underlying a seemingly bare act of attention is closing the door to any real understanding of what the mind is doing in the present moment.

For the Buddha, the main question surrounding acts of attention is whether they and their conditioning factors are informed by knowledge of the four noble truths or are based on ignorance about those truths. This yields the two types of attention that he emphasizes as important: *appropriate* and *inappropriate*. Appropriate attention looks at experience in terms of the four noble truths with the purpose of carrying out their corresponding duties for the sake of putting an end to suffering. Inappropriate attention looks at experience in other terms, asking other questions, and serving other aims. Basically, inappropriate attention is the same thing as the ignorance that underlies the factors of dependent co-arising that lead to suffering. Appropriate attention is the approach that counteracts that ignorance.

To see what this means in practice, we can look at the problem of the present moment—along with its solution and the goal of the solution—from the premises of the four noble truths, to see how those premises contrast with the premises of bare attention.

1. The problem: When you look at the present moment, you see that it's inextricably connected with the past and future. You perceive that the present moment is made up of three things: the results of past actions, present intentions, and the results of present intentions. Present intentions fall into the three types of fabrication—bodily, verbal, and

mental—all of which are put together "for the sake of" something. In other words, they take the raw material coming from past actions for the sake of shaping it into the experience of the present and also for the sake of future experiences.

These fabrications operate on two levels of scale. In the immediate present, they're the three activities we noted in the preceding chapter: Bodily fabrication is the in-and-out breath; verbal fabrication is directed thought and evaluation; mental fabrication is perceptions and feelings.

These present-moment fabrications, though, don't simply arise and pass away in the present moment without leaving a ripple. They send influences into the future. When the Buddha describes how fabrications lead to states of becoming after death, he defines the three types of fabrication in a different way: Bodily fabrication is any intentional bodily act; verbal fabrication is any intentional verbal act; mental fabrication is any intentional mental act.

This gives two different ways of explaining the three types of fabrication, but the two explanations are closely connected: Without the breath you couldn't move the body; without directed thought and evaluation you couldn't speak; and without perceptions and feelings you couldn't think. So when you look at fabrication in the present moment—as when you meditate on the breath—you see not only how you're shaping the present moment, but also how you're sending causal forces into the future that will provide the raw material for future experiences.

Now, without the activity of fabrication in the present moment, there would be no present-moment experience of the senses. At all. This means that the present moment is not a given that you can passively watch. It's a continual construction site, and you're implicated in the construction work. To the extent to which you don't realize this, you're operating in ignorance, which is why there's suffering. When you do realize this, you're beginning to operate from knowledge in a way that leads to suffering's end.

Unlike the model of bare attention, where it's as if you're simply watching a TV with no real control over what you're seeing, the model of appropriate attention portrays the present moment as similar to an interactive game, where your skill in playing the game will make all the

difference in how the game progresses, and whether you will get joy or frustration out of it.

But even if you play the game well—in other words, you fabricate with knowledge—the fabrications are still inconstant, stressful, and not-self. For this reason, the present moment cannot be the goal. The solution to the problem, to be really successful in going beyond suffering, will be to find something unfabricated, which will have to lie outside of past, present, and future entirely.

2. The solution requires knowing which kinds of fabrications, when you develop them, will help you see fabrications clearly in a way that will ultimately give rise to dispassion for *all* fabrications. With dispassion, you outgrow the game and arrive at something much better.

The fabrications that lead to the solution are those of the noble eightfold path. And the factors of the path most relevant to meditation are five: right view, right resolve, right effort, right mindfulness, and right concentration.

- With *right view,* you look at experience in terms of the four noble truths.
- With *right resolve,* you determine to act in ways that will avoid causing suffering and stress. You resolve that you won't indulge in sensuality, in ill will, or in harmfulness.
- With *right effort,* you motivate yourself to actively abandon unskillful mental qualities—which lead to suffering now and into the future—and to develop skillful ones in their place.
- With *right mindfulness,* you remember lessons from the past as to how best to engage in right effort to get your attention focused on a single theme in a way that leads to right concentration.

Right mindfulness is a complex topic. The Buddha himself said that he could answer questions on the topic for 100 years and not come to the end of it. And because it's a topic so widely misunderstood, we have to look at it in some detail. We won't come to the end of it, but at least we can get started in the right direction.

To begin with, we have to note that, for the Buddha, mindfulness is not a form of bare attention. Instead, it's a faculty of the active memory, applied to activities in the present moment. In other words, you remember lessons from the past that give guidance to what you're doing right now. With right mindfulness, this guidance includes recognizing skillful and unskillful mental qualities for what they are as soon as they arise, and remembering what approaches you've learned from others or from your own experience that have worked well in dealing with those sorts of qualities in the past. This enables you to deal skillfully with those qualities right now.

Right mindfulness involves developing three mental qualities to assist in getting the mind to settle down:

Mindfulness itself—the ability to keep lessons from the past in mind.
Alertness—awareness of what you're doing as you're doing it and, over time, of the results you get from what you're doing.
Ardency—the heartfelt desire to do this skillfully.

Of these three qualities, ardency is the one that makes the other two skillful. Mindfulness on its own is neutral, as is alertness. You could be mindful of unskillful lessons learned from the past—such as how to get away with a lie—and alert while doing unskillful things in the present—such as robbing a charity—and you would still count as having mindfulness and alertness. Ardency, however, is by definition skillful. It strives to find the answer to the question that the Buddha said lies at the beginning of all discernment: "What, when I do it, will lead to my long-term welfare and happiness? (MN 135)" Of the three qualities, it's the one that makes right mindfulness right.

The fact that these three qualities have to work together shows how the practice of right mindfulness, although focused on the present moment, doesn't exclude references to the past and future. Mindfulness itself has to remember useful lessons from the past, which is why meditation instructions can play a role in helping you know what to do in the present moment. If mindfulness required that you *not* think about the past, you wouldn't be able to remember those instructions when you

needed them. Ardency keeps the goal of long-term happiness, now and into the future, always in sight. If you couldn't think of the future consequences of your actions, ardency would have no basis for deciding what was skillful and what was not.

In addition to these three qualities, mindfulness needs a point of focus to make it right: It has to stay established in the right frame of reference. The Canon describes three stages in establishing the right frame of reference, with the stages growing more and more refined as mindfulness, concentration, and discernment develop.

In the **first stage,** the establishing of right mindfulness is described by this formula:

> *"There is the case where a monk remains focused on the body in & of itself—ardent, alert, & mindful—subduing greed & distress with reference to the world. He remains focused on feelings… mind… mental qualities in & of themselves—ardent, alert, & mindful—subduing greed & distress with reference to the world."* — SN 47:40

The phrase, "in and of themselves," in this formula is important. It means that you focus on body, feelings, etc., on their own terms, without reference to how they function in the world. For instance, when you stay focused on the body in and of itself, you view it simply as an experience of the body, without reference to how it looks to the people of the world or whether it can accomplish any work you would like to do in the world. Similarly, when you stay focused on feelings in and of themselves, you pay direct attention to feeling tones as they are present or absent, without reference to whatever events in the world may have sparked them.

As you'll notice, by adopting these frames of reference, you're beginning to pry the mind away from one of the coordinates of becoming: the outside world. However, when the discourses describe this stage of the practice in detail, they still make use of the terms "I" and "me": "I am breathing in long." "There is sensual desire present within me." At the same time, the descriptions of this stage of mindfulness practice are essentially descriptions of how to get the mind into concentration. In fact, one discourse, MN 125, actually equates the

establishing of mindfulness in this first stage with the first level of right concentration. And because states of concentration count as states of becoming on the levels of form and formlessness, this means that terms of becoming—such as "I" and "me"—have not yet been totally dropped at this stage of the meditation.

• When right mindfulness is firmly established in any of the four right frames of reference on the first stage, it turns into *right concentration*. Right concentration has four levels, called the four jhānas, which are states of intense full-body absorption.

In the first jhāna, you think about and evaluate the theme of your concentration—say, the breath—to give rise to feelings of pleasure and rapture. You then spread these feelings through the body. The Buddha's image is of a bathman making a "bathing-dough" out of bath powder, kneading water into the powder so that the entire dough is moistened.

In the second jhāna, once the mind is snugly with the breath, you can abandon the activity of directed thought and evaluation, and focus on the breath with a full sense of being unified with it. This more intense concentration gives rise to even stronger feelings of pleasure and rapture, which you allow to spread throughout the body. On this level, though, the act of spreading is more effortless than in the first jhāna. The image here is of a lake continuously fed by the waters of a cool spring.

In the third jhāna, the mind lets go of the feelings of rapture as being too much of a disturbance. The mind becomes equanimous, but there is still a sense of physical pleasure, which permeates the entire body. Here the image is of lotuses immersed in the waters of a cool, still lake, saturated with cool water from their roots to their tips.

In the fourth jhāna, the in-and-out breath becomes so refined that it appears to grow still. Even the refined pleasure in the body turns to equanimity, and a pure, bright awareness fills the body. In this case, the image is of a man sitting with a white cloth enwrapping his entire body.

The practice of the four jhānas develops two qualities of mind: *samatha* (tranquility) and *vipassanā* (insight). In modern circles, samatha and vipassanā are often taught as two separate meditation techniques, but the Buddha never taught them in that way. Instead, he taught them as mental qualities that would develop out of the process of

mastering jhāna, with tranquility or insight being emphasized at any particular moment depending upon which questions you focus on as you try to understand the mind so as to get it to enter jhāna and remain there.

The questions that help develop tranquility are: "How should the mind be established? How should it be made to settle down? How should it be unified? How should it be concentrated?"

The questions that help develop insight are: "How should fabrications be regarded? How should they be investigated? How should they be seen with insight?" (AN 4:94)

Both sets of questions are relevant to the practice of jhāna. On the one hand, you have to settle the mind and concentrate it on a single theme so as to get into jhāna in the first place. On the other hand, you have to understand the processes of fabrication in order to fabricate jhāna as a state within the mind.

For instance, if you're focused on the breath as your object, bodily fabrication is your theme. The directed thought and evaluation of the first jhāna—as you comment on the breath and adjust it to give rise to feelings of pleasure and rapture—count as verbal fabrication. As for mental fabrication, the different levels of jhāna are defined by their feeling tone, and all of them, the Buddha said, are based on perceptions: in this case, how you visualize the body and breath to yourself. This means that as you get the mind into jhāna, you're getting hands-on experience in shaping all three types of fabrication in a skillful way.

But the qualities of tranquility and insight also go beyond jhāna: When tranquility is fully developed, it overcomes passion; when insight is fully developed, it overcomes ignorance.

We'll go into some of the steps for developing tranquility in the next chapter. Here I'd like to focus on the steps for developing insight, to show that insight practice is much more than fostering bare attention.

In response to the first question for fostering insight—how fabrications should be developed—the Buddha advises analyzing fabrications into different sorts, such as the three types of fabrication, bodily, verbal, and mental, that we've mentioned several times so far.

As for the second question—how fabrications should be investigated—the Buddha recommends developing mindfulness and concentration in such a way that you're conscious of the fabrications you're using to create states of concentration, as we've noted above. In this way, you come to know fabrications not simply by *watching* them, but also by *using* them: learning about their cause-and-effect relationships through actively trying to shape them in a skillful direction.

As for the third question—how fabrications are to be seen with insight—the Buddha recommends a **five-step program** for overcoming ignorance about fabrications and developing dispassion for them.

The **first step** is to see their origination. This doesn't mean just watching them arise. Instead, the word "origination" refers to how they are caused, and in particular, how they're caused by events in the body and mind.

The **second step** is to see how they pass away when those internal causes pass away.

The **third step** is to see their allure: Why is it that the mind fastens on certain fabrications even when they're unskillful? For instance, what does the mind find appealing about anger or lust that makes it dig up and revive these emotions even as they keep passing away? Part of the mind may not like these emotions, but there must be a part that does. Otherwise, you wouldn't keep digging them up again.

Here it's useful to see the mind as a committee, composed of many members with different ideas of how to find happiness. To find the allure, you have to learn to identify not only which member of the committee is urging you to go for the emotion, but also how and why.

This step in the process requires a great deal of mental stillness, for five reasons.

a) Stillness of mind allows you to detect the subtle movements of the mind that you wouldn't see otherwise.
b) That stillness provides a sense of well-being, so that you're not so hungry for pleasure that you'll jump at any chance to get a quick fix.

c) The sense of security coming from that stillness allows you to admit the presence of undesirable mental habits without feeling threatened by them.
d) This sense of security also allows you to let go of habits that have long been parts of your identity, without feeling disoriented or left adrift.
e) The fact that your state of stillness has been developed, in part at least, through insight into fabrication, allows you to see that the allure, too, is composed of any of the three types of fabrication, or any combination of them, with perception often playing a leading role. A lot of the allure of lust or anger, for instance, lies in the self-image that goes along with those emotions. For example, you might perceive yourself as attractive when you feel lust, or as powerful when you feel anger.

The **fourth step** in investigating fabrications is to see the drawbacks of the unskillful emotion: If you fall for the allure, what are the long-term negative consequences? It's in this step that the Buddha has you reflect on the inconstancy, stress, and not-selfness of all fabrications. In other words, because they're dependent on changeable causes from within the mind, they're unreliable. Because they're unreliable, they're stressful. And because they're unreliable and stressful, they don't deserve to be held to as you or yours. There has to be a better way to find happiness.

We've noted that these themes are commonly called the three characteristics, but the Buddha himself, instead of calling them "characteristics," called them "perceptions." In other words, they're labels that you actively apply to these fabrications, and they're perceptions with a purpose and an inherent value judgment. Their purpose is to help counteract the unskillful perceptions that see the allure as believable. The value judgment they foster is that fabrications—especially unskillful ones—are really not worth the effort they require after all. This judgment relies on the promise of the third noble truth: that with dispassion for fabrications, there will come the total end of suffering and there will be an experience of the deathless.

The **fifth step** grows out of reflecting on the previous four. When you see clearly that these fabrications require that you keep manufacturing them, even as their drawbacks far outweigh their allure—and remembering that there is the promise of happiness when you abandon fabrications—you develop dispassion toward any idea of getting involved with them. That dispassion allows you to see them as something separate (SN 35:80), and so to escape from them.

The Buddha has you apply this five-step program first to unskillful fabrications. Then, when those fabrications have been taken care of, he has you apply it to the path itself. This allows you to develop dispassion for all fabrications. When there is no passion for continuing to produce fabrications, they cease. And as you may remember from Chapter One, when fabrications cease, all the factors leading to the suffering of aging, illness, and death will cease as well. With their cessation, the mind is freed to gain its first glimpse of the goal, called the arising of the Dhamma eye.

To facilitate this five-step program for gaining insight, the Buddha recommends **two more advanced stages of mindfulness practice** beyond the first stage of establishing mindfulness that got the mind into right concentration.

These stages consist of adopting more refined frames of reference that drop, even more radically than the first stage, the basic terms that constitute becoming: a sense of self-identity in a world. For this reason, their perspective is a good one to master in meditation so that you'll be able to maintain it at the moment of death, in hopes of releasing the mind from all becoming and rebirth.

In the **second stage,** the formula for the frame of reference is expressed as follows, taking the body as an example:

> *"He [the monk] remains focused on the phenomenon of origination with regard to the body, on the phenomenon of passing away with regard to the body, or on the phenomenon of origination & passing away with regard to the body—ardent, alert, & mindful—subduing greed & distress with reference to the world."* — *SN 47:40*

At this stage, the events experienced in the practice of jhāna—the various factors that go into each jhāna as well as the factors that would disturb any of those levels—are viewed simply as phenomena arising through causal relationships. You get a sense of which phenomena are related to one another by consciously doing something with them: mastering the levels of jhāna as best you can as you work with the breath, your thoughts about the breath, and perceptions and feelings around the breath. This is like learning about eggs, not by simply watching them roll around on the table, but by making them into the best possible omelets and soufflés.

This way of looking at experience in terms of cause and effect may sound abstract, but in practice it's not. You come to see that the experience of these events on their own terms is actually more direct than the sense of a self you've been fabricating around them. Even though your sense of self may seem to be your most intimate and grounding experience, you now begin to see that this direct experience of these events interacting simply as events is more immediate, intimate, and grounding than that. It's happening right at your awareness, without your having to assume anything lying behind what you can directly observe.

This exploration of cause and effect helps you to see clearly the first two steps of the Buddha's five-step program for developing insight: origination and passing away. At the same time, it allows you to further weaken any reference to the terms of becoming.

Remember that in the first stage of mindfulness practice, you dropped the outside world from your frame of reference. In this second stage, you also drop any explicit reference to the "I" or "me" doing in the practice. This allows you to witness mental and physical events in the terms of dependent co-arising. But there still remains the world of the jhānas themselves. And if you're observant, you'll also see that there's still an implicit sense of "I" hovering around those jhānas.

In the **third stage** of mindfulness practice, though, the frame of reference is phrased in such a way that all references to the terms of becoming are dropped. The formula here, again taking the body as an example, is this:

> *"Or his mindfulness that 'There is a body' is maintained to the extent of knowledge & remembrance. And he remains independent, not clinging to anything in the world."* — MN 10

Here the focus of the meditation makes no reference to the world, not even the world of the jhāna, and not even an implicit reference to "I" or "me." This frame of reference allows the sense of dispassion, the fifth step in the five-step program, to apply all around: on the one side, to anything that would get in the way of the path, and on the other, to the path itself (SN 48:3). This all-around dispassion is what opens the way for the first glimpse of the goal.

3. The goal is the experience of the deathless. This is a type of consciousness called consciousness without surface because it doesn't "land" or "get established" on anything (MN 49; SN 12:64). It lies entirely outside of space and time, even outside of the continually-fabricated present moment. Because it's not contained in the dimensions of space and time, it has no location. Because it's devoid of aggregates and attachments, the person who has fully awakened to it can't be defined as a being, and so can't be properly described as existing, not existing, both, or neither (SN 22:86). For these two reasons, the deathless lacks the necessary elements of becoming—an identity in a world of experience—and so is free of all suffering. The undefinability of the fully awakened person is compared metaphorically to the immeasurability of the ocean (MN 72; SN 44:1), but even that is an inadequate comparison. Oceans are subject to space and time; the awakened person isn't.

There's a common misunderstanding that on gaining awakening, a person leaves one place—*saṁsāra*—and goes to another place, nibbāna. But actually, neither is a place. Saṁsāra, the wandering-on, is a process by which craving creates locations around which states of becoming—people in places—coalesce. Nibbāna, unbinding, is totally free of craving, so it's the end of that process. As a result, it has no location at all. This is why, when fully awakened people die, their destination can't be found and they're said to be "everywhere released" (Dhp 348) or "everywhere independent" (Sn 4:6).

The Buddha notes that, properly speaking, the deathless can't be described. But he does speak of it metaphorically to indicate that it's eminently worth striving for: a dimension of pure bliss, total freedom, unchanging truth, and excellence (SN 43).

When he calls it *nibbāna*, unbinding, he's pointing metaphorically to the freedom of this experience, but he's also telling you how to get there. According to the physics of his time, fire was said to be "unbound" when it went out. This was because fire, as it was burning, was believed to cling to its fuel. As long as it clung, it was trapped in the fuel. When it let go of its clinging, it went out and was freed. In the same way, the mind is trapped, not by fabrications, but by the act of clinging to fabrications. To be freed, it has only to let them go.

The fact that the goal is the deathless, rather than a simple acceptance of the three characteristics, is illustrated by a simile the Buddha uses to describe the work of tranquility and insight. He portrays them as two swift messengers who enter a fortress and deliver an accurate message to the commander of the fortress. Then they leave (SN 35:204). The fortress stands for the body; the commander for consciousness. The accurate message is not the three characteristics. It's unbinding. And although the messengers may leave the fortress, the message stays.

This is a general map of how and why meditation works, what it's supposed to do, and where it's supposed to lead. As with any map, when you're using it to guide your journey, you don't keep your nose in the map all the time. You consult it only when necessary. And don't let the descriptions of the more advanced stages discourage you. Focus on the parts of the map that are relevant to what you're doing right now. For instance, when you're focused on developing tranquility, it's enough to know that there will come a time where you have to use that tranquility to foster insight. Meanwhile, you focus on the one theme of your concentration. If you find it easy for the mind to settle down and get unified, you don't have to worry about the three fabrications or the five steps in investigating fabrications. You don't even have to think about any of the jhānas. Instead, you focus all of your attention on your chosen theme, such as the breath.

But when you're having trouble settling down, it's good to have some knowledge of the Buddha's vocabulary for describing the workings of the mind. This will sensitize you to physical and mental processes you might not have noticed without that vocabulary. That way, you can benefit from his insights to analyze where your body or mind may be resistant to stillness, and what can be adjusted to overcome that resistance and get things to settle down until your focus is established.

At a later point, when you're beginning to wonder what to do with your mental stillness once it's firm, you can consult the map to get a sense of the choices available to you.

So keep the map at hand, but remember that the actual journey lies in developing the potentials already present in your own body and mind.

"Quite secluded from sensuality, secluded from unskillful qualities, he [a monk] enters & remains in the first jhāna: rapture & pleasure born of seclusion, accompanied by directed thought & evaluation. He permeates & pervades, suffuses & fills this very body with the rapture & pleasure born of seclusion. Just as if a dexterous bathman or bathman's apprentice would pour bath powder into a brass basin and knead it together, sprinkling it again & again with water, so that his ball of bath powder—saturated, moisture-laden, permeated within & without—would nevertheless not drip; even so, the monk permeates… this very body with the rapture & pleasure born of seclusion. There is nothing of his entire body unpervaded by rapture & pleasure born of seclusion. This is a fruit of the contemplative life, visible here & now, more excellent than the previous ones and more sublime.

"Then, with the stilling of directed thoughts & evaluations, he enters & remains in the second jhāna: rapture & pleasure born of concentration, unification of awareness free from directed thought & evaluation—internal assurance. He permeates & pervades, suffuses & fills this very body with the rapture & pleasure born of concentration. Just like a lake with spring-water welling up from within, having no inflow from the east, west, north, or south, and with the skies supplying abundant showers time & again, so that the cool fount of water welling up from within the lake would permeate & pervade, suffuse and fill it with cool waters, there being no part of the lake unpervaded

by the cool waters; even so, the monk permeates… this very body with the rapture & pleasure born of concentration. There is nothing of his entire body unpervaded by rapture & pleasure born of concentration. This, too, is a fruit of the contemplative life, visible here & now, more excellent than the previous ones and more sublime.

"And then, with the fading of rapture, he remains equanimous, mindful, & alert, and senses pleasure with the body. He enters & remains in the third jhāna, of which the noble ones declare, 'Equanimous & mindful, he has a pleasant abiding.' He permeates & pervades, suffuses & fills this very body with the pleasure divested of rapture. Just as in a lotus pond, some of the lotuses, born and growing in the water, stay immersed in the water and flourish without standing up out of the water, so that they are permeated & pervaded, suffused & filled with cool water from their roots to their tips, and nothing of those lotuses would be unpervaded with cool water; even so, the monk permeates… this very body with the pleasure divested of rapture. There is nothing of his entire body unpervaded with pleasure divested of rapture. This, too, is a fruit of the contemplative life, visible here & now, more excellent than the previous ones and more sublime.

"And then, with the abandoning of pleasure & pain—as with the earlier disappearance of elation & distress—he enters & remains in the fourth jhāna: purity of equanimity & mindfulness, neither pleasure nor pain. He sits, permeating the body with a pure, bright awareness. Just as if a man were sitting covered from head to foot with a white cloth so that there would be no part of his body to which the white cloth did not extend; even so, the monk

sits, permeating the body with a pure, bright awareness. There is nothing of his entire body unpervaded by pure, bright awareness. This, too, great king, is a fruit of the contemplative life, visible here & now, more excellent than the previous ones and more sublime." — DN 2

CHAPTER THREE

Meditation in Practice

As we noted in the preceding chapter, meditation lies at the heart of the skills needed for dealing with the problems you encounter as the body ages, grows ill, and dies. Of the various meditation themes the Buddha teaches for this purpose, the most central is mindfulness of breathing.

This may seem ironic. It's easy to understand that working with the breath might be helpful when dealing with aging and illness. After all, working with the breath energies in the body can often help to alleviate weakness and pain. But at death, the breath stops. How could a meditation topic be a helpful preparation for death if it abandons you when you need it most?

The answer lies in the way the Buddha taught breath meditation. He has you direct attention not only to the breath, but also to the three types of fabrication—bodily, verbal, and mental—as they become clear when you focus on the breath. In this way, breath meditation develops both tranquility and insight at the same time. It teaches you to deal directly with the root causes of craving and suffering so that you'll have them mastered prior to the moment of death. Your hands-on knowledge of these types of fabrication will stand you in good stead as you negotiate the choices presented to you when death occurs.

Still, breath meditation is not the only type of meditation that the Buddha recommended for this purpose. And he didn't teach breath meditation cold. He often prefaced it with other contemplations. The most striking instance was when he taught breath meditation to his son, Rāhula (MN 62). Before detailing the steps for mindfulness of breathing, he taught Rāhula a whole series of contemplations to prepare his mind for focusing on the breath:

contemplation of physical properties,
the brahmavihāras,

contemplation of the body, and
contemplation of inconstancy.

As it turns out, these contemplations develop the right understanding and mental skills for dealing with specific issues surrounding aging, illness, and death as well.

For this reason, this chapter will focus on these preliminary contemplations first before turning to the practice of breath meditation itself.

These contemplations make use of verbal and mental fabrication to develop attitudes and values that are conducive for the right practice of meditation. In other words, you talk to yourself and use mental imagery to train the mind to develop views that will help you get the most out of meditation. At the same time, you learn to appreciate those views as aids in approaching the larger problems of life.

Contemplation of Physical Properties

The physics of the Buddha's time divided the physical world into five properties: earth, water, wind, fire, and space. It's easy to dismiss these properties as a primitive version of the elements taught by modern chemistry, but that would be to misunderstand them. To look at the world in terms of these properties is to view it, not in terms of its chemical building blocks, but in terms of how it basically *feels:* Earth feels solid, water feels cool, fire feels warm, wind feels like energy, and space feels unobstructed. These five properties, taken together, cover the various ways in which the physical world presents itself directly to your sense of awareness—both inside the body and in the world outside.

The purpose of contemplating these properties is to develop some dispassion toward them so that the mind can learn not to identify with the body, and to see that it ultimately doesn't have to depend on the body. This realization will be helpful in developing some equanimity around the decay of the body as it ages and grows ill. It will also help curb the felt need to latch on to another body when you have to leave this body at death.

1. The first step in the contemplation of the properties is to see that anything composed of the properties is simply not worth identifying as your self. There are three ways to do this.

a. You can contemplate the general principle that, because the properties are inconstant, all physical phenomena are inconstant. Because they're inconstant, they're stressful. And because they're inconstant and stressful, they're not worth claiming as you or yours. They're not-self. You can use the body for a while, but only for a while, so while you can, try to use it well for the sake of the well-being of the mind. But be prepared for the fact that it'll start malfunctioning without asking your permission, and eventually will not respond to your commands at all.

b. You can contemplate the fact that the physical properties that make up your sense of the body are no different from the physical properties of the world outside. This contemplation helps to drive home the point that your body is nothing special. It's subject to all the mishaps that can happen to any physical object: It can be attacked, crushed, and broken just like a clay pot. So if you latch on to a body, you're exposing yourself to the potential for all kinds of suffering.

c. You can imagine in detail the various parts of the body that most clearly manifest the different properties. Although all five properties permeate all matter, they're more prominent in some parts of the body than others. For example, the earth aspect of the body is clearest in the hair of the head, hair of the body, nails, teeth, skin, and all your internal organs. The water aspect is clearest in the fluids in the body, such as blood, sweat, saliva, and tears. The fire aspect is clearest in the warmth of digestion and the warmth of the body as a whole. The wind aspect is clearest in the different ways energy flows in the body—going up, going down, spreading through every part of the body, and most prominently in the in-and-out breath. Space is clearest in the nostrils, the mouth, and the ears, although when space is developed as a meditation object, it's possible to perceive space

as permeating all matter—a perception that's in line with our current knowledge of how atoms are composed largely of space.

When the body is taken apart in this way, it's hard to identify with any of the parts. So why identify with these same parts when they're put together and wrapped up in skin?

The Buddha notes that when you engage in any of these three approaches to contemplating the body in terms of its properties, it's easy to allow the various properties, one by one, to fade from the mind—not out of hatred for them, but simply from disinterest (MN 140). The word for "fade," in Pali, is related to the word for dispassion: *virāga*. Your interest in the body fades, at least for the time being. This will be helpful as you meditate on the breath, in that thoughts fixated on the beauty or importance of the body will be less likely to distract you from the breath. This lack of interest will also be helpful as aging, illness, and death approach, in that you'll be less blown away by negative changes in the body.

When your interest in the properties of the body fades from the mind in the course of these contemplations, that leaves awareness itself as the object of your awareness.

2. The Buddha then recommends developing meditation "in tune with" the five properties. This may seem ironic—after detaching your awareness from them, you then try to develop qualities in the mind that imitate one of their aspects—but there's nothing ironic about it at all. Only when you separate things out like this can you can see clearly what's skillful and what's unskillful in what you've learned to detach yourself from.

And what's skillful in those properties? You reflect on how they feel no disgust at disgusting things. When you throw trash on the earth, it doesn't recoil; when you use water to wash away trash, it's not repelled; fire burns trash, and wind blows trash around, with no sense of distaste. In the same way, you develop the aspect of the mind that can be present with pleasing or disgusting things and yet not become overcome by any sense of like or dislike.

As for space, you reflect that it's not established anywhere—it's not centered anywhere—so in the same way you try to develop the aspect of your awareness that doesn't get fixated on pleasing or disgusting things.

In other words, for your awareness to be in tune with earth and the other properties, you simply take note of things that come into your awareness without allowing your likes and dislikes to cloud your vision of what's actually going on.

This type of meditation requires two skills: The first is learning to perceive value in the attitude that is non-reactive. It simply takes note of their presence and sees them for what they are. The second is that you try to restrain the mind from engaging in the mental activities that *would* react to things as being likable or disagreeable. When thoughts of that sort arise, you regard them as something to let go because they're "out of tune" with the quality of mind you're trying to develop: patient, enduring, restrained.

It's important to note that this contemplation doesn't treat non-reactivity as the goal. As we'll see when we come to the steps of breath meditation, those steps require that you do more than simply note the presence of the breath. You use the breath to proactively fabricate skillful states in body and mind. But to trust your ability to observe what's actually working and not working as you do that, you first have to become a reliable observer: one who can be with agreeable or disagreeable things and not be overcome by them. This is precisely the ability developed by these meditations "in tune" with the properties.

It's also important to note that meditating in tune with earth, etc., is not choiceless awareness, nor is it bare. You're choosing which activities of the mind are skillful, in line with the perception of earth, etc., and which ones are not, favoring the first and abandoning the latter. In doing that, you're not just aware of those activities. You're practicing restraint.

When you observe and understand the role played by verbal and mental fabrication as you practice restraint in this way, you're developing reflective skills that will be helpful both as you approach breath meditation and as you have to deal with the problems of aging, illness, and death. The more quickly you can pull yourself out of the mind's likes and dislikes, the more you'll be freed from deluded emotions. The more

you can understand how the mind is actually functioning as it steps back in this way, the clearer you'll be about how you fabricate your experience.

These mental skills will keep you from falling for random thoughts that would otherwise destroy your concentration, or that would interfere with your attempts to deal skillfully with aging, illness, and death. They help you to maintain your focus on the real work at hand.

The Brahmavihāras

The *brahmavihāras,* or sublime attitudes, are attitudes of goodwill, compassion, empathetic joy, and equanimity that you spread to all beings, without limit: in other words, with no limit to the amount of goodwill, etc., that you spread, and no limit on the number of beings to whom you spread it. Each of these attitudes is an antidote for mental states that can get in the way of training the mind.

- *Goodwill,* a wish that beings will be happy, is an antidote for ill will, the desire to see beings suffer.
- *Compassion,* a wish that those who are suffering will be freed from their suffering, is an antidote to cruelty, the desire to actually harm others when they're in a position to be harmed.
- *Empathetic joy,* a wish that those who are already happy will continue to be happy, is an antidote to resentment.
- *Equanimity,* the ability to maintain the mind on an even keel when events don't fall in line with your goodwill, is an antidote to irritation.

These attitudes boil down to two—goodwill and equanimity—in that compassion and empathetic joy are basically extensions of goodwill. Compassion is what goodwill feels when encountering suffering; empathetic joy is what goodwill feels when encountering those who are already happy. The Buddha may have separated them out from goodwill in his list of the brahmavihāras because they're good checks for the honesty of your goodwill. If people whose behavior you don't like are suffering the consequences of that behavior, is your goodwill sincere enough to want to see their suffering end? If people whose behavior you

don't like are enjoying the fruits of past good actions, can you honestly say that you're happy for their good fortune?

Equanimity is the backup for cases where, for the time being at least, there's nothing you can do to stop people from suffering or creating the causes of suffering.

This means that you develop each of these qualities where appropriate. You don't regard equanimity as the goal of the practice. In fact, the Buddha never recommends developing equanimity on its own. It always has to be developed with a cluster of other qualities, such as goodwill, so that it doesn't shade into apathy or indifference. And to give it a solid basis, the Buddha always recommends developing a sense of deep inner well-being first—either through the practice of concentration or by fostering insight—so that your equanimity doesn't turn lifeless and dry (SN 36:31; MN 137).

Notice that you practice developing these attitudes toward all beings—including yourself. It's easy to feel goodwill, for example, for those you like, or equanimity toward those who have no connection to you. But it requires a conscious effort to be able to maintain these attitudes toward anyone and everyone. It's not the case that the brahmavihāras are the heart's innate nature. After all, their opposites can come just as naturally to the heart. It's just as easy to feel ill will for those who have betrayed you or your loved ones as it is to feel goodwill for those who behave in ways you like.

So in making your goodwill and equanimity limitless, you're learning to take these attitudes that tend to be partial and you intentionally erase any trace of partiality in how you apply them. In doing so, you lift your human mind to the level of the brahmās, the highest level of heavenly beings, who have developed the sublime attitudes to the point where they can extend them to everyone, no matter who, no matter where.

This takes effort, which means that the sublime attitudes are a type of kamma. And to best understand how to develop them, you have to understand how the principles of kamma apply to them.

Start with goodwill. Given that goodwill is a state of mind that aspires to happiness, you have to understand the kamma both of happiness and the kamma of developing goodwill as a state of mind. And it's easiest to

develop this understanding by seeing how the Buddha regards your wishes for your own happiness. After all, you can know other people's wishes for happiness only through inference, but you can directly know your own. Once you understand yours, you're in a good position to extrapolate from that understanding to understand theirs.

As the Buddha notes, happiness comes from acting on skillful mind states, and all skillful mind states start with heedfulness: the recognition that there are dangers in life, but that your actions can determine whether you'll succumb to those dangers or keep yourself safe. This attitude contains a rudimentary understanding of kamma—that your actions will make a difference in whether you suffer or not—and of goodwill for yourself: You want to keep yourself safe.

To stay safe, you always have to act in harmless ways, which means that you have to act with goodwill at all times. This requires that you develop goodwill for all, regardless of how they have treated you in the past. If you allow yourself to feel ill will for anyone, you can't trust yourself to act in a harmless way toward that person. To ensure that your outside actions are skillful in all circumstances, you have to extend the sublime attitudes toward people and other living beings in all situations. And particularly when you're meditating, you don't want thoughts of ill will, cruelty, resentment, or irritation to obstruct the concentration or discernment you're trying to develop.

So you extend goodwill to all, regardless of whether they "deserve" to be happy. Remember the example of the Buddha, who taught the way to the end of suffering to all beings, regardless of whether they "deserved" to suffer or not.

Then you reflect on how other living beings will have to act to be truly happy: Just like you, they'll have to create the causes for true happiness. So when you extend thoughts of goodwill to others, you're not thinking, "May you be happy doing whatever you're doing." You're thinking, "May you understand the causes for true happiness and be willing and able to act on them." This is an attitude you can extend to all beings, without hypocrisy, regardless of how they've behaved in the past.

Now, in some cases—where people have been particularly cruel—this may be difficult. You might feel that justice requires that they suffer first

before they change their ways. But you have to remind yourself that people rarely see the connection between their misbehavior and their suffering, so wishing for them to suffer—even when it seems to serve the cause of justice—would rarely foster the causes for true happiness in the world. It's better to wish that people come to their senses and have a change of heart on their own, and that you'd be willing to aid them in that process in whatever way you can. After all, wouldn't you prefer to come to your senses without having to be punished first for your past wrongdoings? Allow others the same chance.

Of course, there will be those who are misbehaving and refuse to change their ways, and there's nothing—at least for the moment—you can do about it. That's why equanimity is a necessary part of brahmavihāra practice. You reflect that beings are free to choose their actions, and you're in no position to guarantee that everyone will choose to be skillful. Not even the Buddha could do that. So to keep your focus on training your own mind, you have to develop equanimity in cases where other people are beyond your ability to influence in a skillful direction.

This thought allows you to focus on the inner work that needs to be done to develop the brahmavihāras in an unlimited way. This is where the kamma of developing a mind state comes into play.

This can be seen clearly in the ways in which the Buddha advocates skillful types of verbal fabrication and mental fabrication to develop the sublime attitudes. Unlike breath meditation, where the steps are clearly laid out, the brahmavihāras are not taught in any systematic way in the early discourses. Instead, instructions for developing them are scattered among various passages. Still, those instructions can be sorted into two main types: verbal fabrications in the form of phrases to repeat to yourself, and mental fabrications in the form of images and perceptions to hold in mind to strengthen these attitudes and to maintain them as a form of mindfulness.

The Canon gives the following examples for how to phrase thoughts of goodwill:

"May these beings be free from animosity, free from oppression, free from trouble, and may they look after themselves with ease!"— MN 41

"Happy, at rest,
may all beings be happy at heart.
Whatever beings there may be,
weak or strong, without exception,
long, large,
middling, short,
subtle, gross,
seen & unseen,
living near & far away,
born or seeking birth:
May all beings be happy at heart.

Let no one deceive another
or despise anyone anywhere,
or, through anger or perceptions of irritation,
wish for another to suffer."— Sn 1:8

Notice how the first example ends with the thought, "May they look after themselves with ease." This is a wish that all beings will be able to depend on themselves in their search for happiness. Similarly, the second example ends, not with the simple wish for beings to be happy, but with the wish that they'll avoid developing states of mind that would lead them to behave unskillfully under the power of irritation or ill will. In other words, the ideal expression of universal goodwill for others is the hope that they'll learn to develop universal goodwill and equanimity, too.

In this way, mature goodwill accords dignity to others, recognizing that they are the agents who will have to be responsible for their happiness. Your role is to wish them well in that pursuit, and to influence them, wherever appropriate, to choose their actions wisely. That's how your goodwill can be most effective.

For some reason, the early discourses give no examples for how to phrase thoughts of compassion, empathetic joy, or equanimity. Later

texts provide the following examples for each:

For compassion:

May all living beings be freed from all suffering.

For empathetic joy:

May all living beings not be deprived of the good fortune they have attained.

For equanimity:

All living beings are the owners of their actions, heir to their actions, born of their actions, related through their actions, and have their actions as their arbitrator. Whatever they do, for good or for evil, to that will they fall heir.

This last passage also appears in the early discourses as a reflection meant to give rise to a sense of *saṁvega:* the terror or dismay that arises when you reflect at the meaninglessness of all the many sufferings that life everywhere entails. No matter where you go in the universe, you'll have to keep on creating kamma and experiencing its results. The sense of dismay that comes with this thought is what will motivate you to take on the noble eightfold path.

The dual role of this passage—for fostering both dismay and equanimity—underscores two points about limitless equanimity: 1) When skillful, it's not a generalized indifference to everything. Instead, it's meant to focus your efforts on areas that will pay off in terms of true happiness. 2) It's not the goal. Instead, it's a useful emotion to develop on the way to something much higher and more satisfying.

Of course, it's possible to develop the brahmavihāras by expressing them in your own terms, in whatever way helps to weaken the negative emotions they're supposed to counteract. The important point is that you always keep in mind how the brahmavihāras relate to the principle of kamma and, through kamma, to the four noble truths: Beings will be able to find true happiness only when they develop virtue, concentration, and discernment in line with the noble eightfold path.

The discourses offer some further reflections that expand on the basic sentiments of the brahmavihāras. For example, when you're irritated by another person's behavior, you can remind yourself that it's nothing out of the ordinary when people do good things to other people you don't like, or bad things to people you do like. After all, this is the human realm. What should you expect? (AN 10:80)

Also, when someone does something unskillful that you find displeasing, you can avoid giving in to anger and ill will for that person by focusing on the skillful things that that person has done in the past. This makes it easier to foster thoughts of goodwill and equanimity even in difficult cases. If you can't think of anything skillful that that person has done, you should feel compassion for him: He's creating a lot of bad kamma for himself. Conversely, if the person you find irritating is actually quite skillful in his or her actions, you should take joy in that person's skillfulness.

What this means is that compassion is not only for people who are currently suffering, but also for those who are acting in ways that will lead to their future suffering. And in the same way, empathetic joy is not only for those who are already happy, but also for those who are acting in ways that will lead to future happiness.

The Buddha illustrates these last thoughts with analogies: You should perceive the thoroughly unskillful person as someone lying sick in a desert with no one to help him. Even if he's a total stranger, you can't help feeling compassion for him. In the same way, you should feel compassion for those who are totally unskillful in how they act, speak, and think, because they're creating the causes for their own future suffering. As for the thoroughly skillful person, perceive him as being like a pool of cool, clean water in which you can cool your body and quench your thirst (AN 5:162).

These analogies illustrate the ways in which the Buddha uses not only verbal fabrications but also mental fabrications to strengthen the brahmavihāras.

Other analogies stress the importance of protecting the brahmavihāras in the face of difficulties. For instance, just as a mother with an only child would protect that child with her life, in the same way,

you should protect your goodwill for all beings no matter how they behave, even if they're trying to kill you (Sn 1:8). In one of his more graphic images, the Buddha says that even if bandits have overpowered you and are cutting you into pieces with a two-handled saw, you should develop thoughts of goodwill starting with them and then spreading those thoughts to the entire cosmos. Better that you die protecting your goodwill than that you die with ill will in your heart, for ill will could take you to a bad destination. As the Buddha himself says, it's good to keep this image always in mind, so that when people mistreat you in ways that are less drastic, it'll be easier to maintain goodwill for them (MN 21).

Other analogies that aid in strengthening the brahmavihāras emphasize the fact that as you make them vast, you also make them powerful and enduring, impervious to other people's misbehavior. Perceive them as being like the Earth: A man can come and try to make the Earth be without earth by digging here and there, spitting here and there, urinating here and there, but he'll never succeed, because the Earth is so much larger than his puny actions.

You can also perceive the brahmavihāras as being like the River Ganges. A person can try to use a lit torch to burn up the River Ganges, but the water isn't flammable. It would simply put out the torch. In the same way, you can make your mind inflammable, so that when other people act out of anger, you don't pick up the fire of their anger in response.

Or you can perceive the brahmavihāras as being like space: People can try to write words in space, but the words don't stick, because space has no surface for them to stick to. In the same way, you can make your mind so vast and spacious that other people's hurtful words have no place to adhere (MN 21).

The Buddha also recommends perceiving the brahmavihāras as being like wealth. He expands on this analogy with a comparison: Just as a wealthy person is hardly affected by a small fine, in the same way, if your mind has been made expansive by the brahmavihāras, you're hardly affected by the results of past bad actions (AN 3:101).

You can expand further on the analogy yourself: The brahmavihāras are a form of wealth you can produce from within, simply from your own thoughts, and you can make your wealth as abundant as you like. It's like having your own press for printing money. Unlike worldly currencies—where the more money is printed, the lower its value—the currency of the brahmavihāras keeps growing in value the more you produce it.

Contemplation of the Body

To counteract thoughts of passion and lust for the bodies of other people, or thoughts of pride around your own body, the Buddha recommends analyzing the body into its various parts. You can take the list given in the Canon as a starting point:

> *"Just as if a sack with openings at both ends were full of various kinds of grain—wheat, rice, mung beans, kidney beans, sesame seeds, husked rice—and a man with good eyesight, pouring it out, were to reflect, 'This is wheat. This is rice. These are mung beans. These are kidney beans. These are sesame seeds. This is husked rice,' in the same way, the monk reflects on this very body from the soles of the feet on up, from the crown of the head on down, surrounded by skin and full of various kinds of unclean things: 'In this body there are head hairs, body hairs, nails, teeth, skin, flesh, tendons, bones, bone marrow, kidneys, heart, liver, pleura, spleen, lungs, large intestines, small intestines, gorge, feces, bile, phlegm, pus, blood, sweat, fat, tears, skin-oil, saliva, mucus, fluid in the joints, urine.'" — DN 22*

Start by applying the analysis to your own body, and then to the bodies of others. Some people have complained that this promotes a negative body image, but it's important to realize that, unlike the unhealthy negative body image that many people suffer from, this contemplation actually promotes a healthy negative body image. With an unhealthy negative body image, you see your body as unattractive whereas other people's bodies are attractive. With a healthy negative body image, you realize that when we look at the parts of the body separately like this, we're all equal in being unattractive. This contemplation can then free you from an unhealthy positive body image

—in which you see the value of the body as lying in its external appearance—and allows you to develop a healthy positive body image, in which you value the body as a tool for developing the good qualities of the path.

If you want, you can include in your analysis other parts of the body—such as the eyes or the brain—that for some reason didn't make it into the traditional list. Once you've memorized the list, visualize the parts one by one, asking yourself—with each part—where that part is located in your felt sense of the body. To help with your visualization, you can look at an anatomical chart, but remember that none of the parts in your body are cleanly separate and defined as they would be in such a chart. They're mixed with all the fluids in the body. If visualizing a particular part has an especially strong effect in counteracting passion or lust, you can focus your primary attention on that part and, for the time being, put the rest of the list aside.

Ideally, this contemplation should give rise to an inner sense of lightness as you lose interest in passion and pride around the body. If, however, you find it giving rise to fear or unsettling emotions, drop it and go straight to the breath.

Contemplation of Inconstancy

To counteract the conceit "I am," one of the terms of becoming, the Buddha recommends contemplating the inconstancy of fabrications. Focus on how—no matter how good or bad they may be—they keep changing on you in unreliable ways.

Here the word "conceit" doesn't mean pride. It simply means the way you fashion your sense of yourself existing as a being. This conceit isn't uprooted until the highest levels of the practice, but here the Buddha recommends calling it into question right from the very beginning of the meditation. He doesn't explain why, but several practical reasons come to mind, all related to the fact that this contemplation helps to depersonalize events in the mind. That way, when something especially good or bad happens in the meditation, you don't take it as reflecting on your worth as a person or a meditator. You remember to look at it simply

as the result of the process of fabrication, governed by the principles of this/that conditionality, and you can turn your attention to fabricating skillful thoughts in the present moment in response to whatever has occurred.

For example, if things are going poorly, you can look into what you could possibly change in what you're doing right now. If things seem to be going well, look into them to see if they really are going well, and how you're responding to them. If they seem to be genuinely good, figure out how to maintain them and build on them.

If any psychic phenomena manifest, you can remember that they, too, are inconstant, and so you shouldn't develop any pride around them. Remember that the Buddha said that a sign of no integrity is taking pride in whatever meditative attainments you may reach—and that pride spoils the attainment. The person of integrity realizes that even in cases like that, no sense of self should be fabricated around the attainment, and it should be observed and understood simply as a type of fabrication for the sake of dispassion.

And of course, if you can learn how not to identify with fabrications as they occur in your meditation, you've learned an important skill that will aid you in not identifying with the processes of aging, illness, and death as they come rolling in.

When you've internalized the lessons of these preliminary contemplations, you're ready for breath meditation.

Mindfulness of Breathing

The Buddha taught mindfulness of breathing as a technique for developing right concentration, fostering tranquility and insight at the same time.

His instructions come in sixteen steps, divided into four sets of four, called tetrads. The tetrads correspond to the four frames of reference for establishing mindfulness: the body in and of itself, feelings in and of themselves, the mind in and of itself, and mental qualities in and of themselves. As we noted in Chapter Two, the "in and of itself" in each

case means that you look at these phenomena on their own terms, and not in the terms of how they fit into your notions of the outside world.

Before focusing on the breath, it's important to remember—from the Buddha's analysis of the physical properties—that the in-and-out breath is part of the wind property of the body. This means that your focus should be, not on the tactile sensation of the air coming in and out the nose or the mouth, but on the flow of energy in the body as you breathe in, as you breathe out.

Seeing the breath in this way is very helpful for inducing concentration. As you may remember from Chapter Two, as you get the mind into right concentration, feelings of pleasure and refreshment develop, which you then work through the body in the same way that a bathman works water through a ball of "bathing dough." Becoming sensitive to how the energy flows through the various parts of the body is very useful in allowing those feelings to spread and saturate your sense of the body, giving the mind a place to settle in with a strong sense of wanting to stay.

The tetrads of breath meditation are not practiced 1,2,3,4 in a row. Instead, you practice them in parallel. After all, when you're focused on breath, feelings are right there, the mind is right there, mental qualities are right there. It's simply a matter of emphasis as to which tetrad is most useful to focus on at any one time.

The first three tetrads form a unit, as you try to get the mind together with the breath with a feeling of pleasure. As they gather together more and more snugly, they develop into a quality called *ekaggatā:* having a single gathering place. This is a central feature of concentration.

The fourth tetrad, at least at the beginning of the practice, is concerned mainly with fending off any distractions that prevent the first three frames of reference from gathering into one.

The acts of calming and gathering the mind into one constitute the tranquility aspect of the concentration. The insight aspect comes in the fact that the instructions keep focusing on the role played by fabrication in getting the mind to settle down.

To see how this works, we can look at the tetrads one by one.

In the **first tetrad,** the four steps are: discerning when the breath is long; discerning when the breath is short; training yourself to breathe in and out sensitive to the whole body; and then training yourself to breathe in and out calming bodily fabrication, i.e., the in-and-out breath. All these steps fall under the body in and of itself as a frame of reference.

In the **second tetrad,** you train yourself to breathe in and out sensitive to rapture or refreshment, to breathe in and out sensitive to pleasure, to breathe in and out sensitive to mental fabrications—feelings and perceptions—and then to breathe in and out calming mental fabrications. These steps fall under feelings in and of themselves as a frame of reference.

In the **third tetrad,** you breathe in and out sensitive to the state of the mind, then you breathe in and out gladdening the mind, you breathe in and out concentrating the mind, and you breathe in and out releasing the mind. These steps fall under mind in and of itself as a frame of reference.

The steps in the **fourth tetrad** are these: First, as you breathe in and out, you focus on inconstancy, *anicca*, which would also include *dukkha* and *anattā*, stress and not-self. Then you breathe in and out focusing on dispassion, you breathe in and out focusing on cessation, and finally you breathe in and out focusing on letting go. These steps fall under mental qualities in and of themselves as a frame of reference.

Now let's look at how these tetrads get put together in practice. In the first tetrad, the first two steps can include not only short and long breathing, but also fast and slow, deep and shallow, heavy and light, or in long, out short; in short, out long. We learn from the second tetrad that you will try to breathe in and out sensitive to refreshment and pleasure, which implies that in the first two steps of this first tetrad you explore variations in the breath to see which ways of breathing will be energizing—to provide the refreshment—and comfortable, to provide the pleasure. When those feelings have been activated, you expand your awareness to fill the whole body and let those feelings spread throughout the body as you're aware of it. As we noted above, this is where it's very helpful to think of breathing as a whole-body process, so that the

pleasure and refreshment can spread along with the flow of breath energy.

In this way, you have body, feelings, and mind all occupying the same space: Awareness and a feeling of pleasure and refreshment fill your sense of the body. You energize the body in this way—this corresponds to the step of gladdening the mind in the third tetrad—and then you calm bodily fabrication. In other words, you let the breathing grow calm.

The Buddha uses this technical term *bodily fabrication* to stand for the in-and-out breath in order to call attention to the extent to which you're intentionally shaping the breath and shaping your experience of the body through the way you breathe. This insight into the power of intention will stand you in good stead even as the body stops breathing at death. This is one of the reasons why breath meditation is such a good preparation for aging, illness, and dying.

The calming of bodily fabrication will take you through various levels of jhāna until you get to the fourth, where the in-and-out breath seems to grow still (AN 10:20). It's important that you not try to stifle the breath to make it grow calm. Instead, focus attention on letting the different flows of energy through the body connect with one and another so that they nourish and fill one another. That way, the felt sense that you have to bring more energy in from the outside will subside on its own.

That's what happens as the mind settles down with its primary focus on the breath.

If you focus more on feelings as they relate to the breath, you first try to energize body and mind through developing feelings of rapture—the Pali term here, *pīti*, can also mean refreshment—and then pleasure. As you focus on these feelings, you'll begin to see the perceptions, or mental labels, that surround them, and surround the body and mind as well. So as the next step, you notice the effect of these feelings and acts of perception on the mind, and then you try to still that effect by making the feelings and perceptions more peaceful.

Here again, the Buddha uses the word "fabrication"—mental fabrication—to call attention to the fact that the state of your mind is not just a given. You're actually shaping it, and you can learn to shape it in a

way that calms it down. With feelings, you first let go of the rapture to stay with a calmer sense of pleasure. Then the pleasure grows more refined until you arrive at equanimity. This takes you again through levels of jhāna to the fourth, which has equanimity as its primary feeling tone.

As for perceptions, you look for more and more peaceful ones. For example, with regard to perceptions around the breath, you can start with the perception that breath energy is coming into the body from outside and can run through the spine, internal organs, arms, legs, head, etc. This can be energizing as it relaxes and releases patterns of tension in the body. Then you notice that the energy actually originates in the body, so you hold that perception in mind. Try to see where in the body the energy of the in-breath seems to originate, and center your attention on that spot—or those spots—even as you maintain a sense of the whole body. Allow the energy to spread from its center(s) without obstruction. Hold in mind the perception that breath can flow through any blockage. This allows the breath to become more subtle.

Even more refined is the perception that every cell is breathing. Here you try to develop a diffuse attention that doesn't highlight one part of the body at the expense of any others. This perception of every cell filled with breath allows the in-and-out breath to grow still without any fear that you're going to be deprived of oxygen.

The instructions for the first two tetrads mention bodily and mental fabrication, but not verbal fabrication. Still, the instructions themselves are verbal fabrications: things you say to yourself as you breathe in and out. This means that with the first two tetrads, you're becoming sensitized to all three types of fabrication.

When you focus on the mind in the third tetrad, you see a parallel pattern. First you grow sensitive to your state of mind to see if it's out of balance and to detect what it needs. If it lacks energy, you gladden it: This can be done through the way you breathe or through the perceptions you develop around the breath. Or sometimes, when the mind has trouble settling down with the breath, you may switch to other themes, such as recollection of the Buddha or of your own acts of

generosity, until the mind settles down. Then you can return your focus to the breath.

Once the mind is gladdened, you can concentrate it as its focus gets more solid and mental fabrications grow more refined, as mentioned in the second tetrad. With the last step in this tetrad, you release the mind from factors of lower jhānas, bringing it to the higher ones—and then, ideally, to a first glimpse of awakening.

That's how the first three tetrads work together to create a sense of singleness *(ekaggatā)* in body and mind.

The fourth tetrad serves to protect this singleness from getting distracted and also to help in carrying out the last step in the third tetrad, releasing the mind step by step.

Most of the work in the fourth tetrad is done in the first two steps: focusing on inconstancy and focusing on dispassion. These two steps are a shorthand version of the five-step process for insight that we mentioned in the preceding chapter.

Suppose, for example, that a feeling of anger comes up in the course of your meditation. The five steps for getting yourself out of the anger would go something like this:

Origination: Look for the cause of the anger, not in events outside, but *within the mind*. If you're angry at what someone in your family has done, you don't look for the cause in that person's actions. You look for the attitude in your own mind that perceives anger as an appropriate response.

Passing away: You look to see how anger goes away when the mind loses interest in the cause. You may lose interest because the mind has focused attention on something else, in which case it might be a while before the anger returns. Or the cause may simply lapse with a momentary lapse in your memory, in line with the inconstant nature of fabricated things, but then the mind is ready to pick it up again. When that happens, you want to look for—

The allure: Why do you find the anger attractive? What's its appeal? Part of the mind may not like it, but there must be a part that does like it —or feels bound to a view that sees anger as necessary. Here's where it's

useful to view the mind as a committee. As you look for the allure, it's as if you separate yourself from the committee members who want to be angry, and identify yourself with members who wants to be free of the anger.

For this second group of members to see what attracts the first group of members to the anger, the mind has to be very, very still, for two reasons: 1) The part of the mind that likes anger or lust often tries to hide its real reasons, out of embarrassment, so it speaks in whispers and subliminal hints. To catch such subtle mental events, you have to be very quiet. 2) To make sure that you don't start siding with the part that likes anger, you have to be coming from a sense of well-being, where you're less hungry for unskillful pleasures. That way you'll be more willing to admit how stupid the allure is, and to let it go.

You'll also come to see that the allure is made up of the three kinds of fabrication, especially verbal and mental. The experience you've gained in breath meditation for seeing fabrications will help you here, as you see how the anger satisfies certain perceptions you hold about yourself, or the feeling of freedom that comes when you're angry: Your sense of shame and compunction gets pushed aside, and you tell yourself that because someone else has engaged in outrageous behavior, you have the right to push aside any constraints on your own.

This last line of thinking is why, as one of the antidotes to anger, the Buddha has you remind yourself that the general norm of human speech includes both kind words and hurtful words, words spoken with good intentions and those spoken with bad intentions, truths and lies. The fact that you've been subjected to negative speech is nothing out of the ordinary, so it gives you no extraordinary rights to retaliate.

Once you've caught sight of the allure, you compare it with—

The drawbacks: Because the allure is made up largely of perceptions, you need to use new perceptions to counteract it. This is where you can bring in the perceptions of inconstancy, stress, and not-self to deal with your defilements. In the case of anger, you can also hold in mind perceptions of stupid things you've done under the power of anger in the past. Can you trust that this time around, your anger is so clear-sighted

that it won't make you do something you'll later regret? Given that anger is so delusional, do you really want to label it as you or yours?

Because anger is often related to frustrated sensual desire, it might also be useful to think of the drawbacks of sensual thinking. The Buddha provides many similes—perceptions—to make the point that sensual desire gives you no real nourishment and makes you a slave to things that can be taken away from you at any time. We'll discuss some of these similes in Chapter Six.

These perceptions and ways of thinking are value judgments, to remind you that there are better ways of finding happiness and satisfaction in life.

When the drawbacks really hit home, that's when you find—

The escape in dispassion: You see clearly that the anger is not worth the effort that goes into fabricating it, so you can let it go. And in freeing it, you, too, are freed. This is the fifth step in this five-step process, and the second step in the fourth tetrad.

What follows is the third step in the fourth tetrad, cessation. When there's dispassion, there's no more passion to drive the fabrication of that particular case of anger, so it ceases.

Then you relinquish the whole issue. That's the final step in putting it behind you.

Ultimately, as you get better and better at using these steps to fend off distractions, you can turn the same analysis on concentration and even insight itself. That's when the mind can gain total release.

We noted above that the four tetrads fall into two groups based on their focus. On the one hand, the first three tetrads form a unit centered on keeping the mind properly focused on its meditation topic and increasing its powers of concentration. On the other hand, the fourth tetrad focuses on subduing any distractions that would disturb that focus. Both groups develop tranquility and insight in their own way. The first group induces insight by making you sensitive to the way you fabricate your experience, physically, verbally, and mentally. It induces tranquility by calming those fabrications to the point where they grow still in deeper states of concentration.

The second group induces insight by showing you how to pull out of a state of becoming—such as anger or lust—by looking at the processes that go into fabricating those states of becoming, viewed simply in terms of origination and passing away. The steps in this group then develop calm by helping you to evaluate those processes in a way that helps you arrive at a value judgment: They're not worth fabricating. When the mind drops those fabrications, it settles into a more solid state of calm and peace.

That's how the practice of right mindfulness and right concentration give rise both to tranquility and to insight. As you approach the skill of getting the mind to settle down, you do it in such a way that you become sensitive to how the mind fabricates sensory experience. You then can apply this insight not only to states of concentration, but also to any state of mind. This allows your powers of insight to see more sharply. As insight improves, it protects the mind from subtler and subtler disturbances and distractions, until it can eventually free the mind even from the fabrications of the path. That's when the mind is totally released and experiences the deathless, which is what the practice is all about.

The skills developed through breath meditation are obviously useful for developing your concentration and bringing genuine peace to the mind in the here and now. But more importantly, they're also very helpful when dealing with issues of aging, illness, and death.

The hands-on experience they give you in mastering the three types of fabrication will help you to fabricate good mental states as the body ages, grows ill, and dies.

The persistence, mindfulness, concentration, and discernment you develop by following the four tetrads will give you the physical and mental strength you need to maintain your powers of focus so that you're not distracted by the regrets and nostalgia that accompany aging.

The specific steps for dealing with feelings of pleasure, in the second tetrad, will also come to your aid when illness forces you to deal with feelings of pain.

And the ability to step out of states of becoming, as mastered in the fourth tetrad, will help you to escape from fear and other unskillful states

of becoming at the approach of death.

Ultimately, they can free the mind from becoming altogether. This is the most necessary and useful skill of all.

Ven. Kimbila:

As if sent by a curse,
it drops on us—
aging.
The body seems other,
though it's still the same one.
I'm still here
& have never been absent from it,
but I remember myself
as if somebody else's. — *Thag 1:118*

King Koravya: "Yes, Master Raṭṭhapāla, when I was twenty or twenty-five years old—an expert elephant rider, an expert horseman, an expert charioteer, an expert archer, an expert swordsman—I was strong in arm & strong in thigh, fit, & seasoned in warfare. It was as if I had supernormal power. I can't imagine anyone who could equal me in strength."

"And what do you think, great king? Are you even now as strong in arm & strong in thigh, as fit, & as seasoned in warfare?"

"Not at all, Master Raṭṭhapāla. I'm now aged, old, elderly, advanced in years, having come to the last stage of life, eighty years old. Sometimes, thinking, 'I'll place my foot here,' I place it somewhere else." — *MN 82*

Ambapāli the courtesan:

Black was my hair
—the color of bees—
& curled at the tips.
With age, it looked like coarse hemp.
The Truth-speaker's word
doesn't change.…

Like a delicate peak, my nose
was splendid in the prime of my youth.
With age, it's like a long pepper.
The Truth-speaker's word
doesn't change.…

Adorned with gold & delicate rings,
my hands were once splendid.
With age, they're like onions & tubers.
The Truth-speaker's word
doesn't change.…

As if they were stuffed with soft cotton,
both my feet were once splendid.
With age, they're shriveled & cracked.
The Truth-speaker's word
doesn't change.

Such was this physical heap.
Now: decrepit, the home of pains, many pains,
a house with its plaster all fallen off.
The Truth-speaker's word
doesn't change. — Thig 13:1

CHAPTER FOUR

Aging

When you see an aged person, the Buddha says that you should regard that person as a messenger from the devas (MN 130). The messenger is delivering two messages. The first is that you, too, are subject to aging. The proper response is to learn not to look down on those who are already aged, for they're simply showing you your own fate. At the same time, you have to learn to be heedful in your actions so that, at the very least, you have a refuge of good kamma to hold you in good stead when you yourself begin to age. At best, you want to reach the attainment that's not affected by aging at all, so that you'll be able to live in peace even when old (AN 5:78).

The second message is that all beings are subject to aging. This means that when aging arrives to you, you're not being unfairly singled out for any particular indignity. It's a natural process that happens to everyone who lives long enough, so it would be childish and immature to react to aging with feelings of resentment or irritation. Here again, you have to be heedful so that your emotions don't blind you to the opportunities that still lie open to you to do good in your thoughts, words, and deeds.

When you see signs of aging in your own body, they're messengers of a different sort, giving you advance warning of your own death. The body has begun to slip out of your control. You're struck by how alien it is, as it weakens and begins to shrivel without asking your permission or serving notice at all. Of course, it's been aging ever since you were born, as it gets worn down through exertion and the assaults of the environment, but the signs of aging were masked by the body's ability to regenerate new tissue. As that ability to regenerate begins to fail, there's little you can do about it. Someday—and that someday keeps creeping nearer—you'll totally lose control over it, and it'll die.

Here again, the proper response is to be heedful in your actions.

The Canon focuses special attention on three of signs of aging in the body:

> Its beauty withers and fades,
> its strength weakens, and
> its sense faculties, including the mind, blur and grow dim.

Aside from advocating a healthy diet and physical exercise to keep the body reasonably fit, the Buddha doesn't counsel that you put any extraordinary effort into fighting these processes of physical deterioration. Instead, he advises that you focus on developing mental qualities that will compensate for them. In other words, you develop the beauty, strength, and faculties of the mind. There are a few passages in the Canon where the Buddha states that as you develop the strengths of meditation, feeding on the pleasure that concentration provides or developing unlimited goodwill, one of the rewards is that your complexion brightens and your body is energized (SN 1:10; AN 11:16). But those physical rewards are only side effects. The important point is that the mind isn't overcome by the defilements that often accompany aging—such as frustration, sorrow, or anger—which would lead to its long-term suffering and harm. The body may age, but the mind doesn't have to age along with it.

This observation is not just a random platitude. It's firmly rooted in a lesson from the Buddha's awakening: that the mind comes first and doesn't have to depend on the body. Here's a chance to prove that principle in practice.

Beauty. The mind becomes beautiful as it develops two qualities.

The first is *virtue*. Unlike physical ornaments and cosmetics, which look more and more ridiculous the more you age, virtue is an ornament appropriate for people of all ages. Restraint in your words and actions is a sign of graciousness. This perception of virtue as a beautiful ornament is a mental fabrication that's always wise to keep in mind. However, unlike physical ornaments, it's not an optional decoration. The Buddha also talks of virtue as a form of wealth. A loss of your virtue, he says, is more serious than a loss of health, of material wealth, or even of your

relatives (AN 5:130). Virtue is an inner wealth that's essential to any trustworthy form of well-being.

The basic definition of virtue expresses it in terms of five precepts: to refrain from killing living beings, from stealing, from illicit sex, from telling lies, and from taking intoxicants. It's important to note that these precepts can be broken only when you transgress them on purpose, which means that following the precepts makes you more sensitive to your intentions, and forces you to be alert to what your intentions for your actions really are. In this way, virtue is an excellent preparation for training the mind in meditation.

These virtues are said to be appealing to the noble ones when they're "untorn, unbroken, unspotted, unsplattered, liberating, praised by the observant, ungrasped at, leading to concentration" (AN 10:92).

To say that they're untorn, unbroken, unspotted, and unsplattered means that you hold to them at all times, without exception.

For them to be ungrasped at means that you don't hold to them for the sake of comparing yourself with others, telling yourself that you're better than those who don't follow the precepts. You hold to the precepts for another purpose, which is to cleanse your mind of its defilements. If you *do* compare yourself with others with regard to the precepts, it's to see where other people are more skilled at observing them than you are so that you can learn lessons to apply to your own behavior.

After all, virtue *is* a skill. When you make up your mind to observe the precepts, you'll find that there are many situations that present challenges, as when you want to keep a certain piece of information from others who you suspect will misuse it. The easy way out would be to misrepresent the truth to them, but that would break your precept against lying and present no serious challenge to your discernment. The more skillful strategy—one that actually develops your discernment—would be to find a way to divert the conversation so that you can keep the information to yourself without telling a lie.

Finally, for your virtues to be liberating and to lead to concentration, you have to learn how to be strict in them but without at the same time obsessing over them. You remember that virtue is a matter of intention, so as you develop alertness in all your activities, you can become more

and more confident in the purity of the intentions on which you act. This confidence leads to a gladness that liberates the mind from worry and allows it to settle happily into concentration.

When your virtues are pure and worn gracefully in this way, they're a genuine source of beauty for the heart and mind.

The second source of mental beauty is a cluster of three related qualities: *composure*, *forbearance*, and *equanimity*. Composure is a general ability to keep a calm demeanor in difficult situations. Forbearance—the Pali term *khanti* can also be translated as patience, tolerance, or endurance—is more particularly the ability to restrain yourself from giving vent to your anger and frustration when mistreated by others or encountering undesirable circumstances. This is a theme that the Buddha discusses frequently: Giving vent to anger makes you ugly here and now, and leads to ugliness in a future life. Worse, acting on anger can lead you to do many things that, on calm reflection, you'll later regret (MN 135; AN 7:60).

Equanimity is the internal attitude that gives strength to your composure and forbearance. As we noted in the previous chapter, equanimity is the internal antidote to irritation. Instead of seething inside while trying to maintain a calm exterior, you wisely consider the truth of the principle of kamma, so that your attitude of calm can seep deeper into the heart.

This attitude gets tested again and again as aging progresses. The challenges of life, instead of getting easier in honor of your reduced strength, grow harder with age. You find yourself less able to depend on yourself physically, and more having to rely on the strength of others. And of course, they're not always going to do things as you would like them to. As you lose your strength, you're less able to keep control of situations that you used to control with confidence, and others will see their chance to take control themselves.

This is where you have to exercise some restraint over your anger and irritation, so that you don't drive away the very people who are actually trying to help you. Even when the people around you are not sincere in wanting to help you, you can't let your goodness depend on theirs.

Restraint helps you keep to the moral high ground. An internal attitude of equanimity provides a solid basis for that restraint.

As you'll recall from the preceding chapter, equanimity is developed by reflecting in general on the principle of kamma. The Canon, when discussing forbearance, gives focus to that general reflection, highlighting specific examples of how to apply the teaching on kamma to the two main situations that call for forbearance: painful feelings from injury or illness, and hurtful words from others. We'll discuss how to deal with the pains of illness in the next chapter. As for pains from injury, the Canon advises keeping in mind the simile of the bandits with the saw that we discussed in the preceding chapter: This image or perception is a form of present-moment mental fabrication that can help keep you from fostering ill will for those who have injured you—or are trying to injure you.

In the case of hurtful words, the Canon gives two sets of instructions for how to develop the right internal attitude to strengthen forbearance. The first set of instructions focuses on your *past* kamma; the second, on your *present* kamma.

In his first set of instructions, the Buddha notes that it's because of a mixture of good and bad past kamma that you've been born into the human world, and the speech you're bound to hear in this world is a mixed bag as well: timely or untimely, true or false, affectionate or harsh, beneficial or unbeneficial, spoken with a mind of goodwill or with an attitude of inner hate. This is the normal range of human speech. If you want to hear nothing but pleasing speech, you're in the wrong world (MN 21).

So when someone addresses you with untimely, false, harsh, unbeneficial, or hateful words, it's nothing out of the ordinary. And it certainly gives you no extraordinary right to respond simply as you feel like it, because anything unskillful you do under the influence of anger will still count as more bad kamma for you, no matter how "justified" you think it is. You have to maintain your composure at all times so that your actions will always be skillful.

The second set of instructions focuses on the fact that you suffer most from hurtful words because of your own present-moment verbal and

mental fabrications around what other people have said. Ven. Sāriputta, one of the Buddha's disciples, recommends that when people insult you, you should tell yourself: "A painful feeling, born of ear-contact, has arisen within me. And that is dependent, not independent. Dependent on what? Dependent on contact" (MN 28).

In other words, instead of fabricating narratives around how horrible those words were, and how outrageous it is that someone could think so little of you as to insult you that way, you let the sound of the words stop simply at the contact. Let it die on its own. Don't pull it into the heart. Then you contemplate the contact—in line with the second stage of mindfulness practice, reflecting on how anything dependent on conditions is inconstant. When you let the sound simply pass away on its own, your mind is released from the suffering it would otherwise have created in the present moment by entering into miserable states of becoming expressed in any of your old narratives poised to spring up around the contact.

You also release yourself from the bad kamma that you would likely create if you allowed yourself to brood and nurture anger over those words. And in refraining from anger, as we've noted, you avoid making yourself ugly both in the present moment and on into the future.

The Buddha speaks frequently of forbearance not only as a source of beauty but also as a strength. A poem that appears several times in the Canon makes the point that the strength of anger is the strength of a fool, while if you're truly strong, you show your strength through forbearance. In doing so, you work for your own good and for the good of those trying to provoke you. They may perceive it as a weakness, but that simply shows that they know nothing of the Dhamma (SN 7:2; SN 11:5). You can't let their perceptions influence you to act in an unskillful way.

So keep those two perceptions in mind: that forbearance is a source both of beauty and of strength.

Strengths. As you grow older and your physical strengths weaken, it's all too easy to give in to your weakness—to let your responsibilities slide and give up on making any efforts out of the ordinary. And it's easy to get frustrated as the body keeps finding new ways to resist your will.

However, if you're heedful—in other words, if you sense that your actions will make the difference between long-term pain and long-term happiness—you have to take stock of what strengths you still have. Then you can devote them to securing your greatest long-term benefit. You can't let yourself get lazy and fritter your remaining strengths away.

As we noted in the Introduction, the Canon contains two lists of strengths that aid in promoting long-term welfare and happiness. There are five members in each list, but the lists overlap, so that taken together they provide a list of seven strengths in all. Taken together, these strengths are basically further refinements of heedfulness. They are:

conviction,
shame,
compunction,
persistence,
mindfulness,
concentration, and
discernment.

These strengths will form the basic framework for the remainder of the discussion in this book, so keep them firmly in mind.

The first three strengths form a set, as they work together to foster the proper attitude to bring to the practice. They motivate you to focus on doing your best to work for your long-term welfare and happiness.

Conviction here means conviction in the Buddha's awakening: that he awakened to the true nature of how action can create suffering or lead to the end of suffering, and that the truths to which he awakened should inform your own actions. In particular, as you age, conviction teaches you that you have to take seriously the Buddha's discoveries on kamma and rebirth: that the kamma of each action lies in the intention behind the action, and that your intentions can lead to results not only in this lifetime, but also on into lifetimes after this. As we've already noted, those results can shape your future lifetimes in two ways: in creating openings for good rebirths, and in fostering skills that can exert control over your cravings so that you can best take advantage of the opportunities that present themselves as death arrives.

Both approaches require that you do your best to foster skillful intentions here and now. In this way, conviction takes the principle of heedfulness and focuses it on developing the strengths of the mind, and skillful intentions in particular. As the principles of dependent co-arising point out, your intentions may be influenced to some extent by the strength of the body, but they're not entirely dependent on your physical strength. It is possible, even as the body weakens with age, to accomplish great things in strengthening the mind's tendency to form and act on skillful intentions. Given that the skillfulness of your intentions will determine how well you face illness and death, the best investment of your energy is acting in skillful ways that will help you in that regard.

So it's not wise to compose a bucket list of last-minute sensory pleasures to cram into what little time remains before you go. Instead, your bucket list should focus on the goodness you can create in your thoughts, words, and deeds. This goodness includes two sorts of qualities: general qualities, such as conviction, virtue, generosity, and discernment that will create the conditions for a good rebirth; and specific meditative skills, which will be needed to master craving at the moment of rebirth.

If you're afraid of missing out on the sensual pleasures that the world has to offer, reflect on something Ajaan Fuang, my teacher, once said to me: If there's a particular sensual pleasure you long for, it's usually a sign that you had that pleasure in the past and are now missing it. Think about this for a moment, he said, and you'll develop a sense of saṁvega. After all, if you devote effort to trying to gain it again, you'll lose it again and then want it again. When will you see the futility of continuing to pursue it as it keeps slipping away?

A better use of your time would be to focus on the good you can do now. Ajaan Maha Boowa, one of the Thai forest masters, once had a student in her 80s who came into possession of a large collection of his recorded Dhamma talks, and she wanted to see them transcribed. However, she doubted that she'd have the strength to do it herself, as her eyesight was failing. His advice to her was this: See how much goodness you can squeeze out of the body before you have to discard it at death.

Energized by his advice, she was able to complete the project, leaving behind two large volumes of excellent Dhamma talks.

This attitude toward the body—which we identified in the preceding chapter as a healthy positive body image—is one of the lessons that conviction teaches as aging comes rolling in. But of course, why wait until the body shows obvious signs of aging to heed this lesson? It's not the case that you can die only after aging shows itself. If you're heedful, you try to squeeze as much goodness as you can out of the body—and the mind—as soon and as consistently as you can.

Shame aids in this direction by motivating you to act only on your most skillful intentions, based on your desire to look good in the eyes of others. But because shame is an attitude that has received a lot of bad press from modern psychology, it's good to be clear about what kind of shame the Buddha is talking about here. Actually, there are two types of shame: the unhealthy shame that's the opposite of self-esteem, and the healthy shame that's the opposite of shamelessness. Modern psychology focuses on the first type of shame; the Buddha is talking about the second.

Unhealthy shame is a weakness, but healthy shame can be a strength, depending on whose eyes you want to look good in. The Buddha recommends that you cultivate the desire to look good in the eyes of the wise: in particular, those who have successfully followed the path before you. By learning to look at your own behavior through their eyes, you're training your own eyes to become wise as well.

In this way, you take advantage of the social context in which the Dhamma is taught. Even though we each have to develop the skillfulness of our own thoughts, words, and deeds, we're not asked to reinvent the Dhamma wheel from scratch every time we act. Instead, we can benefit from the lessons learned by those who have practiced the Dhamma before us. In doing so, we're relying on the principle that the Buddha said was the most important *external* factor conducive to awakening: admirable friendship.

Admirable friendship involves more than just making friends with admirable people. You also need to emulate their admirable qualities.

This is where a sense of shame and honor comes into the equation. Your desire for your admirable friends to think well of you is a strong incentive to follow their good example.

Admirable friends can be recognized in possessing four good qualities, and it turns out that these are the basic qualities that create good openings for rebirth. This means that as you emulate your admirable friends, you create good openings for your own rebirth. The qualities are these:

- conviction in the Buddha's awakening and in the principle of kamma;
- virtue, in the sense of not breaking the precepts or encouraging others to break them;
- generosity, and
- discernment.

The discernment of admirable friends can be seen in two things: the *standards* by which they judge you, and their *purpose* in judging you. If they're really discerning, they'll judge you by your actions—not by your appearance, wealth, or anything else over which you have no control. They'll judge your actions both by the intentions on which you act and on the results to which you give rise. In both cases, the standard of judgment is your ability to find happiness in such a way that your intentions and actions harm no one: not you or anyone else.

Admirable friends judge your mistakes not simply to arrive at a judgment. In their compassion for you, they want to help you recognize *why* your mistakes are mistakes, so that you can learn not to repeat them. In this way, they're encouraging you to be compassionate toward yourself and to develop the true source for your happiness: your ability to act with more and more skill.

To develop an attitude of shame in this context means that you learn to judge your actions by the same standards and with the same compassionate purpose that admirable friends would use in judging them. In this way, as you internalize their standards and purposes, focusing on developing skill in line with the lessons of conviction, you

become an admirable friend to yourself, devoting your strengths to your long-term benefit.

If you can't find admirable friends in your immediate surroundings, you can take the Buddha and his noble disciples as your friends. That way, when you start getting lazy in the practice, you can remind yourself of the efforts they made in their practice, and their compassionate intentions in passing the Dhamma on to others—including you. When you realize that you would be letting them down if you continued to be lazy, your healthy sense of shame should spur you to get back on the path.

This is why the Buddha called shame a treasure and a guardian of the world. You benefit when you perceive it in those terms.

Compunction is often paired with shame and, like shame, it's a disinclination to do wrong. It differs only in that its motivation is more impersonal. Instead of focusing on how you look in the eyes of the wise, it focuses more on how, given the way causality works over the long run, you're not immune to the consequences of your actions. You see the negative consequences that could come from acting in unskillful ways—and you care.

In this sense, compunction is the opposite of callousness—the attitude that you'll do as you please and you don't give a damn about the consequences. It's also the opposite of apathy, the defeatist attitude of seeing action as futile, and not caring about anything at all. When you feel compunction, you actively care about your long-term well-being and try your best not to jeopardize it.

This active quality of caring may be one of the reasons why compunction is also paired with ardency in descriptions of meditators wiping unskillful thoughts out of their minds.

Like ardency, compunction is the wise response to a principle that the Buddha said is the most important *internal* factor conducive to awakening: appropriate attention. Appropriate attention looks at experience in terms of the Buddha's two most categorical teachings: (1) the principle that unskillful actions should be abandoned and skillful actions developed; and (2) the four noble truths, together with the duties

appropriate to each. Both of these teachings concern active truths—truths that call for you to act on them. Compunction is the response that's willing to act on them so as to avoid causing anyone any harm.

This is why the Buddha lists compunction along with shame as both a treasure and as a guardian of the world.

The remaining four strengths build on the attitudes fostered by the first three. They, too, form a set, in that their main focus is on developing skillful qualities and abandoning unskillful qualities in the mind. And they, too, are further refinements of heedfulness. They differ only in the degree of subtlety they bring to being heedful.

Persistence starts with the realization that if you're really heedful, you can't simply be convinced of the truth of the Buddha's teachings. After all, his truths contain imperatives on how to act. If you want to really benefit from those truths, you have to make the effort to abandon unskillful qualities and to develop skillful qualities in their place.

From this realization, persistence starts as you motivate yourself to do just that. In other words, skillful persistence is not just brute effort. It involves the effort to make yourself *want* to do the things you know are skillful but are hard to do, and to abandon the things that you know are unskillful but are hard to give up.

The element of desire is necessary here because all phenomena are rooted in desire (AN 10:58). To foster skillful desire, you can bring to bear any of the skillful attitudes that the Buddha recommends: In addition to heedfulness, conviction, shame, and compunction, you can use goodwill for yourself and others as a motive force for arousing your persistence and continuing along the way. You can spur yourself to practice by reminding yourself that you'll benefit the more you practice, and so will others. Remind yourself, too, that goodwill, in the Buddha's estimation, is not a weak and totally gentle quality. It's often depicted together with endurance and strength.

Once your desire is in place, you put in the effort to follow the path. You realize that you can't just coast your way to awakening. This is why, when the Buddha compared the factors of the path to a chariot, he

compared persistence to the wheels, without which the chariot can't move forward. When he compared the elements of the practice to a fortress, persistence was represented by the soldiers, who can never slack off in their efforts to protect the fortress of the mind. And in general, when portraying people who followed the path, the Buddha never used the image of people relaxing their way across the flood. Instead, he'd use images of people going into battle to attain victory, of people actively searching for something useful, or of people working at developing skills.

Discernment plays a further role in skillful persistence in figuring out what precisely is the right effort at any one time. The Buddha lists four types of effort altogether: guarding against unskillful qualities that haven't yet arisen, letting go of any unskillful qualities that have arisen, developing skillful qualities that haven't yet arisen, and maintaining and strengthening skillful qualities that have. The path is not simply a matter of letting go. Ultimately, yes, you will have to let go of everything, including the path, but that stage comes only when you've developed the path in full measure.

Still, the practice requires that you watch over it carefully so that you don't squander your efforts. It also requires nourishment to keep you going. When the Buddha, in discovering the path, realized that he would have to keep his unskillful thoughts in check but could allow his skillful thoughts to range free, he realized that even then, the mind could get tired (MN 19). And of course, once the mind is tired, it's easy to fall back to old, unskillful habits. So as a further refinement on the heedfulness of persistence, he turned his thoughts to resting in concentration.

This step of the path is embodied in the next two strengths: *mindfulness* and *concentration*. These steps can be treated as one because right mindfulness is what gets the mind into right concentration. We've already discussed these two strengths in detail in Chapter Two. Here I'd simply like to focus on their role in developing skillful intentions and abandoning unskillful ones.

By keeping in mind useful lessons you've learned from the past, mindfulness helps you to recognize skillful and unskillful qualities as

soon as they arise. It also helps you to remember what you've done in the past to deal with them appropriately. This makes it easier to deal successfully with these events in the mind before the unskillful qualities strengthen with time, or the skillful ones fade away through inattention.

The role of mindfulness in keeping Dhamma lessons in mind operates on at least two levels: the level of general values and the level of specific techniques.

On the level of general values, mindfulness keeps the larger perspective of right view in mind: that it's always worthwhile to be heedful of the states of the mind, and not to give in to laziness and defeatism as the body weakens with age—or with illness or death. This is the level of mindfulness that's needed to keep up your overall undaunted fighting spirit as physical weakness sets in.

On the level of specific techniques, mindfulness recognizes individual mental states as skillful or unskillful, and remembers which techniques have worked in the past to strengthen skillful states and weaken unskillful ones.

The relationship between mindfulness and persistence on this level of the practice is nicely symbolized in the Buddha's image comparing the practice to a frontier fortress (AN 7:63). Just as persistence is represented by the soldiers, mindfulness is represented by the wise gatekeeper who keeps out those he doesn't recognize and admits into the fortress only those he recognizes as friends: all the good qualities that can be developed in the mind. Without the gatekeeper, the soldiers would have to deal with hordes of friends and foes thronging through the door. But because the gatekeeper is selective in who he allows in, the soldiers can focus their efforts on strengthening their friends as they arrive, and benefiting from the friends they've already strengthened.

In the same image, concentration is represented by the stores of food that sustain both the soldiers and the man at the gate. In bringing the mind to stillness with a sense of well-being, concentration provides a place of rest and nourishment for the mind. But it also does more. The stillness of concentration enables mindfulness to detect the arising of mental qualities more clearly. The sense of well-being makes the mind more willing to view its unskillful qualities with a sense of dispassion,

not hungering for the fleeting pleasures they bring. It also keeps you from getting disoriented as you let go of mental qualities to which you've been clinging tightly as a part of your identity.

The preliminary insights that arise from concentration alert you to the fact that if all qualities could be viewed with total dispassion, then the fortress would be totally secure. But they also alert you to the fact that concentration, on its own, isn't enough to accomplish that task. If you're really heedful, you need to develop the added discernment needed to bring that level of dispassion about.

In this way, concentration provides the foundation for the final strength—discernment—at the same time making you sensitive to why it's needed.

Discernment is defined as the ability to perceive arising and passing away in a penetrative way leading to the right ending of stress (SN 48:10). But just as mindfulness is not bare awareness of events arising and passing away, neither is discernment.

The crucial words in the definition here are "penetrative" and "leading to the right ending of stress." In the Buddha's vocabulary, the term "penetrative" means detecting differences as to which arisings are skillful and which are not. This is in line with the passage in the Canon saying that analysis of qualities, the discernment factor in the factors of awakening, is nourished by appropriate attention to which mental qualities are skillful and which are not (SN 46:51). The fact that this sort of insight is said to lead to the ending of stress puts it in the context of the four noble truths and, in particular, in line with the strategy outlined in those truths: You end stress by fostering dispassion for its cause, which is craving. And as we've noted, craving is what causes you to be reborn. So to put an end to stress and to rebirth, you have to look at arising and passing away in a way that leads to dispassion for craving.

In Chapter Two we discussed the Buddha's strategy for doing precisely that: his five-step program for leading to escape from passion.

- As you watch the arising of mental events, you look to see how they're originated in the mind

• Then you watch to see how they pass away as that internal cause passes away as well.

• If you find yourself reviving them, you look to see what allure they have: why you would want to make the effort to keep pursuing them even as they keep slipping away.

• Then you compare the allure with their drawbacks, to see that the drawbacks far outweigh any benefit you get from the allure.

• Reflecting heedfully on this fact gives rise to dispassion, which allows you to escape from any desire to cling to those events. That's the escape.

As we've also noted, you apply this strategy first to unskillful qualities, and then, when the decks have been cleared, to the five strengths themselves. That's how total release is attained.

That's also how you strengthen the mind so that it can confront not only aging, but also illness and death in a way that you don't have to suffer from them.

We can better appreciate the usefulness of these seven mental strengths by seeing how they counteract particular pitfalls of aging. Take, for instance, the common tendency to indulge in thoughts of nostalgia as you get older. As your body weakens with age and the range of pleasures available to you begins to shrink, it's all too easy to cast back into the past to try to relive old pleasures now lost, or to regret opportunities for pleasures that you could have pursued but didn't.

This habit of trying to wring a few more drops of pleasure out of the past, for some people, is one of the few sources of sweetness as the body grows old. But the sweetness has its bitter aftertaste. It can easily lead to sorrow over what is now out of reach, and that sorrow can inspire resentment and anger.

The desire to find happiness through nostalgia is actually inspired by wrong view—seeing that the present moment offers nothing of value, so you give added value to times that are long gone and cannot be retrieved.

Heedfulness teaches you that the present moment *does* offer opportunities of value, and that nostalgia are a waste of valuable time. You might think of Ajaan Lee's image: Thoughts of nostalgia are like

licking the bottom of yesterday's soup pot when there's no soup left. You get no nourishment to show for your efforts, even though there are other sources of nourishment all around.

Conviction gives focus to heedfulness by telling you of the particular dangers of nostalgia in light of the Buddha's insights into kamma, rebirth, and the four noble truths. Nostalgia squanders time that could be invested in developing qualities that would lead to a good rebirth. Worse, it inclines the mind to align with cravings that could easily lead it astray at death. After all, even though nostalgia may seem like an innocent pleasure, it's actually a form of becoming. If indulging in this type of becoming turns into a habit, it will prime the mind to engage in the same habit as death approaches—and who knows where it will lead? If you pine for a particular place, you may be seized at death with a desire to return to that place. If for a particular person, you'll want to meet that person again. But even if the place and the person were as good as your nostalgia now paints them—and that "if" assumes a lot right there—that place and that person have changed in the meantime. You could easily be setting yourself up for major disappointments. And even if your nostalgic cravings happened to land you in a good place, it, too, would pass away with time, and you'd be stuck with the problem of nostalgia all over again.

You'd be much better off focusing on developing skillful qualities of mind, and trusting that they will take you to places and groups of people that won't disappoint. If you want to think of the past, think of the wise actions you did—times when you were generous out of the sheer goodness of your heart, or virtuous when it involved sacrifice or you could have gotten away with less than honorable behavior. Let those thoughts inspire you to find ways of being generous and virtuous now and on into the future.

Or even better, you can devote your valuable opportunities in the present to develop qualities that will take you further, to forms of happiness beyond the vagaries of places and time.

Based on this conviction, you cultivate the desire to abandon thoughts of nostalgia, and to replace them with something better. This is the basic task of *persistence,* but it can make use of a sense of *shame* and

compunction as well—shame in the sense that you'd be embarrassed to have the Buddha or any of the noble ones see you waste your time in nostalgia; compunction in the sense that you really don't want to create long-term problems for yourself through your short-sighted desire to squeeze pleasure out of the dregs of pleasures long gone.

Instead, you can think of the pleasure you can find by practicing generosity, virtue, and meditation here and now. Squeeze some goodness out of what strength you have. Even if you don't have many material resources or much energy to share, you can find pleasure in developing thoughts of goodwill for all beings. And as long as you have an in-and-out breath, you can foster *mindfulness* and *concentration* around it.

By developing concentration based on the breath, you can sensitize yourself to how you're engaging in the three kinds of fabrication—bodily, verbal, and mental—and you can apply that insight to the mind's tendency to want to go back to the states of becoming that form around thoughts of nostalgia.

This is where you can apply the Buddha's five-step program for *discernment,* starting by seeing which mental events give rise to thoughts of nostalgia and how they pass away. As you learn to observe events in the mind in this way, you can come to see the allure of nostalgia—all the wrong assumptions about pleasure, aging, and life in general that would make you want to go for those thoughts to begin with. You see that the allure is also composed of the three types of fabrication: how you breathe when you engage in those thoughts, the way you talk to yourself around them, and the perceptions and feelings you associate with them. You see how artificial—and even dishonest—the whole enterprise is.

Then you can compare the allure of those thoughts with their drawbacks. You can not only think of the drawbacks that you learned by viewing nostalgia in the light of your conviction in the Buddha's awakening, but you can also realize that if you had continued to indulge in nostalgia, you wouldn't have had the chance to find the pleasures of concentration or to train the mind to look for even higher pleasures that will never leave you.

When it really hits home that the allure of nostalgia is far outweighed by its drawbacks, then you develop dispassion for it. That's how you can

escape from it—for the sake of your long-term welfare and happiness. You've shown yourself that even when the body ages, it can develop the inner strengths to accomplish great things.

Faculties. As the strength of the body fails, its sense faculties weaken as well. This can place severe limitations on the pleasures you can find through these faculties, as your senses of sight, hearing, or taste get murky and less and less reliable. More importantly, it can cut you off from moral support and Dhamma lessons that you could gain from others as you deal with the hardships not only of aging, but also of illness and death. The mind can easily get caught in the echo chamber of its own thoughts, with little or no outside input to dampen the echoes. If those thoughts are positive, there's no problem. But given that the aging of the body can easily put the mind in a depressed state, the amplification of depressed thoughts can drown out the positive thoughts that are precisely what you need at this stage of life.

To protect yourself against this eventuality, you have to learn how to make yourself more self-reliant in the Dhamma. Part of this, of course, means memorizing passages of Dhamma that will hold you in good stead as you lose your ability to read or listen to Dhamma talks. But more importantly, you have to develop good internal qualities that will keep the mind strong.

It so happens that the Buddha taught a list of five mental qualities that he also called "faculties" *(indrīya)*, and that these are precisely the qualities needed to make the mind its own refuge. These mental faculties are identical with five of the strengths we have just considered—conviction, persistence, mindfulness, concentration, and discernment—with two of them, mindfulness and discernment, especially suitable for overcoming unskillful mental states from within.

One of the Buddha's verses (Sn 5:1) notes that mindfulness is like a dam for restraining the currents of unskillful mental states, whereas discernment is what stops them for good. To use modern medical terminology, mindfulness—together with the concentration it leads to—functions as symptom management for a disease, whereas discernment effects the actual cure: searching out and uprooting the disease's causes so that the disease can go away and not return.

This is how these two faculties work together: When you get into an unskillful thought world, such as anger over an incident in which someone mistreated you in the past, mindfulness recognizes it for what it is—unskillful—and reminds you that it's constructed. You can get out of it by stepping back to observe how it results from causes, and how those causes can be abandoned and brought to an end.

Discernment then does the work of analyzing the different kinds of fabrication that give rise to the anger, with an eye to seeing what its allure is. The fact that you're willing to question the anger from an outside perspective shows you that at least part of the mind is ready to view the anger with dispassion. When you gather evidence showing that the drawbacks of angry thinking outweigh the allure, the resulting dispassion can provide you with the escape.

That's how the mind, as it loses contact with the outside world, can act as its own refuge. And of course, it's precisely this ability that will be needed at death.

So in this way, as you develop inner beauty, strength, and reliable mental faculties to compensate for the weakening and withering of the body, you're also beginning to master some of the skills that will be needed at death.

Even as you age, you can still accomplish great things.

King Koravya: "Now, Master Raṭṭhapāla, in this royal court there are elephant troops & cavalry & chariot troops & infantry that will serve to defend us from dangers. And yet you say, 'The world is without shelter, without protector.' How is the meaning of this statement to be understood?"

"What do you think, great king? Do you have any recurring illness?"

"Yes, Master Raṭṭhapāla, I have a recurring wind-illness (sharp pains running through the body). Sometimes my friends & advisors, relatives & blood-kinsmen, stand around me saying, 'This time King Koravya will die. This time King Koravya will die.'"

"And what do you think, great king? Can you say to your friends & advisors, relatives & blood-kinsmen, 'My friends & advisors, relatives & blood-kinsmen are commanded: All of you who are present, share out this pain so that I may feel less pain'? Or do you have to feel that pain all alone?"

"Oh, no, Master Raṭṭhapāla, I can't say to my friends & advisors, relatives & blood-kinsmen, 'All of you who are present, share out this pain so that I may feel less pain.' I have to feel that pain all alone."
— MN 82

Anāthapiṇḍika: "Extreme forces slice through my head, just as if a strong man were slicing my head open with a sharp sword.… Extreme pains have arisen in my head, just as if a strong man were tightening a turban made of tough leather straps

around my head.… Extreme forces carve up my stomach cavity, just as if a butcher or his apprentice were to carve up the stomach cavity of an ox.… There is an extreme burning in my body, just as if two strong men, grabbing a weaker man by the arms, were to roast & broil him over a pit of hot embers. I am not getting better, venerable sir. I am not comfortable. My extreme pains are increasing, not lessening. There are signs of their increasing, and not of their lessening." — MN 143

"A sick person endowed with five qualities is easy to tend to: He does what is amenable to his cure; he knows the proper amount in things amenable to his cure; he takes his medicine; he tells his symptoms, as they have come to be, to the nurse desiring his welfare, saying that they are worse when they are worse, improving when they are improving, or remaining the same when they are remaining the same; and he is the type who can endure bodily feelings that are painful, fierce, sharp, wracking, repellent, disagreeable, life-threatening. A sick person endowed with these five qualities is easy to tend to." — Mv VIII.26.6

"'Even though I may be afflicted in body, my mind will be unafflicted.' That is how you should train yourself." — SN 22:1

Ven. Vakkali:

Stricken by sharp, wind-like pains,
you, monk, living in the forest grove

—harsh, with limited range for alms—
what, what will you do?

Suffusing my body
with abundant rapture & joy,
& enduring what's harsh,
I'll stay in the grove.

Developing the establishings of mindfulness,
strengths, faculties,
the factors for awakening,
I'll stay in the grove.

Reflecting on those who are resolute,
their persistence aroused,
constantly firm in their effort,
united in concord,
I'll stay in the grove.

Recollecting the One Self-Awakened,
self-tamed & centered,
untiring both day & night,
I'll stay
in the grove. — Thag 5:8

CHAPTER FIVE

Illness

When you see a sick person, the Buddha says that you should regard that person, like the aged person, as a messenger from the devas. And this messenger, too, is delivering two messages. The first is that you, too, are subject to illness. The proper response is to learn not to look down on those who are already sick, for they're simply showing you what the human body—*your* human body—is capable of. For every part of the body, there are many possible diseases. At the same time, you have to learn to be heedful in your actions so that, at the very least, you have a refuge of good kamma to hold you in good stead when you yourself fall ill. At best, you want to reach the attainment that's not affected by illness at all, so that you'll be able to live in peace even when sick.

The second message is that all beings are subject to illness. This means that when you fall sick, you're not being unfairly singled out for any particular injustice. It's a natural process happening to everyone, so it would be childish and immature to react to your illness with feelings of resentment or irritation. Here again, you have to be heedful so that your emotions don't blind you to the opportunities that still lie open to you, even when ill, to do good in your thoughts, words, and deeds.

As with aging, the Buddha regards illness as nothing out of the ordinary. It's everywhere and always. He classes hunger—which all beings on Earth feel on a daily basis—as a disease, calling it the foremost disease (Dhp 203). There's a passage where he ridicules a wanderer from another sect for claiming that his body is free from disease. From the Buddha's point of view, the body is a nest of illnesses. The only true health is unbinding (MN 75).

It's good to reflect on your reactions to the pains and weakness of hunger as a case study in how pain and weakness can easily skew your perceptions and lead you to do unskillful things. It's because of hunger that people take advantage of one another. It's because of hunger that

people can kill, steal, and lie. And if we allow ourselves to be driven by these normal pains and weaknesses, what's to keep us from acting even more unskillfully when struck by more serious illnesses? Or when death arrives and forces us, as we are struck by pain, to make choices with long-lasting consequences? When you reflect in this way, you can understand the importance of learning how to develop the mind so that it's not swayed by illness or pain.

At the same time, it's important to note the obvious fact that hunger can be assuaged if the right conditions are met. The pain of hunger as a general fact is inevitable, but individual attacks of hunger can be treated. And they *should* be treated to the extent that they allow you to continue practicing. This was one of the lessons the Buddha learned in his quest for awakening.

These facts about hunger and its treatment are reflected in his approach to illness in general. Illness as a general fact has to be accepted as inevitable, but individual illnesses should be treated. You don't simply put up with them as an inescapable fate. You are right to treat them, at least to the extent that they will allow you to continue with the practice.

The Canon, when discussing illness, touches on the same three issues it focuses on in the context of aging—loss of beauty, loss of strength, and the weakening of one's faculties—but it places its primary focus on a fourth issue, the issue of pain. Because we've already discussed the first three issues in Chapter Three, we'll follow the Buddha in focusing on pain here, too.

Pain

To get the most out of the Buddha's teachings on pain, you have to develop the same seven strengths we discussed under aging: conviction, shame, compunction, persistence, mindfulness, and discernment.

Conviction is required in the sense of taking the Buddha's analysis of pain—its causes and its treatment—as your working hypothesis in dealing with it. In a broad sense, this means accepting the principle of causality that the Buddha discovered on the night of his awakening: that all experiences are a combination of three things—the results of past

actions, present actions, and the results of present actions. It also means accepting the principle that mental actions, as opposed to physical or verbal actions, are the most important causes that have to be addressed when dealing with pain.

In general terms, this means understanding pain and illness as resulting both from past and from present actions. Because the results of past actions can play a role in causing illness, and because you can't do anything to change your past actions, not all illnesses can be cured simply by a change of mind or a change of heart in the present. This is why, contrary to some theories, people who are spiritually very advanced can still experience pain and illness, because the presence of an illness doesn't necessarily reflect your present state of mind. The Buddha himself was a case in point: In the last years of his life, he suffered from backaches, dysentery, and an unnamed illness that almost killed him (DN 16).

However, if disease were caused solely by past actions, you'd be condemned to letting a disease simply run its course untreated. It's because present actions can also play a role in causing illness that it's appropriate to try treating diseases. A change in how the body is exercised or fed could possibly cut a disease short. At the very least, you can train your present mental actions so that even in the presence of intense physical pain, your mind doesn't have to suffer. In the Buddha's terms, even if you are afflicted in body, you should train yourself so that you will be unafflicted in mind (SN 22:2).

Still, even though the Buddha recommends giving primary attention to the mental causes of pain and disease—past and present—that doesn't mean that he would recommend ignoring their physical causes. He was once asked if all pains came from past actions, and his response was No. He then proceeded to list the possible causes of pain, as understood by the medical treatises of his time, and many of them were physical: an imbalance of the physical properties in the body, the change of the seasons, improper care of the body, and injuries (SN 36:21). When we compare this list with another list in the discourses, which classifies experiences as to whether they are present actions or the results of past actions (SN 35:145), we can see that all of these possible causes for pain

fall into one or the other of those categories, or a combination of the two: They're the results either of past actions, present actions, or a combination both.

This means that there are times when the results of unskillful actions come back at you through physical means, and they can be counteracted through physical treatments. This fact, combined with the Buddha's general teaching on the causality of experience, lies behind his observation that there are three types of disease: those that go away without treatment, those that won't go away even with treatment, and those that will go away only with treatment.

The diseases that go away without treatment are those coming from actions whose kammic results happen to run out. Those that won't go away even with treatment are those coming from past actions so strong that even the best present actions can't counteract their effect. Those are the cases where you have to focus your efforts totally on the state of the mind in the present, so that it isn't afflicted by the affliction of the body. As for diseases that go away only with treatment, they come primarily from present actions combined with the results of past actions that come at you through physical means: When you change the actions or the physical means, there's nothing to maintain the disease, and it'll subside.

It's because of the third category that treatment is appropriate in all cases. After all, you don't know ahead of time which category a particular illness will fall into, so the wise and compassionate policy—as recognized by the Buddha—is to assume it's the third (AN 3:22).

Because the diseases that can be cured through treatment cover both those that come purely from mental causes and those that come via physical means, the Buddha recognizes that "treatment" of a disease can be either physical, mental, or a combination of the two. There are many cases in the Canon, for instance, where sick monks were freed from their illness simply on hearing the Dhamma or through practicing meditation (SN 46:14; AN 10:60). There are other cases, though, where even the Buddha himself needed medicine to cure his illness.

It was because of the Buddha's teaching that illnesses should be treated whenever possible that the Vinaya—the collection of rules for the monks and nuns—includes detailed instructions on medical treatments

and medicines for a wide variety of diseases. In fact, it was through the spread of the Dhamma and Vinaya throughout South, Southeast, and Central Asia that Indian medical knowledge spread far and wide in the pre-modern world.

The Vinaya also contains instructions on how to be an ideal patient. These include behaving in a way that doesn't aggravate the disease, behaving in a way that will help hasten its cure, taking your medicine, and telling your doctor or nurse your symptoms as they actually are. The most demanding part of a patient's etiquette is the ability to bear, without complaint, serious pain. This ability will be the focus of the remainder of this chapter, as it involves all seven of the strengths in our list.

Conviction plays a double role in helping you to deal with pain. On the one hand, it provides you with working hypotheses for understanding pain and illness. On the other hand, it helps you master the skill of how to withstand pain by enabling you to see the *value* of developing this ability. As you reflect on what the Buddha had to say about death—that your future course is shaped by your cravings—you realize that you will have to be mindful and alert at the moment of death. This means that you can't let yourself be drugged and drowsy with painkillers at that time. However, you don't want to be overcome by pain then, either. Otherwise, you'll jump at the quickest possibility for rebirth to escape your pain—which may not be the wisest option available. So it's often wise to determine the ideal dose for painkillers that will take the edge off the pain and yet leave you alert. The best course, however, is to remember the Buddha's recommendation that you learn how not to be afflicted in mind even when afflicted in body.

In the discourse where the Buddha makes that statement (SN 22:2), Ven. Sāriputta explains what it means: Staying unafflicted in mind means that you don't build any sense of self-identity around any of the five aggregates of form, feeling, perception, fabrication, or consciousness. You don't assume your self as identical with any of the aggregates, as possessing them, as containing them, or as being contained within them. This definition fits in with the Buddha's definition of how suffering in general is ended: You stop clinging to the

aggregates. And because the Pali word for clinging—*upādāna*—also means taking sustenance, it's easy to see why the Buddha saw hunger as the paradigm for all disease, physical and mental. It's when you don't have to feed the mind on the aggregates that you can be said to be truly healthy.

This type of health is achieved at a very high level of Dhamma practice—at least the first level of awakening—but the discourses in the Canon and the teachings of the Thai Forest masters take the path leading there and break it down into more immediately manageable steps.

One of those steps is to develop a sense of **shame** around the issue of pain, in that healthy shame can help motivate you to develop the ability to withstand it. You think of the Buddha's disciples of the past who were able to face pain and illness even when stuck in the remote wilderness. Ven. Vakkali is an example from the Canon (Thag 5:8). Ajaan Lee Dhammadharo is an example from more recent times: Having hiked three days into a location deep in the forest where he expected to spend the three months of the Rains retreat, he suffered a series of heart attacks soon after his arrival. With no medicine to treat his heart, he fell back on his breath and his powers of concentration, using the breath energies throughout the body to heal his heart and regain his strength. At the end of the three months, he was able to hike back to civilization, and he taught that approach to the breath until his death eight years later.

Both of my own teachers—Ajaan Fuang and Ajaan Suwat—told me that some of their most important insights in meditation came during severe illness. In Ajaan Fuang's case, it was a series of unrelenting headaches. In Ajaan Suwat's, it was a bout of malaria. As he once said to me, "If malaria were a person, I'd bow down to him in gratitude." I also know of many lay practitioners who died of cancer but who, through their meditative abilities, were able to deal with the pains of their illness peacefully with only minimal use of pain medication.

It's easy to say that these people were tougher than you, so they were better able to withstand pain. But what's accomplished by saying that? And how did they become tough? Pain was as painful for them as pain is for you. It was because they saw the value in learning how to withstand pain that they were able to learn how to do it. They trained themselves

to meet the Buddha's standards for a good patient. It would be a shame if you didn't train yourself to acquire the same ability yourself.

And more than a shame: **Compunction** teaches you that if you don't learn how to withstand your pains now, you're setting yourself up to come back and suffer more pains indefinitely. If you want to get past pain, you have to face it directly. Nobody else can face it for you. And it's not going to get any easier as you get older, so why not learn how to master this skill now?

The lessons of conviction, shame, and compunction come together to motivate **persistence** in actually ridding the mind of unskillful attitudes toward illness and developing skillful intentions in your quest to learn how to master pain.

When illness strikes, the primary unskillful attitude you have to get past is the grief expressed in questions like, "Why is this happening to *me?* Why am *I* being singled out to suffer at such an inconvenient time?" You have to remember that illness is normal. It strikes everyone at one time or another, so you're not being singled out for unfair punishment. When you think of all the other people and living beings who are suffering from illnesses, it should give rise to an unlimited feeling of compassion for beings at large. We're all in this together. This thought should actually make your own pains easier to bear. The more expansive your attitude toward pain and suffering in general, the less your particular pains will weigh down the mind.

This point is so important that the Buddha devotes a number of similes to illustrate it, giving guidance in how to employ verbal fabrication and mental fabrication to talk to yourself around the pain of illness (AN 3:101). These similes help you understand how, if the range of your mind is limited, the pain coming from past bad actions will be intensified. But if your mind is broadened and enlarged, the pain coming from past bad actions will be much less intense.

One of the similes is this: A narrow mind is like a small cup of water, whereas an enlarged mind is like a broad, clean river. If you throw a lump of salt into the cup of water, you can't drink the water, because it's too salty. But if you throw the same amount of salt into the river, you

can still drink the water in the river because there's so much more water than salt.

Another simile concerns being fined for stealing a goat. If you're poor, you may not be able to pay the fine, and you could easily get thrown in jail. If you're wealthy, you'll hardly feel the inconvenience of the fine at all.

Thinking about your illness in line with the teachings on kamma can also have the effect of expanding the range of your awareness. You may not know the particular kamma that brought you this illness, but you can accept the general principle that kamma has a role to play. Instead of complaining about it, you can be a good sport about it. Don't be too proud to admit that you probably have done some pretty unskillful things in the past—like everyone else in the human world. This thought opens the mind to want to comprehend the pain—and especially your present mental kamma around the pain—by meditating while you treat the disease.

As for the inconveniences that come from illness—in which you're unable to do your work or meet your family responsibilities—remind yourself that understanding your relationship to pain is ultimately more important than many of your other plans, for it's a skill that you'll have to depend on more and more as you approach death. There will come a day when you have to abandon all your other responsibilities for good, and the world will have to go on without you, so here's your opportunity to give some time to focus on the skills you'll need at that time.

Another set of questions you have to put aside is, "How much longer before I recover? *Will* I recover?" Thoughts of how long you've been suffering from the illness in the past, or how much longer you'll be suffering in the future, simply weigh the present moment down with more weight than it can bear. Remind yourself that past pains are no longer there, future pains haven't arrived yet, and you don't want to burden your mind in the present with thoughts of either. Let the past take care of the past, and the future of the future. Your best course of action is to focus on your relationship to pain right now. The better you master this one issue, the better you'll be prepared for whatever the future will bring.

To comprehend your relationship to pain in the present moment will require not only persistence, but also all the remaining strengths: mindfulness, concentration, and discernment.

The main role of persistence here lies in getting your motivation straight. We're often warned that when contemplating pain, you can't do it with the purpose of wanting the pain to go away. While this warning is true to a certain extent, it's often misunderstood, so we have to qualify it to get the best use out of it.

The warning is frequently justified on two grounds: (1) If you want the pain to go away, that counts as craving, which is the cause of suffering. Your desire will backfire on you and simply pile on more pain. (2) The duty with regard to pain is to comprehend it, not to make it go away. To comprehend it, you simply have to accept its presence as it appears—"There is pain"—and not muddy the waters by trying to do anything to alleviate the pain.

These two justifications, however, miss several important points and, in doing so, actually get in the way of properly comprehending the pain.

To begin with, as we've noted several times in this book, not all desires come under the truth of the origination of suffering. Some actually come under the truth of the path, in the factor of right effort, which is identical with the strength of persistence. An important part of right effort is generating the desire to abandon unskillful mental qualities and to develop skillful ones in their place. These desires are necessary for putting an end to suffering. So the proper attitude in dealing with pain is not to try to contemplate it without desire. It's to figure out which desires around the pain actually make the pain worse, and which will help in alleviating suffering.

The Canon in several places defines the skillful desire around pain in very clear terms: *You want to learn what to do so that the pain doesn't invade the mind and remain* (MN 36; SN 52:10). *Your ultimate goal should be the ability to experience pain but with a sense of being disjoined from it* (MN 140; SN 36:6).

To understand what would be required to gain a sense of being disjoined from pain, you need to consider why the mind would feel conjoined with it to begin with. And there are two reasons: One is that

you're doing something in the present moment that inadvertently contributes to the pain. The other is that even though you wouldn't want to cling to the pain, you've unconsciously conflated it with something that you *do* cling to as you or yours in body or mind.

So to become disjoined from pain, you have to figure out (1) what you might be doing to aggravate it and (2) what you might be clinging to that you feel has been invaded by the pain. When you figure out these issues to the point where you've stopped aggravating the pain and stopped clinging to something you've conflated with the pain, that's when you've comprehended the pain.

The skill of comprehending pain in this way requires patience and endurance, because you'll have to be willing to stay with pain long enough to observe it and your actions around it properly. But this is not the kind of endurance that simply puts up with whatever's arising. You need to be strategic in knowing which pains are worth enduring, and which ones are not.

A basic principle in the Buddha's teachings on endurance is that you don't weigh yourself down with unnecessary pain, and you don't reject pleasure in accordance with the Dhamma—although you're careful not to let yourself get infatuated with that pleasure (MN 101). When dealing with the pain of illness, this means that if you can discern what you're doing to aggravate your pains, it's perfectly legitimate to change what you're doing so as to stop the aggravation. You can also induce feelings of pleasure, based on skillful mental states like concentration, in place of the pain. This allows you more easily to contemplate where you still might be clinging.

To become conscious of what you're doing to aggravate the pain requires that you understand the causal factors surrounding it. And as you'll remember from Chapters One and Two, this is precisely what comprehension entails. In the Buddha's analysis, comprehending pain doesn't mean simply witnessing the fact of pain. It means correctly identifying it and developing dispassion around it. You develop that dispassion by teasing out the causal factors that give rise to it, so that you can develop dispassion for *them*. That's what allows you to become disjoined both from the causal factors and from the pain itself.

The first step in this direction lies in identifying exactly what is the pain that's affecting the mind. In the first noble truth, the Buddha defines mental pain as clinging to any of the five aggregates. Now, these moments of clinging don't come with little badges, saying, "Hi, I'm clinging." And they don't come with their boundaries clearly marked, showing where they begin and where, say, a physical pain associated with them ends. To develop your discernment, you first need to see the events of the mind as separate events, and not conflated or glommed together as they most commonly appear. Then you have to experiment to see exactly which of these events cause which other events.

This can't be done through passive observation. Instead, you have to single out and change the factors of the mind surrounding the pain, to see which changes can have an effect on how you experience pain and how far it invades the mind. This is similar to scientists trying to figure out, say, what will kill a certain type of bacteria. They don't simply observe the bacteria in its natural environment. They isolate it and then expose it to different substances until they find the substances with the desired effect.

The Buddha's teachings on dependent co-arising show where to look for the factors immediately surrounding pain. In those teachings, painful feelings often appear in clusters of physical and mental factors. Our language distinguishes clearly between physical and mental pain, but in actual experience, the line between physical and mental causes for pain is not all that clear. A pain may be caused by a physical imbalance in the body, but the way you perceive that pain may also have a strong effect on how intense it feels. Sometimes, in fact, the original physical cause for the pain may have long since disappeared, but the mental factors aggravating the sensation of pain can still keep it going.

So it's good to know the various clusters of factors that can surround pain, so that you can gain an idea of what you might try changing to test its effect on your experience of the pain.

The major factors are these: Under the factor of fabrication in dependent co-arising, feelings of pain are accompanied by the in-and-out breath, by directed thought and evaluation, and by perception. Under the factor of name and form, they're accompanied by the four primary

properties of the body—solidity, liquidity, energy, and warmth—and by the mental factors of perception, intention, acts of attention, and contact (which here may mean either contact among mental events or between mental events and physical events).

The fact that there's such a wide range of factors that might potentially be aggravating the pain is one of the reasons why pains can be so bewildering. But you can learn to rise to the challenge, seeing these factors as giving you many things to experiment with: If one approach doesn't work, you can always try others. We'll discuss some possible experiments below. Here it's important to note that because some of the physical factors—such as the breath—can be controlled through your intentions, you can approach a pain both from the physical and from the mental side. This means that there may be times when you change, say, your intentions around the pain, and the result is that the pain disappears. That would mean that the pain would come under the category of "unnecessary weight" and the ensuing pleasure would be in accordance with the Dhamma. When you stop aggravating the pain in this way, you've found one way to keep the pain from invading the mind and remaining.

So even though, in your efforts to comprehend your pains, it's not wise to give priority to the desire for the pain to go away, it is perfectly legitimate to want to see if you're doing anything that's making the pain unduly severe. If your investigations don't seem to lessen the pain, take it as a good sport and focus on trying to figure out the other way that pain may be invading the mind: through your assumption that the pain has invaded something you cling to. If your investigations *do* lessen the pain, you've not only lifted an immediate burden from the mind, but you've also developed your discernment into the causal factors that can lead to suffering.

The context for these investigations is supplied by the practice of right **mindfulness.** This is the practice that the Canon highlights as the ideal means for making sure that pain doesn't invade the mind and remain (SN 52:10). However, there's very little information in the Canon as to how to apply right mindfulness in the face of pain. The Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta (MN 10)—which describes the role of mindfulness and alertness

in the practice of right mindfulness—simply notes that you should try to note when pains are present and when they're absent, when they're pains of-the-flesh or pains not-of-the-flesh. However, because this discourse doesn't go into detail on the role of ardency in the practice of right mindfulness, it doesn't give any directions on what to do once you've noticed that pain is there.

Somewhat more helpful is the Ānāpānasati Sutta (MN 118), which does include the role of ardency in its discussion of mindfulness practice, and which lists four steps in its description of how the contemplation of feelings relates to the practice of keeping the breath in mind. These steps come in the second tetrad in the Buddha's instructions. As you may remember from Chapter Three, the four steps in that tetrad are these: breathing in and out sensitive to rapture or refreshment, breathing in and out sensitive to pleasure, breathing in and out sensitive to mental fabrication, and breathing in and out calming mental fabrication. These steps, in the context of the discourse, refer to the stages in getting the mind to settle into deeper and deeper stages of concentration. But the teachings of the Thai forest masters show that these steps can also be applied to the contemplation of the pain of illness as well.

The first two steps receive a great deal of attention from Ajaan Lee. His instructions for breath meditation focus on the breath energies throughout the body that accompany the in-and-out breath, and he shows how these energies can be very useful in exploring what you're doing that may be contributing to physical pain.

The first step he recommends, when there's a pain in the body, is not to focus attention directly on the pain, but instead to focus on a part of the body that you can make comfortable by the way you breathe and by the way you allow the breath energies to flow freely through that area. Sometimes the best place to focus is in a part of the body immediately opposite to the pain: For example, if the pain is in a spot on the right side of the body, you focus on the corresponding spot on the left. If it's in the back, you focus in front. Or you may find that the pain in one part of the body is related to an energy blockage in another, more remote part of the body: In my own experience, I've had migraines that were alleviated when I focused on clearing up energy blockages in my lower back.

Eventually, you'll want to be able to focus directly on the pain itself, but Ajaan Lee's first step in approaching pain accomplishes three things: (1) It gives you a beachhead to which you can retreat if you find that the pain becomes overwhelming. (2) It gives the mind a solid basis in **concentration,** which can provide a sense of nourishment for the work of contemplating the pain. (3) It gives you practice in learning how to focus on a part of the body without tensing up that part of the body. This will be an especially useful lesson in learning how to pay direct attention to pain without aggravating it.

Working with breath in this way also involves **discernment,** as you explore the three types of fabrication in relationship to the pain. You start with bodily fabrication—the rhythm and texture of how you breathe in and out—and also bring in verbal fabrication: talking to yourself about how to make the breath comfortable, how to maintain that sense of comfort once it's there, and how to spread it through the parts of the body that are receptive to that good energy.

This, of course, also involves mental fabrication in terms of the perceptions you use to experiment with the breath energies in different parts of the body. Ajaan Lee also recommends two perceptions to help in this step in dealing with pain: Think of the body as a house with a few rotten floorboards. If you're going to sit or lie down on the floor, choose a spot where the boards aren't rotten. Or think of it as a mango with a rotten spot: Leave the rotten spot to the worms; you eat the good part remaining.

Then, when the breath is solidly comfortable and the mind feels ready, drop those two images. Now think of spreading the good breath energy through the pain. For example, if there's a pain in your knee, think of the good energy going down the leg through the knee and out the tips of the toes. Don't let there be a perception of the pain blocking the breath. Remind yourself that breath is energy, and energy can go through anything. I've found it helpful to think of the area of the body that's in pain as being composed of atoms, and atoms are mainly space, so the breath can penetrate easily through the space. The perception of the pain as a blockage is actually conflating the pain with the solidity of

the body. As long as you cling to the body, that would be a recipe for allowing the pain to invade the mind and remain.

There are also other questions you can ask about the pain and its relationship to perception at this stage. Do you perceive the pain as being blocked off from the breath? Are you using the parts of the body that are in pain to do the breathing? If so, think of those parts relaxing, and allow other parts of the body to do the work of breathing instead. You can also experiment with the perception of having the breath go straight into the pain when it first enters the body. See what that does to your experience of pain.

Sometimes, when you follow this step, the pain will go away or will be greatly reduced. Even if it doesn't, you will have established an important relationship vis-à-vis the pain: You can be proactive in dealing with it. You're not afraid of it. You're not the passive victim. When you're proactive, you're not a stationary target of the pain, so it can't hit you so easily. At the same time, by learning to question your perceptions around the breath and the pain, you've learned how arbitrary some of your original perceptions were. By sensitizing you to the role of perception—mental fabrication—around the pain as you try to find perceptions that help to alleviate the pain, this insight makes some beginning forays into the third and fourth steps in contemplating pain.

These are the steps to which Ajaan Maha Boowa devotes a great deal of attention. He recommends a wide range of questions that you can ask yourself about how you perceive pain. For instance, do you perceive the pain as being the same thing as the part of the body that's in pain? If the pain is in the knee, do you see the pain and the knee as being the same thing? This question may seem strange, but remember: We may have picked up some strange ideas about pain when we were children, and often these ideas are still lurking in our subconscious. The only way to dig them out is to ask questions like this.

If the pain and the part of the body seem to be one, remind yourself that your experience of the body is made up of the four properties of earth, water, wind, and fire, but the pain is something else. The pain may seem solid or hot, but remind yourself that solidity and heat are properties of the body that you've conflated with the pain. Can you

perceive the pain as being separate from the solidity or the heat? To counteract the perception of the solidity of pain, you can try to perceive it as distinct moments, arising and passing away in quick succession.

A related question is: Does the pain have a shape? If you perceive it as having a shape, again you've glommed the pain together with a property of the body.

Similarly, you can ask yourself if there are pains in several parts of the body that seem to be connected with lines of tension. This is actually another way of giving the pains a shape, and of conflating the pains with the body. So ask yourself if you can see the pains as separate from one another. Or try to counteract the perception of a connection with an alternative perception: You have a knife that you can use to cut any connections as soon as they appear.

Another question: Do you perceive the pain as having an intention to hurt you? Remind yourself that pain is not a conscious agent. It has no intentions at all. It's just an event that depends on other events. If you perceive it as having an intention to hurt you, you're creating a sense of self around the perception of being the target of malicious intent. When dropping the perception of its intention, you can also ask yourself why you're identifying yourself as the target.

Another question: Where is the most intense point of pain? If you look carefully, you'll see that it moves around. Try chasing it down. This line of questioning not only helps to loosen up any fixed perceptions you might have around the pain, but it also gives you practice in being courageous in the face of pain. Instead of trying to run away from it, you run toward it—and it'll run away from you. This exercise also helps to guarantee that in your contemplation of pain, you haven't allowed the desire for it to go away to slip into first place in your motivation. You're hunting it down to understand it.

In addition to applying these questions and perceptions—verbal and mental fabrications—to your own pains, you'll also need to come up with some questions of your own around your perception of pain to see what helps you to detect perceptions you may not have noticed and to loosen them up.

A question I've found helpful, once you can perceive the pain as occurring in discrete moments, is to ask yourself: When the moments of pain arise, are they coming at you or going away from you? See if you can hold in mind the perception that they're going away, going away. It's like riding in a train in a seat with your back to the engine. As the train runs along the track and you look out the window, you'll see that whatever comes into the range of your awareness in the landscape outside is already going away from you as soon as you see it. This perception helps to get rid of the perception that the pain is aimed at you. This also helps to detect and loosen up any tendency you have to cling to the perception of yourself as a target.

When you loosen up and drop your perceptions around the pain, either the pain will go away—sometimes in some very uncanny ways—or you'll arrive at a state of mind where you sense that the pain can still be there, but your awareness feels separate from it. The body is one thing, the pain is another, your awareness is yet another. They're in the same place, but they're separate, just like the radio waves transmitted from different stations going through the air all around you. They're all in the same place, but at different frequencies. If you have a radio that can distinguish the frequencies, you can tune into the different frequencies without having to move the radio to one place for one frequency, or to another for another one.

Ajaan Maha Boowa notes that a strategy for dealing with pain that works today may not work with a different pain tomorrow. And given what the Buddha teaches about the many factors surrounding pain, it's easy to see why. One day a pain may invade the mind when you conflate it with one aggregate—form, say, or a particular perception—and on the next day, another pain may invade the mind when you've conflated it with another one.

If you compare the ajaans' strategies with the various causal clusters described in dependent co-arising, you'll see that they deal not only with the issue of perception, under the factor of fabrication, but also with the issues of attention and intention under name in name and form. Attention determines not only where in the body you focus your interest, but also which questions you focus on asking and answering.

Intention, of course, deals with your reasons for contemplating the pain. As noted above, the quest not to have the pain invade the mind can include within it the desire to see the pain go away, but it can't allow that desire to be prominent. For your contemplation to get results, the desire to understand the pain always has to come first.

When you understand these exercises in this way, it gives you an idea of the range of different questions you might try in your own investigation of pain to develop dispassion for the two reasons why pain could invade your mind and remain: what you're doing to aggravate the pain, and what you're clinging to that you've conflated with the pain. When you understand these two issues, you've gone a long way in unraveling the problem of suffering.

The important point is that you don't make illness an excuse for not taking a proactive approach to understanding pain. I noted above that both Ajaan Fuang and Ajaan Suwat gained important insights into pain —and into the mind—while contemplating pain while they were sick. Many other people in the Forest tradition, ordained and not, have also reported similar results. If they can do it, so can you.

Which means that it's possible, even when ill, to accomplish great things.

Heedfulness: the path to the deathless.
Heedlessness: the path to death.
The heedful do not die.
The heedless are as if
already dead. — Dhp 21

Not up in the air,
nor in the middle of the sea,
nor going into a cleft in the mountains
—nowhere on earth—
is a spot to be found
where you could stay & escape
your evil deed.

Not up in the air,
nor in the middle of the sea,
nor going into a cleft in the mountains
—nowhere on earth—
is a spot to be found
where you could stay & not succumb
to death. — Dhp 127–128

Then King Pasenadi Kosala went to the Blessed One in the middle of the day and, on arrival, having bowed down to him, sat to one side. As he was sitting there, the Blessed One said to him: "Well now, great king, where are you coming from in the middle of the day?"

"Just now, lord, I was engaged in the sort of royal affairs typical of head-anointed noble-warrior kings intoxicated with the intoxication of sovereignty,

obsessed by greed for sensuality, who have attained stable control in their country, and who rule having conquered a great sphere of territory on earth."

"What do you think, great king? Suppose a man, trustworthy & reliable, were to come to you from the east. On arrival he would say to you, 'May it please your majesty to know, I have come from the east. There I saw a great mountain, as high as the clouds, coming this way, crushing all living beings (in its path). Do whatever you think should be done.' Then a second man, trustworthy & reliable, were to come to you from the west… Then a third man, trustworthy & reliable, were to come to you from the north… Then a fourth man, trustworthy & reliable, were to come to you from the south. On arrival he would say to you, 'May it please your majesty to know, I have come from the south. There I saw a great mountain, as high as the clouds, coming this way, crushing all living beings. Do whatever you think should be done.' If, your majesty, such a great peril should arise, such a terrible destruction of human life—the human state being so hard to obtain—what should be done?"

"If, lord, such a great peril should arise, such a terrible destruction of human life—the human state being so hard to obtain—what else should be done but Dhamma-conduct, right conduct, skillful deeds, meritorious deeds?"

"I inform you, great king, I announce to you, great king: Aging & death are rolling in on you. When aging & death are rolling in on you, what should be done?"

"As aging & death are rolling in on me, lord, what else should be done but Dhamma-conduct, right

conduct, skillful deeds, meritorious deeds?" — SN 3:25

King Koravya: "Now, in this royal court, Master Raṭṭhapāla, there is a great deal of gold & silver stashed away underground & in attic vaults. And yet you say, 'The world is without ownership. One has to pass on, leaving everything behind.' How is the meaning of this statement to be understood?"

"What do you think, great king? As you now enjoy yourself endowed & replete with the pleasures of the five senses, can you say, 'Even in the afterlife I will enjoy myself in the same way, endowed & replete with the very same pleasures of the five senses'? Or will this wealth fall to others, while you pass on in accordance with your kamma?"

"Oh, no, Master Raṭṭhapāla, I can't say, 'Even in the afterlife I will enjoy myself in the same way, endowed & replete with the very same pleasures of the five senses.' This wealth will fall to others, while I pass on in accordance with my kamma."

"It was in reference to this, great king, that the Blessed One who knows & sees, worthy & rightly self-awakened, said: 'The world is without ownership. One has to pass on, leaving everything behind.' Having known & seen & heard this, I went forth from the home life into homelessness." …

"Now, Master Raṭṭhapāla, you say, 'The world is insufficient, insatiable, a slave to craving.' How is the meaning of this statement to be understood?"

"What do you think, great king? Do you now rule over the prosperous country of Kuru?"

"That is so, Master Raṭṭhapāla. I rule over the prosperous country of Kuru."

"What do you think, great king? Suppose a trustworthy, reliable man were to come to you from the east. On arrival he would say to you, 'May it please your majesty to know, I have come from the east. There I saw a great country, powerful & prosperous, populous & crowded with people. Plenty are the elephant troops there, plenty the cavalry troops, chariot troops, & infantry troops. Plenty is the ivory-work there, plenty the gold & silver, both worked & unworked. Plenty are the women for the taking. It is possible, with the forces you now have, to conquer it. Conquer it, great king!' What would you do?"

"Having conquered it, Master Raṭṭhapāla, I would rule over it."

"Now what do you think, great king? Suppose a trustworthy, reliable man were to come to you from the west… the north… the south… the other side of the ocean. On arrival he would say to you, 'May it please your majesty to know, I have come from the other side of the ocean. There I saw a great country, powerful & prosperous, populous & crowded with people. Plenty are the elephant troops there, plenty the cavalry troops, chariot troops, & infantry troops. Plenty is the ivory-work there, plenty the gold & silver, both worked & unworked. Plenty are the women for the taking. It is possible, with the forces you now have, to conquer it. Conquer it, great king!' What would you do?"

"Having conquered it, Master Raṭṭhapāla, I would rule over it, too."

"It was in reference to this, great king, that the Blessed One who knows & sees, worthy & rightly self-awakened, said: 'The world is insufficient, insatiable, a slave to craving.'" — MN 82

The Buddha: "Vaccha, I designate the rebirth of one who has sustenance, and not of one without sustenance. Just as a fire burns with sustenance and not without sustenance, even so I designate the rebirth of one who has sustenance and not of one without sustenance."

"But, Master Gotama, at the moment a flame is being swept on by the wind and goes a far distance, what do you designate as its sustenance then?"

"Vaccha, when a flame is being swept on by the wind and goes a far distance, I designate it as wind-sustained, for the wind is its sustenance at that time."

"And at the moment when a being sets this body aside and is not yet reborn in another body, Master Gotama, what do you designate as its sustenance then?"

"Vaccha, when a being sets this body aside and is not yet reborn in another body, I designate it as craving-sustained, for craving is its sustenance at that time." — SN 44:9

Encircled with craving,
people hop round & around
like a rabbit caught in a snare.
Tied with fetters & bonds
they go on to suffering,
again & again, for long. — Dhp 342

There's no river like craving. — Dhp 251

When a person lives heedlessly,
his craving grows like a creeping vine.
He runs now here
& now there,
as if looking for fruit:
a monkey in the forest. — Dhp 334

He whose 36 streams,
flowing to what is appealing, are strong:
The currents—resolves based on passion—
carry him, of base views, away.

They flow every which way, the streams,
but the sprouted creeper stays
in place.
Now, seeing that the creeper's arisen,
cut through its root
with discernment. — Dhp 339–340

You shouldn't chase after the past
or place expectations on the future.
What is past
is left behind.
The future
is as yet unreached.
Whatever quality is present
you clearly see right there,
right there.
Not taken in,
unshaken,
that's how you develop the heart.

Ardently doing
what should be done today,
for—who knows?— tomorrow

death.
There is no bargaining
with Mortality & his mighty horde.

Whoever lives thus ardently,
relentlessly
both day & night,
has truly had an auspicious day:
So says the Peaceful Sage. — MN 131

I have heard that on one occasion the Blessed One was staying near Sāvatthī at the Eastern Gatehouse. There he addressed Ven. Sāriputta: "Sāriputta, do you take it on conviction that the faculty of conviction, when developed & pursued, gains a footing in the deathless, has the deathless as its final end & consummation? Do you take it on conviction that the faculty of persistence… mindfulness… concentration… discernment, when developed & pursued, gains a footing in the deathless, has the deathless as its final end & consummation?"

"Lord, it's not that I take it on conviction in the Blessed One that the faculty of conviction… persistence… mindfulness… concentration… discernment, when developed & pursued, gains a footing in the deathless, has the deathless as its final end & consummation.

"Those who have not known, seen, penetrated, realized, or attained it by means of discernment would have to take it on conviction in others that the faculty of conviction… persistence… mindfulness… concentration… discernment, when developed & pursued, gains a footing in the deathless, has the deathless as its final end & consummation; whereas those who have known, seen, penetrated, realized, &

attained it by means of discernment would have no doubt or uncertainty that the faculty of conviction… persistence… mindfulness… concentration… discernment, when developed & pursued, gains a footing in the deathless, has the deathless as its final end & consummation.

"And as for me, I have known, seen, penetrated, realized, & attained it by means of discernment. I have no doubt or uncertainty that the faculty of conviction… persistence… mindfulness… concentration… discernment, when developed & pursued, gains a footing in the deathless, has the deathless as its final end & consummation."

"Excellent, Sāriputta. Excellent." — SN 48:44

CHAPTER SIX

Mindfulness of Death

Unlike aging and illness, which have one deva messenger apiece, death has three. The first, of course, is a corpse. Its message is the simple fact of death: Everyone born is going to die. This means *you're* going to die—and your death could happen at any time. Death is everywhere and always. There are times in the lives of individuals and societies where this message is hidden, but others where it's all too obvious.

Still, this message, on its own, could be interpreted in any number of ways. One popular response is the old drinking-song refrain, "Eat, drink, and be merry, for tomorrow we may die." But that's not the message the devas want to convey. Thus the need for the remaining two messengers: Their purpose is not just to get you to think about death, but to give you an idea of *how* to think about death in the most fruitful way.

The first of the two is a newborn infant, lying helpless on its back. The message here is that, just like the infant, you haven't gone beyond being reborn—and rebirth will at first leave you absolutely helpless. The remaining messenger is a criminal undergoing torture and punishment. Here the message is that any misdeeds you do in this lifetime could be punished in the next.

The proper response to these messages, taken together, is to learn not to look down on those who are dying or dead, for they're simply showing you your own fate. At the same time, you have to learn to be heedful in your actions so that, at the very least, you have a refuge of good kamma to protect you when you die and face the possibility of rebirth: a refuge that will make sure that there will be help when you're helpless, and that no punishments await you. At best, you want to reach the attainment that's not affected by death, and that escapes rebirth entirely.

In this way, these three deva messengers bring words of encouragement: It is possible, in the face of death, to act in such a way that your actions will be meaningful, and you can actually come out

victorious. So these messengers carry a more optimistic and audacious message than is usually recognized.

However, of all the deva messengers, these are the ones whose messages we tend most to resist. For all of us, when we see a corpse, the thought of our own death inspires fear. For someone who is not yet committed to the truths of kamma and rebirth, the other two messengers don't clearly carry a message meant for us or necessarily connected with death at all. Will death be followed by rebirth? We don't know. Even if it is, do our actions have any effect on how we're reborn? That, too, we don't know. Just as the mere thought of death inspires fear, so does the idea of being reborn totally helpless—at the mercy of strangers, completely separated from those we have loved and those who have loved us—or of possibly being punished after death for our mistakes in this life.

Because of these fears, many people prefer to leave these issues unresolved, giving no thought to the issue of death at all. This was as true in the Buddha's time as it is today. These fears, plus the uncertainty that surrounds them, explain the fact, noted in the Introduction, that many people even in Buddhist circles claim that we should simply focus on finding joy in the present moment, and leave the questions surrounding death unresolved as irrelevant to our quest for peace in the here and now.

But as we also noted in the Introduction, even if you leave these questions unresolved, they can never really be irrelevant. Everyone who wants a satisfying life needs a clearly articulated working hypothesis for deciding every day which actions are worth doing and which actions are not. Part of that hypothesis requires answers to these questions: Should you take the teachings on kamma and rebirth into account in your calculations? Or should you assume that death is annihilation? If you don't have clear, consistent answers for these questions, your calculations on what to do and what not to do tend to take place in a murky part of the mind that sometimes wants its actions to have long-term consequences, and sometimes doesn't. In other words, you justify your choices by the mood of the moment.

This is a recipe for a muddled life that accomplishes nothing. It's also a recipe for heedlessness. And it was to counteract this heedlessness that the Buddha, when choosing which aspects of his awakening to include in the handful of leaves he taught to others, saw fit to include the teachings on kamma and rebirth. When you believe that death is followed by rebirth and that rebirth is determined by your actions, you're more likely to act, speak, and think consistently in a heedful manner. You'll treat all your actions—and all other beings—with care and respect.

To counteract our strong fears around death, and the heedlessness that comes when we refuse to think about these issues, the Buddha recommended the meditation practice called mindfulness of death *(maraṇassati)*. One of the ironies of modern Buddhism is that even though some present-day Dhamma teachers focus attention on the present moment as a way of avoiding the issue of death, the Buddha taught present-moment awareness precisely *because* of death. The present moment is where mindfulness of death focuses your attention. After all, death could come at any time, so you have to pay attention to what needs to be done right now to prepare for it. Instead of enjoying the present moment as an end in itself, you look for opportunities to perform your duties with regard to the four noble truths while you still have the time and the opportunity here and now.

There's a passage in the Canon (AN 6:20) where the Buddha recommends reminding yourself every evening, at sunset, that you could easily die tonight. This thought should motivate you to inspect your mind to see if there are any unskillful qualities in it that would create an obstruction for you if you were to die before sunrise. If there are, then "just as when a person whose turban or head was on fire would put forth extra desire, effort, diligence, endeavor, relentlessness, mindfulness, and alertness to put out the fire on his turban or head," you should bring the same intensity of effort to abandon those unskillful qualities. If there are no such qualities, then take joy in that fact and keep on training. In other words, enjoy the pleasures of an alert, concentrated mind, but stay heedful even then.

Then the Buddha recommends that you reflect in the similar way every day at dawn.

There's another passage (AN 6:19) where he states that thinking about death even twice a day like this is still heedless. The truly heedful attitude toward death is to focus constantly on the immediate present with the thought, "O, that I might live for the interval that it takes to swallow having chewed up one morsel of food… (or) for the interval that it takes to breathe out after breathing in, or to breathe in after breathing out, that I might attend to the Blessed One's instructions. I would have accomplished a great deal."

Now, as you'll notice, mindfulness of death is not simply a matter of constantly thinking, "Death, death, death, I'm going to die, die, die." Its primary focus is on what needs to be done here and now to prepare for death, keeping in mind the Buddha's analysis of what happens as death arrives. So instead of fostering fear and depression, this practice of mindfulness is meant to build on your confidence that there are things you can usefully do to prepare.

This practice thus requires conviction in the Buddha's teachings on kamma, rebirth, and the possibility of the deathless. In fact, to get the most out of mindfulness of death, you have to develop all seven of the strengths we've been discussing with regard to aging and illness: conviction, shame, compunction, persistence, mindfulness, concentration, and discernment. It's through cultivating these strengths that, as the Buddha said, mindfulness of death can lead to the deathless (AN 6:20).

Conviction

Conviction as a strength in the face of death is primarily focused on assuming the fact of rebirth, and the complex ways in which your actions play a role in determining where—or whether—you'll be reborn. On the one hand, your skillful and unskillful actions throughout life create good and bad opportunities for taking rebirth. On the other, your views and cravings at the moment of death will determine which of those opportunities you'll actually take. If you've achieved at least stream-entry, the first level of awakening, then you can be assured that you won't choose any opportunities lower than the human realm. If you've achieved full awakening, you won't take rebirth at all. Instead, you'll be

totally unbound. But if you haven't achieved any level of awakening, you'll have to train yourself to act in such a way that you don't leave openings for rebirth in the lower realms, and so that you're not waylaid by random cravings when the body is weakened by aging, or the mind is pained by illness and still prey to fear of death.

Because we've already discussed, in Chapter One, how past and present kamma will play a role at the moment of death, there's no need to repeat that discussion here. As for the types of action that create openings for good rebirths, we'll cover those under the strength of persistence. There we'll also discuss the mental skills that prevent mental hindrances from overcoming the mind when death occurs.

Here we'll focus attention on the Buddha's teachings as to which actions can create which possible openings for rebirth when you're dying.

Rebirth can occur on many levels. Although the discourses contain no complete map of the many individual destinations for rebirth in the cosmos, they do provide several sketches of the major levels, giving a general idea of where your actions, both past and present, can take you.

The Buddhist cosmos is many times vaster, both in terms of space and time, than the physical cosmos generally accepted by modern science. In terms of space, the physical universe as we know it contains only two of the five major levels of rebirth: rebirth as a human being or as a common animal. On a higher plane in the Buddhist cosmos are the worlds of the devas: celestial and terrestrial beings who, together with their worlds, are generally invisible to the human eye, and who experience much less pain and suffering than human beings do.

Devas exist on many levels. The highest are the brahmās, who experience the bliss and equanimity of the various levels of jhāna and the formless levels of concentration. Lower than these are the celestial devas of sensuality, and lower than those are the devas and other spirits who inhabit trees and other locations on Earth. These are said to be "generally" invisible to the human eye because there are cases where people develop powers in their concentration that enable them to see devas—in some instances, these powers carry over from concentration practiced in a previous lifetime—and there are other cases where devas make themselves visible even to people without those powers.

The Canon devotes several discourses to the problem of brahmās who, because of their immensely long life span, think they've achieved liberation from death and rebirth. As a result, they become heedless, thinking that there's nothing more for them to do to achieve unchanging bliss. But even though they may have done many skillful actions in body, speech, and mind to achieve their high level of rebirth, those actions give only temporary results, which means that even the longest-lived brahmā position is temporary as well. A heedless brahmā who hasn't reached any of the levels of awakening could easily be reborn even in the lowest realms.

Lower than the human level, but higher than the level of common animals, is the realm of the hungry ghosts. These are beings who live invisibly in the space of the human world, feeding off the merit dedicated to them by human beings, but suffering in various ways from misdeeds done when they were human. Except for one gruesome series of passages (SN 19), the early discourses say very little about them. Examples from that series include a former hunter whose hair was like knives, with the knives piercing his body again and again. Another is a former adulteress who was being pursued by vultures and crows who tore at her flesh. Later sections of the Canon, however, devote whole collections of poems to describing the lives of individual hungry ghosts in great detail, saying that even though they tend to suffer more than human beings, some of them have their sporadic pleasures and can understand human speech. This may be why the discourses rank them above common animals.

Lower than the common animals are the levels of the invisible hells. As with life on all levels, including the levels of heavenly beings, life in these hells is temporary. When a person reborn in hell has suffered the results of past bad kamma, he or she can take rebirth on a higher level. It's worth noting that although the discourses describe the realms of the devas in only sketchy terms, they go into great detail on the punishments of hell—much more extreme than those suffered by hungry ghosts—probably as a way of inducing compunction in those who hear or read those teachings.

In addition to these five major levels of rebirth, the Canon also mentions the existence of beings who don't fit neatly into any of the five levels. Examples include nāgas, magical serpents who are technically common animals, but who have psychic powers and can assume human form and converse with human beings at will; and asuras, deva-like beings, generally fierce, who were expelled from the heavens and who live in scattered locations. It may be because of beings like this that the Buddha, as portrayed in the discourses, never made any attempt to list all the possible levels of rebirth. The list would have been far too long

One discourse (MN 12) gives similes for the five major levels: The deva realm is like a palace compound with a luxurious bed. The human realm is like a tree growing on even ground with lush foliage providing dense shade. The realm of the hungry ghosts is like a tree growing on uneven ground providing spotty shade. The realm of common animals is like a deep cesspool. Hell is like a deep pit of glowing embers so hot they that they emit neither flame nor smoke.

Rebirth in the lower realms, from hungry ghosts on down, comes from breaking the five precepts—against killing, stealing, engaging in illicit sex, telling lies, and taking intoxicants—and engaging in wrong speech, which in addition to lying includes divisive speech, abusive speech, and idle chatter. It's not inevitable, though, that these misdeeds always result in such a miserable rebirth.

We've already noted the complexity of kamma, in that someone who has performed these misdeeds can be saved from the lower realms by earlier or later good behavior, or by adopting right view at the moment of death. But even if such a person manages to be reborn on the human level, he or she will suffer the consequences of those misdeeds there: being subject, say, to a shortened life from having killed living beings in a previous life. But here again, if that person practices the Dhamma in the new life—in particular, training the mind in the brahmavihāras, training in virtue and discernment, and training the mind not to be overcome by either feelings of pleasure or feelings of pain—then the results of past bad actions will have a much weaker impact on the mind.

Just as the Buddhist cosmos is more extensive in space than the known Western cosmos, so is it vastly more extensive in time. The

discourses speak of cosmos followed by cosmos, going through mind-boggling long periods of expansion and then contraction. Think of how long the stars and galactic clouds of our current cosmos have been in existence. That's just part of one cycle of expansion and contraction. When the Buddha was describing people with memories of past lives, he classed the ability to remember back 40 such cycles of expansion and contraction as short. As he also said, the beginning point for the whole process is inconceivable. Not just unknowable, inconceivable.

And we've been wandering through repeated deaths and rebirths through all that time—which means that we've been doing it many times longer than the lifespan of the oldest galaxies in our cosmos. Think of that the next time you see a picture of a galaxy billions of light-years away.

This is a useful perception to keep in mind, and for several reasons. First, belief in the principle of rebirth helps to counteract one common reason for fearing death: the fear that death means total annihilation. The Buddha affirms that as long as there's still craving in the mind, you'll continue to have opportunities to pursue happiness even after death. In other words, if you want to be reborn, you will. At the same time, if you're afraid that death will separate you from those you love and those who love you, the Buddha offers reassurance that loved ones who want to meet again after death will do so if they develop, in common, four qualities: conviction, virtue, generosity, and discernment.

Still, repeated rebirth is at best an iffy proposition. To begin with, even if you *don't* want to be reborn, you'll still have to take rebirth as long as there is ignorance and craving in the mind. And as for hoping to meet again with your kin and loved ones, how many of them can be relied on to develop right view and maintain it all the way through death? The number of human beings reborn in at least the human realm—to say nothing of the higher realms—is infinitely small when compared to the number reborn in the lower realms. We love our loved ones because of their goodness, but the goodness of individuals can be a fickle thing. Rather than focusing on the goodness of particular individuals as you face death, you'd be safer to focus on goodness itself.

Think back on the Buddha on the night of his awakening. He was able to attain release by focusing not on the beings who were doing actions, but on the actions—and their results—themselves. In a similar way, you're much safer in hoping to rely on your own good deeds, so that you'll meet with goodness wherever you go. Kinship with those deeds is a more secure refuge than kinship with individual people, no matter how loving or kind. As the Dhammapada puts it:

> *A man long absent*
> *comes home safe from afar.*
> *His kin, his friends, his companions,*
> *delight in his return.*
>
> *In just the same way,*
> *when you've done good*
> *& gone from this world*
> *to the world beyond,*
> *your good deeds receive you—*
> *as kin, someone dear*
> *come home.* — Dhp 219–220

Conviction in this principle motivates you to look inward to examine your friendship with the qualities of your mind. As the Buddha noted, we tend to go around with craving as our companion. We'd do better to become companions with the principle of heedfulness and the good deeds it will inspire us to do.

Yet even the refuge offered by this relationship is not totally secure. Your good deeds can find expression in your meeting with new loving people in the next life, but then those relationships, too, will end. And when you think in terms of the Buddha's deep sense of time, you have to realize that these relationships have been formed and dissolved so many times that it would be hard in this lifetime to meet with someone who had not, at some point in that long stretch of time, been your mother, your father, your sister, your brother, your daughter, or your son (SN 15:14–19). Think about that the next time you walk along a crowded street. People who were once your closest relatives—people over whose death you shed more tears than there is water in the ocean (SN 15:3)—

are now random faces in the crowd. Think about *that* the next time you see the ocean. How many more times do you want to establish new relationships that will end in more oceans of tears?

This thought, as the Buddha noted, should be enough to give rise to dispassion for the prospect of rebirth, and for a desire instead to gain total release.

Shame

When you're convinced of the truth of the Buddha's teachings, you can't help but be impressed by the compassion with which he made them available. After all, on gaining awakening, he was indebted to no one. He could have lived out his life simply enjoying the bliss of release. Instead, he went to all the trouble of formulating the Dhamma and Vinaya, teaching and training people from all walks of life for 45 years. From this thought, it should be easy to develop a sense of shame around the idea of not taking advantage of his teachings on how to understand and prepare for aging, illness, and particularly death. He has charted the way, and it would be a shame to throw away the chart.

But as the texts make clear, the facts of aging, illness, and death are all around us in the human realm. People in general, whether Buddhist or not, should be ashamed of being heedless when it's so obvious that they have to prepare for these facts of life.

This is the point of the passage in the Canon that tells of the five deva messengers that we've been citing in the course of this book. The story goes that a human being who has died is brought before Yama, the king of the dead. Yama notes that this person has been heedless in his behavior throughout life, so he questions him: Didn't you see the five deva messengers? The man answers that he saw them, but didn't regard them as messengers. Yama then shames him for being so blind as to not get the obvious message: "I'd better do good in body, speech, and mind" (MN 130).

The Canon also treats heedlessness as shameful in a more indirect way, in the story of King Koravya, from which we've also been quoting in the course of this book. The king visits a young monk, Ven. Raṭṭhapāla,

and asks him why he had ordained, given that he had suffered no loss in terms of relatives, health, or wealth. Raṭṭhapāla answers with four Dhamma summaries concerning aging, illness, death, and the power of craving. He gets the king to reflect in a poignant way on the fact that he, too, is subject to aging, illness, and death.

Then Raṭṭhapāla gets to the fourth Dhamma summary. He asks the king if, had he the chance, he would still want to conquer other kingdoms, even one on the other side of the ocean. The king, without hesitating, responds that yes, of course he would. This, in spite of the fact that he is old and has just reflected on the fact that he can't take anything with him aside from his kamma when he dies. Raṭṭhapāla says nothing to shame the king, but the receptive reader is made to reflect on him or herself, seeing that to give in so blindly to the power of craving would clearly be something to be ashamed of (MN 82).

Two other cases from the Canon show the positive power of shame around the issue of rebirth. They deal with monks, but they're applicable to serious lay practitioners as well. In both cases, the monks turn their backs on the higher goal of release, and practice for the sake of being reborn as devas to enjoy the sensual pleasures of heaven. AN 7:47 calls this aspiration a "fetter of sexuality," from which a monk should try to free himself. So monks who continue to aspire to that goal are fair game for criticism.

In the first of the two cases (DN 20), a devout Buddhist laywoman is reborn as a deva in the heaven of the Thirty-three, one of the sensual levels of heaven, but one in which it is possible to continue practicing the Dhamma. She sees three gandhabbas, servants of the devas on that level, who were formerly monks, indulging heedlessly in sensual pleasures. According to the discourses, gandhabbas are obsessed with music and sex, so she goes to shame them: "Why on earth didn't you exert yourselves in the Blessed One's teachings? I, formerly a woman who—inspired by the Buddha, Dhamma, and Saṅgha, having been perfect in terms of the precepts—have been reborn… as a son of the king of the devas.… It's a sad sight to see our fellows in the Dhamma reborn in the inferior state of gandhabbas!" Two of the gandhabbas, stung with shame, go off to practice meditation and are reborn in the higher state of

Brahmā's retinue—a non-sensual level of heaven. The other gandhabba, though, is immune to shame and stays stuck where he is.

The other case (Ud 3:2) is more famous. Ven. Nanda, the Buddha's half-brother, wants to disrobe and return to the woman he left behind when he ordained. The Buddha learns of this and so takes Nanda up to the heaven of the Thirty-three, where he sees the king of the devas waited on by 500 dove-footed nymphs. The Buddha asks him: Which is lovelier, the woman he left behind or the 500 dove-footed nymphs? Nanda replies that, compared to the nymphs, the woman he left behind looks like a "cauterized monkey with its ears and nose cut off." So the Buddha promises Nanda that if he stays on as a monk, he'll get 500 dove-footed nymphs after death.

Nanda agrees to stay ordained on that condition, and word gets out. The other monks, learning of the deal, call him a hired hand, someone who has been bought off with nymphs. Ashamed, Nanda goes off to practice in earnest, and eventually gains full awakening. He then goes to the Buddha and releases him from his promise. He has no desire for nymphs anymore.

Now, this is not to say that it's wrong to aim at rebirth on the heavenly planes. After all, the Canon contains many examples of devas and brahmās who practice the Dhamma and can gain any of the levels of awakening. What's shameful is aiming at the higher levels simply for the sake of their sensual pleasures. To aim at the higher levels in hopes of continuing to practice the Dhamma, if you can't complete your practice here, is not shameful at all.

There's a more general case involving the skillful use of shame at the approach of death, and that relates to a custom among the monks of the Buddha's time. Normally, it was considered bad form for a monk to tell his fellows about his superior human attainments: the jhānas, the cognitive powers based on them, or the noble attainments of awakening. However, when a monk was dying, his fellows were to ask him if he had any such attainment and, if so, to focus his mind there. As a result, the Buddha recommended, as a frequent practice beforehand, that each monk reflect: "Have I attained a superior human attainment, a truly noble distinction of knowledge and vision, such that—when my

companions in the holy life question me in the last days of my life—I won't feel abashed? (AN 10:48)" In other words, if a monk reflecting in this way hadn't yet gained such an attainment, then to avoid feeling ashamed at the hour of death, he should practice to do so now.

These are a few examples of how shame can play a positive role in getting people to practice in earnest in preparation for death so as to get the most out of the Buddha's teachings on kamma, rebirth, and release. Ideally, you don't want others to have to shame you in these ways. But there's nothing wrong with developing an inner sense of shame over the idea of behaving heedlessly when the facts of aging, illness, and death surround you on all sides. This healthy sense of shame can motivate you to become heedful—and when you do become heedful, the Canon tells us, you brighten the world like a moon released from a cloud (Dhp 172).

Compunction

Many of the Buddha's teachings for approaching death in a wise manner are aimed at overcoming the most common reasons for fearing death: fear of losing human sensual pleasures, fear of losing the body, fear of being punished for cruel deeds you know you've done in the past, and the larger fear of not knowing what death holds in store when you haven't seen the true Dhamma (AN 4:184).

These four fears are directly related to the three types of craving. Fear of losing human sensual pleasures, of course, is related to craving for sensuality. Fear of losing the body is related both to craving for sensuality and to craving for becoming, in that the body is one of your tools for finding sensual pleasures in the human world and forms a large part of sense of your self functioning in that world. Fear of punishment also relates to craving for sensuality and craving for becoming, in that you crave a new becoming but you don't want to be forced into a world where you'll be subjected to pain. Fear of not knowing the true Dhamma relates to all three forms of craving: Regardless of what you crave, your ignorance of what happens after death means that you don't know if your cravings will be thwarted or fulfilled.

In every case, the fear comes from a sense of powerlessness combined with ignorance: You realize that there may be unknown forces beyond your control that could prevent your cravings from achieving their goals. Because these four fears feed off of craving, ignorance, and a sense of powerlessness, they can lead to all sorts of unskillful behavior, which is why they have to be overcome. As we will see below, the first step in overcoming these fears is to overcome the hindrances to concentration and discernment.

However, there is one type of fear surrounding death that the Buddha actually encourages, and that's compunction. As we've already noted, compunction means fearing the painful consequences coming from doing unskillful actions. It, along with a sense of shame, is called a guardian of the world in that it inspires you to avoid doing anything that would cause harm, either to yourself or to others. Reflecting on the Buddha's teachings on kamma, death, and rebirth, you're concerned about how your actions will open or close possibilities for good or bad rebirths. So you care about your choices in the present moment and the long-term effect they will have.

Compunction differs from the other types of fear surrounding death in two important and connected ways. First, because it's based on conviction and heedfulness, it always leads you to behave skillfully. Second, it's a type of fear associated, not with a feeling of powerlessness, but with a sense of power. You realize the power of your actions to shape your experience of the present and the future, and you'd be afraid to abuse or misuse that power—or to let it go to waste.

The Canon describes compunction specifically as coming from a strong sense of the consequences of poor bodily, verbal, and mental conduct. Poor bodily conduct is defined as killing, stealing, and engaging in illicit sex. Poor verbal conduct is defined as telling lies, divisive tale-bearing, abusive speech, and idle chatter. Poor mental conduct is defined as inordinate greed, ill will, and wrong view.

To inspire a sense of compunction in his listeners, the Buddha would occasionally describe, in great detail, the miseries of hell awaiting those who behave unskillfully in any of these ways. He would also list the unfortunate consequences that particular unskillful actions tend to

produce after death even when they don't lead to hell. We've noted repeatedly that his teaching on kamma is not a strict determinism, but still, acts of certain types have the tendency to lead to certain types of results. If you don't want to create unnecessary difficulties for yourself in the future, you'll take these lists to heart.

We've already alluded to one of these lists (AN 8:40) in the section above on conviction, when we noted that rebirth in the lower realms, from hungry ghosts on down, comes from breaking the five precepts—against killing, stealing, engaging in illicit sex, telling lies, and taking intoxicants—and engaging in wrong speech, which in addition to lying includes divisive speech, abusive speech, and idle chatter. This list is equivalent to the seven types of poor bodily and verbal conduct, with the addition of taking intoxicants to bring the total list to eight. As we also noted, these actions don't always lead inevitably to rebirth on the lower levels, but if you come back to the human level, they can still produce unfortunate consequences here. The results they tend to produce here are these:

- Taking life leads to a short life span.
- Stealing leads to loss of one's wealth.
- Illicit sex leads to becoming a victim of rivalry and revenge.
- Telling lies leads to being falsely accused.
- Divisive tale-bearing leads to the breaking of one's friendships.
- Abusive speech leads to hearing unappealing sounds.
- Idle chatter leads to hearing words that aren't worth taking to heart.
- Taking intoxicants leads to mental derangement.

Another list for inciting compunction (MN 135) deals more with character traits and habits, although it overlaps with the above list in one instance. These traits don't obviously map on to the standard list of the types of poor conduct, although it could be argued that the last four traits in the list below reflect wrong view. Again, these traits can lead to rebirth on a lower realm, but if you come back to the human realm, they can also produce these consequences:

- Taking life leads to a short life span.

- Injuring living beings leads to being sickly.
- Being ill-tempered and easily provoked to anger leads to being ugly.
- Being resentful and envious of the respect shown to others leads to being uninfluential.
- Being ungenerous leads to being poor.
- Being obstinate and arrogant, refusing to show respect to those who deserve it, leads to being reborn in a low social status.
- Not asking wise contemplatives what actions will lead to long-term welfare and happiness leads to stupidity.

Now, if you avoid these actions and instead engage in their opposites, your actions will tend toward opposite good consequences in this life and in future lives. For example, if you don't resent the respect shown to others, you'll tend to be influential. If you abstain from intoxicants, you won't suffer derangement.

As for the three types of poor mental conduct and their negative impact on future lives, the Buddha provides no lists, but he does treat the three individually at scattered locations in the discourses.

In the case of greed, he points out that those who are obsessed with greed—trying to gain and maintain power to satisfy their greed—tend to inflict suffering on others who get in their way. As a result, they tend to deny the truth about their actions. Not wanting their own lies to be uncovered, they become unable—and often unwilling—to untangle the lies of others. Their thoughts and words stray away from the Dhamma. As a result, they dwell in suffering in the here and now, "feeling threatened, turbulent, feverish," and after death can expect a bad destination (AN 3:70).

As for the effects of ill will and wrong view at death, the Buddha gives the example of a soldier struck down in battle at a moment when he is fighting while thinking, "May these beings be struck down or slaughtered or annihilated or destroyed. May they not exist." His thoughts of ill will have the power to potentially send him to the hell of those slain in battle. But if he believes that he's destined for the heaven of those slain in battle, that's wrong view. And the results of wrong view, the Buddha says, are rebirth either in hell or an animal womb (SN 42:3).

We've already discussed the more general effects of wrong view, especially at death. If you adopt wrong view at that time, it's enough to delay the results of your prior good actions to a much later rebirth.

There are also more subtle effects of wrong view at the moment of death, in which you can fasten on a mind state that's relatively skillful but which falls short of the goal. A poignant example of this tendency is the story of one of Ven. Sāriputta's disciples, a brahman named Dhanañjānin, who is on his deathbed. Sāriputta goes to visit him and, noticing that Dhanañjānin seems fixated on the idea of gaining rebirth in the brahmā world, teaches him the brahmavihāras. Soon after Sāriputta leaves, Dhanañjānin, having practiced the brahmavihāras, dies and is reborn in a brahmā world. The Buddha later chides Sāriputta for having left when there was still more to be done—meaning that Dhanañjānin could have been led to one of the noble attainments (MN 97). The point of this story is to encourage a person with compunction to do his or her best not to settle for second best as death approaches.

So the lesson of compunction is that because your actions have the power to lead to evil, good, or even greater good, you should care about how you choose your actions so that you can avoid unnecessary pain and trouble now and into the future. For this reason, a strong sense of compunction is a useful trait to develop as you do your best not to create difficulties for yourself at death.

Persistance (1)

When you're convinced of the truth of the Buddha's analysis of the way kamma works at the moment of death, and of the demands that will be placed on you at that time—and your feelings of shame and compunction tell you that you'd be a fool not to do what you can to be prepared—the heedful thing to do is to get to work. Give rise to qualities that, at the very least, will open good opportunities for rebirth, and abandon qualities that will lead your cravings at the moment of death astray.

Some people object to the lessons of heedfulness here, saying, "Why can't we simply enjoy the pleasures of the human world? Why do we

have to keep preparing for another life?" Here it's important to understand that the Buddha is not saying that you can't enjoy the pleasures of the human life. After all, he criticizes misers for not enjoying their wealth, because their miserliness will give rise to an unhealthy attitude toward their own happiness and the happiness of others, leading to a lack of compassion all around. Any pleasure that doesn't involve unskillful attitudes is perfectly fine.

The Buddha gives two tests for determining which sensual pleasures qualify as relatively skillful. The first is that if a pleasure involves breaking the precepts, it's to be avoided. The second involves noticing the effect that the pleasure has on the mind. If it fosters unskillful mental states, it should be avoided. If it doesn't, then it's perfectly all right (MN 101). Just make sure that you're not like the person who gets a job and then, on receiving his first paycheck, quits and spends all his money. Be more heedful. Keep on working, and enjoy your money on the side.

After all, the qualities that the Buddha says lead to a good rebirth can be sources of pleasure, too. In fact, the really good things in human life are not the good sights to see, sounds to hear, or tastes to taste. They're the opportunities that a human birth provides to do good things for one another and to develop good qualities in the mind, leading to the ultimate goodness of nibbāna.

The Buddha commonly lists four qualities that create openings for good rebirths: conviction, virtue, generosity, and discernment. These, you may remember, are the qualities of an admirable friend—and also the qualities that you want to develop together with any of your loved ones whom you want to meet again in a future life. By developing these qualities in yourself, you're acting as your own best friend. You show that you really do love yourself.

In other contexts, the Buddha mentions two other qualities that are also conducive to rebirth on the higher levels: learning and the practice of the sublime attitudes.

This gives six qualities. Of the six, we've already said a great deal about four: conviction, virtue, the sublime attitudes, and discernment. Here we can focus on the remaining two.

Learning means learning the Dhamma. You listen often to the Dhamma and memorize passages that you find especially meaningful. The Canon adds that you also discuss them with others and try to penetrate their meaning. When the Buddha compares Dhamma practice to the ways in which a fortress is protected, learning is the storehouse of weapons used by the soldiers of right effort (AN 7:63).

It's not hard to see why this sort of erudition would be a useful preparation for death. When craving comes whispering its deceptive ideas into your mind, knowledge of the Dhamma gives you a fund of ready responses to use against it. This type of learning is especially needed in the modern world, where people's minds, exposed to mass culture, have so many thoughtless jingles and songs sloshing around inside. You certainly don't want the ideas expressed in their lyrics to take hold of the mind as you approach death. The best defense against that is to learn passages of Dhamma and frequently repeat them to yourself. Let *them* slosh around in your mind, where they can do you a lot of good.

To help in this direction, a collection of Dhamma passages useful for memorization in preparation for death is included in the Appendix.

As for **generosity:** The first lesson about generosity is that a gift has to be voluntary if it's to count as a genuine gift.

King Pasenadi once came to ask the Buddha, "Where should a gift be given?" He probably expected the Buddha to say, "To Buddhists," or, "To Dhamma teachers." But the Buddha said something very different: "(Give) where the mind feels confidence. (SN 3:24)" In other words, there are no "shoulds" as to where you should give a gift. That's why, when the monks are asked, "Where should I give a gift?" they're supposed to answer, "Give wherever your gift would be used, or would be well-cared for, or would last long, or wherever your mind feels inspired."

The reason for the monks' restraint in this area derives from the fact that the virtue of generosity is closely related to the teaching on kamma. When the Buddha introduced the topic of kamma in his explanation of mundane right view—the level of right view conducive to a good rebirth—he started by saying, "There is what is given." This idea may sound too

obvious to even mention, but in fact there were teachers in his time who denied that anything was really given.

They had two main lines of reasoning for saying this. One was that your actions were totally determined by the past, so you really had no choice in the matter. The things you gave to other people were not really gifts, because the stars or past kamma or a creator god had arranged that the item would have to change hands. So instead of being a virtue, the giving of a gift was simply a matter of outside forces working themselves out. The other line of reasoning was that people were annihilated at death, so nothing was accomplished by being generous: both the donor and the recipient would turn to nothing at death, so why bother giving anything to anyone?

This means that when the Buddha taught, "There is what is given," he was making two implicit statements: One, you do have the choice to give or not to give and, two, the act of giving bears meaningful fruit. In fact, it's possible to see the act of giving as your first experience of free will and of the benefits of acting on skillful intentions: You have an item that you could use yourself, but instead, you see that you're free to give it away. You also see that the pleasure you gain as a result is greater than the pleasure you could have derived from keeping the item for yourself. It's for this reason that the Buddhist culture around giving is designed to protect the act of giving as a totally voluntary act.

However, King Pasenadi went on to ask another question of the Buddha: "But a gift given where bears great fruit?" That, the Buddha replied, was a different question, and it required a different answer.

It's with this question that we approach the act of giving as a skill. And it's here that we see how the other qualities conducive to a good rebirth—conviction, virtue, the sublime attitudes, and discernment—play a role in enabling the act of generosity to bear the greatest possible fruit.

Generosity as a skill takes into consideration four factors:

- the recipient of the gift,
- the item given,
- your motivation in giving, and
- your attitude while giving.

The recipient: In answering King Pasenadi's question, the Buddha noted that gifts given to those whose minds are devoid of passion, aversion, and delusion—or to those practicing to abandon these defilements—bear the greatest fruit. The reason for this is that these people will make the best use of the gift. When the donor sees them doing that, his/her mind generates a sense of joy. Recognizing a potential recipient of this sort requires that you use your powers of observation and exercise your discernment. This is one of the ways in which discernment augments the happiness coming from the act of giving.

Now, it's important to note that the Buddha did *not* counsel against giving to people who are not on the path to the end of passion, aversion, and delusion. During his lifetime he was accused of saying that the only gifts that bear fruit are those given to himself or his followers, but as he notes in AN 3:58, the accusation was untrue. He goes on to say that whoever prevents a potential donor from giving a gift where the donor feels inspired to give creates three obstacles: an obstacle for oneself, an obstacle for the donor, and an obstacle for the intended recipient.

Then the Buddha clarifies his position: "Even if a person throws the rinsings of a bowl or a cup into a village pool or pond, thinking, 'May whatever animals live here feed on this,' that would be a source of merit, to say nothing of what is given to human beings." But still, he concludes, the greatest merit comes from giving to those free of defilement or who are practicing to attain that freedom.

The item given: In another context, the Buddha notes two qualities of an ideal gift—that it's given in season and that it doesn't adversely affect the donor or the recipient. A gift out of season, for example, would be medicine for treating an illness that the recipient isn't subject to. A gift that would adversely affect the donor would be one that would create financial hardships for the donor or his/her family. Also, a gift that the donor stole in order to give would also adversely affect the donor. A gift that would adversely affect the recipient, in the case of a monk or a nun, would be one that would be inappropriate for a contemplative to use, or would involve breaking the rules by which the monks and nuns live.

What this means is that it's wisest to choose a gift that's appropriate for the needs of the recipient. This requires thinking, with sympathy, of the recipient's actual needs. In this way, generosity becomes an exercise in goodwill and compassion. It also becomes an exercise in creativity, as you use your imagination to anticipate what the recipient would need or would be pleased to receive.

The Buddha says very little about the relationship between the merit earned by a gift and the amount of money it costs. He does note that there's more merit in giving a gift that's equal to or better than the sort of items you use yourself, as opposed to giving something of worse quality than you would use. But he also notes that the material worth of the gift doesn't matter nearly as much as the attitude with which it's given.

The attitude: The best attitude when giving a gift is to give it attentively, instead of acting as if you're throwing it away, and to give with a feeling of empathy and respect for the recipient. It's also best to be convinced that something good will come of the gift. This is an area in which conviction in the principle of kamma plays a role in increasing the fruitfulness of the gift.

The motivation: Another area where conviction plays a role, along with discernment, is in the motivation for giving. In AN 7:49, the Buddha lists seven possible motivations for giving an appropriate gift to an appropriate recipient, and pairs them with the level of rebirth to which they tend to lead. In ascending order:

- A gift given with the thought of storing it up for yourself in a future life tends to lead to rebirth in the heaven of the Four Great Kings.

- A gift given, not with the thought of storing it up, but simply with the thought that "Giving is good" tends to lead to rebirth in the heaven of the Devas of the Thirty-three.

- A gift given with the thought of carrying on one's family's good tradition of generosity tends to lead to rebirth in the heaven of the Devas of the Hours.

- A gift given with the thought, "I'm well off. It's not right that I don't give to those who are not well off," tends to lead to rebirth in the heaven of the Contented Devas.

• A gift given with the thought of continuing the tradition of those in the past who made famous large-scale distributions of gifts tends to lead to rebirth in the heaven of the Devas who Delight in Creation.

• A gift given with the thought that giving makes the mind serene and gives rise to gratification and joy tends to lead to rebirth in the heaven of the Devas Wielding Power over the Creations of Others.

Here it's worth noting that these six heavens are on the sensual level, and that the donor who gives an appropriate gift with any of these motivations will return to the human level after his/her deva lifespan runs out.

• Finally, a gift given with the thought that it's an ornament of the mind—in other words, the gift is given not with any felt need to feed emotionally off the results of the gift—tends to lead to rebirth in the non-sensual heaven of the Devas of Brahmā's Retinue. The Buddha notes that this person will not return to this world. This apparently means that he or she will continue practicing on that level, and will reach awakening without coming back to the human realm.

For this reason, it's wise to use discernment in thinking about your motivation for giving a gift.

In DN 33, the Buddha lists another way in which your motivation when giving a gift can affect the level of rebirth to which it leads. You can set your mind on being reborn either as a wealthy human being or as a deva in any of the heavens mentioned above, and the intention will come true *if* you are also virtuous. This is a case where virtue plays a role in increasing the fruitfulness of the gift. The Buddha gives the added proviso that rebirth in the non-sensual heaven of the Devas of Brahmā's Retinue also requires that you have a mind devoid of passion, which in this context apparently means, at the very least, that it's well developed in concentration.

When an appropriate gift is given with the proper attitude and motivation, it can lead to great joy in the anticipation of giving. This is where it's enjoyable to exercise your imagination in devising an especially appropriate gift. Such a gift also engenders joy in the act of giving and then again afterwards, when you reflect on the good that you've done. This is why the Buddha said that acts of merit are another

word for happiness (Iti 22): You don't have to wait for future lives to enjoy them. When, for example, an act of generosity is accompanied by conviction, virtue, the sublime attitudes, and discernment, there's joy in the action itself. And unlike the memory of past sensual pleasures now gone, the memory of a wise act of generosity is never tinged with regret. It's a reliable source of self-esteem. It's for this reason that the practice of reflecting on your generosity can be a source of strength at the approach of death.

Non-material generosity: So far we've been discussing the practice of giving material gifts, but the Buddha recognizes that there are other forms of giving that also tend to lead to a good rebirth. For example, you can give of your physical strength to help someone else give a gift, or you can think approving thoughts about that person's gift. In both cases, you have a share in the merit—without, the Buddha notes, depleting the merit of the original donor (AN 5:36).

He also says that, in observing the precepts without exceptions, you're giving universal safety to others—in other words, no one anywhere has to fear any danger from you—and you yourself have a share in that universal safety (AN 8:39).

Later Buddhist traditions add the gift of knowledge and the gift of forgiveness to the list of non-material gifts. The Forest ajaans will sometimes portray the entirety of the practice as a form of giving: To counteract the hungry dynamic of feeding and clinging, you develop inner wealth that you can then radiate to the world as you develop the perfections of your character. In this way, the simple act of giving a gift becomes a metaphor for the entire path to the end of suffering.

The highest gift, though, the Canon tells us, is the gift of the Dhamma (Dhp 354). This is because other forms of generosity provide the recipient with help from the outside, whereas if you give another person the Dhamma, that person can use the Dhamma to attack the true sources of suffering from within.

Here again, the Buddha established a culture by which the Dhamma is not to be sold. He refused to accept payment for his teachings (Sn 1:4) and in that way made it clear that the Dhamma thrives best when it is treated, both by the donor and by the recipient, as a gift. People sharing

the Dhamma in this way get the most benefit from it, both now and into the future.

As you develop generosity along with the other qualities that tend toward a good rebirth—conviction, virtue, learning, the sublime attitudes, and discernment—you not only create the conditions for good rebirths, but you also provide your life with a narrative that you can be proud to look back on: You've lived your life in a manner that embodies values worthy of praise. This narrative will be helpful in two ways as you approach death. On the most basic level, it provides you with the confidence that you are genuinely worthy of a good rebirth. This confidence will help you withstand any doubts or fears that would pull your mind toward an undesirable destination. On a higher level, as we will note below, if you want to be able to go beyond rebirth entirely, you will have to abandon all narratives of yourself as a being in a world. If the narrative of your life has been full of actions you regret doing, it will be hard to let go. It's much easier to abandon, without any negative feelings, a narrative in which your actions have been noble and harmless. So do your best to create that kind of narrative while you have the chance.

Persistance (2)

If you're really heedful in your persistence, you can't limit yourself to acting in ways that will produce openings for good rebirths. You also have to develop qualities of mind that will protect you from being led astray by craving as you die. Given that the mind, as the Buddha noted, is so quick to reverse direction even in ordinary day-to-day life, you need to develop all your mental skills to ensure that it stays on course as it's buffeted by the greater challenges that present themselves when you can no longer stay in the body.

Think back on the Buddha's image of how a being, on leaving this body and going to another, clings to craving in the same way that a fire clings to the wind as it's blown from one house to the next. There are two ways in which the process can be handled skillfully—i.e., with relative skill or with absolute skill.

On the level of relative skill, you maintain your identity as a being, and you simply keep your cravings aimed in a good direction. In the Buddha's analysis, this means staying attached to the five aggregates—that attachment is what defines you as a being—and gaining control over your cravings to the extent that you don't let them get waylaid by unskillful mental states. You continue thinking in line with the basic elements of becoming: a being going from this world to the next. In terms of the Buddha's analogy, you build good houses in the neighborhood and do what you can to ensure that the wind blows you to the best one available.

On the level of absolute skill, though, you dissolve your attachment to the aggregates and, in so doing, you release yourself from being defined as a being. At the same time, you stop thinking in terms of worlds in which it would be desirable to be reborn. In terms of the Buddha's analogy, you lose your passion for houses and you let go of the wind. The fire releases its grip on the burning house and goes out: totally unbound.

In both cases, you acquire mastery by gaining control over the factors that can condition craving. As we've seen, dependent co-arising traces these factors back to ignorance. Now, as the Buddha notes, there's no way of pointing back in time to the moment when ignorance first arose, but he also notes that ignorance is continually fed by the five hindrances that obstruct concentration and discernment:

> sensual desire,
> ill will,
> sloth and drowsiness,
> restlessness and anxiety, and
> doubt.

So the first order of business in gaining some control over craving and the string of conditions leading up to it is to overcome these hindrances. And it so happens that the Buddha's discussions of the unskillful mental states that present dangers at the approach of death focus precisely on these same five hindrances. So whether you aim at relative skill or

absolute skill in mastering craving, the hindrances are the first things over which you need to gain mastery.

It may seem strange that the Buddha doesn't list sorrow or grief over your impending death as an obstacle when dying, but there's a reason for this apparent omission. In his analysis, these forms of grief are rooted in the four reasons for fearing death that we mentioned in the discussion of compunction: fear of losing human sensual pleasures, fear of losing the body, fear of being punished for cruel deeds you know you've done, and the larger fear of not knowing what death holds in store when you haven't seen the true Dhamma (AN 4:184). It's because of these four fears that, in the Buddha's words, a dying person "grieves and is tormented, weeps, beats his breast, and grows delirious."

These four fears, in turn, can be overcome by mastering the hindrances. The first two fears are overcome when you master sensual desire, the fear of punishment is overcome when you master anxiety, and the fear of not knowing what death holds in store is overcome when you master doubt. So rather than focusing on the dying person's grief as an obstacle at death, the Buddha follows the pattern of the four noble truths in general by devoting his primary attention to the causes of grief and the practices aimed at putting an end to grief by putting an end to the causes. That's why his main focus is on mastering the hindrances.

Here, we'll focus on how to gain relative mastery over the hindrances. Then, in the next section, we'll focus on the Buddha's instructions for how make that mastery absolute.

We often hear of the hindrances simply as problems you encounter when trying to get the mind to stick with your theme of mindfulness or to settle down in concentration. But the fact that they also create problems at the moment of death underscores the truth of the statement, often made by the Thai ajaans, that meditation is primarily a process of learning how to die well. When you can get past the hindrances in practicing mindfulness and concentration on a daily basis, you're getting practice in how to get past them as you die.

When you look in detail at the hindrances, it's easy to see why they could cause problems at death.

Sensual desire refers to attachment to the body and to thoughts and plans for sensual pleasures. The Buddha was wise in defining sensuality, not as sensual pleasures, but as the mind's fascination with fantasizing about them. You can often be more attached to your fantasies about sensual pleasures than to the pleasures themselves. And it's this attachment that poses a great challenge at death, as you fear being deprived of the pleasures that having a human body has allowed you to enjoy in the past. This would make you eager to latch on to another body on the sensual plane. If you're desperate, you could easily latch on to a body in one of the lower realms.

Ill will is the desire to see other people suffer or be punished because of their past bad actions. These thoughts can be disguised as righteous anger—a desire to see justice done—but if they seize the mind at the moment of death, you can be reborn with an attitude of revenge, which would pull you down.

Sloth and drowsiness obscure mindfulness and alertness, which are precisely the qualities you need to stay on top of events as you're leaving the body.

Restlessness and anxiety can take the form of concern for the future of your loved ones, as to what will happen to them when you're no longer there to care for them, or a concern over your own future: the possibility that you'll be punished after death for your past misdeeds. This hindrance can also develop around any concerns that can arise when you realize that you're dying, you notice that your mind is not in the best shape, and you're worried that your lack of mindfulness or discernment will lead to a bad rebirth.

Doubt is doubt about the truth of the Dhamma. With regard to death, it boils down to doubts as to whether death will be followed by rebirth or by annihilation. This doubt can make you desperate to be reborn if you think that annihilation is the only alternative, and that sense of desperation can lead you to grasp at any opening for rebirth, no matter how bad.

Of these five hindrances, sensual desire, ill will, restlessness and anxiety, and doubt can be especially aggravated if the approach of death involves a lot of pain:

• You can easily be tempted to look for sensual fantasies as a means of escaping the pain.

• Your irritation at the pain can easily give rise to ill will for those who are caring for you, or for those whose past wrongs suddenly spring to mind.

• You might read that pain as a sign that death holds more pain in store, which can make you restless and anxious. Or, as noted above, if your brain starts malfunctioning as death approaches—or your mindfulness is simply scattered—you may be overcome with anxiety that your lack of control will lead you down, and the anxiety itself can become the problem.

• Unexpectedly severe pain may make you doubt the power of mindfulness, concentration, and discernment to deal with it.

So it's easy to see that the hindrances will present special challenges as death approaches.

The Buddha gives two sets of similes to describe these five hindrances, similes that aid in visualizing them to yourself as genuine obstacles to the mind.

In the first set (SN 46:55), you imagine that you're trying to see your reflection in a bowl of water, but the reflection is distorted or difficult to see for one of five reasons:

Sensual desire—the water is colored with dye.
Ill will—the water is boiling.
Sloth and drowsiness—the water is covered with algae and slime.
Restlessness and anxiety—wind is blowing over the water, creating ripples.
Doubt—the water is turbid and placed in the dark.

The second set of similes (DN 2) compares the hindrances to hardships:

Sensual desire is like being in debt.
Ill will is like being sick.
Sloth and drowsiness is like being imprisoned.
Restlessness and anxiety is like being enslaved.

Doubt is like carrying money and goods through desolate territory.

These similes are good to keep in mind, because the first problem when dealing with the hindrances is recognizing them as hindrances. Usually, when they arise, your first thought is not that they're getting in your way or leading you astray. Instead, you tend to side with them, seeing them as reasonable and right: The objects of sensual desire really are desirable, the people you'd like to see suffer really deserve to suffer, and so on. However, once you can recognize that these mind states are distorting your view of reality and creating hardships for you, you're ready for the antidotes that the Buddha recommends for counteracting them. As you practice overcoming the hindrances in the course of your meditation practice, you're not only solidifying your mindfulness and concentration. You're also getting one step closer to mastering the currents of craving that will flow out when the body is no longer a place where you can stay.

The Buddha's instructions for dealing with the hindrances at the approach of death make most sense when viewed in the context of his teaching about how those currents of the mind influence death and rebirth. As we've noted, this teaching, in turn, is based on his explanation of kamma and rebirth. This means that **doubt** around accepting the truth of these teachings is the first hindrance you have to deal with. Even though you may have developed your conviction in the Buddha's teachings prior to death, the pains and fears that can arise as death approaches can make your conviction waver. As the Buddha noted, even in ordinary circumstances, the mind is quick to change direction—so quick, that even he, a master of apt similes, could think of no adequate simile to illustrate how quickly that can happen (AN 1:49). This is why you have to do your best to overcome doubt as thoroughly as you can while you can, and to be prepared if it suddenly reappears at the approach of death.

AN 4:184, as we've noted, lists doubt about the true Dhamma as one of the major causes for fear and terror at the time of death. Now, this may sound strange, in that there are many people who've never even

heard of the true Dhamma. But even they will fear death if they're unsure about what will happen at death and if they have no firm basis for knowing that their actions can have a positive impact on what they'll experience before, during, and after their dying moment.

The only sure cure for this type of doubt is to have practiced the Dhamma to the point of attaining the first level of awakening, called the arising of the Dhamma eye. That's when your conviction in the Dhamma has genuinely been confirmed: You see a dimension of experience that isn't touched by death, and you know that it can be attained through human efforts. But to practice to gain the Dhamma eye, you first have to accept the Buddha's teachings on kamma and rebirth as working hypotheses on which you base your practice.

To strengthen your conviction in these working hypotheses, the Buddha advises that you carefully observe skillful and unskillful mental states as they arise in the mind and influence your actions, noting the results that come from acting on them. In particular, he recommends developing the four brahmavihāras to observe how they have a good impact on your actions and on your life as a whole (AN 3:66). As we'll see below, the Buddha also recommends these four brahmavihāras as antidotes to two other hindrances: anxiety over your past mistreatment of others, and ill will toward people who have been or are mistreating you.

When you've followed these instructions heedfully, the Buddha notes that there's no reason to fear what will happen after death (AN 4:116). This doesn't totally overcome doubt about the true Dhamma, but it can give a measure of reassurance. If you pursue the brahmavihāras to the point of giving rise to strong concentration, that concentration can then become the basis for the development of insight leading to dispassion—and dispassion is what can lead to the arising of the Dhamma eye. That will put an end to doubt about the true Dhamma once and for all.

Drowsiness is another hindrance that has to be dealt with before dealing with the others. If you're falling asleep, there's no way you can recognize the other hindrances as they arise, nor can you do anything to counteract them. Strangely, this is the one hindrance not explicitly

mentioned in the Canon as a potential obstacle at death. But because drowsiness is the main obstacle to mindfulness and alertness—and because the Buddha explicitly taught that one should approach the moment of death mindful and alert—there seems to be every reason to regard it as an implicit obstacle to the very skills you'll need to deal with the hindrances when you're dying.

This is why it's good to master ahead of time the Buddha's techniques for dealing with drowsiness. His primary recommendation, if you find yourself getting sleepy as you meditate, is to change your meditation theme to one that's more rousing. If gentle breathing is putting you to sleep, breathe more forcefully. Or change your meditation topic altogether to one that involves more active thinking, such as the contemplation of the parts of the body, to develop some dispassion toward it—and toward the idea of taking on a new body after death. If you've memorized any passages of Dhamma, repeat them to yourself, either silently or out loud. This is another way in which learning the Dhamma is a good preparation for death. Rub your limbs and pull at your ears to increase the circulation in the body. Or, if you're able, get up to do walking meditation (AN 7:58).

To guard against the need for narcotic painkillers at the approach of death, it's also good to gain experience in dealing skillfully with pain so that you can learn to see the body, the pain, and your awareness as three separate but interrelated things, as noted in Chapter Three. When you can separate pain from the mind in this way, you'll be in a better position to approach death mindful and alert.

As for the remaining hindrances, two—restlessness and anxiety, and ill will—are treated as out-and-out obstacles. Sensual desire, though, is treated in a more complex fashion, both as an obstacle but also as a lure for overcoming other obstacles.

Of all the hindrances discussed in relationship to imminent death, **restlessness and anxiety** seems to be the Buddha's primary focus. In his various instructions for how to give advice to a person who's dying, this is the hindrance he always treats first. This may be because the dying person is assumed already to have at least some conviction in the

true Dhamma. Or it may be that, no matter what one's beliefs, this hindrance can cause the most anguish and grief before, during, and after death.

When the Buddha visits individual monks who are sick, his first question—after asking after their physical comfort—is to ask if they have any anxiety, anguish, or remorse (SN 35:74–75). When Nakulamātar, one of the Buddha's closest lay disciples, comforts her husband, who is severely ill (AN 6:16), she starts by saying, "Don't be worried as you die, householder. Death is painful for one who is worried. The Blessed One has criticized being worried at the time of death." When the Buddha gives advice to his cousin, Mahānāma, on how to counsel a dying person (SN 55:54), he tells him first to comfort the person as to his/her virtue, and then to ask if the person has any worries.

The discourses list a wide range of things that people might be worried about at the time of death. Nakulamātar focuses on her husband's potential worries about her: that she won't be able to support herself and the family, that she'll take another husband, or that she'll fall away from the Dhamma. In every case, she assures him that his worries are unfounded. She's skilled at carding wool and spinning cotton, so she can easily support herself and their children; she'll remain faithful to him even after his death just as she has been faithful throughout their life together; and she'll feel an even greater desire to see the Buddha after he, her husband, is gone. As it turns out, her husband doesn't die, and he goes, leaning on a stick, to see the Buddha, who tells him, "It's your gain, your great gain, householder, that you have Nakulamātar—sympathetic and wishing for your welfare—as your counselor and instructor."

As for Mahānāma, he's also told to focus on any worries that a dying person might have about his/her family, but in this case he's told to tell the person that the time when worry might be potentially helpful has past: "You, my dear friend, are subject to death. If you feel concern for your spouse and children, you're still going to die. If you don't feel concern for your spouse and children, you're still going to die. It would be good if you abandoned concern for your spouse and children." Instead, the dying person should focus on the business at hand: trying to face the challenges of death mindful and alert.

Other potential worries at the time of death are those focused more on what will happen after death. When the Buddha visited sick monks, he sometimes found that their major worry was that they would die without having attained a noble attainment that could guarantee the safety of their future course. He taught them to regard all possible objects of craving and clinging as not-self, and as a result, they all reached one or another of the levels of awakening (SN 35:74–75).

On a more mundane level, there are also worries around potential kammic punishments for past unskillful actions—which have a way of looming large in the mind as death approaches. This, in fact, is one of the major reasons why people fear death. The Buddha advises, in cases like that, that you recognize that no amount of remorse can go back and undo a past misdeed. Instead, you should recognize it as a mistake, not to be repeated, and then develop the brahmavihāras: thoughts of unlimited goodwill, compassion, empathetic joy, and equanimity for all beings (SN 42:8).

This practice accomplishes several things at once. By taking this expanded framework, you help to keep the mind from obsessing about the past deed, and to see it in the context of all the deeds, skillful and unskillful, committed by beings throughout the universe in their often unskillful quest for happiness. By developing goodwill for all other beings as well as for yourself, you strengthen your intention never to repeat your past mistakes. This helps to keep the mind from heading on a downward slope.

At the same time, you can allay your fears about your future course by reminding yourself of the good you've done and the good qualities you've developed in the mind. The Buddha recommends three recollections in this area:

- recollection of generosity—recalling times when you have voluntarily given gifts to others;
- recollection of virtue—recalling times you kept to the precepts even when you would have benefitted in the short term from breaking them; and
- recollection of the devas—recalling that you have developed within you the qualities that can lead to rebirth in a deva realm:

conviction, virtue, learning, generosity, and discernment.

These reflections, the Buddha notes, gladden the mind and incline it to concentration, which helps get you past any worries or anxiety. This is why the tradition has developed in Buddhist countries that caregivers remind those who are dying of the good they have done and the good they have within them.

At the same time, these reflections can help comfort you if you're concerned that your brain is malfunctioning or your mindfulness is muddled at the moment of death. SN 55:21 tells of a time when Mahānāma was concerned about his own future course: What if he died when attacked by a runaway horse or elephant, and his mindfulness was muddled? The Buddha reassures him that if the mind is well nurtured with conviction, virtue, learning, generosity, and discernment, it will rise upward from the body and separate out. He gives the following image:

> *"Suppose a man were to throw a jar of ghee or a jar of oil into a deep lake of water, where it would break. There the shards & jar-fragments would go down, while the ghee or oil would rise upward and separate out. In the same way, if one's mind has long been nurtured with conviction, nurtured with virtue, nurtured with learning, nurtured with relinquishment, nurtured with discernment, then when the body—endowed with form, composed of the four primary elements, born from mother & father, nourished with rice & porridge, subject to inconstancy, rubbing, pressing, dissolution, & dispersion—is eaten by crows, vultures, hawks, dogs, hyenas, or all sorts of creatures, nevertheless the mind—long nurtured with conviction, nurtured with virtue, learning, relinquishment, & discernment—rises upward and separates out."*

Although Mahānāma was a stream-enterer, the Buddha does not make stream entry a precondition for reassurance here. Just make sure that you maintain confidence in right view, and you'll benefit from the accumulated results of your good actions in the past.

Universal goodwill is also recommended for counteracting **ill will** at the time of death. Think of the soldier slain while wishing ill on his

enemies: He's destined to hell or the animal womb, neither of which are places you'd want to go. The antidote for ill will is goodwill for all, no matter how badly anyone has treated you. Here, think of the image of the bandits cutting you into pieces, mentioned in Chapter Three. Even in that case, the Buddha said, you should try to develop thoughts of goodwill, beginning with the bandits and then extending out to the entire cosmos. You don't want to be reborn with thoughts of revenge, for that would get you involved in a kammic back and forth that could pull you nowhere but down. Goodwill, in this case, might not be able to protect you from the pain of a violent death, but it would liberate you from an enormous amount of suffering on into the future. So protect your goodwill as a mother would protect her only child (Sn 1:8).

Throughout the Canon, the Buddha treats the last remaining hindrance, **sensual desire,** as a major obstacle to getting and staying on the path. As we've noted, this type of desire also accounts for two of the major reasons for fearing death: attachment to sensual pleasures and attachment to the body. We've also noted that this attachment can become especially acute if the approach of death involves a lot of pain. As the Buddha said, if you can't find a better alternative for escaping from pain—such as the pleasures of right concentration—your mind will try to escape into sensual fantasies. And when pain is severe, it's not too picky about what sort of pleasures it will fantasize about. This puts you in a precarious position if you happen to die while engaged in fantasies of this sort.

This is why the Canon contains so many passages dealing with the drawbacks of sensuality—drawbacks that apply not only in this lifetime, but also in any other lifetime you may go to, from the human level on down. A desire for sensual pleasures forces people to work hard to gain wealth, and even when their efforts succeed—which is by no means a sure thing—they suffer in trying, often unsuccessfully, to protect their wealth from thieves, governments, and hateful heirs. Sensuality also leads to conflicts, ranging from family spats to total war between countries (MN 14). MN 53 gives a long list of images to illustrate the futility and dangers of sensuality. Among them: It's like a bead of honey on the blade of a knife; like borrowed goods that the owners can take

back at any time; like a person sitting in a tree, eating its fruit, when someone else comes along to cut the tree down with an ax; and like a dog gnawing on a bone that provides no nourishment at all. As Ajaan Lee explains this last image, the dog gets nothing but the taste of its own saliva.

Even heavenly sensual pleasures have their drawbacks. They weaken the mind and can easily lead to heedlessness. When you're heedless, you're headed for a fall.

The Canon also contains many passages dealing with the drawbacks of having a body: When you look at its individual parts, for instance, you can't find anything that's clean or worth getting attached to. The fact that you have a body leaves you open to all sorts of illnesses (AN 10:60)—a contemplation that we'll treat in more detail in the next section. These contemplations help to keep you from resenting whichever parts of your own body have subjected you to illness—it's the nature of all bodies and all body parts to be prone to illness—and to prevent you from aspiring to taking on another body after death in hopes of continuing to enjoy the sensual pleasures to which having that body would give you access.

The Buddha was so alive to the dangers of sensuality that he once taught that if your only choice was between indulging in sensual fantasies or falling asleep, you'd do better to fall asleep.

Given the general tenor of the Buddha's teachings on sensuality, it's somewhat surprising, then, that he also sees a use for sensual desire at the approach of death. He instructs Mahānāma that, after he has cleared away any worries in the mind of his dying friend, he should ask the friend if he/she is worried about leaving human sensual pleasures behind. If the answer is Yes, he should tell the friend that heavenly sensual pleasures are even more splendid and refined than human pleasures: One should set one's mind on those. These instructions begin with the lowest level of the sensual heavens, starting with the heaven of the Four Great Kings. From there, they counsel the dying friend to aim at progressively higher levels of heaven, where the pleasures grow progressively more splendid and refined, until he at last has the friend aim at the highest heavens, the brahmā world.

If Mahānāma can get the friend this far, he should then tell the friend, "Friend, even the brahmā world is inconstant, impermanent, included in self-identity. It would be good if, having raised your mind above the brahmā world, you brought it to the cessation of self-identity." If the friend can follow these instructions, then, the Buddha says, "There is no difference—in terms of release—between the release of that lay follower whose mind is released and the release of a monk whose mind is released." In other words, it is possible for the person to reach full awakening at death.

At the very least, this passage shows how it's possible to aim your desires at a realm where you can continue practicing the Dhamma with a minimum amount of suffering. And if you can keep your hindrances at bay, those desires have a good chance of bearing fruit.

This, of course, assumes that you've already had some background in training the mind in virtue, concentration, and discernment. This is a point that has to be kept in mind with regard to all of these hindrances: It's best not to wait until the moment of death to try to master them. But still, even if death comes when you haven't mastered concentration, that's no reason to abandon hope. The Canon contains stories of people whose practice during the course of their lives was not especially inspiring, but who were able to pull their minds together and achieve a noble attainment at the moment of death.

Which goes to show that even when you're dying, it's still possible to achieve great things.

Mindfulness, Concentration, & Discernment

The greatest thing that can be accomplished at the moment of death, of course, is to gain total release from birth. As a Forest ajaan once said, people who feel comfortable with the idea of rebirth don't understand rebirth. If you really take the Buddha seriously—that rebirth will keep on happening as long as there's craving—you'll want to find a way to put an end to birth once and for all.

As you'll remember from the earlier chapters, the ending of birth depends on the ending of becoming. A becoming is an identity as a being

in a particular world of experience. It, in turn, can be ended only when you focus on the steps in the process leading up to becoming. It was to lay out these steps that the Buddha taught dependent co-arising, and in particular, the roles played by the five aggregates and the six senses in the factors leading up to the suffering of aging, illness, and death.

Your sense of the world boils down to the six senses and the five aggregates. Your sense of your self—you as a being—is built out of the same raw material. This is the being that, if it's not dismantled, will ride the winds of craving at the moment of death and set fire to the house next door. The act of creating and identifying with this being was what the Buddha was referring to when he advised Mahānāma to tell his dying friend to abandon self-identity. The friend was to look at the aggregates of form, feeling, perception, thought-fabrication, and sensory consciousness in such a way that he/she would have no sense of "I am this" hovering around any of them: thinking that he/she was either identical with the aggregate, possessing the aggregate, existing in the aggregate, or containing the aggregate within him/herself. Because the passage goes on to say that a person who could successfully follow these instructions would gain a release in no way inferior to the release of a monk whose mind is fully released, "self-identity" in this context must mean not only the sense of "I am this," but also the more basic conceit, "I am."

Now, this sounds disconcertingly like self annihilation, but the Buddha assures us that there is a consciousness independent of the aggregates and the six senses that can be found only when attachment to the aggregates and senses falls away (DN 11; MN 49). It's not a self of any kind—as the Buddha pointed out, when the six senses drop away, there can't be the thought, "I am" (DN 15)— but this consciousness will not end, even with the death of the body and the ending of attachment.

To an unawakened mind, this consciousness may sound alien and uninviting, which is why you need a lot of reassurance and encouragement in this direction so that you'll feel confident that the Buddha's instructions are worth following to the end. Otherwise, you'll try to find something to hold on to as the aggregates and senses slip away from your grasp. And of course, what you'll latch on to will be the

craving that clings to more aggregates as you ride the wind to set fire to another house.

That's why, in his instructions to those who are sick or dying, the Buddha recommends ways of preparing the mind to look favorably on the idea of abandoning the aggregates and senses. Ironically, these ways involve using some of the aggregates as tools in this process. In particular, he has you focus on perceptions and feelings as the raft that will lead you to the other side of the river. These will help you focus on the drawbacks of all fabrications. Then, when you've arrived at the other shore, you can let the raft go.

There are many passages in the Canon that function in this way, but a good one to begin with is an image/perception that the Buddha cites more than once: People involved in becoming are like fish floundering in the puddles of a dried-up stream (Sn 4:2; Sn 4:15). The fish are fighting one another in an increasingly confined space, and even those who succeed in laying claim to the space will still die. Their struggles accomplish nothing, aside from creating the kamma of conflict and strife. The Buddha notes that perceiving the world in this way gave rise to the sense of saṁvega that inspired him to leave home and look for the deathless.

In another passage, he notes that even if you could turn two mountains the size of the Himalayan range into solid gold, it still wouldn't be enough for one person's desires (SN 4:20). The desire that leads to further becoming can never be fully satisfied, because what all beings have in common is the need to feed. Their hunger knows no end, and their feeding grounds—both in terms of physical feeding and emotional feeding—overlap. This is why, in trying to satisfy the desire that leads to becoming, we get into battles with one another, pulling ourselves down to levels of great suffering.

The purpose of these perceptions is to incline the mind to see the escape from becoming—which includes being a being—as a desirable thing.

A list of ten perceptions that the Buddha said should be taught to a sick monk makes the same point, but more directly.

The story goes that a monk, Ven. Girimānanda, is sick. Ven. Ananda goes to the Buddha and asks him to kindly visit Girimānanda, but the Buddha instead tells Ānanda that *he* should be the one who makes the visit, giving him a list of ten perceptions to teach Girimānanda (AN 10:60). Ānanda does as he is told, and Girimānanda recovers from his illness. Even though this list wasn't intended for someone who was dying at that point, a glance at the list shows that it's an ideal set of perceptions to keep in mind as you approach death so that you won't be inclined to want to take another birth.

The ten perceptions are these:

1) The perception of inconstancy: perceiving the five aggregates as inconstant.
2) The perception of not-self: perceiving the six senses along with their objects as not-self.
3) The perception of unattractiveness: analyzing the body into its many unclean parts.
4) The perception of drawbacks: listing many of the diseases to which the body is prey.
5) The perception of abandoning: not allowing unskillful mind states—such as sensuality, ill will, and harmfulness—to remain in the mind.
6) The perception of dispassion: perceiving the dispassion leading to unbinding as something exquisite.
7) The perception of cessation: perceiving the cessation leading to unbinding as something exquisite.
8) The perception of distaste for any world: abandoning any attachments for or obsessions with any world at all.
9) The perception of the undesirability of all fabrications: developing a sense of horror and disgust toward all fabrications.
10) Mindfulness of in-and-out breathing: training in the sixteen steps discussed in Chapter Three.

The dynamic of the list is interesting. The first two perceptions focus on the drawbacks of the raw materials from which a state of becoming could be fashioned: aggregates and sense media. The next two focus

specifically on the drawbacks of having a body. The fifth perception focuses on the unskillful states of mind that would lead to an undesirable rebirth. The next two perceptions focus on the desirability of attaining the total liberation of unbinding. The next focuses back on the drawbacks of grasping at this world or taking birth in any world at all, even the most refined. This is the perception that helps to cut through any narratives going through the mind about what's happening to "you" as you're dying, where you've been, or where you're about to go. The ninth perception looks directly at the process of fabrication in the mind, realizing that it's the source of all the trouble entailed in becoming—your sense of you in a world. As a result, this perception induces a sense of disgust for fabrications of every sort. This is where the line of inquiry becomes self-reflective, because all the perceptions in the list up to and including this one are fabrications, too.

So how to abandon them? That's the duty of the final perception. It may seem odd that mindfulness of in-and-out breathing is listed as a perception here, but think back on the role that perception plays in the second and third tetrads of the Buddha's breath meditation instructions: In the second tetrad, you become sensitive to the role that perception plays in shaping the mind; in the third, you learn how to use perceptions to gladden, concentrate, and release the mind. Then, in the ultimate application of the fourth tetrad, you focus on the inconstancy of perceptions—following the five steps of the Buddha's program for insight, which we discussed in Chapters Two and Three—until you can develop dispassion for them. Perceptions can then cease, and you can relinquish everything, even the path.

That's one of the ways in which the Buddha would counsel a person who is sick and possibly dying to attain total release. There are some striking similarities between his instructions here and the instructions he gave when introducing mindfulness of breathing to Ven. Rāhula, which we discussed in Chapter Three. In both cases, he prefaces his breath meditation instructions with a series of perceptions designed to get the most out of his program of sixteen steps. There's some overlap in the perceptions meant to induce dispassion—such as inconstancy, not-self, and the unattractiveness of the body—although in Rāhula's case the

instructions seem aimed at getting you started with breath meditation, whereas here the instructions seem more aimed at total dispassion, including, ultimately, dispassion even for the perceptions needed in the practice itself.

When you follow the Buddha's instructions in either case, you are in effect borrowing his discernment to apply to the practice of right mindfulness and right concentration. This allows you to reach a level of inner calm where you can give rise to your own discernment into the nature and value of fabrication, allowing you ultimately to let all fabrications go.

Another way in which the Buddha would counsel a person who is sick and dying starts directly with the practice of right mindfulness, although here the focus is on the other aggregate listed under mental fabrication: feeling.

These instructions come in a discourse where the Buddha visits the monks in a sick ward (SN 36:7). His first piece of advice to them is to approach the time of death mindful and alert. "Mindful" he defines in terms of the standard formula for the first stage of right mindfulness practice, the establishing of mindfulness, which we discussed in Chapter Two. As MN 118 notes, all four establishings of mindfulness mentioned in that formula are fulfilled when the sixteen steps of breath meditation are fulfilled.

"Alert" he defines as clearly knowing what you're doing while you're doing it.

The discussion then moves on to the second stage of mindfulness practice, in which you focus on the phenomenon of origination and passing away, here with the focus on the second frame of reference: feelings in and of themselves.

As we noted in Chapter Two, this second stage of mindfulness is where explicit notions of "self" and "world" are put aside. This stage is especially important as death approaches, because the mind at that point can often be overcome with narratives about you, the world you're leaving, and the world to which you may go. These narratives, of course, are forms of becoming that tend to lead to further becoming. To cut them

short, you need a way of regarding your experience in which you drop all reference to these basic terms of becoming. So this second stage of mindfulness practice is particularly useful at this point in helping to dissolve any narratives that may be running through the mind.

The Buddha notes that as you're mindful and alert in this way—looking directly at the body, feelings, and awareness of the present on their own terms, and putting aside any narratives about "you" in a "world"—then when a feeling of pleasure arises, you reflect on the fact that it's dependent on the body. And with the body being inconstant, fabricated, and dependently co-arisen, how can the feeling be constant? This thought inspires you to remain focused on the dissolution of the feeling of pleasure, along with that of the body, giving rise to dispassion, cessation, and relinquishment for both the body and the feeling. This contemplation, you'll note, is in line with the steps of the final tetrad of the Buddha's instructions in breath meditation.

When you do this, he says, you'll abandon any passion-obsession with regard to the body or the feeling of pleasure.

You can also apply the same analysis to feelings of pain and feelings of neither pleasure nor pain. In the case of pain, you'll then abandon any resistance-obsession with regard to the body or the feeling of pain. In other words, you won't be consumed with the desire for the pain to go away. In the case of a feeling of neither pleasure nor pain, you'll abandon any ignorance-obsession with regard to the body or the feeling of neither pleasure nor pain. You won't be inclined to ignore this neutral feeling, and so you'll be able to comprehend it thoroughly.

As we noted in Chapter One, SN 12:15 adds an important observation here: When you're focused on seeing events arise in the present moment like this, the idea of "non-existence" doesn't occur to you. When you're focused on seeing those events pass away in the present moment, the idea of "existence" doesn't occur to you. When ideas of existence and non-existence are far from the mind, then the question of the existence or non-existence of your self or of the world also becomes a non-issue. You simply see everything arising and passing away as stress arising and stress passing away—a way of perceiving that would apply even to the arising and passing away of any sense of self or

of the world. When all arisings are seen as stress, your only inclination is toward dispassion for everything. That's how you free yourself from the constraints of becoming: by letting go of the basic terms of "self" and "world," and escaping, through dispassion, the raw material that you used to lay claim to as your self or your world.

In a similar vein, SN 36:7 continues by saying that once you've abandoned the three obsessions around feelings and the body, you experience feelings as inconstant, not grasped at, not relished. With feelings of any sort—pleasant, painful, or neither—you sense them disjoined from them. That's because you aren't trying to feed on them, so they don't invade the mind. Pains in the body are limited to the body. They don't make inroads on awareness. As for pains limited to life, you know that they'll end when life ends. When feelings are not relished, then at the ending of life, "all that is experienced, not being relished, will grow cold right here."

This, Iti 44 tells us, is how a fully awakened person experiences death of the body. The phrase, "all that is experienced," refers to the experiences of the six senses. As for consciousness without surface, which is not related to the six senses, that is without end.

The Buddha offers a simile to conclude SN 36:7: Just as the flame of an oil lamp burns in dependence on oil and wick, and will be unbound when the oil and wick run out, in the same way, all that is experienced, not being relished, grows cold right here. And as we noted in Chapter Two, when the Buddha spoke of a flame being unbound as it went out, the implication was not annihilation.

It was total release.

Now, the analysis here may seem abstract, but it's actually pointing at direct experiences divorced from your social sense of self, and facing directly at something very intimate: your own internal experience of body, feelings, and mind. It was to establish this framework that the Buddha told the monks in the sick ward to be mindful, and then explained mindfulness in these terms. These are the things you'll have to deal with directly as you approach death—anything else is extraneous—and if you can maintain your focus here, keeping the Buddha's instructions in mind, you, too, can get the most out of his teachings. It

was for the sake of this—that people could come out victorious in the face of death—that the Buddha searched for the Dhamma, found it, and revealed it to the world.

As he said, if people couldn't follow these teachings, he wouldn't have taught them. The fact that he *did* make the effort to teach shows that he had faith in all those who sincerely want to put an end to suffering. In teaching the Dhamma, he accomplished something audacious and great, so that you, too, can accomplish great things.

Now at that time a certain monk was sick with dysentery. He lay fouled in his own urine & excrement. Then the Blessed One, on an inspection tour of the lodgings with Ven. Ānanda as his attendant, went to that monk's dwelling and, on arrival, saw the monk lying fouled in his own urine & excrement. On seeing him, he went to the monk and said, "What is your illness, monk?"

"I have dysentery, O Blessed One."

"But do you have an attendant?"

"No, O Blessed One."

"Then why don't the monks tend to you?"

"I don't do anything for the monks, venerable sir, which is why they don't tend to me."

Then the Blessed One addressed Ven. Ānanda: "Go fetch some water, Ānanda. We will wash this monk."

"As you say, venerable sir," Ven. Ānanda responded, and he fetched some water. The Blessed One poured water on the monk, and Ven. Ānanda washed him off. Then—with the Blessed One taking the monk by the head, and Ven. Ānanda taking him by the feet—they lifted him up and placed him on a bed.

Then the Blessed One, with regard to this cause, to this incident, had the monks assembled and asked them: "Is there a sick monk in that dwelling over there?"

"Yes, O Blessed One, there is."

"And what is his illness?"

"He has dysentery, O Blessed One."

"But does he have an attendant?"

"No, O Blessed One."

"Then why don't the monks tend to him?"

"He doesn't do anything for the monks, venerable sir, which is why they don't tend to him."

"Monks, you have no mother, you have no father, who might tend to you. If you don't tend to one another, who then will tend to you? Whoever would tend to me, should tend to the sick. …

"A caregiver endowed with five qualities is fit to tend to the sick: He is competent at mixing medicine; he knows what is compatible or incompatible with the patient's cure, taking away things that are incompatible and bringing things that are compatible; he is motivated by thoughts of goodwill, not by material gain; he does not get disgusted at cleaning up excrement, urine, saliva, or vomit; and he is competent at instructing, urging, rousing, & encouraging the sick person at the proper occasions with a talk on Dhamma. A caregiver endowed with these five qualities is fit to tend to the sick."—Mv VIII.26.1–3, 8

[Ven. Sāriputta to Anāthapiṇḍika, who is on his deathbed:] "Then, householder, you should train yourself in this way: 'I won't cling to the eye; my consciousness will not be dependent on the eye.' That's how you should train yourself. 'I won't cling to the ear… nose… tongue… body; my consciousness will not be dependent on the body.' … 'I won't cling to the intellect; my consciousness will not be dependent on the intellect.' That's how you should train yourself.

"Then, householder, you should train yourself in this way: 'I won't cling to forms… sounds… smells… tastes… tactile sensations; my consciousness will not be dependent on tactile sensations.' … 'I won't cling to ideas; my consciousness will not be dependent on ideas.' That's how you should train yourself.

"Then, householder, you should train yourself in this way: 'I won't cling to eye-consciousness… ear-consciousness… nose-consciousness… tongue-consciousness… body-consciousness; my consciousness will not be dependent on body-consciousness.' … 'I won't cling to intellect-consciousness; my consciousness will not be dependent on intellect-consciousness.' That's how you should train yourself.

"Then, householder, you should train yourself in this way: 'I won't cling to contact at the eye… contact at the ear… contact at the nose… contact at the tongue… contact at the body; my consciousness will not be dependent on contact at the body.' … 'I won't cling to contact at the intellect; my consciousness will not be dependent on contact at the intellect.' That's how you should train yourself.

"Then, householder, you should train yourself in this way: 'I won't cling to feeling born of contact at the eye… feeling born of contact at the ear… feeling born of contact at the nose… feeling born of contact at the tongue… feeling born of contact at the body; my consciousness will not be dependent on feeling born of contact at the body.' … 'I won't cling to feeling born of contact at the intellect; my consciousness will not be dependent on feeling born of contact at the intellect.' That's how you should train yourself.

"Then, householder, you should train yourself in this way: 'I won't cling to the earth property… liquid property… fire property… wind property… space property; my consciousness will not be dependent on the space property.' … 'I won't cling to the consciousness property; my consciousness will not be dependent on the consciousness property.' That's how you should train yourself.

"Then, householder, you should train yourself in this way: 'I won't cling to form… feeling… perception… fabrications; my consciousness will not be dependent on fabrications.' … 'I won't cling to consciousness; my consciousness will not be dependent on consciousness.' That's how you should train yourself.

"Then, householder, you should train yourself in this way: 'I won't cling to the dimension of the infinitude of space… the dimension of the infinitude of consciousness… the dimension of nothingness; my consciousness will not be dependent on the dimension of nothingness.' … 'I won't cling to the dimension of neither perception nor non-perception; my consciousness will not be dependent on the dimension of neither perception nor non-perception.' That's how you should train yourself.

"Then, householder, you should train yourself in this way: 'I won't cling to this world; my consciousness will not be dependent on this world… I won't cling to the world beyond; my consciousness will not be dependent on the world beyond.' That's how you should train yourself.

"Then, householder, you should train yourself in this way: 'I won't cling to what is seen, heard, sensed, cognized, attained, sought after, pondered by

the intellect; my consciousness will not be dependent on that.' That's how you should train yourself."

When this was said, Anāthapiṇḍika the householder wept and shed tears. Ven. Ānanda said to him, "Are you sinking, householder? Are you foundering?"

"No, venerable sir. I'm not sinking, nor am I foundering. It's just that for a long time I have attended to the Teacher, and to the monks who inspire my heart, but never before have I heard a talk on the Dhamma like this."

"This sort of talk on the Dhamma, householder, is not given to lay people clad in white. This sort of talk on the Dhamma is given to those gone forth."

"In that case, Ven. Sāriputta, please let this sort of talk on the Dhamma be given to lay people clad in white. There are clansmen with little dust in their eyes who are wasting away through not hearing (this) Dhamma. There will be those who will understand it."

Then Ven. Sāriputta and Ven. Ānanda, having given this instruction to Anāthapiṇḍika the householder, got up from their seats & left. Then, not long after they left, Anāthapiṇḍika the householder died & reappeared in the heaven of the Contented (devas). — MN 143

Then a certain monk went to the Blessed One and, on arrival, having bowed down to him, sat to one side. As he was sitting there he said to the Blessed One, "Lord, in such and such a dwelling a certain monk—newly ordained, not well known—is diseased, in pain, severely ill. It would be good if the

Blessed One would visit the monk, out of sympathy for him."

Then the Blessed One, on hearing the word "newly ordained," on hearing the word "diseased," and realizing that the monk was not well known, went to him. The monk saw the Blessed One coming from afar and, on seeing him, stirred in his bed. Then the Blessed One said to him, "Enough, monk. Don't stir in your bed. There are these seats made ready. I will sit down there."

The Blessed One sat down on a seat made ready. Having sat down, he said to the monk, "I hope you are getting better, monk. I hope you are comfortable. I hope that your pains are lessening and not increasing. I hope that there are signs of their lessening, and not of their increasing."

"I'm not getting better, lord. I'm not comfortable. My extreme pains are increasing, not lessening. There are signs of their increasing, and not of their lessening."

"Then I hope you have no anxiety, monk. I hope you have no anguish."

"Yes, lord, I do have not a small amount of anxiety, not a small amount of anguish."

"I hope you can't fault yourself with regard to your virtue."

"No, lord, I can't fault myself with regard to my virtue."

"Then what are you anxious about? What is your anguish?"

"I understand that the Blessed One has not taught the Dhamma with purity of virtue as its goal."

"If you understand that I have not taught the Dhamma with purity of virtue as its goal, then for

what goal do you understand that I have taught the Dhamma?"

"I understand that the Blessed One has taught the Dhamma with total unbinding through lack of clinging as its goal."

"Good, monk, good. It's good that you understand that I have taught the Dhamma with total unbinding through lack of clinging as its goal, for I have taught the Dhamma with total unbinding through lack of clinging as its goal.

"What do you think, monk? Is the eye constant or inconstant?"

"Inconstant, lord."

"And is that which is inconstant easeful or stressful?"

"Stressful, lord."

"And is it fitting to regard what is inconstant, stressful, subject to change as: 'This is mine. This is my self. This is what I am'?"

"No, lord."

"… Is the ear constant or inconstant?"—"Inconstant, lord." …

"… Is the nose constant or inconstant?"—"Inconstant, lord." …

"… Is the tongue constant or inconstant?"—"Inconstant, lord." …

"… Is the body constant or inconstant?"—"Inconstant, lord." …

"What do you think, monk? Is the intellect constant or inconstant?"

"Inconstant, lord."

"And is that which is inconstant easeful or stressful?"

"Stressful, lord."

"And is it fitting to regard what is inconstant, stressful, subject to change as: 'This is mine. This is my self. This is what I am'?"

"No, lord."

"Seeing thus, the instructed disciple of the noble ones grows disenchanted with the eye, disenchanted with the ear, disenchanted with the nose, disenchanted with the tongue, disenchanted with the body, disenchanted with the intellect. Disenchanted, he becomes dispassionate. Through dispassion, he is released. With release, there is the knowledge, 'Released.' He discerns that 'Birth is ended, the holy life fulfilled, the task done. There is nothing further for this world.'"

That is what the Blessed One said. Gratified, the monk delighted in the Blessed One's words. And while this explanation was being given, the mind of that monk, through lack of clinging/sustenance, was released from effluents. — SN 35:75

CHAPTER SEVEN

Giving Care

The Buddha's instructions on how best to approach aging, illness, and death apply to everyone: not only in the sense that we all face these facts of life, but also in the sense that we will be called upon—even before we face these facts ourselves—to give care to those who are facing them in the present.

The Canon doesn't depict a deva messenger who conveys this message. Caregivers do play a—literally—supporting role in the portrait of the ill deva messenger: picking him up and helping him lie down. But they come to the fore in the passage describing the Buddha and his closest attendant, Ven. Ānanda, caring for the monk with dysentery.

This story delivers a message phrased in strong terms: If you would tend to the Buddha himself, tend to the sick. This message was aimed directly at the monks—on the grounds that they had no family to attend to them, so they should care for one another—but it's phrased in such a way that the message applies indirectly to lay people as well: When you belong to a family, you're duty-bound to look after the aged, ill, or dying members of your family. After all, "tending to one another" implies that someday you will need someone to tend to you, too. We're all in this together.

The Buddha lists the traits needed to be a good caregiver, whether you're a relative or friend of the patient, or are a professional who wants to give care not only to the patient's body but also to his or her mind. His comments on this topic were designed for situations in which both the patient and the caregiver are Buddhist and have shared views about what the true Dhamma teaches. The following discussion is also based on that assumption, but because this situation is still rare in the West, the advice given here should be adapted to the particular needs of the situation.

Some of the lessons—such as how to deal with pain or to develop the brahmavihāras—are more universal than others. And there's one proviso:

If you're a Buddhist caregiver, it's important that you observe the Buddha's strictures about how to treat a patient in line with the precepts. For instance, you can't lie to the patient—say, sugar-coating the doctor's diagnosis by misrepresenting it—and you can't do anything to speed up the patient's death, even if the patient requests it, because those actions would harm *you*. Harming yourself through breaking the precepts is something the Buddha would never recommend, regardless of how other people might feel that they would benefit from your "helping" them in that way.

Of the Buddha's stipulations for an ideal caregiver, two require special discussion: what it means to have goodwill for the patient, and how to teach the patient lessons in the Dhamma.

Goodwill. Everyone would agree that a caregiver should have goodwill and compassion toward a patient. However, there's little agreement on how compassion translates into the major question of extending or shortening life. Because this issue sets the outside parameters for caring for a sick person, it's best to discuss it up front.

For some people, compassion means extending life as long as possible; for others, it means terminating life—through assisted suicide or euthanasia—when quality of life falls below a certain level. Neither of these two groups sees the other as compassionate at all. The first sees the second as criminal; the second sees the first as heartless and cruel.

The Vinaya—the collection of the Buddha's rules for governing monastic life—charts a middle course between these two extremes. The rules show how the Buddha himself worked out the practical details on how to apply the principles of goodwill and virtue to this specific issue.

On the one hand, he didn't subscribe to the notion that medical treatment should try to extend life at all costs. He imposed only a minor penalty on a monk who totally abandons a sick monk before the latter recovers or dies. And there's no penalty for withholding or discontinuing a specific medical treatment. So the rules convey no message that the failure to keep life going would count as murder. This is backed up by the Vinaya's definition for killing: cutting off the other being's life faculty. For this reason, the decision to discontinue life support—thus allowing the

patient's life faculty simply to run out on its own— would not break the precept against killing.

On the other hand, though, a monk who deliberately ends the life of a patient or deliberately speeds up the patient's death, even from compassionate motives, is expelled from the monkhood and can never reordain in this life. After all, you don't know where the patient is going to go after death—whether to a better place or to one with more suffering—so you can't justify speeding up the patient's death as an act of "putting the person out of his or her misery." For this reason, there's no room for euthanasia or assisted suicide.

Within those two parameters, compassionate care means easing the patient's pain as is appropriate, balancing two considerations: the patient's ability to handle pain and his/her ability to stay mindful and alert. You want to avoid leaving the patient in so much pain that he/she can't stay focused and calm. At the same time, you don't want to get the patient too blurry from painkillers to maintain any focus at all. Also, you ideally would want to provide a quiet environment so that the patient can attend to the work at hand: trying to comprehend the pains and other difficulties of illness while observing his/her own mind.

Don't be surprised if the patient becomes difficult. This is where it's important that you strengthen your own goodwill, to make it resilient and enduring. Adopt a daily practice of developing an attitude of goodwill for all, together with the other brahmavihāras, in line with the instructions in Chapter Three.

Another important way of showing goodwill for a patient is not giving in to any grief that you may feel as the patient's condition deteriorates. The patient has enough burdens to bear as it is, so you don't want to impose on him or her the burden of your own sense of loss. Instructions for how to handle grief are given in the next chapter.

Teaching the Dhamma. Here again, the *don'ts* mark off the territory for the *do's*. The Vinaya cites cases where monks tell a sick person to focus his thoughts on dying, in the belief that death would be better than the miserable state of his life. The sick person does as they advise, he dies as a result, and the Buddha expels the monks from the monkhood. Thus, from the Buddha's perspective, encouraging a sick

person to relax hia/her grip on life or to give up the will to live would not count as an act of compassion. Instead of trying to speed up the patient's transition to death, the Buddha focused on speeding up his/her insight into suffering and its end. When you tell the patient to let go, it shouldn't be with the intention of hastening the dying process. It should be with the intention of relieving the suffering of clinging in the present moment.

The Buddha's attitude here derives from a point we discussed in Chapter Six: Every moment of life—every in-and-out breath, even the last—is an opportunity to practice and benefit from the Dhamma. A moment's comprehension of the pain of the present is far more beneficial than viewing the present moment with disgust and placing one's hopes on a better future.

As for the Dhamma you *do* teach the patient, this will depend on your relationship to the patient. In some cases, the patient will be willing to listen to the true Dhamma regardless of whoever speaks it. In other cases, he/she will be willing to listen to the Dhamma only from certain people. If that's the case, find recordings made by those people, or—if possible—invite them to talk to the patient in person or via electronic means. Or read passages from the writings of authors the patient finds inspiring.

If the patient does show an interest in listening to what you have to say, remind yourself that your primary role is as an aid to the patient's mindfulness, to give reminders of teachings that the patient has already heard and/or practiced but is now forgetting, whether from weakness, pain, fear, or cognitive impairment. There is some evidence that patients suffering from dementia or in a comatose state can still, on a subconscious level, benefit from hearing the Dhamma, so it's not a waste of time or energy to read or speak Dhamma to them.

The focus should be on strengthening the patient in terms of the seven strengths that have formed the framework of the discussion in this book: conviction, shame, compunction, persistence, mindfulness, concentration, and discernment. For instance, if the patient is having trouble in dealing with pain, look at the discussion in Chapter Three on how to use these seven strengths in dealing with pain. If the patient is

troubled by thoughts of worry and anxiety, look at the discussion of the hindrances in the section on Persistence (2) in Chapter Six.

Because your emphasis should be on strengthening the patient, then —as the Buddha recommends—the style your talks should resemble the style of his: not simply instructing, but also urging, rousing, and encouraging your listener. You should try, as best as is possible, to encourage your patient in being strong in the face of pain, illness, and death.

Of the seven strengths, the most important ones to emphasize are those dealing with right view: conviction and discernment. Remember the lesson the Buddha learned on the night of his awakening, on the power of a person's views at the moment of death to pull that person in a good or a bad direction. You don't want your patient, under any circumstances, to abandon right view. Yet it's precisely in the area of conviction and discernment that the pain and weakness of illness, along with fear of death, can wreak the most havoc in weakening the mind.

Even people who have been meditating a long time, if they haven't really succeeded in perceiving pains as something separate from awareness, can get discouraged as they find themselves unequal to the task of facing the pains of their illness with discernment. Like King Koravya, they are alone with their pains, with no one to share the pains to make them less. On top of that, the body is beginning to escape whatever measure of control they used to have, and they face the prospect of leaving everything in this life behind. Like the king, they may revert to their enslavement to craving, rather than recognizing their cravings as something to be mastered.

One of the worst things that their cravings might tell them is that Dhamma practice doesn't work after all. This may lead them to revert to their pre-Buddhist views, or to the condition the Buddha identified as our most primal reaction to pain: bewilderment on the one hand, and a search for someone, anyone, who will know how to put an end to the pain on the other. Pain, fear, and weakness are bad enough. Add bewilderment to the mix, and the mind can search for and grasp at anything. If people have to leave the body at that moment, the wind of craving can take them anywhere at all.

So it's essential that you help your patient maintain right view in the midst of these challenges. This may have been one of the reasons why the monks in the time of the Buddha would question any fellow monk on his deathbed about his personal attainments: to bring that attainment back to mind, and to encourage him to devote all his energy to developing it further, if necessary, as best he can. That way, he could focus on viewing his pains and physical weakness from a Dhamma perspective, rather than a me-the-victim one. Viewing pains and weakness from a Dhamma perspective is half the battle right there.

The other half depends on rousing and encouraging your patient's defiant fighting spirit in the face of pain, physical weakness, and fear. After all, as you'll remember from the Introduction, it was the bodhisatta's own fighting spirit—his audacious desire to come out victorious over death—that enabled him to find the Dhamma of the deathless and teach it to the world to begin with. And it's only through inspiring that same undaunted attitude in one another that we can help one another find that Dhamma within ourselves in spite of the hardships of aging, illness, and death.

Think of the two examples of Ven. Sāriputta giving instructions to men on their deathbed. In one case, he underestimated the patient's capabilities (MN 97); in the other, he overestimated them (MN 143). The case to be regretted was the one where he underestimated what the dying person could do. This is a point that a caregiver teaching the Dhamma to a dying patient should always keep in mind.

Once you've been able to strengthen the patient's conviction and discernment, it's relatively easy to encourage the remaining five strengths. Given that we've discussed them so often in this book, I won't detail them all again here. I'll just focus on a couple of examples.

The first example deals with strengthening *mindfulness* and *concentration*. When I was in Thailand, a very elderly man, together with his daughter, once came to spend the three-month rains retreat at our monastery. Toward the end of the retreat, he developed pains in his jaw, which he dismissed as nothing more than a toothache. At the end of the retreat, he went to the dentist, only to learn that he had an advanced case of cancer. He returned to the monastery to bid farewell to Ajaan Fuang,

saying that he planned to go home to die. Ajaan Fuang told him that if he went home, he'd hear nothing but his nieces and nephews arguing over the inheritance—which wasn't much, but it was enough to argue about. So he told the old man to continue staying at the monastery.

We arranged a place for him to stay in the chedi, the spired monument we had built on the top of the hill. His daughter was his primary caregiver, while the monks also helped look after him as the disease advanced. It got to the point where he wouldn't talk, but we had trouble getting adequate painkillers, and we could see that he was in pain: He would plow his head back and forth on his pillow when it got overwhelming. I told the daughter that when that happened, she should whisper his meditation word, *buddho*, into his ear. She did, and the plowing would stop for two or three hours. When it began again, she whispered it into his ear again, and the plowing would stop again. This kept up for several days until, late one night, he died peacefully and alert.

The next morning, I helped build his coffin, and we held funeral services for him for several days. Then the nieces and nephews came to pick up the body to take it back to the old man's hometown for the cremation. Sure enough, as they were loading the coffin on the truck, they argued among themselves about the inheritance.

The second example deals with strengthening *shame*. It might seem strange to appeal to a dying person's sense of shame, but there have been cases where it has been helpful. The important proviso is that the patient respect the person making the appeal.

Years after the above incident—after Ajaan Fuang had died and I had returned to America—it was the daughter's turn. She herself was on her deathbed at home. She proved to be a very difficult patient, cursing her husband and children, and complaining constantly of the pain. No matter how much they tried to get her to contemplate the pains from a Dhamma perspective, she wouldn't listen to them, saying that they had no idea of how strong the pain was. A monk who had studied with Ajaan Fuang learned of what was happening, so he went to yell at her: "What kind of meditator are you? Didn't Ajaan Fuang teach you how to deal with pain? Why aren't you using the lessons you were so lucky to learn?"

Shocked, she came to her senses and, somewhat later, died peacefully.

This approach may not always be appropriate, but it sometimes can be effective, so it's good to know that it can have its time and place in a caregiver's repertoire.

Another lesson to take from these two stories, of course, is that eventually the caregiver will become a patient. So it's important that you, as a caregiver, develop the seven strengths in yourself. This will benefit both you and your patient, now and into the future: The more experience you have in cultivating these strengths, the stronger you can be in dealing with whatever difficulties the patient throws your way, and the more authority you can bring to urging, rousing, and encouraging the patient to be strong as well. As for you, the more you develop them now, the more undaunted and audacious you can be when the time comes to face your own aging, illness, and death, and come out victorious.

[The Buddha counsels King Pasenadi:]

Not by sorrowing,
not by lamenting,
is any aim accomplished here,
not even a bit.
Knowing you're sorrowing & in pain,
your enemies are gratified.

But when a sage
with a sense for determining what is his aim
doesn't waver in the face of misfortune,
his enemies are pained,
seeing his face unchanged, as of old.

Where & however an aim is accomplished
through
eulogies, chants, good sayings,
donations, & family customs,
follow them diligently there & that way.
But if you discern that
your own aim
or that of others

is not gained in this way,
acquiesce (to the nature of things)
unsorrowing, with the thought:

'What important work
am I doing now?' — AN 5:49

[Paṭācārā recounts the Buddha's words:]

"You don't know
the path

of his coming or going,
that being who has come
from where?—
the one you lament as 'my son.'

But when you know
the path
of his coming or going,
you don't grieve after him,
for that is the nature
of beings.

Unasked,
he came from there.
Without permission,
he went from here
—coming from where?—
having stayed a few days.
And coming one way from here,
he goes yet another
from there.
Dying in the human form,
he will go wandering on.
As he came, so he has gone—
so what is there
to lament?"

Pulling out
—completely out—
the arrow so hard to see,
embedded in my heart,
he [the Buddha] expelled from me
—overcome with grief—
the grief
over my son.

Today—with arrow removed,
without hunger, entirely

unbound—
to the Buddha, Dhamma, & Saṅgha I go,
for refuge to
the Sage. — Thig 6:1

Gentle sages…
go to the unwavering state
where, having gone,
there's no grief. — Dhp 225

CHAPTER EIGHT

Grief for the Loss of a Loved One

When the young bodhisatta set out on his quest for awakening, he was looking not only for freedom from aging, illness, and death, but also for freedom from sorrow. When he fully awakened to the deathless, he awakened to freedom from sorrow as well. And just as he taught the way to the deathless to his students, he taught them the way to freedom from sorrow, too.

We've already noted in Chapter Six, his teachings on how dying people can be freed from sorrow and grief over their own impending death. He treats this form of grief as primarily an issue of fear.

However, he also teaches the friends and loved ones of those who are aging, ill, or dead how to handle *their* grief. In this case, he provides a different analysis for the causes of grief, which means that he has to recommend a different way of getting past it.

His advice in this area comes on two levels: symptom-management and total cure. In managing the symptoms of grief, you learn how to engage in skillful verbal fabrication, talking to yourself in such a way that you can keep the grief from overwhelming or ruining your life. You're able to lift your mind from your own personal grief to the larger emotion of compassion for all, so that you can resume your normal activities with a renewed sense of purpose, even though the causes for suffering around grief haven't been entirely removed.

With the total cure, though, you dig down into the mind to see how the ways you normally frame your own verbal and mental fabrications are causing you to suffer from grief. Then—when you've found the underlying concepts and attachments—you can reframe your inner discussion in a way that allows you to experience the loss of those you love and esteem without suffering any alteration in the mind.

There are two reasons why the Buddha needed to teach both approaches. The first is that the total cure requires a radical reordering of

your views about yourself and your relationships with others. It calls into question common beliefs about love and relationships that many people are not ready to question. For this reason, the Buddha's teachings on symptom management can provide help for people not yet ready to attempt the total cure.

The second reason is that the total cure can take time. Everyone, even those who plan to go on to the total cure, can benefit from symptom management in the immediate present when dealing with the aging, illness, or death of a loved one. And, as we will see, symptom management provides a perspective that helps to inform and motivate a desire to attempt the total cure.

Both of these approaches rely on the strengths we've been discussing throughout this book, although grief management focuses on the first four—conviction, shame, compunction, and persistence —whereas the total cure includes the remaining three—mindfulness, concentration, and discernment—as well.

Both approaches begin with a step that they have in common with the Buddha's first step when dealing with aging, illness, and death: calling to mind the universality of what you're suffering from. To the extent that there are beings, there will always be loss and separation as beings age, grow ill, and die.

The two approaches to grief differ, however, in how they analyze the universality of loss, and in the emotions they recommend developing in response to this fact. From this difference, the two approaches diverge in their aims.

Grief Management

AN 5:49 tells of how King Pasenadi happened to be in the Buddha's presence when one of his courtiers came and whispered into his ear that his favorite queen, Mallikā, had just died. Overcome with shock and sorrow, the king could do nothing but sit there brooding, his shoulders drooping, at a loss for words.

The Buddha's immediate response was to teach him three things to do to manage his grief. The first was to reflect on the universality of loss.

No one anywhere, no matter how powerful, can arrange for what is subject to change not to change, or for what is subject to death not to die. To the extent that there are beings—past, present, and future—change and death happen to all of them. This thought helps take some of the personal sting out of the loss, allowing you to acquiesce to what has happened and not to waste energy in trying to undo what can't be undone.

The second step the Buddha taught to the king was that as long as he saw that traditional funeral observances performed a useful function in giving skillful expression to his sense of loss and to his appreciation for the person now gone, he should arrange them. The Buddha never advocated that his listeners try to smother their grief with feigned indifference. As long as they felt a need to express their loss, they should try to do it in a skillful and healing way.

Among the observances he mentioned as potentially useful were eulogies, donations, and the recital of wise sayings. These three activities have since formed the core of funeral observances in many Buddhist traditions. If you actually want to help the person who has passed on, you make gifts and do good in other ways. Then you dedicate the merit to your loved one. To heal the wound in your heart, and to encourage goodness in the people still alive, you express your appreciation for your loved one's goodness. To remind you of the continued value of Dhamma practice, you listen to passages of Dhamma. Weeping and wailing accomplish none of this. They destroy your health, cause distress to those who love you, and please those who hate or despise you.

The Buddha mentioned this last point as motivation for gathering energy for the third step, which is to remind yourself that there are still good things to accomplish in life. For the sake of your true well-being and that of others, once you've skillfully expressed your appreciation for your loved one, you need to get back to the good work that the loss has interrupted.

The Buddha gave just an outline explanation of these three steps to Pasenadi, perhaps assuming that the king would know how to fill in the details, especially for steps one and three. But our discussion in Chapters Three and Six should allow us to fill in the details ourselves.

With regard to the first step, reflecting on the universality of loss: In light of the practice of the brahmavihāras, when you think of all the beings everywhere who have suffered loss, the obvious response should be compassion. When you think of how unavoidable and pervasive loss is throughout the cosmos, it helps to broaden your heart and to enlarge your compassion for the suffering of others. At the same time, the act of broadening your perspective on others' loss and grief helps you gain some distance from your own. You pull out of your grief, not by denying it—for that would be inhumane—but by turning it into a more healing, expansive, and uplifting emotion, one that acknowledges suffering but, instead of being swallowed up by it, allows the mind to grow larger than its sufferings and to manage a more ennobling and nourishing response to them.

From this enlarged perspective, you can gain a broader sense of what needs to be done in the third step of grief management, reflecting on what good work you still have to do in life. In the words of the question that ended the Buddha's conversation with Pasenadi, you should ask yourself, "What important work am I doing now?" The wise response is not to define "important" in terms of the pressing responsibilities of the daily grind. Instead, you think about what's important in terms of the future course of your life as a whole.

As Pasenadi himself noted in SN 3:25, when you reflect in this way, you realize that the important work is Dhamma practice. And as we saw in the discussion in Chapter Six, this means developing qualities like conviction, virtue, generosity, learning, discernment, and the sublime attitudes. These are the qualities that can help guarantee good opportunities for rebirth when you approach your own death. If you want to meet your loved one again in a future life, these qualities guarantee that you will have the opportunity to meet in positive circumstances.

When we view these three steps in grief management in terms of the seven strengths, it's easy to see how they employ and foster the first four. Conviction reminds you that you can't just wallow in your sorrow. Given the need to continue creating good kamma for the sake of your long-term happiness, you've got to get to work to manage at least the

symptoms of your grief. The reflection on how excessive grief distresses your loved ones and pleases your enemies should appeal to your sense of shame. The reflection on how it destroys your health and interferes with the work that needs to be done to keep yourself from falling into even greater suffering appeals to your sense of compunction. Finally, persistence is what actually allows you to think in these terms and to pull yourself out of your grieving thoughts into the more ennobling emotion of compassion for all, and then to act on that compassion for your own good and that of others.

As we've noted, the Buddha offers these steps to King Pasenadi simply as basic instructions in grief management. They're designed to assuage the pangs of grief only to the extent of ensuring that grief doesn't become self-indulgent and ruin your life. They can't entirely remove the arrow of grief from the heart.

The Cure

The Buddha's more advanced instructions for going entirely beyond grief take the same three steps—accepting the universality of loss, skillfully expressing appreciation for what has been lost, and directing your focus to the good things that still need to be done—and pursue them on a deeper level.

First, the universality of loss: The Buddha recommends taking the compassion developed in the first stage of grief management and developing it further. After all, if compassion is genuine and thoughtful, it contains within it the desire to do something about the causes of grief. Think of the Buddha on the night of his awakening: In the second watch of the night, he viewed the sufferings of all beings from a cosmic perspective, but he didn't stop there. The sense of distance from his own sufferings that he gained from this knowledge enabled him to see objectively the causes of suffering within himself. He then went on to apply that knowledge for the purpose of putting an end to suffering, first by ferreting out and removing the causes of suffering in his own heart, and then by teaching others how to remove the causes of suffering in theirs.

In the same way, the objective distancing from your own grief that can come with compassion isn't an end in itself. It's meant to help you look objectively into the internal causes of grief. It then motivates you to do something about them.

We need to get some distance from our grief if we're to understand it because it has very deep roots that reach beyond the particularities of loss down into the mind's underlying attitude toward itself—an attitude you might rather not question. But it's true: In line with the Buddha's understanding of causality and the three types of fabrication, we suffer not so much from the loss of things outside, but because of unskillful tendencies inside.

Ven. Sāriputta once remarked to a group of fellow monks that, on reflection, he realized that there was nothing in the world the loss of which would cause him any grief (SN 21:2). Ven. Ānanda, who was sitting in the group, immediately countered with the example of the Buddha: If the Buddha were to pass away, would Sāriputta still feel no sorrow? Sāriputta replied, "Even if there were change and alteration in the Teacher, my friend, there would arise within me no sorrow, lamentation, pain, distress, or despair. Still, I would have this thought: 'What a great being, of great might, of great prowess, has disappeared! For if the Blessed One were to remain for a long time, that would be for the benefit of many people, for the happiness of many people, out of sympathy for the world; for the welfare, benefit, and happiness of devas and human beings.'"

Ānanda then commented that this was a sign that Sāriputta had no *māna*, or conceit—meaning, in this case, not excessive pride, but the simple insertion of the thought, "I am," into his thoughts.

This was a very astute analysis on Ānanda's part. We feel the sting of loss because we make it "our" loss. And, as the Buddha points out elsewhere (SN 42:11; DN 21), we make it ours through the passion and desire we have felt for the people and things we've lost. Looking even more radically, we can see that we wouldn't have even developed a sense of what's dear to us without the sense of "I am." That "I am" needs to feed, which is one of the reasons it looks for people and things to love. This is why love almost always entails feeding on our loved ones emotionally.

When we've lost them, we've lost our food. This is why grief is so intimately felt. We've been internalizing the other person or the situation now gone, so what we had made a part of ourselves has been ripped away. Grief is grief because loss deprives us of an intimate portion of who we have assumed we are.

This means that to go totally beyond grief, we have to learn how to stop making things ours. And the first step in that direction is to reflect on the universality of loss in a way that gives rise to another emotion, beyond acceptance and compassion: *saṁvega*.

As we noted in Chapter Three, saṁvega is the terror or dismay that arises when you reflect at the meaninglessness of all the many sufferings and conflicts that life everywhere entails. The sense of "I am" that leads to the desire for love also leads to conflicts. When you realize this, a sense of saṁvega motivates you to want to go beyond simply recovering from grief over a particular loss, and to aspire instead to freeing yourself from the possibility of experiencing grief or conflict ever again.

When you develop saṁvega, it lifts you from what the Buddha calls house-based distress (MN 137)—sorrow over the loss of the people and sensory objects you love—to what he calls renunciation-based distress: the sense that there is a way out of experiencing this kind of loss, but that you haven't reached it yet. This realization is distressing because it alerts you to the amount of work that needs to be done, but it contains an element of hope that house-based distress doesn't: the conviction that it is possible to get beyond grief. Renunciation-based distress, for this reason, doesn't just indulge in sorrow. It uses sorrow as motivation to do what needs to be done to get out.

It was to induce this useful sense of distress that the Buddha once asked a group of monks which was greater: the water in the four great oceans or the tears they had shed in the course of their many lifetimes over the loss of a mother (SN 15:3). The answer: the tears. The same answer applies to the tears shed over the loss of a father, a sister, a brother, a daughter, a son. The emotion that comes with this reflection is a mixture of acceptance and defiant unwillingness: acceptance that this is the way things will continue to be if you don't find a way out, and an unwillingness to stay trapped in this immense and unending suffering.

The proper response to this reflection is to look for the way out and to develop conviction that the path of practice will take you there. It's from this perspective that the Buddha has you develop further the second step in going beyond grief: expressing appreciation. In this case, the appreciation goes in two directions.

The first is to realize that the best thing you can do for those who have helped you is to follow the noble path all the way to the end of suffering, and then to dedicate the merit of your attainment to them. In this way, the good they have done for you will bear them great fruit (MN 39).

The second direction is to develop appreciation for all the difficulties the Buddha went through in finding and teaching the noble path. This appreciation is followed by a desire to practice the Dhamma in accordance with the Dhamma—i.e., to follow the path as the Buddha taught it. Instead of trying to change it to suit your preferences, you try to change yourself to be worthy of the path. It's only when you have great respect for the Dhamma that you'll allow it to question your most firmly held views and feelings about yourself. This reflection, in itself, helps to take you beyond yourself and to help heal the "you" defined around the object of your loss. Instead of being a person defined by grief, you are now defined by your noble desire to follow the path.

This new sense of yourself leads to the third step in fully overcoming grief, which is to focus your attention on the good work that still needs to be done. The nature of that work is indicated in the Buddha's response to the news of Ven. Sāriputta's passing (SN 47:13). It's somewhat ironic, in light of Ven. Ānanda's conversation with Ven. Sāriputta, that Sāriputta actually passed away before the Buddha did. When Ānanda brought the Buddha the news, he added that when he himself had heard the news, it was as if he had lost his bearings, and all the directions became dark—his attachment to Sāriputta was that strong. In short, Ānanda's was the typical reaction of intense grief: There was no brightness left in the world because the person he had relied on with so much trust was now gone.

So the Buddha questioned him: When Sāriputta passed away, did he take virtue along with him? No. Concentration? No. Discernment? No. Release? No. Knowledge and vision of release? No. In other words, the

good work of the world—the best work of the world, the path to total release from suffering—is still there to be done.

This work, of course, is composed of all eight factors in the noble eightfold path. Particularly important is the work of right mindfulness, right concentration, and the discernment of right view and right resolve. As we noted in Chapters Two and Six, when your practice of right mindfulness matures as you develop concentration and discernment, it helps you to dismantle, in real time, the inner conversations framed by your sense of a self existing in a world—the basic parameters of becoming. You drop your narratives of your life—"you" in the "world"—and can look at the processes leading up to becoming without reading a "self" or a "world" into them at all. The pleasure and stability of right concentration allow you to do this in a way that is not disorienting, but actually more and more grounding.

It's when this work is accomplished that renunciation-based distress leads to renunciation-based joy and equanimity: the joy that comes with the realization that you're freed from any need to be affected by any sort of change at all, and the unshaken equanimity that reflects that freedom. The mind no longer creates the sense of "me" and "mine" that has to feed on things that change, because it has found a happiness that doesn't change and hasn't the slightest need to feed.

In that sense, the mind no longer turns itself into a being, for beings are defined by their attachment to how they feed (SN 23:2; Khp 4). When the mind no longer takes on the identity of a "being" anywhere at all, it's everywhere released. In this way, you find that the Buddha's words to King Pasenadi—"to the extent that there are beings"—turn out to have a limit. Going beyond that limit, the mind no longer stabs itself with the arrows of grief. From that point on, as long as it continues to live in the world, it will know loss but not suffer from it. When it has gone beyond the world, it will "dwell" in a dimension beyond time and space where there's no possibility of loss at all.

That's where the three steps in the Buddha's total cure for grief can take you: freedom from having to experience grief or sorrow ever again.

Here too, it's easy to see how this cure employs and fosters all seven of the strengths that have formed the framework for the discussion throughout this book.

Conviction in the Buddha's awakening is what motivates you to take on the difficult work of dismantling your sense of "I am."

Your appreciation of the Buddha's accomplishment—the hard work and compassion that went into it—gives you a sense of shame around the idea of not following the path all the way to the end.

Your sense of compunction, when fully developed, is what sparks you to go beyond mere management of your grief to settling for nothing less than the total cure.

Your persistence, mindfulness, concentration, and discernment do the actual work of abandoning the last traces of conceit, allowing you to go beyond the birth, aging, illness, death, and sorrow that being a being entails.

It's through these strengths that the bodhisatta became the Buddha. They helped him develop the undaunted heart that allowed him to attempt and complete the path to the deathless. When you cultivate them, you can develop the same undaunted heart as well.

With arrow pulled out,
independent,
attaining peace of awareness,
all grief transcended,
free of grief,
you're unbound. — Sn 3:8

Appendix

Refuge

[Namo tassa] bhagavato arahato sammā-sambuddhassa. (three times)

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

Buddhaṁ saraṇaṁ gacchāmi.

I go to the Buddha for refuge.

Dhammaṁ saraṇaṁ gacchāmi.

I go to the Dhamma for refuge.

Saṅghaṁ saraṇaṁ gacchāmi.

I go to the Saṅgha for refuge.

Dutiyam-pi buddhaṁ saraṇaṁ gacchāmi.

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

Dutiyam-pi dhammaṁ saraṇaṁ gacchāmi.

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

Dutiyam-pi saṅghaṁ saraṇaṁ gacchāmi.

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

Tatiyam-pi buddhaṁ saraṇaṁ gacchāmi.

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

Tatiyam-pi dhammaṁ saraṇaṁ gacchāmi.

A third time, I go to the Dhamma for refuge.

Tatiyam-pi saṅghaṁ saraṇaṁ gacchāmi.

A third time, I go to the Saṅgha for refuge.

N'atthi me saraṇaṁ aññaṁ
Buddho me saraṇaṁ varaṁ
Etena sacca-vajjena
Sotthi te [me] hotu sabbadā.

I have no other refuge,
The Buddha is my foremost refuge.
Through the speaking of this truth, may they [I] be blessed always.

N'atthi me saraṇaṁ aññaṁ
Dhammo me saraṇaṁ varaṁ
Etena sacca-vajjena
Sotthi te [me] hotu sabbadā.

I have no other refuge,
The Dhamma is my foremost refuge.
Through the speaking of this truth, may they [I] be blessed always.

N'atthi me saraṇaṁ aññaṁ
Saṅgho me saraṇaṁ varaṁ
Etena sacca-vajjena
Sotthi te [me] hotu sabbadā.

I have no other refuge,
The Saṅgha is my foremost refuge.
Through the speaking of this truth, may they [I] be blessed always.

The Sublime Attitudes

(METTĀ – GOODWILL)

Ahaṁ sukhito homi

May I be happy.

Niddukkho homi

May I be free from stress & pain.

Avero homi

May I be free from animosity.

Abyāpajjho homi

May I be free from oppression.

Anīgho homi

May I be free from trouble.

Sukhī attānaṁ pariharāmi

May I look after myself with ease.

Sabbe sattā sukhitā hontu.

May all living beings be happy.

Sabbe sattā averā hontu.

May all living beings be free from animosity.

Sabbe sattā abyāpajjhā hontu.

May all living beings be free from oppression.

Sabbe sattā anīghā hontu.

May all living beings be free from trouble.

Sabbe sattā sukhī attānaṁ pariharantu.

May all living beings look after themselves with ease.

(KARUṆĀ – COMPASSION)

Sabbe sattā sabba-dukkhā pamuccantu.

May all living beings be freed from all stress & pain.

(MUDITĀ – EMPATHETIC JOY)

Sabbe sattā laddha-sampattito mā vigacchantu.

May all living beings not be deprived of the good fortune they have attained.

(UPEKKHĀ – EQUANIMITY)

Sabbe sattā kammassakā kamma-dāyādā kamma-yonī kamma-bandhū kamma-paṭisaraṇā.

All living beings are the owners of their actions, heir to their actions, born of their actions, related through their actions, and live dependent on their actions.

Yaṁ kammaṁ karissanti kalyāṇaṁ vā pāpakaṁ vā tassa dāyādā bhavissanti.

Whatever they do, for good or for evil, to that will they fall heir.

Karaṇīya Mettā Sutta

The Discourse on Goodwill

Karaṇīyam-attha-kusalena

yantaṁ santaṁ padaṁ abhisamecca,

This is to be done by one skilled in aims appreciating the state of peace:

Sakko ujū ca suhujū ca

suvaco c'assa mudu anatimānī,

Be capable, upright, & straightforward, easy to instruct, gentle, & not conceited,

Santussako ca subharo ca

appakicco ca sallahuka-vutti,

content & easy to support, with few duties, living lightly,

Santindriyo ca nipako ca

appagabbho kulesu ananugiddho.

with peaceful faculties, masterful, modest, & no greed for supporters.

Na ca khuddaṁ samācare kiñci

yena viññū pare upavadeyyuṁ.

Do not do the slightest thing that the wise would later censure.

Sukhino vā khemino hontu

sabbe sattā bhavantu sukhitattā.

Think: Happy & secure, may all beings be happy at heart.

Ye keci pāṇa-bhūtatthi

tasā vā thāvarā vā anavasesā,

Whatever beings there may be, weak or strong, without exception,

Dīghā vā ye mahantā vā

majjhimā rassakā aṇuka-thūlā,

long, large, middling, short, subtle, blatant,

Diṭṭhā vā ye ca aditṭhā

ye ca dūre vasanti avidūre,

seen & unseen, living near & far,

Bhūtā vā sambhavesī vā

sabbe sattā bhavantu sukhitattā.

born & seeking birth: May all beings be happy at heart.

Na paro paraṁ nikubbetha

nātimaññetha katthaci naṁ kiñci,

Let no one deceive another or despise anyone anywhere,

Byārosanā paṭīgha-saññā

nāñña-m-aññassa dukkham-iccheyya.

or through anger or irritation wish for another to suffer.

Mātā yathā niyaṁ puttaṁ

āyusā eka-puttam-anurakkhe,

As a mother would risk her life to protect her child, her only child,

Evam-pi sabba-bhūtesu

māna-sambhāvaye aparimāṇaṁ.

even so should one cultivate the heart limitlessly with regard to all beings.

Mettañ-ca sabba-lokasmiṁ

māna-sambhāvaye aparimāṇaṁ,

With goodwill for the entire cosmos, cultivate the heart limitlessly:

Uddhaṁ adho ca tiriyañ-ca

asambādhaṁ averaṁ asapattaṁ.

above, below, & all around, unobstructed, without animosity or hate.

Tiṭṭhañ-caraṁ nisinno vā

sayāno vā yāvatassa vigata-middho,

Whether standing, walking, sitting, or lying down, as long as one's drowsiness is gone,

Etaṁ satiṁ adhiṭṭheyya

brahmam-etaṁ vihāraṁ idham-āhu.

one should be resolved on this mindfulness.

This is called a sublime abiding here.

Diṭṭhiñ-ca anupagamma

sīlavā dassanena sampanno,

Not taken with views, but virtuous & consummate in vision,

Kāmesu vineyya gedhaṁ,
Na hi jātu gabbha-seyyaṁ punaretīti.
having subdued desire for sensual pleasures,
one never again will lie in the womb. — Sn 1:8

Contemplation of the Body

Ayaṁ kho me kāyo,
This body of mine,
Uddhaṁ pādatalā,
from the soles of the feet on up,
Adho kesa-matthakā,
from the crown of the head on down,
Taca-pariyanto,
surrounded by skin,
Pūro nānappakārassa asucino,
filled with all sorts of unclean things.
Atthi imasmiṁ kāye:
In this body there is:

Kesā *Hair of the head,*
Lomā *Hair of the body,*
Nakhā *Nails,*
Dantā *Teeth,*
Taco *Skin,*
Maṁsaṁ *Flesh,*
Nhārū *Tendons,*
Aṭṭhī *Bones,*
Aṭṭhimiñjaṁ *Bone marrow,*

Vakkaṁ *Spleen,*
Hadayaṁ *Heart,*
Yakanaṁ *Liver,*
Kilomakaṁ *Membranes,*
Pihakaṁ *Kidneys,*
Papphāsaṁ *Lungs,*
Antaṁ *Large intestines,*
Antaguṇaṁ *Small intestines,*
Udariyaṁ *Gorge,*
Karīsaṁ *Feces,*
Matthake matthaluṅgaṁ *Brain,*
Pittaṁ *Gall,*
Semhaṁ *Phlegm,*
Pubbo *Lymph,*
Lohitaṁ *Blood,*
Sedo *Sweat,*
Medo *Fat,*
Assu *Tears,*
Vasā *Oil,*
Kheḷo *Saliva,*
Siṅghāṇikā *Mucus,*
Lasikā *Oil in the joints,*
Muttaṁ *Urine.*

Evam-ayaṁ me kāyo:
Such is this body of mine:
Uddhaṁ pādatalā,

from the soles of the feet on up,

Adho kesa-matthakā,

from the crown of the head on down,

Taca-pariyanto,

surrounded by skin,

Pūro nānappakārassa asucino.

filled with all sorts of unclean things. — DN 22

Five Subjects for Frequent Recollection

Jarā-dhammomhi jaraṁ anatīto.

I am subject to aging. Aging is unavoidable.

Byādhi-dhammomhi byādhiṁ anatīto.

I am subject to illness. Illness is unavoidable.

Maraṇa-dhammomhi maraṇaṁ anatīto.

I am subject to death. Death is unavoidable.

Sabbehi me piyehi manāpehi nānā-bhāvo vinā-bhāvo.

I will grow different, separate from all that is dear & appealing to me.

Kammassakomhi kamma-dāyādo kamma-yoni kamma-bandhu kamma-paṭisaraṇo.

I am the owner of my actions, heir to my actions, born of my actions, related through my actions, and live dependent on my actions.

Yaṁ kammaṁ karissāmi kalyāṇaṁ vā pāpakaṁ vā tassa dāyādo bhavissāmi.

Whatever I do, for good or for evil, to that will I fall heir.

Evaṁ amhehi abhiṇhaṁ paccavekkhitabbaṁ.

We should often reflect on this. — AN 5:57

The Four Dhamma Summaries

1. Upanīyati loko.
   The world is swept away.
   Addhuvo.
   It does not endure.
2. Atāṇo loko.
   The world offers no shelter.
   Anabhissaro.
   There is no one in charge.
3. Assako loko.
   The world has nothing of its own.
   Sabbaṁ pahāya gamanīyaṁ.
   One has to pass on, leaving everything behind.
4. Ūno loko,
   The world is insufficient,
   Atitto,
   insatiable,
   Taṇhā dāso.
   a slave to craving. — MN 82

Pabbatopama Gāthā

The Mountain Simile

Yathāpi selā vipulā
   Nabhaṁ āhacca pabbatā
Samantā anupariyeyyuṁ
   Nippothentā catuddisā
   Like massive boulders, mountains pressing against the sky

moving in from all sides, crushing the four directions,

Evaṁ jarā ca maccu ca
Adhivattanti pāṇino
Khattiye brāhmaṇe vesse
Sudde caṇḍāla-pukkuse.
In the same way, aging & death roll over living beings:
noble warriors, brāhmans, merchants,
workers, outcastes, & scavengers.

Na kiñci parivajjeti
Sabbam-evābhimaddati.
Na tattha hatthīnaṁ bhūmi.
Na rathānaṁ na pattiyā.
Na cāpi manta-yuddhena.
Sakkā jetuṁ dhanena vā.
They spare nothing. They trample everything.
Here elephants can hold no ground,
nor can chariots or infantry,
nor can a battle of spells or wealth win out.

Tasmā hi paṇḍito poso
Sampassaṁ attham-attano
Buddhe Dhamme ca Saṅghe ca.
Dhīro saddhaṁ nivesaye.
So a wise person, envisioning his own benefit,
enlightened, secures conviction
in the Buddha, Dhamma, & Saṅgha.

Yo dhammacārī kāyena
Vācāya uda cetasā

Idh'eva naṁ pasaṁsanti.
Pecca sagge pamodati.
One who practices the Dhamma in thought, word, & deed,
is praised here and, after death, rejoices in heaven. — SN 3:25

Ariyadhana Gāthā
Noble Wealth

Yassa saddhā Tathāgate
Acalā supatiṭṭhitā
Sīlañ-ca yassa kalyāṇaṁ
Ariya-kantaṁ pasaṁsitaṁ
One whose conviction in the Tathāgata
is unshakable, well-established,
whose virtue is admirable,
praised, cherished by the Noble Ones,
Saṅghe pasādo yassatthi
Ujubhūtañ-ca dassanaṁ
Adaḷiddoti taṁ āhu
Amoghan-tassa jīvitaṁ.
who has faith in the Saṅgha, straightforwardness, vision:
"Not poor," they say of him. Not in vain his life.
Tasmā saddhañ-ca sīlañ-ca
Pasādaṁ dhamma-dassanaṁ
Anuyuñjetha medhāvī
Saraṁ buddhāna-sāsananti
So conviction & virtue, faith, & dhamma-vision
should be cultivated by the intelligent,

remembering the Buddhas' teachings. — SN 11:14

Bhadd'eka-ratta Gāthā

An Auspicious Day

Atītaṁ nānvāgameyya
Nappaṭikaṅkhe anāgataṁ
Yaḍatītam-pahīnantaṁ
Appattañ-ca anāgataṁ

You shouldn't chase after the past, or place expectations on the future.

What is past is left behind. The future is as yet unreached.

Paccuppannañ-ca yo dhammaṁ
Tattha tattha vipassati
Asaṁhiraṁ asaṅkuppaṁ
Taṁ viddhā manubrūhaye

Whatever phenomenon is present, you clearly see right there, right there.

Unvanquished, unshaken, that's you you develop the mind.

Ajjeva kiccam-ātappaṁ
Ko jaññā maraṇaṁ suve
Na hi no saṅgarantena
Mahāsenena maccunā

Doing your duty ardently today, for—who knows?—tomorrow: death.

There is no bargaining with Death & his mighty horde.

Evaṁ vihārim-ātāpiṁ
Aho-rattam-atanditaṁ
Taṁ ve bhaddeka-ratto'ti

Santo ācikkhate munīti.

Whoever lives thus ardently, relentlessly both day & night,
has truly had an auspicious day: So says the Peaceful Sage. —
MN 131

Dhamma-niyāma Sutta
The Orderliness of the Dhamma

Evam-me sutaṁ, Ekaṁ samayaṁ Bhagavā, Sāvatthiyaṁ viharati, Jetavane Anāthapiṇḍikassa, ārāme.

I have heard that on one occasion the Blessed One was staying near Sāvatthī at Jeta's Grove, Anāthapiṇḍika's park.

Tatra kho Bhagavā bhikkhū āmantesi "Bhikkhavo ti."

There he addressed the monks, saying, "Monks."

"Bhadante ti" te bhikkhū Bhagavato paccassosuṁ.

"Yes, lord," the monks responded to him.

Bhagavā etad-avoca.

The Blessed One said,

"Uppādā vā bhikkhave Tathāgatānaṁ anuppādā vā Tathāgatānaṁ, ṭhitāva sā dhātu dhammaṭṭhitatā dhamma-niyāmatā:

'Sabbe saṅkhārā aniccāti.'

"Whether or not there is the arising of Tathāgatas, this property stands— this steadfastness of the Dhamma, this orderliness of the Dhamma: 'All fabrications are inconstant.'

Taṁ Tathāgato abhisambujjhati abhisameti. Abhisambujjhitvā abhisametvā ācikkhati deseti, paññapeti paṭṭhappeti, vivarati vibhajati uttānī-karoti:

'Sabbe saṅkhārā aniccāti.'

The Tathāgata directly awakens to that, breaks through to that. Directly awakening & breaking through to that, he declares it, teaches it, describes it, sets it forth. He reveals it, explains it, makes it plain: 'All fabrications are inconstant.'

Uppādā vā bhikkhave Tathāgatānaṁ anuppādā vā Tathāgatānaṁ, ṭhitāva sā dhātu dhammaṭṭhitatā dhamma-niyāmatā:

'Sabbe saṅkhārā dukkhāti.'

Whether or not there is the arising of Tathāgatas, this property stands— this steadfastness of the Dhamma, this orderliness of the Dhamma: 'All fabrications are stressful.'

Taṁ Tathāgato abhisambujjhati abhisameti. Abhisambujjhitvā abhisametvā ācikkhati deseti, paññapeti paṭṭhappeti, vivarati vibhajati uttānī-karoti:

'Sabbe saṅkhārā dukkhāti.'

The Tathāgata directly awakens to that, breaks through to that. Directly awakening & breaking through to that, he declares it, teaches it, describes it, sets it forth. He reveals it, explains it, makes it plain: 'All fabrications are stressful.'

Uppādā vā bhikkhave Tathāgatānaṁ anuppādā vā Tathāgatānaṁ, ṭhitāva sā dhātu dhammaṭṭhitatā dhamma-niyāmatā:

'Sabbe dhammā anattāti.'

Whether or not there is the arising of Tathāgatas, this property stands— this steadfastness of the Dhamma, this orderliness of the Dhamma: 'All phenomena are not-self.

Taṁ Tathāgato abhisambujjhati abhisameti. Abhisambujjhitvā abhisametvā ācikkhati deseti, paññapeti paṭṭhappeti, vivarati vibhajati uttānī-karoti:

'Sabbe dhammā anattāti.'"

The Tathāgata directly awakens to that, breaks through to that. Directly awakening & breaking through to that, he declares it, teaches it, describes it, sets it forth. He reveals it, explains it, makes it plain: 'All phenomena are not-self.'"

Idam-avoca Bhagavā.

Attamanā te bhikkhū Bhagavato bhāsitaṁ, abhinandunti.

That is what the Blessed One said. Gratified, the monks delighted in his words. — AN 3:137

The Stilling of Fabrications

Aniccā vata saṅkhārā

Uppāda-vaya-dhammino.

Uppajjitvā nirujjhanti

Tesaṁ vūpasamo sukho.

Sabbe sattā maranti ca

Mariṅsu ca marissare.

Taṫ'evāhaṁ marissāmi

N'atthi me ettha saṅsayo.

How inconstant are fabrications! Their nature: to arise & pass away.

They disband as they are arising. Their total stilling is bliss. — DN 16

Girimānanda Sutta

To Girimānanda

[Evam-me sutaṁ.] Ekaṁ samayaṁ Bhagavā, Sāvatthiyaṁ viharati Jetavane Anāthapiṇḍikassa ārāme. Tena kho pana

samayena āyasmā Girimānando, ābādhiko hoti dukkhito bāḷha-gilāno.

On one occasion the Blessed One was staying near Sāvatthī, in Jeta's Grove, Anāthapiṇḍika's monastery. And on that occasion Ven. Girimānanda was diseased, in pain, severely ill.

Atha kho āyasmā Ānando yena Bhagavā tenupasaṅkami. Upasaṅkamitvā Bhagavantaṁ abhivādetvā ekam-antaṁ nisīdi. Ekam-antaṁ nisinno kho āyasmā Ānando Bhagavantaṁ etad-avoca, "Āyasmā bhante Girimānando, ābādhiko hoti dukkhito bāḷha-gilāno. Sādhu bhante Bhagavā yen'āyasmā Girimānando ten'upasaṅkamatu, anukampaṁ upādāyāti."

Then Ven. Ānanda went to the Blessed One and, on arrival, having bowed down to him, sat to one side. As he was sitting there he said to the Blessed One, "Lord, Ven. Girimānanda is diseased, in pain, severely ill. It would be good if the Blessed One would visit Ven. Girimānanda, out of sympathy for him."

"Sace kho tvaṁ Ānanda, Girimānandassa bhikkhuno upasaṅkamitvā, dasa saññā bhāseyyāsi, ṭhānaṁ kho pan'etaṁ vijjati, yaṁ Girimānandassa bhikkhuno dasa saññā sutvā, so ābādho ṭhānaso paṭipassambheyya. Katamā dasa?

"Ānanda, if you go to the monk Girimānanda and tell him ten perceptions, it's possible that when he hears the ten perceptions his disease may subside. Which ten?

Anicca-saññā anatta-saññā, asubha-saññā ādīnava-saññā, pahāna-saññā virāga-saññā, nirodha-saññā sabba-loke anabhirata-saññā, sabba-saṅkhāresu anicchā-saññā ānāpāna-sati.

The perception of inconstancy, the perception of not-self, the perception of unattractiveness, the perception of drawbacks, the

perception of abandoning, the perception of dispassion, the perception of cessation, the perception of distaste for every world, the perception of the undesirability of all fabrications, mindfulness of in-&-out breathing.

[1] Katamā c'Ānanda anicca-saññā? Idh'Ānanda bhikkhu araññña-gato vā rukkha-mūla-gato vā suññāgāra-gato vā, iti paṭisañcikkhati: 'Rūpaṁ aniccaṁ, vedanā aniccā, saññā aniccā, saṅkhārā aniccā, viññāṇaṁ aniccanti.' Iti imesu pañcasu upādānakkhandhesu, aniccānupassī viharati. Ayaṁ vuccat'Ānanda anicca-saññā.

And what is the perception of inconstancy? There is the case where a monk—having gone to the wilderness, to the shade of a tree, or to an empty building—reflects thus: 'Form is inconstant, feeling is inconstant, perception is inconstant, fabrications are inconstant, consciousness is inconstant.' Thus he remains focused on inconstancy with regard to the five aggregates. This, Ānanda, is called the perception of inconstancy.

[2] Katamā c'Ānanda anatta-saññā? Idh'Ānanda bhikkhu araññña-gato vā rukkha-mūla-gato vā suññāgāra-gato vā, iti paṭisañcikkhati: 'Cakkhuṁ anattā rūpaṁ anattā. Sotaṁ anattā saddā anattā. Ghānaṁ anattā gandhā anattā. Jivhā anattā rasā anattā. Kāyo anattā phoṭṭhabbā anattā. Mano anattā dhammā anattāti.' Iti imesu chasu ajjhattika-bāhiresu āyatanesu, anattānupassī viharati. Ayaṁ vuccat'Ānanda anatta-saññā.

And what is the perception of not-self? There is the case where a monk—having gone to the wilderness, to the shade of a tree, or to an empty building—reflects thus: 'The eye is not-self; forms are not-self. The ear is not-self; sounds are not-self. The nose is not-self; aromas are not-self. The tongue is not-self; flavors are not-self. The body is not-self; tactile sensations are not-self. The

intellect is not-self; ideas are not-self.' Thus he remains focused on not-selfness with regard to the six inner & outer sense media. This is called the perception of not-self.

[3] Katamā c'Ānanda asubha-saññā? Idh'Ānanda bhikkhu imam-eva kāyaṁ uddhaṁ pādatalā, adho kesa-matthakā, taca-pariyantaṁ, pūraṁ nānappakārassa asucino paccavekkhati: 'Atthi imasmiṁ kāye, kesā lomā nakhā dantā taco, maṁsaṁ nhārū aṭṭhī aṭṭhi-miñjaṁ, vakkaṁ hadayaṁ yakanaṁ kilomakaṁ pihakaṁ papphāsaṁ, antaṁ antaguṇaṁ udariyaṁ karīsaṁ, pittaṁ semhaṁ pubbo lohitaṁ sedo medo, assu vasā kheḷo siṅghāṇikā lasikā muttanti.' Iti imasmiṁ kāye, asubhānupassī viharati. Ayaṁ vuccat'Ānanda asubha-saññā.

And what is the perception of unattractiveness? There is the case where a monk ponders this very body—from the soles of the feet on up, from the crown of the head on down, surrounded by skin, filled with all sorts of unclean things: 'There is in this body: hair of the head, hair of the body, nails, teeth, skin, muscle, tendons, bones, bone marrow, spleen, heart, liver, membranes, kidneys, lungs, large intestines, small intestines, gorge, feces, gall, phlegm, lymph, blood, sweat, fat, tears, oil, saliva, mucus, oil in the joints, urine.' Thus he remains focused on unattractiveness with regard to this very body. This is called the perception of unattractiveness.

[4] Katamā c'Ānanda ādīnava-saññā? Idh'Ānanda bhikkhu araññña-gato vā rukkha-mūla-gato vā suññāgāra-gato vā, iti paṭisañcikkhati: 'Bahu-dukkho kho ayaṁ kāyo bahu-ādīnavo. Iti imasmiṁ kāye, vividhā ābādhā uppajjanti, seyyathīdaṁ: cakkhu-rogo, sota-rogo, ghāna-rogo, jivhā-rogo, kāya-rogo, sīsa-rogo, kaṇṇa-rogo, mukha-rogo, danta-rogo, kāso sāso pināso, ḍaho jaro kucchi-rogo, mucchā

pakkhandikā sulā visūcikā, kuṭṭhaṁ gaṇḍo kilāso, soso apamāro, dandu kaṇḍu kacchu, rakhasā vitacchikā, lohitaṁ pittaṁ madhumeho, aṁsā piḷakā bhagandalā, pitta-samuṭṭhānā ābādhā, semha-samuṭṭhānā ābādhā, vāta-samuṭṭhānā ābādhā, sannipātikā ābādhā, utupariṇāmajā ābādhā, visama-parihārajā ābādhā, opakkamikā ābādhā, kamma-vipākajā ābādhā, sītaṁ uṇhaṁ, jighacchā pipāsā, uccāro passāvoti.′ Iti imasmiṁ kāye, ādīnavānupassī viharati. Ayaṁ vuccat′Ānanda ādīnava-saññā.

And what is the perception of drawbacks? There is the case where a monk— having gone to the wilderness, to the foot of a tree, or to an empty dwelling—reflects thus: 'This body has many pains, many drawbacks. In this body many kinds of disease arise, such as: seeing-diseases, hearing- diseases, nose-diseases, tongue-diseases, body-diseases, head-diseases, ear- diseases, mouth-diseases, teeth-diseases, cough, asthma, catarrh, fever, aging, stomach-ache, fainting, dysentery, grippe, cholera, leprosy, boils, ringworm, tuberculosis, epilepsy, skin-diseases, itch, scab, psoriasis, scabies, jaundice, diabetes, hemorrhoids, fistulas, ulcers; diseases arising from bile, from phlegm, from the wind-property, from combinations of bodily humors, from changes in the weather, from uneven care of the body, from attacks, from the result of kamma; cold, heat, hunger, thirst, defecation, urination.' Thus he remains focused on drawbacks with regard to this body. This is called the perception of drawbacks.

[5] Katamā c′Ānanda pahāna-saññā? Idh′Ānanda bhikkhu uppannaṁ kāma-vitakkaṁ nādhivāseti, pajahati vinodeti, byantī-karoti anabhāvaṁ gameti. Uppannaṁ byāpāda-vitakkaṁ nādhivāseti, pajahati vinodeti, byantī-karoti anabhāvaṁ gameti. Uppannaṁ vihiṁsā-vitakkaṁ nādhivāseti, pajahati vinodeti, byantī-karoti anabhāvaṁ

gameti. Uppann'uppanne pāpake akusale dhamme nādhivāseti, pajahati vinodeti, byantī-karoti anabhāvaṁ gameti. Ayaṁ vuccat'Ānanda pahāna-saññā.

And what is the perception of abandoning? There is the case where a monk doesn't acquiesce to an arisen thought of sensuality. He abandons it, destroys it, dispels it, & wipes it out of existence. He doesn't acquiesce to an arisen thought of ill-will. He abandons it, destroys it, dispels it, & wipes it out of existence. He doesn't acquiesce to an arisen thought of harmfulness. He abandons it, destroys it, dispels it, & wipes it out of existence. He doesn't acquiesce to any arisen evil, unskillful qualities. He abandons them, destroys them, dispels them, & wipes them out of existence. This is called the perception of abandoning.

[6] Katamā c'Ānanda virāga-saññā? Idh'Ānanda bhikkhu araññña-gato vā rukkha-mūla-gato vā suññāgāra-gato vā, iti paṭisañcikkhati: 'Etaṁ santaṁ etaṁ paṇītaṁ, yad'idaṁ sabba-saṅkhāra-samatho, sabbūpadhi-paṭinissaggo, taṇhakkhayo virāgo nibbānanti.' Ayaṁ vuccat'Ānanda virāga-saññā.

And what is the perception of dispassion? There is the case where a monk— having gone to the wilderness, to the shade of a tree, or to an empty building—reflects thus: 'This is peace, this is exquisite—the stilling of all fabrications, the relinquishment of all acquisitions, the ending of craving, dispassion, unbinding.' This is called the perception of dispassion.

[7] Katamā c'Ānanda nirodha-saññā? Idh'Ānanda bhikkhu araññña-gato vā rukkha-mūla-gato vā suññāgāra-gato vā, iti paṭisañcikkhati: 'Etaṁ santaṁ etaṁ paṇītaṁ, yad'idaṁ sabba-saṅkhāra-samatho, sabbūpadhi-paṭinissaggo, taṇhakkhayo nirodho nibbānanti.' Ayaṁ vuccat'Ānanda nirodha-saññā.

And what is the perception of cessation? There is the case where a monk— having gone to the wilderness, to the shade of a tree, or to an empty building—reflects thus: 'This is peace, this is exquisite—the stilling of all fabrications, the relinquishment of all acquisitions, the ending of craving, cessation, unbinding.' This is called the perception of cessation.

[8] Katamā c'Ānanda sabba-loke anabhirata-saññā? Idh'Ānanda bhikkhu, ye loke upāyupādānā, cetaso adhiṭṭhānābhinivesānusayā, te pajahanto viramati na upādiyanto. Ayaṁ vuccat'Ānanda sabba-loke anabhirata-saññā.

And what is the perception of distaste for every world? There is the case where a monk abandoning any attachments, clingings, fixations of awareness, biases, or obsessions with regard to any world, refrains from them and does not get involved. This is called the perception of distaste for every world.

[9] Katamā c'Ānanda sabba-saṅkhāresu anicchā-saññā? Idh'Ānanda bhikkhu sabba-saṅkhārehi aṭṭiyati harāyati jigucchati. Ayaṁ vuccat'Ānanda sabba-saṅkhāresu anicchā-saññā.

And what is the perception of the undesirability of all fabrications? There is the case where a monk feels horrified, humiliated, & disgusted with all fabrications. This is called the perception of the undesirability of all fabrications.

[10] Katamā c'Ānanda ānāpāna-sati? Idh'Ānanda bhikkhu araññña-gato vā rukkha-mūla-gato vā suññāgāra-gato vā, nisīdati pallaṅkaṁ ābhujitvā ujuṁ kāyaṁ paṇidhāya, parimukhaṁ satiṁ upaṭṭhapetvā, so sato'va assasati sato passasati.

And what is mindfulness of in-&-out breathing? There is the case where a monk—having gone to the wilderness, to the shade

of a tree, or to an empty building—sits down folding his legs crosswise, holding his body erect, and setting mindfulness to the fore. Always mindful, he breathes in; mindful he breathes out.

Dīghaṁ vā assasanto 'dīghaṁ assasāmīti' pajānāti; dīghaṁ vā passasanto 'dīghaṁ passasāmīti' pajānāti.

Rassaṁ vā assasanto 'rassaṁ assasāmīti' pajānāti; rassaṁ vā passasanto rassaṁ passasāmīti' pajānāti.

'Sabba-kāya-paṭisaṁvedī assasissāmīti' sikkhati; 'sabba-kāya-paṭisaṁvedī passasissāmīti' sikkhati.

'Passambhayaṁ kāya-saṅkhāraṁ assasissāmīti' sikkhati; 'passambhayaṁ kāya-saṅkhāraṁ passasissāmīti' sikkhati.

Breathing in long, he discerns, 'I am breathing in long'; or breathing out long, he discerns, 'I am breathing out long.' Or breathing in short, he discerns, 'I am breathing in short'; or breathing out short, he discerns, 'I am breathing out short.' He trains himself, 'I will breathe in sensitive to the entire body.' He trains himself, 'I will breathe out sensitive to the entire body.' He trains himself, 'I will breathe in calming bodily fabrication.' He trains himself, 'I will breathe out calming bodily fabrication.'

Pīti-paṭisaṁvedī assasissāmīti' sikkhati; 'pīti-paṭisaṁvedī passasissāmīti' sikkhati.

'Sukha-paṭisaṁvedī assasissāmīti' sikkhati; 'sukha-paṭisaṁvedī passasissāmīti' sikkhati.

'Citta-saṅkhāra-paṭisaṁvedī assasissāmīti' sikkhati; 'citta-saṅkhāra-paṭisaṁvedī passasissāmīti' sikkhati.

'Passambhayaṁ citta-saṅkhāraṁ assasissāmīti' sikkhati; 'passambhayaṁ citta-saṅkhāraṁ passasissāmīti' sikkhati.

He trains himself, 'I will breathe in sensitive to rapture.' He trains himself, 'I will breathe out sensitive to rapture.' He trains himself, 'I will breathe in sensitive to pleasure.' He trains himself,

'I will breathe out sensitive to pleasure.' He trains himself, 'I will breathe in sensitive to mental fabrication.' He trains himself, 'I will breathe out sensitive to mental fabrication.' He trains himself, 'I will breathe in calming mental fabrication.' He trains himself, 'I will breathe out calming mental fabrication.'

'Citta-paṭisaṁvedī assasissāmīti' sikkhati; 'citta-paṭisaṁvedī passasissāmīti' sikkhati.

'Abhippamodayaṁ cittaṁ assasissāmīti' sikkhati; 'abhippamodayaṁ cittaṁ passasissāmīti' sikkhati.

'Samādahaṁ cittaṁ assasissāmīti' sikkhati; 'samādahaṁ cittaṁ passasissāmīti' sikkhati.

'Vimocayaṁ cittaṁ assasissāmīti' sikkhati; 'vimocayaṁ cittaṁ passasissāmīti' sikkhati.

He trains himself, 'I will breathe in sensitive to the mind.' He trains himself, 'I will breathe out sensitive to the mind.' He trains himself, 'I will breathe in satisfying the mind.' He trains himself, 'I will breathe out satisfying the mind.' He trains himself, 'I will breathe in steadying the mind.' He trains himself, 'I will breathe out steadying the mind. He trains himself, 'I will breathe in releasing the mind.' He trains himself, 'I will breathe out releasing the mind.'

'Aniccānupassī assasissāmīti' sikkhati; 'aniccānupassī passasissāmīti' sikkhati.

'Virāgānupassī assasissāmīti' sikkhati; 'virāgānupassī passasissāmīti' sikkhati.

'Nirodhānupassī assasissāmīti' sikkhati; 'nirodhānupassī passasissāmīti' sikkhati.

'Paṭinissaggānupassī assasissāmīti' sikkhati; 'paṭinissaggānupassī passasissāmīti' sikkhati.

Ayaṁ vuccat'Ānanda ānāpāna-sati.

He trains himself, 'I will breathe in focusing on inconstancy.' He trains himself, 'I will breathe out focusing on inconstancy.' He trains himself, 'I will breathe in focusing on dispassion [lit: fading].' He trains himself, 'I will breathe out focusing on dispassion.' He trains himself, 'I will breathe in focusing on cessation.' He trains himself, 'I will breathe out focusing on cessation.' He trains himself, 'I will breathe in focusing on relinquishment.' He trains himself, 'I will breathe out focusing on relinquishment.' This, Ānanda, is called mindfulness of in-&-out breathing.

Sace kho tvaṁ Ānanda, Girimānandassa bhikkhuno upasaṅkamitvā imā dasa saññā bhāseyyāsi, ṭhānaṁ kho paṅetaṁ vijjati, yaṁ Girimānandassa bhikkhuno imā dasa saññā sutvā, so ābādho ṭhānaso paṭipassambheyyāti."

Now, Ānanda, if you go to the monk Girimānanda and tell him these ten perceptions, it's possible that when he hears these ten perceptions his disease may subside."

Atha kho āyasmā Ānando, Bhagavato santike imā dasa saññā uggahetvā, yeṅāyasmā Girimānando teṅupasaṅkami. Upasaṅkamitvā āyasmato Girimānandassa imā dasa saññā abhāsi.

Then Ven. Ānanda, having learned these ten perceptions in the Blessed One's presence, went to Ven. Girimānanda and told them to him.

Atha kho āyasmato Girimānandassa imā dasa saññā sutvā, so ābādho ṭhānaso paṭipassambhi. Vuṭṭhahi cāyasmā Girimānando tamhā ābādhā. Tathā pahīno ca paṅāyasmato Girimānandassa, so ābādho ahosīti.

As Ven. Girimānanda heard these ten perceptions, his disease immediately subsided. And Ven. Girimānanda recovered from his

disease. That was how Ven. Girimānanda's disease was abandoned. — AN 10:60

Glossary

Ajaan (Thai): Mentor; teacher. Pali form: *Ācariya.*

Āsava: Effluent; fermentation. Four qualities—sensuality, views, becoming, and ignorance—that "flow out" of the mind and create the flood of the round of death and rebirth.

Asura: A member of a race of beings who, like the Titans in Greek mythology, battled the devas for sovereignty in heaven and lost.

Bodhisatta: "A being (striving) for awakening;" the term used to describe the Buddha before he actually became Buddha, from his first aspiration to Buddhahood until the time of his full awakening. Sanskrit form: *Bodhisattva.*

Brahman: In common usage, a brahman is a member of the priestly caste, which claimed to be the highest caste in India, based on birth. In a specifically Buddhist usage, "brahman" can also mean an arahant, conveying the point that excellence is based, not on birth or race, but on the qualities attained in the mind.

Brahmā: An inhabitant of the heavenly realms of form or formlessness.

Brahmavihāra: Sublime attitude of unlimited goodwill, compassion, empathetic joy, or equanimity.

Deva: Literally, "shining one." An inhabitant of the terrestrial or heavenly realms higher than the human.

Dhamma: (1) Event; action; (2) a phenomenon in and of itself; (3) mental quality; (4) doctrine, teaching; (5) *nibbāna* (although there are passages describing nibbāna as the abandoning of all dhammas). Sanskrit form: *Dharma.*

Gotama: The Buddha's clan name.

Jhāna: Mental absorption. A state of strong concentration focused on a single sensation or mental notion. This term is derived from the verb

jhāyati, which means to burn with a steady, still flame.

Kamma: Intentional act. Sanskrit form: *Karma*.

Nibbāna: Literally, the "unbinding" of the mind from passion, aversion, and delusion, and from the entire round of death and rebirth. As this term also denotes the extinguishing of a fire, it carries connotations of stilling, cooling, and peace. Sanskrit form: *Nirvāṇa*.

Pali: The name of the earliest extant collection of the Buddha's teachings and, by extension, of the language in which it was recorded.

Samatha: Tranquility.

Saṁsāra: Transmigration; the process of wandering through repeated states of becoming, with their attendant death and rebirth.

Saṁvega: A sense of dismay or terror over the meaninglessness and futility of life as it is ordinarily lived, combined with a strong sense of urgency in looking for a way out.

Saṅgha: On the conventional *(sammati)* level, this term denotes the communities of Buddhist monks and nuns. On the ideal *(ariya)* level, it denotes those followers of the Buddha, lay or ordained, who have attained at least stream-entry.

Sutta: Discourse.

Vinaya: The monastic discipline.

Vipassanā: Clear-seeing insight.

Abbreviations

AN	*Aṅguttara Nikāya*
Dhp	*Dhammapada*
DN	*Dīgha Nikāya*
Iti	*Itivuttaka*
Khp	*Khuddakapātha*
MN	*Majjhima Nikāya*
Mv	*Mahāvagga*
SN	*Saṁyutta Nikāya*
Sn	*Sutta Nipāta*
Thag	*Theragāthā*
Thig	*Therīgāthā*
Ud	*Udāna*

References to DN, Iti, Khp, and MN are to discourse (sutta). Those to Dhp are to verse. Those to Mv are to chapter, section, and subsection. References to other texts are to section (saṁyutta, nipāta, or vagga) and discourse.

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Any mistakes that remain, of course, are my own responsibility.

Ṭhānissaro Bhikkhu
(Geoffrey DeGraff)

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