



from heart and hand  
vol. III

Ajahn Jayasāro









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*by Ajahn Jayasaro*

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## Foreword

This book consists of a selection of teachings that I post twice-weekly on a social media platform. As I limit the teachings to a single hand-written page my intention has not been to provide detailed expositions of the Dhamma.

The format does, however lend itself to concise summaries, observations and topics for reflection.

My intention has been that these pages be of benefit to all those with limited time at their disposal, but who appreciate Buddhist 'food for the heart'.

I would like to express my appreciation to Panyaprateep Foundation and all those who have played a part in producing this book for free distribution, and thereby making its content available to a wider audience. May the virtues of the Triple Gem guide and protect you all

Ajahn Jayasāro





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**Vol. III**

A queen and her retinue were having a picnic in a forest grove. After eating, the drowsy queen laid down for a nap. While she was asleep, a female monkey stole her diamond bracelet. When the queen woke up she saw the monkey high up in a nearby tree admiring the necklace. The queen shouted for her guards, but there was nothing that they could do. There was no clear shot for their arrows through the forest canopy, and if she was chased the monkey could jump from tree to tree and escape them with ease.

A wise woman was summoned for advice. She told a servant to buy a large number of cheap trinkets in the local town. Then she had the trinkets spread across the forest floor and told everyone to hide. Within minutes a large number of monkeys arrived. They held up the trinkets to glitter in the sun. Before long the monkey thief was in their midst, parading up and down proudly as if to say, 'Those are nothing. They're cheap trash. Look at these. They are real diamonds!'

The soldiers rushed out, the monkey panicked, and dropping the diamond bracelet, ran off shrieking. Back at the top of a tree she remembered the words of a great monkey sage: "Greed and pride make us stupid and predictable"





There is a story of a mountaineer who got caught in a terrible storm near the top of a mountain. Although he lost all his supplies, he was able to find shelter under a large rock. After three days the storm ended. The man was now very weak. Seeing an old rat he reasoned that only by killing and eating it would he have enough energy to get down the mountain. He would have to break his precept but it looked as if the rat would soon die anyway and he felt that he had no choice. Grabbing a rock he killed the rat, ate it, and did indeed reach safety.

But the life of the rat was not without meaning. In its old age it had not been able to catch healthy insects and had fed on diseased ones. With the rat's death, the diseased insects' population increased. Disease spread through the whole species and they died off. Without the insects to pollinate and fertilize the plants, vegetation started to diminish. With less vegetation the soil began to erode. Eventually there was a great landslide which killed many people living at the foot of the mountain.

The chain of cause and effect is complex. The precepts provide safety and a refuge for oneself and others.





The Buddha often reminded us that true inner change occurs through an organic approach that is gradual and incremental. In one discourse he identifies four wholesome activities; listening to the Dhamma, discussing the Dhamma, calming the mind and investigating its nature. These four activities rightly developed and coordinated eventually culminate in the destruction of all the defilements and complete liberation.

“Just as when it is raining and the rain pours down in thick droplets on a mountain top, the water flows down the slope and fills the clefts and crevices; these, becoming full, fill up the pools; these, becoming full, fill up the mountain lakes; these, becoming full, fill up the streams; these, becoming full, fill up the rivers; and these becoming full, fill up the great ocean.”



There is a pond in my hermitage overlooked by a big stone Buddha at its western end. Although the fish are on a monastic diet — I only feed them once a day — they are big and healthy. I like to think that the pond is almost a fish paradise. But even heaven realms are impermanent. Recently, a family of monitor lizards appeared and began to hunt the fish. I have seen them gliding through the water with grace and menace. For fish who have never had an enemy in their life, it must be traumatic. This week, out of compassion for the fish, we have started to trap the lizards and take them away to a wilder place a few kilometres away. Now, in the evenings, as the sun hangs low in the sky, and I throw food pellets to the hungry fish, I wonder if they are any wiser. Have they learned from their lizard teachers that nothing at all can be taken for granted. That everything and everyone we love and cherish, our life itself, can vanish in the glint of sun on the water. Do these fish now have some small sense of how precious is every moment of every day.





At last, some rain has fallen on the hermitage. How grateful the trees seem to be! Within a few days, the tired brown forest floor has become carpeted with green. Sad, naked branches have become clothed with leaves. The cool patches of shade grow daily. It seems to me quite wonderful that these leaves, each one so flimsy in itself, when gathered together can provide such protection from the fierce summer sun.

Our hearts need the Dhamma. When we put effort into the quality of our actions and the words that we speak, when we cultivate a constant inner wakefulness, it is as if a deep thirst is being quenched. Every good, kind, wise action that we perform, whether through body, speech or mind, refreshes us. Our wholesome actions, each one perhaps a rather small and flimsy thing, when gathered together can provide us with a marvellous sense of cool shade in the midst of a hot, oppressive world.



The relationship between forest monks and the people who put food in their bowls every day is a most unusual one. As the monks walk through the village early in the morning they do not greet the donors, they do not establish eye-contact with them, they do not thank them for their offerings. And yet over the days, months and years it is perhaps, more than any other factor, the power of this simple ritual of giving that sustains the strong warm bond between the monastics and the local community. Almsround allows the villagers to start their day with an act of goodness and a reminder of spiritual values. Almsround reminds the monks that every mouthful of food they eat is the expression of the hard work, generosity and faith of the lay Buddhists; they remember never to take this support for granted, but to strive to be worthy of it. Although the relationship between monks and the inhabitants of the villages close to their monastery is a unique one, it is based upon universal principles. Healthy long-term relationships, of every form, thrive when based upon mutual generosity and support, kindness, sincerity and trust.





Forest monasteries can seem very strict and serious, especially to a newcomer. But they are also places of genuine warmth and good humour. This can easily be seen in the relationship between the abbot and the monastery's lay supporters. I must confess that when I was such an abbot I would sometimes gently tease the old grandmothers and grandfathers. When one of the village ladies would shout out in the Dhamma Hall, 'Please speak louder. Your voice is so soft. I can't hear a word you're saying,' I would sometimes reply, 'Well, whose fault is that? When you were young and your ears were working well, all you wanted to listen to was loud music. It's only now, when you're old and half-deaf that you want to listen to the Dhamma. All of you, remind your families: you don't have to wait until your hair goes grey and your teeth start falling out before you start to practise the Dhamma. The longer you leave it, the harder it is, the thicker and stickier your defilements become.' Everybody would laugh and I would try to speak a little louder.





Before we can let go of defilements we have to understand them. To understand craving (foolish, destructive desire) we have to be able to recognize its characteristics. Here are a few observations:

The goal of craving is pleasant feeling, either directly (for example the craving for some delicious food), or indirectly (the craving for money or fame because of the feelings it is believed they will provide).

Craving is always focused on the future. It always requires a dissatisfaction with the present.

The experience of craving itself is unpleasant. The one who craves wants the craving to disappear as quickly as possible, and be replaced by enjoyment of the object of craving.

Enjoying the object of craving is like scratching an itch. It soon returns, and stronger.

Craving agitates the mind. It robs the mind of its sense of right and wrong.

Craving leads to the breaking of precepts and to conflicts ranging from the personal to the international.

Only when craving is abandoned and wise desire (explained in the next teaching) is cultivated can we find true peace.



The Buddha taught that while foolish desire is to be abandoned, wise desire should be cultivated.

Wise desire is the desire, the passion, the enthusiasm, the commitment that arises from Right View. It manifests in Right Effort.

Wise desire is focused on the cultivation of goodness and virtue in our actions of body, speech and mind, and in discovering the truth of things.

Wise desire is grounded in the present. It is intent on optimising the quality and meaning of our actions rather than merely striving in order to enjoy the result of those actions. It may be accompanied by pleasant feelings but they are not the goal of wise desire.

Wise desire energizes the mind. It does not cause inner agitation, heedlessness or depression. It does not lead to conflicts within ourselves or with others.

Foolish desire leads to bondage. Wise desire leads to liberation.





Mindfulness drives a wedge between stimulus and reaction. With the equanimous awareness of the stimulus, considerations of right and wrong, appropriate and inappropriate, wholesome and unwholesome, have a space in which to appear. It is right here that we learn to transform our relationship with the external world and inner impulses, from blind reaction to intelligent response.

Without mindfulness, our wisdom faculty is disabled. We may know what is right and wrong before and after a crisis. But at the moment of crisis itself, when wisdom is most needed, it is like the greyed-out option on a computer screen.

Mindfulness is the means by which we can take responsibility for our life, and learn how to create an inner refuge.



There was once a monk who refused to participate in group activities. He would not help out with any work projects. This caused some resentment. When criticized, he gave the reason that he was simply following the Buddha's teaching: he was removing himself from distractions in order to strive wholeheartedly for enlightenment. Eventually he was called in front of the Buddha. But on justifying his behaviour as being due to his love of solitude, the Buddha replied that he was mistaken, he was not living alone; in fact, he was sharing his hut with a friend. The monk was confused by this statement, and the Buddha explained that he was living with defilement as his friend.

The more we study the Dhamma the easier it is to find a teaching that, taken out of context, can justify or excuse doing what we want to do. One aspect of mindfulness is being aware of the mind's tendency to seek noble reasons for less than noble actions. Looking within, we need to find the middle path between cynicism and gullibility.





The story is told of a certain man who got very angry at being overlooked for a job that was given to someone much junior to him. He complained to his superior about the injustice. He said that he should have got the job as he had twenty years of experience compared to the other person's mere eight years. His superior replied, 'Yes, it's true that she has only eight years of experience, but you have only one year of experience repeated twenty times'.

Whether in worldly or spiritual matters, it is easy to become complacent. The days, weeks, months, years that pass do not necessarily lead to progress. Without love of learning and truth, we can settle back into our comfort zone. Keep pushing gently at the boundaries of what you think you can do.



The Buddha often emphasized the importance of remembering and contemplating the teachings we receive, until we 'penetrate them with wisdom'. But simply remembering them is a challenging task for most of us, especially the discourses delivered by the disciples of Ajahn Chah, with their free-flowing unstructured style. Scientists say that 80% of memory loss of studied material occurs in the first 24 hours. For this reason, it is important to find time to revise what we have learnt as soon after receiving the teachings as possible. Sitting with friends and sharing memories of a Dhamma talk stimulates our recall in an enjoyable way. Such discussion was praised by the Buddha as one of life's greatest blessings. Revising again at night, before sleep will further imprint the teaching on the mind.

If we are alone, it can be helpful to record a summary on our phone. While doing so we can imagine that we are speaking to an intelligent child. Speaking out loud in this way improves memorization. If we prefer we may write the summary, but it should be in the same clear jargon-free style that a child could understand. This effort to express the teachings clarifies them for us and reveals any gaps in our knowledge.





Faith in the Buddha's teachings grows as we put more and more of them to the test of experience, observing that every single teaching that we have been able to verify has proved to be true, our trust and confidence grows in those teachings dealing with matters that still lie ahead of us.

The Buddhist's logic is simple. The Buddha has never let me down. The more I practice his teachings the more clearly I see, the more I reduce the suffering in my life, the more content and fulfilled I feel, the more I have to give to others.

Buddhists do not place their faith in dogmas. Their faith is in the Buddha as the Great Physician and Guide, the Dhamma as the true path to liberation, and the Sangha as excellent role models and teachers.



Today is Visakha Pūja, the day on which we commemorate the birth, enlightenment and passing away of the Lord Buddha. Of these three events, it is the enlightenment that is most significant. Through his enlightenment the Buddha proved that human life is not determined by external unseen powers. We have no need to pray to gods and goddesses, or to make sacrifices to them. There is no great being who rewards us when we're good and punishes us when we're bad. There is no great plan for the world or for us.

We all create, moment by moment, the unsatisfactory world of experience which we inhabit. Each one of us, male and female, can learn how to stop creating this self-made suffering and allow it to cease, leaving only wisdom, compassion and inner freedom. All we need to do is to diligently follow the Noble Eightfold Path. We are like beggars sat on a mound of gold coins. The Buddha points us to the truth that we have been blind to. Namo tassa bhagavato arahato sammāsambuddhassa!





As practising Buddhists we should be careful observers of our experience, and in particular the causal relationships of which it is composed. Commitment to the practice of generosity, to keeping precepts and to the training of the mind are all strengthened when we observe the effects that they produce within us. Noticing again and again how selfishness and greed, anger and jealousy, sully our hearts we naturally turn away from them. Observation of the connection between our actions of body, speech and mind and the mental states and the habits that result from them give us confidence in the law of kamma. We carry around with us many superstitious, unexamined ideas about ourselves, our lives, our relationships, our happiness. As meditators we take nothing for granted. We gaze at our experience in its entirety with the clear fresh eyes of mindfulness. It is amazing what we can discover.



Before I left England in 1978, I accompanied Ajahn Sumedho on a walk through some of the colleges of Oxford University. As we walked along he gave me some very good advice for my future life in Thailand. At one point he said, 'Don't seek for the perfect monastery. It doesn't exist.' I guessed he must have seen that as an idealistic young man, I had too many ideas about how a monastery should be, how monks should behave and so on.

Ajahn Sumedho's words went right to my heart. They helped me to be mindful of my expectations and not take them so seriously. I came to see that nothing produces discontent so easily as a fixed view about how things should be. I noticed that I sometimes gained more wisdom from observing monks who behaved badly as I did from those who behaved well. I learned that the more gratitude I felt for what I did receive, the weaker became the disappointments at what I did not





The path of life is not easy for anyone. Whatever vehicle we are driving we will have to cross bumpy patches on the road. Practice of the Dhamma does not mean that we can bypass all the cracks and potholes. What Dhamma gives us is the inner resources to deal with the challenges we face without creating unnecessary suffering to add to the physical pain.

Wise people let go of self-pity like a dirty rag. They don't get caught up in poisonous questions like 'Why me? Why always me?' They don't shout out in their minds, 'It's not fair!' They don't lecture themselves, 'How could you be so stupid? If you'd just done this rather than that, none of this would have happened. You know this already. Why didn't you listen to him or her? You should be smarter than this.'

Wise people don't spend hours worrying about an uncertain future to no purpose.



Wise people say, 'Right now it is like this. It is just this way. Being like this, what is the best thing I can do right now. What is the best thing I can do with my mind at this very minute? Is it possible in some small way to turn a disaster into an opportunity?'



As a school student I once read an anecdote written by a psychiatrist about a man tormented by loud voices in his head. He was admitted into hospital and given a lobotomy. Afterwards, he would wander around the hospital shouting to his voices, "What's that you say? Speak up. I can't hear you."

I remember as I read this anecdote, it made me chuckle. Then, as I realized that I was laughing at the pain of a person truly worthy of compassion, I stopped with a start, feeling guilty. I wondered how I could be so callous. My answer to myself was that if I was to have met that man in the hospital I would not have laughed. I had been amused because the presentation of the ironic situation had been in such a form as to bypass the reader's compassion. It was one of my first lessons on how to read and listen mindfully. Every account, written or verbal, involves choices as to what is to be included, and what left out.





When problems arise, Buddhist practitioners go beyond demanding who is to blame. Instead they seek to establish themselves in a state of mind most conducive to discovering the causes and conditions that have contributed to the problem. They don't ask, 'Whose fault is this?' but examine the nature of the fault. Blame means pointing the finger, while understanding contribution means tracing the web of internal and external factors. The first is coarse, the second subtle. Blame says, 'I am right. I know I am'. Contribution asks questions, 'This is how it seems to me. But is there something I'm not seeing? What alternative explanations might there be.' Blame feeds on a lack of awareness; contribution thrives on mindfulness. The attraction of assigning blame is the emotional purge it can provide; the reward for mapping contributions is the joy of seeing clearly.



The desire for an explanation is not necessarily the same thing as the desire for truth. Often our primary goal is a sense of closure. We want painful experiences to make sense and we usually make that happen by embedding them in a story. Throughout history, ideas of fate and divine will have been the most popular of these stories. Hindus and Buddhists have usually looked to the teaching of kamma to meet this deep need for meaning and consolation.

On one occasion a lay Buddhist recounted a string of painful experiences to Ajahn Chah. She asked him why these things had happened to her. Instead of telling her that her pain was the result of actions from a past life, he said simply, 'Because you were born?'



Ajahn Chah's answer was not a consolation. It was a reminder of a challenging truth. Having taken a human birth we are vulnerable, fragile beings. We can have no guarantees that painful things will not happen to ourselves or our loved ones. We are always walking on thin ice. It is neither fair nor unfair; it is the way life is. Practising the Dhamma is our best option. With eyes wide open, we can develop the inner stability, clarity and compassion to live well and wisely in this inherently unstable world.



The Roman Stoic philosopher Seneca often spoke about the virtue of simplicity and the rejection of unnecessary wealth. He wrote that all the gold in the world could not provide enough happiness to outweigh the headaches that would come from owning it. Nevertheless, Seneca himself made many shrewd investments and became an extremely rich man. One of his biographers said that in singing the praises of poverty, 'nobody excelled this millionaire' Seneca's wealth made him many enemies. The obvious conflict between his words and his actions made him appear insincere.

Although he defended himself fiercely, it seems clear that Seneca's ability to promote virtue was undermined by his desires.

We cannot expect our words to have weight if they are contradicted by our actions. One reason children do not always listen to their parents is because it is their parents' actions that influence them more. Some of us can almost rival Seneca in our ability to rationalize our defilements. We should remember that although we may be able to convince ourselves that we are being consistent, that does not ensure that those around us will also see it that way.





Whatever meditation object we focus upon, our initial challenge is to create and sustain such a relationship between the mind and the object that mental defilements cannot arise. Such a relationship bears many similarities to healthy relationships in the external world - in both we need to cultivate sincerity, appreciation and contentment. The relationship with the meditation object is our anchor and refuge. It is not an escape from our problems, but the provider of an environment in which the roots of our suffering can be recognized in full awareness without fear, anxiety or aversion. Sometimes our problems simply dissolve in this light of awareness. At other times we need to investigate the impermanent, flawed, selfless nature of our experience for release to take place. We all tie ourselves into knots. Meditation allows us to untie those knots.



Recently I was discussing with a monk friend how ready people are to express strong opinions on subjects about which they knew next to nothing. He told me that from his experience living in Europe, this is especially true of the teaching of rebirth. People often tell him that while there are many aspects of Buddhism that they find interesting and profound, rebirth makes no sense to them. The monk replies that in his opinion the evidence supporting rebirth is very strong, and suggests they start the discussion by refuting the evidence.

In every case he's met the questioners become uncomfortable: they have never read the research or examined the evidence. The monk invites them to come back when they've done the reading, and he will be glad to discuss it with them. It is sad to see, we said, how many people assume Buddhist teachings to be dogmas, either to be accepted or rejected according to the feelings they provoke, rather than hypotheses to be put to the test.





The Buddha taught that dwelling on nine thoughts in our minds resentment towards other people grows like a poison within us:

'They have caused me harm'

'They are causing me harm'

'They will cause me harm'

'They have caused harm to someone I care about.'

'They are causing harm to someone I care about.'

'They will cause harm to someone I care about.'

'They have acted to benefit someone I dislike'

'They are acting to benefit someone I dislike'

'They will act to benefit someone I dislike'

Here the Buddha is not concerned with the legitimate means by which we take care of ourselves and our loved ones. He is focused on the resentment. He suggests that to let go of these obsessive thoughts we reflect that given this person's beliefs and perceptions and desires and fears and habits, how could it be otherwise?

The Buddha points out that the suffering is always in the thought, 'It shouldn't be like this.'



Learning how to refer to changing phenomena by unchanging names was one of the first great triumphs of human intelligence. It has enabled us to label complex systems with such simple words as river or electricity or money. As a result, we have an efficient and convenient means to think and communicate.

But there are drawbacks. It is easy for us to forget that there is a crucial difference between a phenomena itself and its name. By confusing the two, we lose sight of the underlying impermanence of all things and thus lose contact with reality. Much suffering stems from this mistake.

As Buddhists we should regularly examine our perceptions of other people. Can we see what lies behind the labels by which we refer to them? At the very least, can we see how all of us are united as companions in birth, old age, sickness and death?





Samādhi is not an end in itself. In a description of the mind that has developed samādhi correctly, the Buddha spoke of it as 'malleable, wieldy and luminous, pliant and properly concentrated for the destruction of the taints.' In other words, the primary function of samādhi is to provide the necessary conditions for the arising of liberating wisdom.

Only when gold has been purified of its defilement by five metals — iron, copper, tin, lead and silver — is it ready to be made into beautiful ornaments. Only when the mind has been purified of five hindrances — sensual desire, ill-will, dullness and drowsiness, restlessness and remorse, and doubt — is it ready to see things in their true light.



The constant search for novelty and excitement inevitably leads to periods of boredom and depression. Excitement is no more the antidote to boredom than scratching is the answer to an itch.

We Buddhist practitioners are not free of the restless pursuit of the new. These days there is such easy access to the teachings of so many Buddhist schools, that the temptation to try something different never goes away. As our path becomes more challenging, we can easily become tempted by the allure of other approaches. But when the initial buzz of the new has passed away, we can find ourselves back at square one, frustrated and full of doubts.

The moral is simple: be patient. Be a humble student of the Dhamma, not a restless consumer of teachings.





Close observation is not merely a matter of paying attention to what appears in the present moment with steady focus and without bias. It also involves looking for absences: what might be expected to be present but is not. This requires calling upon memory. Observation also involves relating present experience to the larger context — the Buddha's path to awakening — with an investigation as to whether the present phenomena is rooted in craving or wise desire (chanda), leads to an increase in suffering for oneself and others, or to its cessation. The most penetrative observation takes place when the observing mind has been purified of the five disruptive mental states called 'hindrances'. Then the investigation of the impermanent, ownerless and unsatisfactory nature of experience can become truly profound.



When we perceive an object through the senses - living or inanimate - one of three feelings arises: pleasant, unpleasant or neutral. Our instincts tell us to move towards whatever evokes pleasant feeling, away from whatever evokes unpleasant feeling, and to ignore whatever evokes neutral feeling. But there is a problem here. Things which are detrimental to our long-term welfare can, in the short term, evoke pleasant or neutral feelings. As a result we may be drawn into pursuing or ignoring such things, creating the conditions for future suffering. Similarly, things which are conducive to our long-term welfare can, in the short-term, evoke unpleasant or neutral feelings. As a result, we may avoid or neglect things which could enhance our long-term well-being.



It is consequently important that we keep a constant watch on our feelings and not be overly influenced by them. Feelings provide us with information about the objects that we perceive, but they are not reliable guides for action. Training ourselves how to sustain an awareness of our values and long-term spiritual goals in the midst of experience, whatever the feelings that arise in the mind, is one of our most important tasks.



The Buddha spoke of three marvels; the marvel of psychic powers, the marvel of mind-reading and the marvel of instruction. The Buddha said that he saw danger in the first two, and only considered the last one to be noble and sublime. The ability to communicate the path to ultimate liberation is the one true marvel.

Today we commemorate Asalha Pūjā, the day on which the Buddha demonstrated the marvel of instruction for the first time. Two months after his enlightenment he arrived at the Deer Park in Sarnath in order to teach his five former disciples. At first, these ascetics were hostile towards the Buddha and distrustful. Their minds were attached to mistaken ideas about spiritual development. But within minutes the Buddha was able to allay their hostility, and transform it into faith and inspiration. He was able to present his revolutionary 'Middle Way' teaching with such power and eloquence that they readily accepted it.

By the end of the discourse, Kondañña, the eldest member of the group had realised the first level of enlightenment and the other four were far along the path towards it.





There are many kinds of unskilful speech not specifically mentioned in the texts explaining Right Speech. We often slip into them when someone close to us misbehaves, especially a child. Often these ways of talking are well-intentioned. But they are unskilful because they rarely provide the effect they aim at producing, and often make matters worse. Here are a few examples to avoid:

asking rhetorical questions:

'How could you do that? What were you thinking?'

blaming and shaming

'That's disgraceful; totally unacceptable! You've caused a huge problem for everybody!'

commanding

'Sort this out right now.' Go and say sorry.'

name-calling

'This shows just what a lazy, selfish, ungrateful person you are.'

using sarcasm

'Well, that's what I call being mindful in daily life.'

threatening

'If you don't change your ways very soon, I'm going to do something you really won't like.

warning

'If you carry on like this, you're going to end your life a sad and lonely old woman.





In daily life the key principles that we have committed ourselves to - beginning with the five precepts - must be in easy reach of the mind. That is to say that we must become so familiar with them that they spring to mind effortlessly. It is not enough to simply be conscious of what we are doing or saying, but we must be aware of what we are doing or saying in relation to our values. The more time we spend reflecting on the precepts the more fluent we become in applying them.

We can also make our own individualized 'pegs' for mindfulness. For instance, we could make a determination not to boast, not to complain, not to be sarcastic. We could determine to never take pleasure in the suffering of a fellow human being, no matter how much we think they deserve it. We can make a list based on our unskillful habits, memorize it and check for successes and failures every night. By this means we can gradually wear away the defilements.





The impulse to give and share and help others is a wonderful jewel of the human mind. But this impulse must be fortified by wisdom for it to lead to the true and sustainable welfare of those we seek to help. Here is an inspiring example that I came across recently.

When MIT professor Timothy Presto visited a hospital in rural Indonesia he found that all eight incubators for newborn babies donated by aid organizations were broken, and the staff did not know how to repair them. Dr. Presto and his team began working on a new design that used locally available car parts: headlights for warmth, dashboard fans for ventilation, and a motorcycle battery for power. If any of these incubators went wrong, hospital staff just needed to find someone who was good with cars to fix it — the principles were the same.



The other day I received a visit from an elderly lady who I have known for over thirty years. She is in her mid-eighties now but her mind is still bright and sharp, and she has the calm demeanour and good humour of one who has been practising Dhamma for a very long time.

As a young woman she had a sparkling career and was a prominent member of high society. Her life took a radical and unexpected turn after meeting Ajahn Fan, one of the great disciples of Ajahn Man. One day she went to further her meditation practice in a forest monastery in a remote part of northeast Thailand. She never left. Now forty five years have passed and she is very happy with the way her life has turned out.

As we reminisced, she recalled how she felt when she first started listening to Ajahn Fan's teachings. She said that during the day, while she was at work, whatever she was doing, she would feel that her heart was smiling. As I listened to her, I thought 'Yes, that is it. That is exactly it.' This joy in the Dhamma is a precious thing. Recognize it and nurture it. It is a true refuge.





Confronted with separation from something or someone we love, our natural tendency is to either indulge in the grief or try to be rid of it. Both reactions make it worse, like exposing a fresh wound to infection. The middle way between the extremes of indulgence and suppression is to simply recognize feelings of grief and loss as normal results of separation. By calmly bearing with these unpleasant feelings, we allow them to cease without interference. By doing this again and again, the frequency and intensity of the feelings diminishes. Eventually, like a wound that has been kept clean, healing takes place.





On one occasion during the time of the Buddha, the nun Soma was assailed by Māra, the Evil One. When he tried to undermine her practice by declaring that enlightenment was too profound for shallow women to realize, she did not lose her mind/faith. She replied to him:

"What difference does being a woman make when the mind is well concentrated, when knowledge flows on steadily seeing clearly, rightly, into the Dhamma?"

She went on to let Māra know that she recognized him, and that as she had no identification with gender, she was immune to his tricks.

Then, says the sutta, "Māra the Evil One - sed and dejected at realizing, 'Soma the nun knows me' - vanished right there."



Meditation techniques can be divided into two kinds: those that employ thinking and those that do not. Examples of non-thinking meditations would be mindfulness of breathing, and the scanning of physical sensations throughout the body. Thinking meditations include reflections on death, on loving-kindness and on the unattractive aspects of the human body. Thinking meditations can be very good options when the mind is in a busy or agitated state.

Thinking meditations require the meditator to use the mind systematically. The points on which the mind is to reflect have been decided upon before the meditation begins. Often, meditators find that after a certain period of time the thinking starts to feel heavy and tiresome. This is a signal that the mind is now ready to switch to a non-thinking object like the breath. In other cases the reflection leads to a feeling of intense well-being or bliss. When this occurs meditators may now focus on that feeling as a non-thinking object to take the mind deeper into samādhi.





A key feature of the Buddha's teachings is that they are verifiable. On one occasion the Buddha was asked on what grounds he declared the Dhamma to be "apparent here and now, timeless, encouraging investigation, leading inwards, to be experienced individually by the wise"

The Buddha replied that when the mind is overwhelmed by defilements we are unable to understand our own true welfare or the true welfare of others. As a result we are drawn to actions of body, speech and mind that lead both to our own affliction and to the affliction of others. Consequently, we suffer mental pain and depression.

When, however, the mind has freed itself of defilements, we are now able to understand our own true welfare and the true welfare of others. As a result we are no longer drawn to actions of body, speech and mind that afflict ourselves and others. Consequently, we do not suffer.



It is, in other words, because we can observe the effects of defilement, the training to eliminate the defilements, and the results of eliminating the defilements that the Dhamma is 'apparent here and now, timeless, encouraging investigation, leading inwards, to be experienced individually by the wise



When learned brahmins heard the Buddha teach for the first time, many became so inspired that they immediately asked to take refuge in Buddha, Dhamma and Sangha, and to be considered lay followers of the Buddha from that day onwards.

The exclamations of praise for the Buddha often included the following phrase: "he has made the Dhamma clear, as if he were righting what has been overturned, revealing what was hidden, showing the way to one who was lost, or holding up a lamp in the darkness so that one who has good eyesight can see what is there."<sup>11</sup>

This phrase captures well the realization that although the important truths of life are always all around us, we have in our ignorance allowed them to be overturned or concealed. The path has always been present but we've turned down side roads without realizing it. Our lack of vision is not through a defect in our eyes, but because we have wandered into a place without illumination. The Buddha does not say 'Will you believe this?' but 'Can you now see this?'





The Buddha taught in a step-by-step manner. He would not impart the more profound teachings until he was sure that his audience had the necessary foundation of right view to be able to benefit from them. He would address the immediate concerns of the audience and gradually build upon them. In one discourse to householders the Buddha spoke about four kinds of happiness for one living in the world.

Firstly, he said is the happiness of one who works hard and honestly. For the consciousness of being the owner of 'righteous wealth righteously gained' brings joy to the mind. Secondly, the knowledge that one has used that righteously gained wealth for the enjoyment and welfare of oneself and family, and also to perform meritorious deeds brings joy to the mind.

Thirdly, the knowledge that one is free of debts, large and small, brings joy to the mind.

Fourthly, the knowledge that one's actions of body, speech and mind are blameless and without blemish brings joy to the mind.

The Buddha said that householders should aspire to all four kinds of happiness, but should know that the happiness of the first three combined cannot provide even a small fraction of the happiness to be gained by the fourth





Ajahn Chah taught his disciples to establish the sense of knowing in their minds and try to sustain it throughout the meditation. To explain this idea he gave the analogy of a room with six doors and with a single chair placed at its centre. He said that if the owner of the room sits on the chair and does not get up, then even though there may be guests wandering in and out of the room through the various doors they will not stay long, because there is no chair for them to sit on. Here, the mind is like the room and the doors are the sense organs. If mindfulness and alertness are fully established then it is if they occupy the space at the centre of the mind. Other mental states may wander into the mind but there is nowhere for them to become comfortable and they soon leave.





The key principle that the teacher must try to impress upon the student is that suffering arises and is sustained by craving, that it is reduced by a reduction of craving and that it disappears through the abandonment of craving, achieved through practice of the Eightfold Path. This understanding constitutes the fundamental pillar of Right View.

The teacher must encourage students to observe, again and again, how craving poisons their minds, and how letting go of craving frees it. Students need to see for themselves how the burning desire to get, to become, to get rid of, always makes things worse. Difficult situations, difficult people are the cause of difficulties. They are not, in themselves, the cause of suffering. There are so many things in our life that we cannot control. Hope does not lie in manipulating external conditions, but in practice of the Eightfold Path. The more grounded we are in the Dhamma, the wiser will be our responses to the challenges we face.



I'm not sure what I think about Chang'e. In one popular version of the legend she drank her husband's elixir to prevent it falling into the hands of the villain, Fengmeng. In another version she stole the elixir and was turned into a frog as a punishment. Elsewhere it is said that her husband, Hou Yi, gave it to her as a gift. And one version says that Chang'e took the elixir and flew to the moon from anger when she found out her husband was having an affair.

With the growth of the internet we have come to live in a world of gossip (often masquerading as 'news'), a world in which we do not have the time or resources to be sure who is telling the truth. But this has always been the case to some degree. At least we can remind ourselves not to fall into the trap of assuming that gossip which agrees with our prejudices is probably true, and that which contradicts our prejudices is probably false. More importantly, surrounded by so many things competing for our interest,



we must be mindful and wise in choosing what to pay attention to. Many of the issues that spin our minds around are as important to our lives as a debate about the virtue of Chang'e





The mind can change so swiftly. In a moment it can switch from reflecting on a profound point of Dhamma to wondering about what to have for lunch. It can move from high to low and back again with breathtaking speed. The body, however, cannot make extreme changes in a short time. It is important to remember this point when the mind and body combine together to produce a strong emotion, such as fear. The most common response to fear is to attend solely to its mental aspect with, for example, logic or reassurance. This strategy may allow us to let go of the fearful thoughts for a while. The problem is that the physical phenomena aroused by the fear — accelerated heart beat, adrenaline rush etc — still persist, and can easily stimulate a new round of fearful thinking. This being the case, it is better to focus on being mindful of the physical sensation of fear throughout the body. With the mind intent on this task, the body relaxes and the fearful thoughts will usually fade away by themselves.



Ceremonies are designed to affect us emotionally. Ritual movements and chanting can provoke unexpected feelings of faith and inspiration to arise in a new participant, and thus form their first gateway into the Dhamma. Ceremonies provide a focal point for people to come together and make merit. They mark important events in memorable ways. Ceremonies form a tangible link to other Buddhist communities, and also to Buddhists of previous generations. They contribute to an uplifting sense of tradition and culture. Precept ceremonies both formalise and deepen our commitment to leading a good and caring life in society. Death ceremonies can provide a healing space in which to address the pain of grief and separation, and even to gain insight into the truths of life and death.

There are many other positive results that may be looked for from Buddhist ceremonies. But these results are not guaranteed by the ceremonies themselves. Ceremonies and ritual may be supporting conditions for growth in Dhamma, but they may also, if we are not mindful, lead to superstition and attachment. It is up to us to look after our traditions with love and wisdom.





A meditation based upon recollection of the virtues of the Buddha can be a powerful means to purify the mind of hindrances. There are a number of devotional texts which can provide uplifting themes for this contemplation. My favourite is 'Satapañcasalkā : Mātreceta's 'Hymn to the Buddha', translated by Ven. Dhammika. Here is a short selection of verses:

"When matched with your calm equanimity, the firmness of the earth seems like the quivering of a flower petal"

"Beside the radiance of your wisdom, which destroys the darkness of ignorance, the sun does not attain even the brightness of a firefly."

"Lovely yet calming, bright but not blinding, gentle yet strong who would not be inspired just to see you?"

"The joy one feels on beholding you for the first time does not diminish even after seeing you a hundred times."

"Although you preferred the delights of solitude, compassion led you to spend your time among the crowd."



"From your mouth, pleasing to the eye, drop words  
pleasing to the ear, like nectar from the moon."

"Those who work for the welfare of the world and those of  
compassionate heart, what could they do wherein you have not  
already led the way?"



The findings of neuroscience now agree with Buddhist teachings that pain is not simply a physical phenomena. Perceptions of pain, understanding of its meaning and emotional reactions to pain, for example, make considerable contributions to the severity of experienced pain. Extreme pain can be made much more manageable by changing the frame within which it is felt. The American athlete and author, Christopher Bergland, has recounted his experience running the 135 mile (217 km) Badwater Ultramarathon<sup>4</sup>. He said that by the 100 mile mark the bottoms of his feet were one extremely painful sheet of blisters from heel to toes. He said it felt like he was running on red-hot coals. He coped by imagining that the jolt of pain he felt when his foot hit the ground was actually the sensation of a positive current of energy entering his body. He visualized himself absorbing the energy from the core of the earth, transferring it through his nervous system, and into his muscles.

" Instead of stepping lightly or thinking of the pain as negative, I would actually stomp my feet harder into the ground and welcome the pain as a symbol of this outside source of power coming from the centre of the earth into my body through my feet... all the while chanting "Bring it on!" silently to myself as I charged ahead.

\* in temperatures of  $120^{\circ}\text{F}$  ( $49^{\circ}\text{C}$ )





We constantly forget things that it is important for us to remember. I am not here referring to names or faces or where we put our keys, important though they may be in daily life. I am referring to the underlying truths of existence such as impermanence and the fragile uncertainty of our life. So many of our most foolish actions and words are rooted in an instinctive feeling that we will never die. Physical immortality is so obviously impossible that it requires no debate. But we forget our mortality. Time and time again. Rarely are our actions the expression of our awareness of the way things are. More often we are swept along by the flow of ignorance. Sometimes we deliberately turn our backs on uncomfortable truths. But more often it is simply that we forget. And that is why Buddhist training puts so much emphasis on mindfulness.

The practice of mindfulness is a practice of remembering. It involves developing the ability to bear in mind the simple truths of life, and allow them to inform the way we live our lives. It means remembering the larger context of our experience within the pressures, expectations and temptations of daily life.



In Thailand, it is quite common for monasteries of the Ajahn Cha tradition to arrange with local hospitals for groups of monks to attend autopsies. The experience is a powerful one, and can have a galvanising effect on the monks meditation practice, especially on their contemplation of the body. The sights and smells leave lasting impressions.

Many doctors are keen Buddhist practitioners. But many are not. Indeed, I can think of few pathologists who have been prompted by their work with corpses to search for a deeper understanding of life and death. It is clear that mere close proximity to old age, sickness and death does not in itself awaken the mind. There has to be a readiness and an openness to learn from experience. Many people make their minds hard and numb to avoid facing difficult truths. Many others adopt comforting beliefs. Others — and this has always been especially true of soldiers and medical students — use humour to distance themselves from the truth. As students of Buddhism we must try to be be courageous enough to open our eyes and allow ourselves to learn deeply from what we see.





The arising of craving is the arising of the feeling of lack. Craving tells us that we must add that thing, that experience to our life because without it we are incomplete. Craving is accompanied by restlessness and a reluctance to consider any moral considerations. It whispers in our ear, 'Don't think so much. Just do it!'

Samādhi provides us with a sense of completeness: an absence of lack. When the practice of mindfulness has matured into a firm inner calm and clarity, craving arises less often and with less power. When it does arise it can be fully experienced as a conditioned mental event. We do not feel compelled to follow its urgings. It cannot bully us into compliance. We can watch craving arise, express itself and pass away within the peaceful mind.





learning to examine the conditioned nature of phenomena again and again provides us with an affinity with the three characteristics which may eventually mature into liberating insight.

This kind of investigation was often taught by Venerable Nandaka. On one occasion he gave a number of similes to his audience. He pointed out that as the oil, wick and flame of a burning oil lamp are all impermanent, how much more so is the radiance emanating from it. As the roots, trunk and foliage of a great tree are all impermanent, how much more so is the shade conditioned by it.

Similarly as the six internal sense bases (eyes, ears, tongue, nose, body, mind) and the six external sense bases (forms, sounds, odours, tastes, tangibles and mind-objects) are all impermanent, how much more so are the feelings that arise in dependence upon them.



The Noble Eightfold Path begins with Right View. On the foundational level, 'Right View' refers to views, theories, beliefs, and values informed by the law of kamma, and which emphasize personal responsibility. On its more profound level, Right View manifests as the vision of the causal nature of phenomena which culminates in liberation.

Right View arises in dependence on two factors

(1) External influence in the form of information and inspiration. Ideally, this is provided by the teacher, known as 'the good friend', but may also be derived to a certain degree from one's culture, parents, schooling or the media.

(2) Wise reflection: considering, exploring, digesting, and integrating the information one receives in order to use it as a guiding light in one's life.

In emphasizing the importance of wise reflection the Buddha once said:



"Monks, whatever states there are that are wholesome  
... they are all rooted in wise reflection, converge  
upon wise reflection, and wise reflection is declared  
to be the chief among them"





We can always find reasons not to meditate.

'It's too early'; 'it's too late'.

'I have a busy day ahead of me and need more rest'

'I've had a busy day today and need to rest'

'I'm too hungry'; 'I'm too full'.

'I'm not feeling very well and need to rest up in case I get worse'

'I'm just recovering from illness and need to rest up in case I have a relapse.'

The Buddha gives examples of more skillful thinking:

'I have a busy day ahead of me and won't have much opportunity to meditate; I'll meditate now while I still have the chance'

'I've had a busy day today and didn't get much opportunity to meditate; now I'm free I'll catch up.'

'I'm not feeling very well. If it gets much worse I may not be able to meditate; I'll meditate now while I still can.'

'I'm starting to feel better now, but I may have a relapse and be unable to meditate; I'll meditate now while I still can.'



It is easy to doubt the law of kamma. We see so many people who do good deeds and seem to gain no benefit. So many people do bad things and become rich and successful.

The Buddha said that the results of kamma will only appear rapidly if the surroundings allow it. For example, a corrupt person in a corrupt environment will receive the kammic results of his bad actions much more slowly than a corrupt person in an environment that values honesty. Sooner or later, however, the results will manifest.

Most important to note is that every time that we act with a good, kind, noble intention then those qualities are immediately strengthened in our hearts. And so with selfish, cruel intentions. This strengthening of good and bad qualities in the heart is the perceivable result of kamma, which we do not merely believe in, but can see for ourselves.





Someone (with no budget restrictions) intending to buy a car would probably make their choice dependent on such criteria as safety, durability, comfort, design and performance. Buddhist criteria for consideration of superior human beings would perhaps not be so different as might first be thought.

Safety: They keep five precepts. By refraining from unskillful actions of body and speech, they are protected from the painful results of such actions.

Durability: They endure patiently through physical discomfort, the harsh words of others and the unwholesome impulses that arise in their minds.

Comfort: They meditate every day and do not experience the stresses and tension that arise from lack of mindfulness and awareness.

Design: They turn their minds to uplifting and insightful mental states with a pleasing elegance and precision.

Performance: They approach their responsibilities with powerful focus, can fluently adapt to changing conditions, are very fast in understanding and slow to take offence. They move smoothly through life's busy traffic with minimal inner noise.





The pleasures of the world are short-lived. Once they have passed they seem like a dream. They provide no long-lasting fulfillment, comfort or refuge. Acts of goodness have a long life. Once they have passed, recollection of them brings joy. Goodness provides us with lasting fulfillment, comfort and refuge.

In the Dhammapada the Buddha taught.

"Here he rejoices, hereafter he rejoices. In both states, the well-doer rejoices. He rejoices, exceedingly rejoices, perceiving the purity of his own deeds" (v. xvi)

"Here he is happy, hereafter he is happy. In both states the well-doer is happy. "Good have I done" (thinking thus), he is happy. Furthermore, he is happy having gone to a blissful state. (v. xviii)



Belief in the power of love to overcome all obstacles is a staple of romantic books and movies. But without shared values and goals, without self-knowledge, without patience, without compromise, without learning how to communicate skillfully, loving couples often find their relationship founders. And if they have children, the suffering does not end with them. It is transmitted to the next generations.

Love between two people can be a beautiful thing. But while it may provide invaluable support and companionship on the path to freedom from suffering, it is in itself not a solution to the challenges of life. However blessed we may be in our closest relationships, the most important work we have to do in this precious human birth must be accomplished alone.





When we lack awareness a desire is experienced as a command. We follow it blindly. If we are prevented from doing so we feel angry or depressed.

With a small amount of awareness the desire feels like a bothersome itch. We recognise the possibility of not scratching but can rarely refrain. Knowing that scratching will only provide temporary relief helps us little.

With mindfulness firmly established, the desire is experienced as an invitation that we feel free to decline.

Observe this often: how the development of mindfulness produces an expansion of inner freedom, how lack of mindfulness condemns us to servitude. From this observation our dedication to Dhamma practice gains much strength.





The Buddha considered his emphasis on the central importance of systematic effort to human well-being to be a defining feature of his teachings. *Sammā Vāyāma*, the fifth limb of his Eightfold Path consists of the efforts:

- 1) to prevent the arising of as-yet unarisen defilements.
- 2) to abandon defilements that have already arisen.
- 3) to introduce virtues into the mind.
- 4) to nurture those virtues that have already arisen and bring them to maturity.

These four efforts constitute the heart of Dhamma practice. Reviewing the degree to which one has been able to put forth these four kinds of efforts consistently is one good means of measuring progress on the path, and pinpointing weaknesses.



Thirty years ago, if you were to buy fresh fruit or vegetables in a Thai market, you would probably take your purchases home in bags made from stapled newspaper. One young mother in Bangkok arrived home from such a shopping trip, mind obsessed with anger towards her unfaithful and absent husband, plotting all kinds of revenge. Something on the kitchen table caught her eye. She pulled one of the newspaper bags apart and started to read. The column gave a summary of a Dhamma talk given at the Ministry of Industry by a Western monk, Ajahn Jayasaro. She read that the monk had said that indulging in the desire for revenge does more long-term harm to our well-being than the actions of the person who hurt us. Every sentence made sense. Tears started to fall down her cheeks. She cried and cried. Finally the tears stopped and she felt as if a great weight had fallen away. She had forgiven her husband, and was now determined to make the best of her life without him. Some time later she sent me one of the most beautiful and memorable thank you letters that I have ever received.





Difficult external situations are sometimes unavoidable. But the frustration that comes from not wanting to have to be faced with them is always self-created. One of the simplest ways to let go of that frustration is by inwardly reciting the mantra: 'It's like this.' We can remind ourselves that we are practising Dhamma in order to learn the wisest way to deal with what is, not to struggle to make things how we would like them to be. If our practice cannot endure patiently through this degree of obstruction, we may enquire, then what hope is there for progress? If we are practising in order to gain and hold onto some permanent blissful state then surely we are practising for rebirth in heaven, not liberation. Most importantly, we should ask the question: 'In what way can I look at this difficulty that will allow it to become part of my practice, rather than an enemy towards it?'





When the Buddha spoke about the precepts becoming sullied or muddied, his emphasis was more on the unwise attitudes that may be taken to the precepts, rather than to the transgressions themselves. The reason for this is that he did not consider keeping the precepts as an end in itself, but rather as an integral part of an education that encompasses all human faculties, and that must be based on the correct motivation.

Thus, refraining from unwholesome actions of body and speech does not yet count as a training in *sīla* if those who refrain do so mindlessly, with no understanding of why it is wise to refrain, or if they feel they are being forced to refrain against their will. *Sīla* is considered impure if those keeping precepts do so out the desire for some reward, either in this life or the next. The same applies to those holding mistaken views that keeping precepts or adopting certain observances can, in themselves, produce spiritual purity. Finally, *sīla* is undermined if those who keep precepts consider themselves superior to those who do not.



One of my favourite stories of the great Tibetan master Milarepa concerns the last words he spoke to his student and Dharma-heir, Gampopa. When Gampopa finally took leave of his master after many years of hard practice, he requested the blessing of a final teaching. To his dismay, Milarepa refused, saying only, 'What you need is more effort, not more teachings. But as Gampopa crossed the narrow stream in front of his master's cave, knowing that it would be the last time, he heard Milarepa shouting out to him, 'Wait! I do have one last very profound secret instruction.' Gampopa turned around joyfully. At that moment Milarepa bent over and pulled up his ragged robe, exposing buttocks as calloused and pockmarked as a horse's hoof, evidence of a lifetime of seated meditation on bare rock. 'Son of my heart!', he shouted, 'this is my final instruction. Just do it!'





Shortly before he passed away the Buddha gave a brief final teaching. Characteristically, it consisted of two clauses: an observation and a recommendation based upon that observation. The observation was that nothing lasts, that all conditioned phenomena are transient. The recommendation was that therefore the goal of practice is to be realized through heedfulness (appamāda).

Heedfulness may be explained as unbroken mindfulness, particularly in the sense of constantly bearing in mind one's commitment to abandoning the unwholesome and cultivating the wholesome. It means not allowing the mind any occasion to indulge in defilement, and not allowing any opportunity for growth in Dhamma to be passed by.

This Pāli word 'appamāda' has also been translated as 'diligence' and 'non-neglect'. One aspect of its meaning may be expressed by the English idiom, 'taking nothing for granted'. A great modern scholar has referred to it as the Buddhist concept of responsibility.





We can only take responsibility for those things over which we can exercise deliberate control. We cannot, for example, forbid ourselves in advance from experiencing a desire to say something hurtful to another person. But we can resolve not to act upon that desire if it should arise. As Buddhists, we take full responsibility for our actions and speech, but do not consider ourselves bad for greedy, angry, foolish thoughts. Failure to understand this point leads to a mind tormented by guilt. Many people endlessly criticize themselves and believe that they are bad people because they have bad thoughts. It is a sad mistake that causes a huge amount of unnecessary suffering in the world.

When we refrain from acting upon bad thoughts we can make progress in removing them from the mind. The vital steps are to consistently refuse to indulge in them, and to cultivate the meditation skills that cut them off at the root. Indeed, it might be said that this is the most profound acceptance of responsibility: taking on the work necessary to remove unwholesome thoughts from the mind, and to develop the wholesome.



Ajahn Chah was once asked whether it was better to practice in order to become a bodhisattva or an arahant. He said, 'Don't be a bodhisattva, don't be an arahant, don't be anything at all. As soon as you think you are something — whatever it is — then you'll suffer.'

Please be mindful of this point. It is important to have noble aspirations, but whenever they are conceived in terms of becoming something or changing into something other than what you believe yourself to be, suffering will inevitably follow. Whenever you think, 'I want to be....' or 'I don't want to be...' you have fallen into the trap of craving.





Some defilements respond to Dhamma practice almost immediately. Before long we see an overall decline in the frequency of their occurrence, their intensity and their duration. Observing this is energizing: it boosts our faith in the Dhamma as a tool for genuine transformation of the mind. Other defilements are more resistant. Sometimes it can seem like we are trying to oppose an armoured car with a bow and arrows. Falling foul of these defilements again and again can be deeply dispiriting.

To deal effectively with recurrent, chronic defilements it is important to recognize that often the problem is that one part of us does not want to be free of them. The defilements answer some psychological needs within us. For this reason, we should not look at those defilements simply as enemies to be overcome, but rather as unwise answers to unacknowledged needs. Discovering these needs will give us the opportunity to find more wholesome ways to address them. When this work of investigation is combined with a regular meditation practice, steady progress can be made





Ajahn Chah once related how he tried to develop wisdom through thinking. It didn't work. His mind remained unresponsive to all his efforts. After contemplating a spider, he changed his approach. He decided that he didn't need to seek out things to investigate, but would wait for them to come to him. He observed how the spider dwelt silent and without moving at the centre of its web until an insect became trapped in it. Then the spider, made aware of its prey by the disturbance to the web, would immediately dart towards the insect and gobble it up. Ajahn Chah said that he decided to make his mind like a spider. He would dwell at peace in the present moment, mindful and alert. When he became aware of a sense object impinging on the web of his awareness he would pounce upon it with an investigation of its impermanent, unsatisfactory and selfless nature. It was a turning point.



Cross-cultural misunderstandings, when they are not tragic, are often humorous. In the early sixteenth century, when the Spanish invaded what is now Mexico, the Aztecs assigned incense bearers to accompany them wherever they went. The Spanish interpreted this as a sign of great honour, that they were being perceived as gods. In fact, scholars later discovered, it was because the local people found the smell of the Europeans unbearable.

But misinterpretations are, of course, not restricted to those of different cultures and languages. Grave misunderstandings can arise in the closest of relationships between people sharing a single language and background. A major reason for this is that we tend to assume that our needs, emotions and intentions must be obvious to those around us, even though we have done very little to put them into words. At the same time we can be overly confident that we know the needs, emotions and



intentions of others even though they have never clearly articulated them. Relationships can improve when we examine the assumptions we are making about our own transparency and the transparency of those around us. A great deal can be accomplished with a humble heart.





As a teenager I came up with a number of ways to deal with everyday suffering. A couple of them I devised for dealing with delays and disappointments. These were especially useful while travelling in Asia. Changing a traveller's cheque in a provincial Indian bank in the 1970's could be a gruelling task. It often meant facing an obstacle course that included various ledgers and tokens and could take hours to complete. My favourite skillful means was to say to myself, 'Well, it's better than ...' and contemplate a worse alternative. It being India, a common phrase would be, 'It's better than standing in this queue with stomach cramps and diarrhoea'. Very soon, imagining that nightmare scenario would bring me back to peace with the situation. A more sobering reflection would be, 'Well, it's better than having no traveller's cheques to change'. It would often amaze me to see how easy it was to drastically reduce mental pain by means of a change of focus or frame.

It is a simple practice but an effective one. When we wake up to the present moment with mindfulness, we have a choice. We can see what we are adding to situations and stop adding it or add something else, more skillful.





Take a human being. Imagine a slide show presenting photographs taken of him daily from the day of his birth until the day of his death as an old man. Imagine a diary listing his thoughts, beliefs, emotions, desires and fears every week from childhood until death. The chief characteristic of these two records would be constant change. There would be little in common between the beginning and end of the slide show and diary. Our genius as human beings has been to learn how to assign fixed names to such streams of unfixed phenomena. We could, for example, call this life, Joe.

The advantage of this naming of processes is enormous. Much of our great success as a species can be attributed to it. But there is a drawback. When we understand ourselves and the world in terms of fixed labels we tend to believe ourselves and our world to truly consist of fixed entities (attā). This is the root cause of our suffering. Dhamma practice consists of re-connecting with the actual process nature of our lives (anattā).



We still respect and make use of names like 'Joe' or 'Theiland' but are not deluded into thinking that they accurately represent the nature of things.



In Buddhism, faith is not dependent on belief in dogmas. It is essentially a confidence in the truth of three propositions:

- (i) There can be no freedom from suffering, and no true lasting happiness in the unenlightened state.
- (ii) The Buddha's enlightenment proves the human potential - and therefore our own potential - for enlightenment.
- (iii) Our lives being governed not by chance or a divine plan, but by the law of kamma, we can realize our potential for enlightenment by wise action. This wise action consists of the training of body, speech and mind called the Noble Eightfold Path.

The measure of our faith as Buddhists is not then the intensity of our belief. It is the willingness to put these propositions to the test. If we see the unsatisfactoriness of the unenlightened state, if we genuinely believe in our potential for enlightenment, and if we believe that a path towards it has been revealed, how can we not apply ourselves to the training?



For many people this is the time of year to enjoy good food. For Buddhists it is also an appropriate time to reflect on one of the Buddha's teachings that sprang from his direct knowledge of the kammic results of our deeds:

"Monks, if beings knew as I know, the result of giving and sharing, they would not eat without having given, nor would they allow the stain of meanness to obsess them and take root in their minds. Even if it were their last morsel, their last mouthful, they would not eat without having shared it, if there were someone to share it with."

### Itivuttaka 18

The pleasurable taste of each mouthful of food lasts for a few seconds. The joy of giving and sharing food lasts for a lifetime.





Beware of words that ignore the truths of impermanence and contingency such as 'always' and 'never', especially when they follow personal pronouns e.g.

"I always....."      "I never....."  
"You always....."      "You never....."  
"He/she always...."      "He/she never...."  
"They always...."      "They never...."

So much anger, frustration and depression has resulted from using these words unwisely. Strong emotions often provoke us to use absolute terms both in our thinking and our speech. But such exaggeration sets us on the path of delusion. Being careful and precise in our use of language is not being pedantic. It can prevent much conflict and suffering.



These days the news on our screens can be overwhelming. So much anger, so much violence, so much ignorance and greed! It is easy for us to fall into the trap of anxiety, depression or denial. The Buddha taught us to deal with the craziness around us by determining: this world is infected by greed and selfishness; I, at least, will try to live my life with restraint and a generous heart. This world is infected by hate and anger; I, at least, will try to live my life with kindness and compassion. This world is infected by ignorance and superstition; I, at least, will try to live my life with wise consideration. We may not be able to do much to alleviate the suffering that appears on our screens. But we can be a force for good, moment by moment, day by day, in our families, our workplace and our community.





"Monks, even if bandits were to sever you savagely limb by limb with a two-handed saw, if you were to give rise to a mind of hate towards them, you would not be carrying out my teachings" This is surely one of the most startling and intimidating of the sayings of the Buddha.

So how should we hold it in our hearts? Some people might think that the Buddha has set us an impossibly high standard to live up to. They may well feel despair: 'I will never be a true disciple of the Buddha. It's just too hard.'

Myself, I believe that with these words the Buddha was giving us a new perspective on our feelings, a skillful reflection to make use of at times when anger and ill-will threaten to engulf our minds. We can think, "The Buddha said that if I were practising his teachings well,



I could let go of hate even if bandits were to be sawing my limbs off. Compared with that, this provocation is nothing. I may not be able to guarantee my feelings if someone were to lop my arms off, but in this small matter, at least, I can show my determination to follow the Buddha's path to liberation.



Ajahn Chah rarely spoke about himself. When he did, the stories he related were almost all concerned with the defilements he used to have, and the struggles he'd endured during his practice. This seemed to me a wise and compassionate way of talking to his disciples. It is natural for us to feel in awe of such a teacher and to feel that the gap between him and us is unimaginably wide. By telling us of his failings, Ajahn Cha reminded us that when he began his practice he was no different from us. His realisation came through intelligent and consistent effort, through patience and resilience. The lesson he wanted to teach us was: if I can do it, so can you.





16<sup>th</sup> January is Teachers Day in Thailand. It is also the day that Ajahn Cha passed away. Every year, to commemorate his passing, over a thousand monks and nuns and several thousand lay Buddhists gather at his monastery for six days of Dhamma practice. On the afternoon of the 16<sup>th</sup>, the whole assembly pays their respects to Ajahn Cha's relics by forming into a long column and circumnambulating the stupa in which the relics are enshrined.

When I give Dhamma talks on these days I find myself returning to a familiar point. Ajahn Cha left us once, in January 1992. But since then we, his disciples, have left him many, many times. Whenever we choose to ignore or act in opposition to his wise and compassionate teachings it is as if we turn our backs on him and walk away. My appeal is that we should all try to honour his memory by keeping his teachings in our hearts and, come what may, putting them into practice as best we can. This, I believe, is the ultimate expression of gratitude and deep respect.





The cultivation of sense restraint is one of the primary tasks of the newly ordained monk. Monks are taught that certain sense objects easily inflame the mind. When there is no need to pay attention to such objects one should train oneself to avoid dwelling on either their overall impression or any of their attractive features. The logic is clear: preventing the arising of a problem is more efficient than dealing with one after it has arisen. This is not a practice to eliminate defilements but to reduce the food on which they feed.

In adapting this teaching for young people, I tend to replace the phrase 'sense restraint' with 'taking care of the senses'. Although lay Buddhists do not generally aspire to the intensity of the monastic training, almost everyone in the modern world faces the challenge of sensory overload.

Bringing attention to the sense data that we allow into our minds, and refraining from stimulation that unnecessarily distract and upset us, is an important life skill. We take care of our senses, and thus our mental health, by monitoring how much and what kind of sense data we expose ourselves to.





In his teachings on the cultivation of Right Mindfulness the Buddha listed four objects or foundations (satipatthāna) for the practice.

- (i) the body
- (ii) feeling tone (pleasant, unpleasant or neutral)
- (iii) the mind
- (iv) mental states perceived in terms of their obscuring (akusala) or enlightening (kusala) effects on the mind.

During meditation, being aware of the breath is to practise the first foundation of mindfulness.

Being aware of the feeling tone present during every inhalation and exhalation is to practise the second foundation of mindfulness.

Being aware of the quality of the mind that pays attention to the breath is to practise the third foundation of mindfulness.

Being aware of the presence or absence of the hindrances (nivarana) and enlightenment factors (bojjhanga) and understanding the causal processes involved, is to practise the fourth foundation of mindfulness.



Practising Dhamma means putting the Buddha's teachings to the test of experience. Simply believing that they are true is not the point. Belief without experience can never escape the shadow of doubt, except by repression. As we put the teachings into practice we start to change. But we may not recognise the changes taking place because they do not always correspond to what we think they should be. Practitioners are sometimes so focused on looking for 'wow!' moments that they overlook the modest, incremental improvements taking place in their conduct and inner life. These improvements include a growing sense of gratitude for all one has been given in one's life, an increased joy in giving and sharing, a stronger commitment to precepts, a natural, unforced turning away from trivial pursuits. Recognising such changes, while avoiding the traps of pride and complacency, can be a major factor in inspiring consistency in our practice. And if there is any special recipe for success in Dhamma practice, it is consistency.



The strength of our anxiety bears no fixed relationship to the severity of the threats that we face in life. We can be as anxious about things that have almost no likelihood of occurring as about things that pose a real danger to our well-being. Anxiety is not caused by our sense of threat, it is what we add on to it. Allowing the mind to dwell again and again on a worst case scenario makes it come to seem far more likely to occur than the situation warrants. Taking care of our physical health needs to be accompanied by a sincere effort to take care of our mental health. We need to catch ourselves when we get caught up in anxious thoughts and gently but firmly put them down. Again and again. We can motivate ourselves by remembering that anxiety and its associated states of stress and panic weaken our immune system and make us more vulnerable to the very illness that we fear.



Times of threat and uncertainty bring out both the best and worst in human beings. Let us be in the group that rises up to challenges with self-discipline and mindfulness, calm and good humour, with consideration for those around us and compassion for all.





In the present day, a gathering of even five or six arahants would be a marvellous event. But on the full moon day of February, in the year following the Buddha's enlightenment, a completely unplanned meeting of 1,250 arahants took place at the Bamboo Grove Monastery in Rajagaha. The teaching that they received on that day has come down to us in abbreviated form as the 'Ovāda Pātimokkha'. In it the Buddha gave a list of key principles for Buddhist practitioners. It provided the assembly of arahants with a checklist that they could memorise and refer to as they wandered through the North Indian countryside propagating the Dhamma and instructing their students.

Today, Magha Pujā, we celebrate this unique occasion that took place so long ago. It is a good time to re-read the short text. At first glance, the teachings within it are very simple. Key points include the declaration of Nibbāna as ultimate goal, the supreme importance of forbearance (khaṇṭi), and the summarization of practise as abandoning all evil, cultivating all that is good and purifying the mind. The text may be read in a minute or two. But it would be wise to give it an hour or two. And to return to it again and again.





Meditation plays a vital role in providing us with a space in which we can digest and evaluate our experiences in daily life. This is important because our conduct is often conditioned by fears, anxieties, desires and attachments in ways in which we are scarcely, if at all, aware. We make so many avoidable mistakes.

It is not that we use our meditation sessions to review the issues that we are currently dealing with in our lives. It is more that as we become more mindful, more calm, more stable, more bright and clear and energised, certain insights pop up into our minds. For example, the realisation that some problem that has been keeping us awake at night is really a very minor matter, can suddenly appear in the mind. Or the recognition that some matter we'd been dismissing as insignificant, is in fact very serious, and needs to be dealt with immediately. Thoughts, perceptions, views that have seemed so real and meaningful can now come to be seen as unrooted and insubstantial. The meaning of wise words of our teachers can suddenly come alive.



Wisdom - beginning with these kinds of insight and culminating in the penetration of the three characteristics - is our goal. As meditators our challenge is to create the conditions for wisdom to arise.



The Buddha's approach to problem solving consists of strategies covering the three main areas of life: conduct, emotions and thinking.

In the present day, in the case of our destructive relationship with the natural environment, this might take the following form

- (i) Encouraging firm commitments to certain behaviours e.g. to live a more simple life, to reduce the consumption of goods and services that unnecessarily harm the environment, to support initiatives that put the long-term welfare of sentient beings and the planet above short-term monetary gains.
- (ii) Encouraging the cultivation of a sense of appreciation for the beauty of this fragile world. Encouraging the cultivation of love and compassion for the planet and all sentient beings, including those who are wantonly destroying the natural environment. Encouraging the wish to be part of the solution rather than part of the problem.

(iii) Encouraging the contemplation of all the suffering that arises from mistreating the environment, and of the benefits that come from caring for it with respect and gratitude. Investigating the web of relationships that link sentient beings to each other and to the material world. Seeing clearly how we are a part of nature not its owner or adversary.

These three areas of life must be addressed in a holistic way. Only when people have developed the necessary emotional and intellectual foundations will they commit to the beneficial but difficult changes that need to be made.





In Theravāda Buddhism, enlightened monastics are distinguished by their devotion to sila. The first reason for this is straightforward. Almost all of the transgressions of precepts can only occur when there is defilement in the mind. No defilement, no defiled intention, no transgression.

But there are also cases where defilement may not necessarily be present in the mind for transgression of a precept to occur e.g. eating after midday. Here, two other factors come into play:

(i) A wish to be a good example to one's students and to future generations. Hearing that great arahants keep all their precepts leads monks to think, 'Well if they keep all the rules even though their minds are unshakably pure, how much more should I, whose mind is still full of defilement.'

(ii) Love and respect for the Buddha. Disregarding a precept, even though the Buddha made no exceptions for his enlightened disciples, would be disrespectful. The noble disciple does not put his own judgement above the Buddha's.

For lay Buddhists these three factors are also worthy of consideration: keeping precepts to prevent the expression and thus strengthening of the defilements necessary for transgression; being a good example to those around you; honouring the Buddha who made the precepts a key part of the training





The word 'mettā' is usually translated into English as 'loving kindness'. It is often understood to refer to unconditional love. Boundless love for all beings is an inspiring idea but not one easily put into practice in daily life. Fortunately, practising mettā doesn't mean you have to love everyone. That's too high a standard. Trying to be a friend to all beings is probably a better place to start.

True friends allow no room in their heart for enmity. They know it is a poison. True friends do no harm, either through their actions or their speech. True friends are concerned for their friends' welfare. They not only wish that their friends be free from suffering, but that they also be free from the defilements that lead them to create suffering for those around them. They wish their friends to experience the happiness that is born of goodness and wisdom.

With difficult or cruel or selfish people, this inward recitation may be helpful:

"Not a single person is excluded from my heart."





The Buddha encouraged the monks to look after each other in times of sickness. He once said 'Let him who would minister to me, minister to the sick amongst you.' He later listed the qualities of good nurses and good patients.

The good nurse:

- 1) is able to prepare medicine
- 2) knows what is beneficial and what is harmful, providing the beneficial and withholding the harmful.
- 3) he nurses the patient with a mind of loving-kindness, without the wish for any kind of reward.
- 4) he is free of disgust for feces, urine, vomit and phlegm.
- 5) he is able, at appropriate times, to inform, encourage, inspire and cheer the patient with talk on Dhamma.

The good patient:

- 1) does what is beneficial
- 2) observes moderation in what is beneficial
- 3) he takes his medicine
- 4) he accurately discloses his symptoms to his nurse; he reports whether he is getting better, worse or remaining the same
- 5) he patiently endures painful feelings



Before I became a monk I enjoyed reading the works of the great Sufi sages. They often wrote poems addressed to the Divine in the form of love poetry. Years later, travelling England, I overheard a romantic song playing on a car radio and was inspired to write my own version of it, a love song addressed to the Dhamma. The original was called 'Everything I do, (I do it for you)' by Bryan Adams. Here is my version:

To see and be free

looked into my life,  
Made me feel sad and so unreal  
Searched my heart, searched my mind  
But my eyes were shut, I was searching blind.  
I needed goals worth striving for,  
It was trash all I had been crying for.  
Then it came to me:  
Got to learn to see, to see and be free.  
Looked into my heart,



There I found a beauty so profound.  
So I made my choice, I'd give my life,  
I would give it all, I would sacrifice.  
Don't tell me it's not worth trying for.  
I can't help it; there's nothing I want more  
Cos' it came to me  
Got to learn to see, to see and be free .  
Just reach peace, all pains cease.  
Only wisdom gives this real peace.  
There's nowhere - unless truth's there.  
All the time - all the way.  
Don't tell me it's not worth striving for.  
I can't help it; there's nothing I want more.  
Dhamma fills my mind, it thrills my mind.  
Dhamma stills my mind, yeah, it heals my mind  
Oh it came to me  
Got to learn to see,  
To see and be free .



A certain person, 'the Baltimore Stockbroker', sends out 10,240 emails. Half of these emails predict that a certain share price will increase in value, the other half that it will decrease. Some time later he sends a second email to the 5,120 people who received the correct prediction in the first email. Half of them are told that a certain share price will increase, the other half that it will decrease. Some time later he sends a third email to the 2,560 people who received the correct prediction in the second email, ... you get the picture. After ten emails have been sent, there remain ten people who have received ten consecutive accurate predictions. To them it seems that this cannot be a lucky fluke. The Baltimore Stockbroker is a genius! They are ready to be exploited.



This is the deceptive magic of big numbers. To many people the world around us seems to have been designed specifically for human beings. But taking into account the untold billions and billions of planets in the universe that is an unnecessary hypothesis.

Whether we explore the worlds of science and maths, or the internal world of the mind, it is awareness of context that keeps us undeceived.



Today I would like to recount an old Buddhist legend. It is a simple tale that reminds the reader how worldly desires can blind us to our true welfare. The story concerns the beautiful courtesan Vasavadatta who fell deeply in love with a young monk called Upagutta, the future teacher of Emperor Ashoka. Vasavadatta tried every means at her disposal to entice the monk. But however she invited or pleaded with him, Ven. Upagutta would always tell her that the time was not yet ripe. Later, while engaged in an affair with a local man, Vasavadatta found out that an extremely rich merchant desired her. Driven by greed for the riches she might gain, she killed the lover who stood in her way. But her crime was discovered. The judge ordered that her ears and nose, her hands and feet be cut off, and that she should be abandoned in the charnel ground to die.



Vasavatta, writhing in pain on the ground, saw Ven. Upagutta walking towards her. Frantically, she begged the loyal servant still with her, to hide the amputated body parts. When the monk arrived she complained that when she was beautiful and dressed in her finery, he would not come to her. Now she was mutilated and covered in filth and blood he came. How could this be the right time at last? Ven. Upagutta replied that he did not come to enjoy her body but to release her mind. Formerly, she had been so absorbed in the sensual world of beauty and pleasure that she'd been incapable of receiving the Dhamma. Now, if she paid attention, she could understand. And so it was. Before passing away, Vasavadatta's heart at peace and filled with faith, took refuge in the Buddha, Dhamma and Sangha.



Imagine yourself trapped in an enclosed space with a deeply frightened creature. The creature howls, whines and whimpers. It throws itself against the walls. It urinates and excretes on the floor. The whole experience is a nightmare.

Now imagine yourself in a park, grass and trees as far as the eye can see. The creature appears, racing in circles, howling loudly. But after a while it slows down. It starts to relax. Eventually, it lies down to rest in the cool shade.

In the untrained mind, the experience of fear can feel like confinement with a panicking animal. Practising the Dhamma, it's not necessarily that the fear no longer arises. It's more that we enlarge the space around it. The fear runs its course and comes to rest. We can accomplish this by grounding attention in the body. We make sure that our breathing is normal. Then we establish a relaxed awareness of the pattern of sensations coursing through the body from head to feet. We make the body into a spacious park. We don't have to struggle with the fear. We allow it to cease.





The more closely we contemplate our bodies and minds and the world we live in, the more profoundly we become aware of fragility and instability. When a crisis like this pandemic lays bare the unreliable and uncertain nature of the world, we are unsurprised. We know that what is happening right now is not a deviation from the norm. It is merely that the covers have been dragged away from truths that most people spend their lives trying to ignore. With a daily grounding in the way things are, we can remain free from panic, anxiety and depression. We can turn our minds to compassion.

Faced with suffering of this depth and range, we form the heart-felt wish that all people, young and old, in all countries of the world, be free from infection. If they have contracted the virus, may they recover. If they do not recover may they be able to endure their pain with patience and acceptance; may they have a refuge in their heart to turn to; and in their final days may they be surrounded with love and kindness.



People suffering great anguish would often go to request teachings from Ajahn Chah. When they would ask, for example, why such bad things could happen to such a good person or why an innocent child should have to die, he would rarely talk about kamma from past lives. He would often say very simply, 'because they were born.' As soon as we're born we become vulnerable to all kinds of pain, simply through the possession of a human body.

In the case that a virus sweeps around the world, questions may arise. Why did this person survive and that person not? The simple and undeniable answer is that as humans we have bodies that are susceptible to a huge number of illnesses. We are all inescapably subject to sickness, ageing and death. The ripening of kamma created in a previous life may sometimes play a part in a particular misfortune, but not necessarily. There are multiple causes and conditions



for any event. It is in recognizing what we all share in common as human beings that we open up to the sufferings of others and our selfishness falls away.



The Bhikkuni Sangha was established in the first years after the Buddha's enlightenment. Initially, the Buddha showed some reluctance to authorize it.

When questioned as to his reasons, he clarified that it was not because women had an inherent inability to achieve liberation. From that moment, the Buddhist position on the spiritual potential of women has never been in question. An indication of this acknowledgement is given in the CulaVedalla Sutta (MN43). The layman, Visakha, relates to the Buddha profound teachings he has received from his ex-wife, the bhikkhuni Dhammadinnā. The Buddha says:

"The bhikkhuni Dhammadinnā is wise, Visākha, she has great wisdom. If you had asked me the meaning of this matter, I would have explained it to you in the same way that she did."



2,500 years later a Korean Zen master living in America shocked his audience when questioned on this topic. Asked whether a woman can become enlightened he answered without hesitation, 'No'. He allowed the room, containing many women meditators a few moments of shocked silence before adding, 'And neither can a man. As long as anyone identifies being either a man or a woman they are far from liberation'



## A few mindfulness exercises for the pandemic

① Be mindful of anxiety as a phenomena affecting body and mind. Don't fight it or indulge it. See the anxious thoughts as simply thoughts, like clouds passing through the sky of the mind. See the physical sensations as merely sensation, part of nature.

Breathe deeply. Imagine the anxiety leaving the body with the outbreath. Imagine calm and clarity entering the body and mind with the inbreath.

② Develop mindfulness of the urge to touch the face, and endure through it. (Remembering how it feels when the impulse passes away is a help in resisting it the next time). Be mindful while washing your hands for twenty seconds. For example try reciting inwardly: 1-Buddho, 2-Buddho, 3-Buddho up to 10-Buddho, then 10-Buddho, 9-Buddho... down to zero. Be mindful of the distance between you and others.

③. Develop mindfulness as an inner refuge by daily periods of chanting and meditation. Chanting Pali verses with full attention is calming. Chanting in translation brings to mind important reflections that are uplifting and wise. Meditation helps to create



a quiet oasis of inner calm amid all the confusion of daily life.

- ④ Be mindful of children's fears. Explain the virus to them as best as you can; encourage them to ask questions. Let them know that their safety is your first concern. Beware of your speech concerning the virus in their presence.
- ⑤ Be mindful of your use of social media. Restrict your consumption of news. Catching up once or twice a day is sufficient. Avoid unreliable social media that stir up fears or are full of miracle cures. (This will all be much easier if you observe how your mental state is affected by what you look at on your screen). If you have children, ensure that they are similarly restrained.
- ⑥ Be mindful of the suffering of others. Don't be reckless. Don't be selfish in your use of precious resources. Get together with like-minded friends and offer assistance to any elderly people at risk or children going hungry.
- ⑦ Be mindful of this opportunity to spend some quality time with your family.



When I first heard Ajahn Cha's teachings on uncertainty and unpredictability, and of the need for constant vigilance, it struck a deep chord in me. It had been one of the main lessons I had been learning over the previous couple of years. Let me give you an illustration.

It was 1976. I was a smooth-faced eighteen year old, hitchhiking from Mashad in northeastern Iran to Teheran. In the later afternoon I got lucky: a huge container lorry stopped for me. Suddenly I found myself settling back onto a luxurious seat in an air-conditioned cab. It felt so good, an upgrade on the battered pick-up trucks and motor scooters I'd become used to. But late that night, as we crossed a mountain range, the driver pulled into a layby. He insisted that we spend the night together in the bed behind the seats. When I refused, he tried to assault me. After a struggle I got the door open and jumped down to the ground. Cursing, he came after me, but I was hidden too deep in the trees. He drove off angrily, leaving me in the darkness and the cold.



I started to walk along the road to keep warm. After a kilometre or so I came to a restaurant. I walked around the back looking for an open window, but there were none. Then I noticed a large Persian carpet propped up against an exterior wall. I had an idea. I unrolled it in the courtyard, and laid down upon it. Grabbing one end of the carpet, I rolled and rolled. I'd made myself a warm, cosy nest and I soon fell asleep.

Early next morning I was out on the road again. There were still few cars on the road and I was not optimistic. But the second car stopped. It was a family group. A moment later I was sharing the breakfast of three sweet kids. Ahhh! I sighed inwardly, 'a happy ending to a grim night.' And then, no more than ten kilometres down the mountain, the car broke down. It was serious and it would be hours before help arrived. I said my reluctant goodbyes and started walking down the road.

'Well', I thought, 'you really can't take anything for granted.'



We human beings have agreed that there is something called 'time' which can be measured by clocks and calendars. But what exactly is time in the real world of our direct experience? Can we know time in the way that we can know a visible form, a sound or an odour? I would say no. What we can observe is a perception of 'time passing' such as when we glance at a clock or look at the position of the sun or moon. But time itself is more elusive. And the question arises: is it really a thing at all? This is not merely philosophical musing. With so many people around the world confined to their homes, it is important to recognize how our understanding of time conditions our feelings. If we think of time as an entity composed of days, weeks and months that we have to somehow fill up with something or other, suffering will surely follow. But we can look at time in a different way: as a succession of present moments. We don't have to try to be in the present moment, we already are and always have been in it.



The challenge is simply to awaken to what is already the case. Having been forced to slow down and simplify one's life, now is the opportunity to find a way back to the present moment. Free of obsessive thoughts, memories and imagination, what is this?



The Buddha taught that one of the characteristics of a well-trained mind is its sensitivity to time and place. The law of kamma reveals that there are timeless principles governing our actions and their consequences. But how we apply our awareness of these principles in daily life cannot be learnt from a book. We learn through experience.

During this period when families are spending more time together than they are used to, opportunities for conflict have increased. Cultivating mindfulness of time and place is an especially important Dhamma practice at this moment. As place - the home - is more or less decided for us, the emphasis falls on time. We are mindful that:



There is a time to give and a time to receive.

A time to talk and a time to be silent

A time to speak and a time to listen.

A time to lead and a time to follow.

A time to be serious and a time to be humorous.

A time to work and a time to relax

A time to be together and a time to be alone.

A time to persist and a time to let go.

A time for news of the world and a time for  
the latest news of our own body and mind.

A time for patience and kindness. Always.



During a visit to my family home sometime in the mid-1990's, I came across a dear friend under the stairs. This was not so strange as you may think. The friend was a book - as many of my best friends growing up tended to be - an old, tattered edition of Peter Kropotkin's 'Mutual Aid'.

I had purchased the book in a second-hand bookstore in Cambridge some twenty years before. It came into my life at a time when I was looking hard for intelligent refutations of the idea that life is a grim struggle in which every person should look after number one. I wanted support in my conviction that altruism is not only possible, but an essential feature of human survival and flourishing.

Kropotkin's book was a revelation. Here, he summarises his findings; "Mutual aid is as much a law of animal life as mutual struggle; but that as a factor of evolution it most probably has a far greater importance, inasmuch as it favours the development of such habits and



characters as ensure the maintenance and further developement of the species, together with the greatest amount of welfare and enjoyment of life for the individual, with the least waste of energy."

Over a hundred years have passed since the publication of this book. But with the current situation in the world it has come back to my mind again. In this crisis, there are signs that many are waking up to the necessity and nobility of mutual aid. In the coming months and years, as the economic impact of the virus becomes apparent, especially on the poor and vulnerable, let us nurture this commitment to compassionate action for the welfare of all.



Every full moon and dark moon day - in other words every fifteen days - lay Buddhists are encouraged to undertake the eight precepts. In the modern idiom this might be called a detox. For one day and one night the person who follows this practice abstains from eating after midday, from every kind of sexual activity, from all kinds of physical adornment, from all kinds of entertainment. It means no social media, no internet, no video games, no music. Temporary separation from these things provides an opportunity to observe to what extent they have produced toxins in our minds. If we see that they have, we can contemplate how to develop a more healthy relationship with them. At the same time, abstaining from these activities frees up time to devote to our spiritual welfare: to reading Dhamma books or listening to Dhamma talks, to chanting and to meditation. At least for two days a month, lay Buddhists are encouraged to put spiritual matters at the top of the list of their priorities.



This year, through no wish of their own, people all over the world are experiencing separation from things that give their lives pleasure and purpose. It is very difficult. But, at the same time, it can fulfil some of the functions of a spiritual detox. There is time to examine one's life and goals. It may lead to questioning, perhaps for the first time, as to what is truly important in one's life. And that is the first step towards wisdom.



At the time of the Buddha, spiritual teachers were expected to adopt a clear position regarding the key philosophical doctrines of the day. These doctrines (e.g. the enlightened one exists after death, does not exist, both exists and does not exist, or neither exists nor does not exist) were gathered in a sort of checklist which religious seekers would use as a basis for their questioning of famous masters. The Buddha confused and angered many people by always refusing to answer these questions. He said that they were irrelevant. The subject of his teaching was suffering and the end of suffering. Nothing more.

These days we are surrounded by so many questions and unresolved issues. Although we don't have enough information to come to any conclusions about the future of our lives and careers and our society after the virus has been overcome, it is hard to refrain from speculation. Little is gained other than an increase in anxiety. Far better at times like this to follow the Buddha's advice. Turn attention to what can be known and dealt



with in the present moment. 'Here, now, what is my suffering? How does it feel? What is the craving right here and now which is fuelling this suffering? How can I apply the Buddha's teachings to let go of this craving and be free from the suffering?'



One day I was attending on Ajahn Chah as he sat underneath his kuti receiving guests. At one point, a group of people from Bangkok arrived. During the course of his conversation with them, Ajahn Chah pointed to me, 'This one's only been here for a short time and he already speaks Thai and Isan dialect really well.' He turned towards me, 'Don't you?'. 'Yes, sir' I replied. He beamed at his guests, 'You see!' I don't think that ever in my life had I felt as proud of myself as I did at that moment.

After all the laypeople had left, Ajahn Chah took out his false teeth - now stained red with betel-nut juice - and told me to scrub them clean with sand.

As I worked, he spoke to me in rapid Isan. Even with his teeth in, I would have struggled to understand more than the gist of what he said. Without his teeth, I couldn't understand a word. Scowling, he grumbled about my language skills to the other monks.



I don't think that ever in my life had I felt so deflated as I did at that moment.

This is how Ajahn Chah taught me about praise and blame.



A Buddhist legend recounts the story of a young casteless woman, Pakati, who was drawing water from a well one day when Venerable Ananda walked by. To her shock, he requested some water to drink. She told him that this was a well of the casteless community, and if he were to drink the water he would be defiled by it. Ven. Ananda replied that he had not inquired about caste, only water.

Pakati watched wide-eyed as Ven. Ananda drank the water she offered him before taking his leave. She followed after him all the way to the monastery in which the Buddha resided. She picked up her courage and followed him inside. She went to pay respects to the Buddha and begged him to allow her to stay there, close to Ven. Ananda, so that she could serve him. Pakati said that she loved Ven. Ananda. The Buddha told her gently that she was mistaken.



She did not love Ven. Ananda. She loved the kindness that she had found so unexpectedly in his manner and words. She could be close to that kindness at all times by cultivating it within herself and by extending it to others. By doing so, she could become a truly noble being, irrespective of her birth.



In discussing rebirth we may either 'zoom out' and consider it in terms of a succession of lifetimes, or 'zoom in' and look at it in terms of the moment-by-moment succession of mental states in the present lifetime. Both are legitimate perspectives. But many Buddhists find the goal of putting an end to rebirth as uninspiring or off-putting because they focus too much on the first of these options. As most of us have no memory of past lives, it is far more useful to concentrate on the second option. To do this we examine present experience. We reflect on the Buddha's teaching that every time we identify with a mental state as 'me' or 'mine' we are, in a sense, taking birth. The taking of birth is followed by death and a new birth. Again and again and again.



We can see this for ourselves by observing the arising and passing away of the various forms of greed, anger and delusion that occur in daily life. We ask ourselves, 'Wouldn't it be wonderful if we never again had to be born into the realm of greed, or the realm of anger or the realm of delusion? If we have seen clearly, our answer will be yes. In this way, our feelings about an end to rebirth begin to mature.



To follow a middle way is often understood to refer to adopting a moderate approach half-way between two opposing positions. But there is an obvious problem with such an interpretation. A middle way between a bad option and a disastrous one will not end well. Or perhaps (a somewhat unlikely example) someone might claim to be following the middle way between living as a pacifist and being a serial killer by only killing people when they are really angry with them.

In the Buddhist sense of the term, following the Middle Way requires us first to establish our goal: liberation from all suffering. The extremes to be avoided are determined by that goal. They are the actions, speech and mental states that are



obstructive to its realisation. In one of his Dhamma talks, Ajahn Chah summarised these as indulgence in feelings of like and of dislike . The Eightfold Path is the true Middle Way because it avoids those traps and provides the optimal training for one who aspires to liberation.



No matter how pleasant and comfortable our surroundings may be, there will always be occasions when a form, sound, odour, taste or physical sensation encourages aversion in the mind. No matter how unpleasant and uncomfortable our surroundings may be, there will always be occasions when a form, sound, odour, taste or physical sensation encourages greed in the mind. No matter what our surroundings may be, pleasant or unpleasant, there will always be occasions when a form, sound, odour, taste or physical sensation encourages us to forget our sense of right and wrong, wholesome and unwholesome, appropriate and inappropriate.

Practising the Dhamma in daily life requires us to be ready to deal with all challenges. We firmly resolve that today:

'I will not allow greed to overwhelm my mind when in contact with an object encouraging greed.'

'I will not allow aversion to overwhelm my mind when in contact with an object encouraging aversion.'



'I will not allow delusion to overwhelm my mind when in contact with an object encouraging delusion.'

This determination is a supporting condition for mindfulness. We live in a world in which there will always be experiences that invite us to respond with defilement. We cannot change that. But what we can do is to cultivate the ability to calmly and politely refuse the invitation.



It was the full moon of May. The Buddha-to-be was reflecting on the ascetic practices he had undertaken over the past six years. He realised that although it was possible that there might be ascetics who had equalled the amount of physical pain he had endured over those years, nobody had ever or would ever exceed it. And yet after all of his efforts, after all of that pain, he had still made no real headway in his search for enlightenment. At that moment he recalled a day from his childhood when while meditating in the cool shade of a rose-apple tree his mind had entered the first jhāna. He remembered the rapture and pleasure of that meditative state and suddenly realised his mistake; he had been assuming that all kinds of pleasure were a trap to be avoided by the spiritual seeker. In fact, experiencing the pleasure that arises unconnected to sensuality and unwholesome things, while not grasping on to it, is what empowers the mind to go beyond the world. It was time for him to take some nourishment for his body, and follow a new path. That night he discovered



the four essential truths of human existence: suffering, the cause of suffering, the cessation of suffering and the path leading to the cessation of suffering. He became the Buddha.



## Well-spoken words (1)

To speak well and communicate effectively first requires us to check on our intention in speaking, and on the prevailing circumstances. During the conversation itself we should keep track of the truthfulness and effect of our words and of the manner in which we speak them.

### Intention

It is better to abstain from speech if we become aware of an intention to deceive, manipulate, belittle, or to vent aggression and pain. Driving a wedge between the defilements that arise in the mind and the verbal expression of them is a significant spiritual achievement. Good speech results from the wish to share, to inform, to offer support, to comfort, to encourage, to gently remind and



- if appropriate - to admonish. Mettā, the heart-felt wish for the well-being of both self and other, is the best foundation for right speech. Our speech will be well-balanced when we also determine to listen with care and respect to all those we speak to, and seek to understand them.  
(to be continued)



## Well-spoken words II

### Circumstance

We ask ourselves if this is the right time and place to have this conversation. We consider, for example, how much time is available, whether it is better to speak in private or in the presence of others, whether our mental state is conducive to speaking well. Is the other person in the right frame of mind to listen to our words? Timing is crucial in so many important matters. Speaking about a sensitive topic out of impatience, before we have all our facts straight, can undermine the other person's confidence in our trustworthiness and good-will; and may go on to jeopardise future communication. Repeatedly putting off a painful conversation because of fear of what may result may lead to a bad situation becoming worse, or even reaching a state beyond remedy.



## Truthfulness

We train ourselves to speak from the hearts. We tell the truth as we see it, always open to the possibility that we have got something wrong. We don't exaggerate in order to look good, or for the sake of laughter. We don't omit anything that the other person has a right to know, even if it may be embarrassing. We may prefer to keep certain matters private but we do not deliberately mislead others in order to protect that privacy. We aspire to be trustworthy and reliable.



### Well-spoken words III

We have looked at the two preliminary considerations of intention and timeliness. We have looked at the two considerations of content: truthfulness and benefit. The fifth consideration is of manner.

We try to speak in a polite and tactful manner, sensitive to the views, beliefs, desires and fears of the other person. Even if we are provoked, we abstain from crude or malicious words aimed to wound or pay back. We strive to speak clearly, to the point, and avoid the use of alienating jargon. We listen patiently, and are calm but firm if we are interrupted. We are mindful of



our body language and tone of voice. We show respect for the other person's words and a genuine interest to understand. We do not adopt the stance of 'I'm right and you're wrong'; 'I'm good and you're bad'; 'I'm smart and you're foolish'. We are aware that the most fruitful conversations have no winners or losers. Our goal is to speak in the manner of the best of friends.



## Well-spoken words IV

At the same time as considering these five points within ourselves, we also practice being aware of them with regard to other people

### Intention

We remind ourselves that we cannot read minds. We can never be completely sure of the other person's intention. Nevertheless we reflect upon it: 'Do they seem sincere? Do they want something from us? Are they trying to flatter or intimidate us?' While doing this, we are careful to avoid allowing our likes or dislikes for somebody to influence our interpretation of their words.

### Time and Place

If the other person has chosen the time and place of the conversation, we consider whether or not we are comfortable with their choice. If we are not, then, if possible, we say so and suggest an alternative.



## Truthfulness

Sometimes people say things we believe to be false. We do not jump to the conclusion that they are lying. It is possible that our information is wrong, or that they believe their false words to be true, or even that they have simply forgotten things they've said and done in the past. It is only when bearing these possibilities in mind that we address the falsehood, and only then if we judge that it will be of benefit to do so.



## Well-spoken words (V)

### Benefit

We are mindful if the other person's words are (a) relevant to the conversation, and (b) conducive to growth in wholesome or unwholesome mental states. If the other person's words become diverted into irrelevant or unwholesome topics, we politely bring the conversation back to the matter in hand. We may say something like, "If it's okay with you, I wonder if we could talk a bit more about..." We do not add our own negative comments if the person we are speaking to starts to denigrate another person behind their back. We don't join in making fun of others. We don't acquiesce in expressions of anger or contempt or disrespect towards those of different political or religious beliefs. If the conversation is going round in circles, and is obviously not going to achieve any of its goals, we may suggest ending it, at least for the time being.



## Manner

We seek to be aware of the effect upon our judgement of the other persons appearance, body language and tone of voice. We remind ourselves that a charming, confident, articulate manner is not a guarantee that a person's words are necessarily true or beneficial. We remind ourselves that a nervous, inarticulate manner is not evidence that the speaker's words are without weight or significance. If the person's manner seems aggressive or disrespectful then we need to be clear exactly where our boundaries lie. If the person's manner is beyond what we consider acceptable then we let them know that we feel uncomfortable and end the conversation. But we are also careful not to let our dislike of the manner in which someone expresses themselves lead us to reject words which may be true and beneficial.



For most people reaching the end of their life, breathing becomes laboured. Meditation on the breath, even for experienced meditators, becomes difficult.

At this crucial time, with death approaching, the meditations that are most practical are those that use the power of recollection to stimulate uplifting emotion. Once kindled, that emotion can become the meditation object. If the mind starts to waver, then the meditator is encouraged to return to the original recollection in order to re-ignite the emotion. Wholesome emotion, systematically cultivated in this way, can take the mind beyond the hindrances and into samādhi.

The most powerful of these meditations is the recollection of the good deeds that one has performed throughout one's life. When we recall occasions on which we acted kindly and purely for the welfare of others, with no desire for any kind of reward, we feel an immediate sense of well-being. This is true even for good actions performed many years ago. To realise that such a source of joy and peace lies within us is a wonderful discovery.



We come to understand that no goodness is ever lost.  
Every kind action we have performed has added to  
the store of 'noble treasure' within.



Taking refuge in the Buddha, and Dhamma Sangha means that we no longer seek for refuge in sensual pleasures or in the sense of self provided by wealth, status or power. A natural humility appears, one that - in the words of a modern sage - does not consist of thinking less of yourself, but of thinking of yourself less. So much of people's suffering in social situations occurs because they are thinking about themselves too much. They are desperate to be seen in a certain way, and fear that they will not be. The effort to maintain a certain image of oneself is stressful and depressing. Buddhist practitioners are confident that if they take care of their actions, speech and mind in line with the Buddha's teachings, they will flourish. If mindfulness and clear comprehension are well-established, thoughts of 'me' and 'mine' can be seen as empty phenomena, and allowed to pass away without regret.



With the mind free of attachment to thoughts of 'me' and 'mine', comparison with others loses its grounding. Pride, competitiveness and jealousy begin to fade away.



Many years ago, I was sitting with Ajahn Buddhadasa in front of his kuti when a lay Buddhist approached him. The man was clearly in a state of some confusion. He exclaimed, 'Luang Por, my mind is so agitated!' Ajahn Buddhadasa looked at him with a calm, even gaze and replied, 'Well then, stop agitating it.'

The defilements are not enemies that have invaded our minds. We are complicit in their presence. Although it may not seem like it, defilements cannot arise in the mind without our consent; and if they stay a long time, it is because one part of us wants them to.





In the forest growing up around the kuti in which I live there are many poisonous snakes, including cobras, king cobras and banded kraits.

We call certain kinds of snake poisonous because they carry around a venom in their body which can cause pain and death to human beings. It doesn't mean, of course, that they all necessarily bite human beings whenever they can. Certainly if we go too near them, startle them or tread on them they may well bite and poison us. But if we keep out of their way we will be safe.

The Buddha's teaching that all phenomena are dukkha is equivalent to the statement that all cobras are poisonous. It doesn't mean that all phenomena necessarily make us suffer the whole time. It means that they are always ready to do so if we relate to them with ignorance and craving. Relating to phenomena with mindfulness and wisdom is like living in peaceful co-existence with a forest full of poisonous snakes.



Avijjā means both a lack of understanding and a false understanding of our life, i.e. our body and mind.

Avijjā manifests as craving for sense experience, craving to be or to become, and craving not to be or not to become.

As long as avijjā and craving remain we will never find true happiness and peace.

Avijjā and craving cease with the arising of vijjā. Vijjā means a true understanding of our body and mind.

Vijjā arises through the cultivation of wisdom.

Wisdom is cultivated in the presence of the clarity and stability of samādhi.

Samādhi arises through the cultivation of mindfulness, clear comprehension and right effort.

Mindfulness, clear comprehension and right effort are cultivated through meditation practices such as mindfulness of breathing.

The success of meditation practices depends on living a life of generosity and kindness, moral restraint and the continual effort to be awake and aware in daily life.





Human skin is about 1mm thick. Its colour is determined by the body's production of melanin. What could be more idiotic than to discriminate against another human being on account of the colour of their skin? As Buddhists we learn to focus on the fundamental things that unite us, rather than obsessing about the trivial things that divide us.

The Buddha said that he taught only two things: suffering and the cessation of suffering. This presents us with a simple choice. Do we want to spend our short lives increasing the amount of suffering in our own life and the lives of others, or do we want to devote ourselves to the reduction and elimination of suffering wherever, whenever and however we can?



The Buddha taught that walking meditation is excellent physical exercise: it keeps us healthy, makes us more resilient, helps with digestion. Most importantly, it leads to a calm stability of mind that stays with us after the meditation has ended. Walking at a normal pace with eyes open can produce a samādhi more easily integrated into daily life than that produced by sitting meditation.

Walking meditation can be alternated with sitting meditation. It may also be practised in preference to sitting if the meditator is sleepy, for example, or if an illness or injury makes sitting difficult.

In forest monasteries we walk on shaded paths between twenty to thirty paces long. On a twenty-four pace path, the beginning, middle and end of the path provide the opportunity to check one's mindfulness every twelve paces. If the mind wanders, it does not do so for long.



The first task during walking meditation is the abandonment of distracting mental states. This may be accomplished by sustaining mindfulness on a single area of sensation such as that which appears in the soles of the feet as they touch the ground, or of the whole body. Another popular technique is to inwardly recite a mantra such as 'Buddho' - 'Bud' as the right foot touches the ground, 'Dho' as the left foot touches.

When the mind has freed itself of hindrances, it may be directed to contemplation of one of the three characteristics of existence: impermanence, suffering or not-self as they manifest in the present moment.



Clarity can be very convincing.

Imagine you once misinterpreted a comment somebody made as an insult. It hurt so much that even years later the memory of it is crystal clear. The memory is so vivid that you assume that therefore the thing that is remembered - the painful insult - must definitely have occurred. In fact the clarity is merely the result of the emotion that the memory evokes. So many arguments over the past could be avoided through understanding this point.

Imagine there is an abstract topic which you have been struggling to understand for years. You are very frustrated. Then you hear a brilliant analogy that explains the point. Your frustration dissolves. What was foggy and obscure is now simple and clear. You assume that the clarity of the image is a proof of the accuracy of the analogy. It is not. Wise people do not abandon the principle of 'not sure'.



Although mental clarity may be misleading, there is a case in which it is reliable: the clarity that manifests when the five hindrances are abandoned through meditation. Here the clarity is not an attribute of the objects that arise in consciousness, but of the ground in which they appear. It is the clarity which allows mental objects to be recognized as impermanent, ownerless phenomena rather than as self or possessions of self. It is the clarity which is a pre-requisite for the development of wisdom.



Even the most wonderful experience, the most fulfilling relationship, can be ruined by a single moment of greed, hatred or delusion. As long as the mind is still subject to mental defilements there can be no true security or happiness.

Human beings are creatures who naturally shrink suffering and desire to be happy. For this reason, dealing effectively with mental defilements is the most important life skill that we need to master.

How is this achieved? Initially, by learning (i) how to look after the mind in such a way that as-yet unarisen defilements cannot manifest; and (ii) by learning how to let go of defilements that have already manifested. The key factors involved here are mindfulness, clear comprehension and consistent, balanced application. However, although this stage restrains defilements, it does not eliminate them. Only wisdom can do that.



When the mind can dwell in the present moment without interruption, then attention may be turned to the nature of the body and mind. It is in this investigation that the underlying beliefs and assumptions that fuel defilements are exposed and abandoned. When body and mind are seen in their true light, the profound truth of the Buddha's teachings shines forth.



As usual, I am writing this Yellow Page teaching sitting on the verandah of my kuti. Through the lush vegetation to the south I can see the sky covered with thick grey clouds as far as the Kow Yai mountains. A fresh breeze, cooling my shaved head and bare arms, tells me that rain is on the way. Ajahn Chah looks down at me from a large framed black-and-white photograph on the wall. Tomorrow, the 17th, is his birthday and my mind, as it does so often, turns to him.

Although he must have found the addiction to thinking amongst his Western disciples quite alien, he also found it very funny, and he teased them about it. He was also aware that the university education most of them had received tended to burden them with a tendency towards chronic doubt. Luang Por would remind the Western monks that doubts never disappeared due to the words of another, no matter how wise. Doubts in the Dhamma only ceased through putting them to the test of experience. He reminded them that doubt is a conditioned mental phenomena. They should see how it arises, what feeds it and how it comes to cease. Only in this way would they ever find their way out of the maze of doubt





In the first two lines of the Discourse on Blessings (Mangala Sutta), the Buddha gives his most fundamental advice for life in the world: be careful who you associate with. However, the terms he uses may need some explanation. The Buddha says that two of life's highest blessings come from 'not associating with the foolish, but associating with the wise.' I think that the difficulty most people would have with following this advice is that they would judge the majority of their associates to be neither outright fools nor particularly wise.

I would like to rephrase the teaching as follows: not cultivating destructive relationships but cultivating nourishing ones. Here, a destructive relationship would mean one in which the good and noble qualities in one's heart start to wither and the mean and ignoble ones steadily grow. If one finds it more difficult to keep the precepts, if one finds oneself becoming more neglectful of spiritual cultivation, then this is not a relationship worth pursuing. If, on the other hand, it feels as if an association brings out the best in one, if one feels oneself growing in the Dhamma as a result of it, then that is a relationship to cherish. It is a blessing.



One morning when I was about nine years old, I walked out of my family home with all my savings in my pocket. I caught a bus from our village to the nearby town of Hythe, and from there bought a ferry ticket to the port city of Southampton. I walked about the city for an hour or so, then caught a return ferry, and a bus back home. I told no one of my adventure. I was quite a sickly boy at that time, and the expedition gave me a wonderful sense of achievement. I felt that I had proved myself a fearless explorer and someone who would one day be able to take care of himself. A small thing perhaps - a few journeys on public transport and a stroll along city streets - but it gave me a confidence that I had never felt before.

It is hard to sustain enthusiasm for Dhamma practice over a number of years. This can be true for monastics as much as for lay meditators. One skilful means that may be employed to deal with this problem is to regularly set yourself modest,



measurable spiritual goals. You might, for example, abstain from eating after midday for a week or a month. You might abstain from television or movies or your favourite indulgence for a certain period of time. You might vow to meditate for a certain number of hours a week. You might vow to meditate all through the night every full moon, or at least until midnight. The point is to experience the joy of accomplishment, of being someone who achieves goals. It is a feeling that can arise through small victories; it can give you a renewed confidence and commitment to face the larger challenges ahead.



On the full moon day of July, we commemorate the occasion on which the Buddha delivered his first discourse, the Dhammacakkha - pavattana Sutta, so called because it 'set into motion the wheel of Dhamma'.

It was the day the teachings first appeared in the world, and the day that Venerable Kondanno<sup>nu</sup> became the first person to penetrate their deep meaning.

This Dhamma wheel has now been revolving through the world for over 2,500 years. During that time, those who have taken refuge in the teachings recorded in the Pāli canon have waged no wars, inflicted no violence in their name. In whatever country of the world men and women have adopted the Buddha's training of action, speech and mind with a sincere heart, they have seen qualities of peace, wisdom and compassion grow within them. How fortunate we are that thanks to the Buddha and his disciples even now, in this day and age, 'the gates to the Deathless' are still open.



The knowledge that leads to the opening of these gates is profound but not complex. Venerable Kondanno's exclamation as understanding manifested in his heart on that full-moon day was unexpectedly simple: all that arises, passes away. Deceptively straightforward, but contemplating this short phrase is of incalculable benefit to all practising Buddhists.



The Buddha identified four factors conditioning fear of death. Those whose life has been based on the pursuit and enjoyment of sense pleasures tend to see death in terms of their approaching separation from those pleasures, and thus experience fear. Those who have been obsessed with their body and identified with it, tend to fear death as the separation from that cherished body. Those who have committed deeds for which they feel remorse may look on death as a precursor to some kind of payment for their bad actions, and feel fear. Lastly, those who are confused and without an inner refuge tend to experience doubts and mental agitation regarding their coming death, which results in fear.

Little or no fear of death is shown by those people who have not given such value to sense pleasures or their body; to those who have committed many good actions and are confident of the good karmic results of those actions awaiting them after death; and by those who have an inner refuge and a calm, stable mind.



Of course, these days many people overcome their fear of death by adopting the belief in annihilation. They look on the mind as a function of the brain and see physical death as like turning off a light. This kind of superstition can be comforting and is praised as realistic or 'scientific'. But it requires a refusal to seriously examine all the evidence for rebirth. For Buddhists, that is a step too far.



Recently, I was sent a beautiful vignette. It concerned the great cultural anthropologist, Margaret Mead. On one occasion she was asked what she considered to be the first sign of civilization in a culture.

Presumably, her questioner expected the answer to involve some kind of ancient tool or artefact. Instead, she answered that it was a femur (a human thighbone) that had been broken and then healed. She explained that for creatures in the wild a broken leg is a death sentence: the injured animal cannot hunt, make its way to a watering hole, or escape from its enemies.

A healed broken femur shows that the person received assistance. Someone helped them by binding up the wound, carrying them to safety, nursing them until they recovered. Margaret Mead concluded that in her view civilization begins when people start helping each other through difficulties.



I found these words very moving and my mind keeps returning to them. They reinforce my conviction that mutual aid is not just the beginning of civilization, but its heart. It is only when we dare to go beyond the narrow, suffocating prison of self concern that in our inner world we can open ourselves to the Dhamma, and in our life in the world, we can help to create a society worth living in.



Every time we act upon a volition, wholesome or unwholesome, we strengthen that volition and increase the likelihood that it will reappear in the future.

Every time we refrain from acting upon a volition, wholesome or unwholesome, we weaken that volition and decrease the likelihood that it will reappear in the future.

This is the meaning of the popular summary of the teachings on kamma ; ' do good, get good ; do evil, get evil '.

In taking on precepts we make a commitment to refrain from acting upon certain unwholesome volitions. This training of conduct is focused on the expression of defilements. It complements the practice of meditation in which we learn how to deal directly with the defilements themselves.

Without keeping precepts we constantly feed unwholesome intentions and thus the defilements from which they spring. By doing so we undermine the work of meditation. For progress on the Buddha's path it is vital to understand the links between the practice of meditation and the practice of sīla





Forests in Thailand are not quiet places. Birdsong can be loud and raucous. In the evening the cicadas can make such a din that it is impossible to hold a conversation.

On occasions in the past I have had to end (amplified) Dhamma discourses to the Sangha because the croaking of bullfrogs made them inaudible. But the natural sounds of the forest, however loud, do not disturb its atmosphere of peace.

Strangely enough, the sounds seem to be a part of the peace, or even to enhance it.

In daily life it is not possible to fulfil all our responsibilities with a completely quiet mind. There is thinking that needs to be done. But if we persevere with our Dhamma practice, the chasm between thinking mind and non-thinking mind narrows. Thought in the mind is experienced more like birdsong in the forest than a pneumatic drill by the roadside.



The Buddha's teachings recorded in the Pali Canon may be divided into two categories:

- (i) statements about the nature of existence, 'the way things are'
- (ii) advice on the best way to live as a human being.

The two categories are connected. The Buddha taught that the wisest way to live is best determined in light of the constraints and possibilities afforded by 'the way things are'. It is in the Buddha's discovery of the true nature of human existence and his ability to devise a way of life in harmony with it, that his unrivalled genius may be appreciated.

One of the Buddha's core statements about human nature is that our fundamental misunderstandings about it are deeply significant. Crucially, our ignorance manifests as an instinctive belief in a permanent, independent self at the centre of our being. Our lives are motivated, above all, by the craving to serve the needs of that imaginary self. This ignorance and its attendant craving is at the root of human suffering. Another of the Buddha's core statements is more optimistic. He proclaimed that ignorance, and the craving



and suffering it engenders, can be completely eliminated by the systematic training of our conduct, emotions and thinking which he called the Noble Eightfold Path. In following the Eightfold Path for the welfare and happiness of self and others, we fulfil our greatest potential as human beings.



A few years ago a researcher in America quizzed university graduates on their college major. First he asked them how well they understood some of the fundamental principles of their discipline. Then he asked them to write detailed descriptions of the principles they claimed to know. To their surprise and embarrassment, many of the students found it extremely difficult. The most likely reason, the researcher proposed, was that participants had not realised how much they had forgotten. He concluded that what many students carried with them after university was not so much a store of useful knowledge as an over-inflated confidence in their abilities.



Believing that you know things that you don't really know, or that you did know once but have now forgotten, causes all kinds of problems in the workplace. And it is also true in the study of Buddhism. It is a good practice to return every now and again to the fundamental teachings and imagine that you have to explain them to an intelligent, sympathetic listener who has absolutely no prior knowledge of Dhamma. You can do this by writing a few paragraphs or by speaking aloud. Any gaps or fuzzy patches in your understanding will become immediately clear. It is a practice based on one of the most important of all teachings : take nothing for granted.



In this period of great stress and uncertainty, one of our most important tools to maintain sanity and balance is the cultivation of loving-kindness for self and others.

On one occasion the Buddha listed the benefits that may be realised. The range is remarkable:

beginning with physical and mental well-being and culminating in profound spiritual accomplishment:

- 1) one sleeps well
- 2) one awakens happily
- 3) one does not have bad dreams
- 4) one is pleasing to human beings
- 5) one is pleasing to non-human beings
- 6) one is protected by devas
- 7) fire, poison and weapons do not injure one
- 8) one's mind becomes quickly concentrated
- 9) one's countenance is serene
- 10) one dies unconfused
- 11) if one fails to attain arahantship, one is reborn in a brahma realm.

(AN 11.15)





All the various challenges that occur during meditation (and, indeed, life itself) involve us attaching to physical and mental phenomena as 'me' and 'mine'. Thus any effective method applied to deal with those challenges must be aimed at undermining this attachment. One powerful method that the Buddha taught us is to look at phenomena in terms of four elements. These are listed in the texts as earth, water, fire and air, but we may refer to them in more modern terms as 'mass, fluidity (or cohesiveness), temperature and motion.' Mass, for example, may be observed in the heaviness in the shoulders when sad. A constriction in the throat or chest may be seen as weak fluidity. Temperature may be seen in the shivering of fear and the heat of anger. Restlessness and a racing heart beat may be observed as motion. We can use these four concepts of mass, fluidity, temperature and motion to deconstruct experiences. By doing so the identification with them and the false sense of ownership can dissolve. And when that dissolves, so does the suffering.



A person suffering from a number of ailments went to see a doctor. The doctor did not reveal his diagnosis but prescribed a certain pill for his patient which he said should be taken three times a day: morning, afternoon and nighttime. He said that it was important that after taking the pill the patient should drink a large glass of water. Some time later the person returned for a checkup. He said that he felt much better and asked the doctor what exactly had been wrong with him. The doctor said, 'You weren't drinking enough water.'

Sometimes practitioners go to see their teachers wanting a special pill to take away their problems. But many difficulties are the result of a fault in our overall approach and attitude, rather than a technical flaw to be cured with a technical fix. Perhaps the teacher will give a pill, but the most important thing is drinking the water.





The more clearly and accurately we see ourselves and the world around us the more we change for the better. There is a deep, organic connection between wisdom and goodness. The more, for example, we understand the causal processes underlying progress - whether in the worldly or spiritual realm - the more our minds become imbued with gratitude and humility. It is not so much that we have to make some special effort to be grateful or humble, but that these virtues manifest as natural expressions of a mind that sees things in their true light.

It cannot be said that every appearance of gratitude or humility, kindness, generosity or patience is evidence of wisdom. It is common to see people distinguished by one virtue at the same time as being deficient in others. But it may be observed that when the mind is refreshed by the cool rain of wisdom, all the good and noble qualities within it flourish in harmony.



One helpful way of reflecting on unfair criticism is to recollect how normal it is, how many times even the purest of beings have been subjected to such treatment. The most famous example is perhaps the occasion when a woman called Ciñca Manavika accepted payment from religious teachers jealous of the Buddha to accuse him of making her pregnant. There are accounts of nearly all the great enlightened disciples being falsely accused of one thing or another. Ven. Sāriputta provided a model for how to deal with such a situation. On one occasion he was accused by another monk of striking him and then leaving the monastery without apologizing. The Buddha knew this could not be true but nevertheless called a meeting to examine the matter, ensuring that there could be no grounds for criticism that he was prejudiced in favour of his senior disciple.



In the course of conducting his defence, Ven. Sāriputta compared his mind to the four elements. He said that people throw impure things — feces, urine, spittle, pus and blood — on the earth, and wash them in water; fire burns those impure things and air blows upon them. Despite coming into contact with all kinds of impure things, the elements of earth, water, fire and air are not repelled, humiliated or disgusted by them. Similarly, he, Sāriputta, dwelt in the midst of slander and malicious gossip with a mind like earth, like water, like fire, like air, "vast, exalted and measureless, without enmity or ill-will."



There is a well-known story of a man sitting by the side of a sack of chilli peppers. He bites on a chilli, grimaces and spits it out. He picks out another chilli and does the same thing. He repeats the same process again and again, even though it is unpleasant for him to do so. When asked what he's doing, he replies that he's searching for a sweet one. Clearly, this is a story teaching the foolishness of recreating the same causes again and again, while hoping for a different, better result. In the Buddhist version the story is taken to express the futility of looking for lasting happiness in impermanent experiences.

But how does the man in the story see the situation? Presumably, he does not perceive himself as a fool. My guess is that he has some logic on his side. Maybe he has heard that one in a thousand chillis has such a marvellous sweet taste that it is worth the discomfort of chewing hundreds of spicy ones in order to find it. Maybe he has read an article on the internet revealing that the existence of sweet chillis is a secret jealously guarded by an evil international organization.



Maybe he believes that a god will create a miracle of sweetness for him if he prays hard enough.

The observation: people acting irrationally often believe themselves to be the truly rational ones.

The moral: don't take the feeling that you are being rational as proof that you are.



Before we start to practise Dhamma we cannot avoid being aware on some level that life is brief, fragile and uncertain. But we turn our back on that truth as best we can. We are afraid that thoughts of death will lead to depression and despair. The knowledge that death can come at any time rarely affects the choices we make in life.

The Buddha taught that facing up with mindfulness to our mortality need not be morbid. It helps us to see the value of our life, and the importance of living it well. He once listed approvingly a number of similes taught by an ancient teacher called Araka:

Just as a drop of dew will quickly vanish as soon as the sun rises, so too is human life like a drop of dew.

Just as when the rain pours down, bubbles of water form and then swiftly vanish, so too is human life like such a water bubble.

Just as a line drawn on water with a stick will swiftly vanish, so too is human life like a line drawn on water with a stick.



Just as a stream flowing swiftly down a mountain, carrying along much flotsam, will not stand still for even an instant, a fraction of a second, but will rush on, swirl and flow forward, so too is human life like a mountain stream.

Just as a strong man might form a lump of spittle at the tip of his tongue and spit it out, so too is human life like a lump of spittle.

Just as a piece of meat thrown into an iron pan heated all day will quickly vanish, so too is human life like this piece of meat.

Just as when a cow to be slaughtered is being led to the slaughterhouse, whatever leg she lifts, she moves closer to slaughter, closer to death; so too is human life like a cow condemned to slaughter



One of the first discoveries in meditation is how unfree we are. The effort to sustain attention on a meditation object reveals just how little control we have over our mind. However, wise reflection on the unfree and conditioned nature of the untrained mind, when supported by the confidence that Dhamma practice offers a path to true freedom, is empowering. We come to feel that this is an intolerable situation and that we really must do something about it.

The Buddha showed how the five hindrances that arise during meditation limit our freedom with a number of similes:

Indulgence in thoughts of sense pleasures is like being in debt. Every moment of pleasure increases the payment to be made when it comes to an end.

Indulgence in negative thoughts is like having a fever.

One can do no constructive work and is drained of all joy. Dullness and lethargy are like being in prison, cut off from all that brings happiness and benefit.

Restlessness and worry make one like a slave. The mind feels compelled to rush around from one matter to another with no benefit to oneself whatsoever.



Being caught in wavering doubt and indecision is like being lost in a desolate land.

Freeing oneself of these hindrances with right effort, mindfulness and clear comprehension brings great joy to the mind. It is similar to the joy that may be experienced when becoming free of debt, recovering from illness, being released from prison, released from slavery or discovering a path to safety.



There is an old saying:  
A single hair conceals the mountain.  
Thought is a single hair.  
It is thin, brittle and insubstantial.  
But it grabs our attention so strongly  
that we can see nothing else.  
We live in a world of thought  
and imagine it to be the real world.  
Meditation reveals a way out  
of the stifling world of thought.  
We withdraw from without regret.  
We change our focus.  
And now we see the mountain.  
We see the leaves  
on the trees  
on the mountain slope  
fluttering in the wind.





Human beings are very good at measuring. We are constantly finding more and more things to measure, and developing ever more sophisticated tools to measure them. Measurement lies at the heart of the scientific method. Our ability to measure things underlies much of the material progress that has been made in the world over the last two hundred years. But there is a danger. We can be so involved with measurement that we overlook or downplay all the things that cannot be measured. Often, unmeasurable has come to mean unscientific and unscientific to mean unreal. But how many of the most important things in life are, in fact, measurable? How, for example, could we quantify a parent's love for their child? Notably, the Buddha gave the title of the Four Immeasurables to the wholesome emotions of loving-kindness, compassion, sympathetic joy and equanimity.

In the human search for understanding, science and Dhamma go hand in hand. The scientific method provides our best tool to explore all the aspects of our experience that can be measured. The Buddha's teachings provide our best tool to explore all the aspects that cannot.



The Buddha once said, 'Enmity never comes to cease through enmity. Enmity only ever comes to cease through non-enmity. This is a timeless truth.'

Over 2,500 years after these words were uttered we might add that it is indeed a timeless truth, but also one that is endlessly forgotten.

The use of the word non-enmity in the verse is worthy of note. Non-enmity here is not simply a synonym for loving-kindness. It has a broader meaning, including a number of wholesome mental states that may each contribute towards a wise response to enmity. Meeting enmity with mettā is an inspiring achievement, but for most people it can be a step too far. For them, empathy, patience and equanimity may be better goals.



The vital thing to bear in mind is that we need to make a special effort to be mindful in times of conflict. If we observe enmity in our heart, we should stop, realize that we have taken a wrong turning, and re-establish our mind in a wholesome mental state. Because with enmity in our heart - no matter how certain we are that we are right and the other side is wrong - we will be unable to find a lasting solution to the conflict; we might achieve a short-term fix, but in the long-term we will only make matters worse. This is a timeless truth.



On a number of occasions in the suttas, Māra, the personification of evil, tries to lead monks and nuns astray. But Māra's power lasts only as long as he remains unrecognized. As soon as he is seen for who he is, he disappears. In more abstract terms we might say that defilement ceases with the arising of clear vision.

On one occasion, while the bhikkhūnī Soma was meditating in a forest grove near the town of Savatthī, she heard a voice. It told her that women are, by nature, not intelligent enough to achieve liberation. Hearing this voice, Soma realized who spoke. She replied in verse:

" What does womanhood matter at all  
When the mind is concentrated well,  
When knowledge flows on steadily  
As one sees correctly into Dhamma? "



Then she gave her 'lion's roar'. She declared that she was not a fitting target for such a jibe as she did not consider herself in terms of gender:

"One to whom it might occur  
'I am a man' or 'I am a woman'  
Or 'I am anything at all' -  
Is fit for Māra to address."

Then, the sutta tells us

"Māra the Evil One, realizing 'The bhikkhū Soma knows me,' sad and disappointed, disappeared right there.



The senior American monk, Ajahn Dick (Silaratano), spent many years as the personal attendant of his teacher, the great master, Ajahn Mahā Bua. His duties took up many hours of the day, and in the early days he confessed to feeling some dismay at how much less time he now had to meditate. But as time passed he realised just how fortunate he was and how much he was benefiting. He summarised:

"(He)... believed that the right temperament was just as critical to success in practice as were intelligence or effort, if not more so. Only by raising the character of our inner being does the mind become worthy of encountering the right circumstances, the right guidance and the right insights that will lead to realising the truth of Dhamma. The practice requires more than simply an emphasis on striving for deep samādhi and insightful experiences. Actually, the level of meditation a person is capable of achieving is dependent on an inner readiness to accept that level. For that reason, cultivating our inner worth is a critically important, though often neglected, aspect of the overall practice.



This principle is surely the most significant lesson that I took away from my teacher's approach to teaching his students.



When someone important in our life passes away, our grief can be of many layers. If our relationship to that person was a central part of our life, then we may suffer from the realization that the person we were in that relationship - spouse, son, daughter, friend - has gone and will never return. We may thus, in a way, be grieving for a cherished part of ourself. And we may even grieve for a version of ourself that we never truly believed in. Some time after the death of her father, the American author Toni Morrison wrote "He had a flattering view of me as someone interesting, capable, witty, smart, high-spirited. I did not share that view of myself, and wondered why he held it. But it was the death of that girl - the one who lived in his head - that I mourned when he died. Even more than I mourned him, I suffered the loss of the person he thought I was"



Separation from all that we love is inevitable, and is always accompanied by pain. But by opening up to the simple truth that every hello conditions a lasting goodbye and reflecting on it every day, we can reduce the bitterness of the pain. We can learn to face up to future separation with calm acceptance, and experience its pain with patience, free from rage and despair.



Upādāna is the name that the Buddha gave to the various kinds of attachment that arise in the mind dependent upon craving (tanhā). They must be eliminated by those intent on liberation. The Buddha listed four kinds of attachment:

(i) Attachment to sensual pleasure

In attaching to sense pleasures we make them seem essential to our well-being. Life without them comes to seem depressing or meaningless. We fear separation from sense pleasures and strive to prevent it. Our mind becomes dominated by sensual thoughts, and is imprisoned by them.

(ii) Attachment to views, opinions, beliefs

We become attached to views, theories, philosophies, religious beliefs that reflect or allow us to gratify our cravings, especially for being or non-being. As a consequence, we feel threatened by opposing views and different beliefs. We see them as a danger to who we think we are. This kind of attachment leads to prejudice and narrow-mindedness.



(iii) Attachment to external religious forms

Ceremonies, rituals, conventions, training rules, can all become objects of attachment. We come to see them as having an intrinsic value in themselves independent of our relationship to them. In other words, we believe that by simply behaving in a certain way, purification of mind will take place automatically. This leads to complacency and superstition

(iv) Attachment to the idea of a permanent, independent self.

This kind of attachment is the most characteristic expression of ignorance. It is reinforced by the conventions of language, especially words such as 'I', 'me' and 'mine'. It leads to selfishness, conflict and harmful ideas of possession and control. It prevents us from seeing the stream of causes and conditions that constitute body and mind.



In the Four Noble Truths the Buddha identified craving (tanhā) as the cause of suffering. He revealed how it is only when craving has been abandoned that suffering will cease.

It is important to understand that not all kinds of desire are considered to be forms of craving. Craving refers specifically to the desires that arise in the mind in the absence of authentic knowledge of the true nature of our life and the world we live in.

The Buddha spoke of three kinds of craving:

(1) The craving for the pleasure that arises through contact with visible forms, sounds, odours, tastes and physical sensations. The ignorant mind feels a deep sense of lack which it seeks to remedy with sense pleasure. But no sense pleasure can give more than temporary relief. Craving for sense pleasures ties the mind to a coarse, restless and superficial level. Seeking happiness from sense pleasures has been compared to licking honey from a razor blade.



(ii) The craving for being. The ignorant mind perceives a stable, independent self. It craves to protect and enhance that imaginary self. This kind of craving may be seen in the desire to be a particular kind of person, or to be seen as such. It manifests in the desire to stand out, to be special, unique, to live for ever. It is seen in the craving for status, fame and power.

(iii) The craving for non-being. The ignorant mind perceives a stable, independent self. It craves for that self to disappear or be annihilated. This craving can lead to the decision to commit suicide. It appears generally in the craving to escape from or to get rid of anything we dislike.



Consideration of time and place is one of the most important expressions of mindfulness in daily life.

We make the effort to avoid speaking when it is too early or too late in the day. We don't speak in public what should be spoken in private, or speak in private what should be spoken in public. We don't speak when it is too early or too late in a relationship. We don't speak when our emotions make it impossible to express ourselves well. We don't speak when the other person's emotions make it impossible for them to hear us. We don't speak about serious matters before checking our information. We abstain from speaking when it would be wiser to rest in mindful silence. We don't speak when it would be better to listen. We don't speak when whatever we say will only make things worse.



We make the effort to speak when the conditions for good communication are ripe, or as ripe as they can be. We speak at the best time of day for our purpose, privately or publicly as is appropriate. We speak with awareness of how the current state of our relationship affects what we can usefully speak about. We make sure of our facts before bringing up sensitive issues. If there is no suitable time and place to speak we know how to be patient and rest in mindful silence. We listen when we need to listen more than speak. And when whatever we say will make things worse, we stop talking or politely take our leave.



When lay meditators go to stay in a monastery for an extended period of retreat they often feel that their practice gets worse rather than better. They can, for example, find themselves being very critical of those around them.

They can become obsessed over matters which at home, they say, they would find quite easy to let go of. In the monastery, all of their faults seem magnified. Some people lose faith in the training; others lose faith in themselves.

If one gets caught in this kind of doubt, the first refuge is patience. Buddhist training is not - in the familiar analogy - a hundred metre sprint. It is not even a marathon. It is more like a great many ultra-marathons one after another. But that is only a problem if you think you've got something better to do with your life. The advice I give is to see doubt as doubt, and carry on.



Today I told one student, 'Without expectation or comparison, just deal as best you can with whatever arises, moment by moment.' The monastery is a place designed to drastically reduce distraction. When you have nowhere to hide from yourself, defilements appear like stains on white cloth. That is a good thing. It is only when you clearly see defilements that you can find the way to free yourself from them.



On reading of someone's misfortune, a thought pops up into your mind. But why that particular thought? It is a matter of kamma. All of our intentional actions, speech and thoughts in the past are called 'old kamma'. The thought that arises spontaneously in the present is conditioned by that kamma. For example, if you know the person, and have thought about them kindly and spoken of them well in the past, then your first reaction might be, 'Oh dear, I hope they recover soon.' But perhaps you know this person, dislike them, and have spent a lot of time thinking about them with anger and contempt in your mind, and spoken about them with anger and contempt. In that case, at the moment of hearing about that person's misfortune, it is unsurprising that the initial reaction is negative: 'Serves them right!' or 'I hope they suffer!'



Your response to that initial reaction involves volition and constitutes new mental kamma. If the initial reaction is positive, it might lead to a wholesome train of thought devoted to the question, 'How could I help that poor person?' Thus good new kamma is created. If the reaction is negative and you dwell on it, taking pleasure in thoughts about the pain of the person you don't like, then bad new kamma is created. However, if you recognise the initial thought as poisonous and abandon it, good new kamma is created.

In short, the results of our past actions of body, speech and mind are a given. The question is how we deal with those results. It is in the quality of our response that we create ourselves in this world, moment by moment.



How many times have we suffered, and how many times have we created suffering for others, because of our negative emotions? How many times have we been consumed by self-aversion because of things we have said or done? How many times have we acted in ways that we had previously promised ourselves, 'Never again!'

This is not the first lifetime in which we have had to endure such a frustrating state of affairs. It has happened countless times before, in countless lifetimes. And unless we take more responsibility for our lives, it will go on happening for countless more lives in the future. Just stop and think about that for a moment. The Buddha once observed that the greatest of all enemies is our own untrained mind. But — and it is here that we can find some hope — the mind is trainable. The Buddha also said that there is no friend that can compare to the well-trained mind. So please put forth your best effort to train your mind. Break free from your worst enemy and find happiness and peace with your truest friend.





One day recently a student of mine was praised for being kind. As a result, he immediately felt a warm feeling in his heart. Later, he wondered whether his reaction was a mental defilement. He asked me 'Do truly wise people feel pleasure when they are praised?' I replied that the wise people that I know do not see themselves as the owners of their good qualities. They do not crave praise for their goodness or become attached to it. However, they may feel the kind of joy that gardeners may feel when people praise the beauty of flowers in their garden.



Most people like watching magic tricks. We can watch them again and again without feeling bored. Our continued enjoyment of a trick is dependent on not being able to work out how it is done. We know that sleight of hand is involved but our eyes are not quick enough to catch it. We are intrigued.

But let's say that someone reveals to us how a trick is done. We feel a sense of disappointment: is that all? Once it's been explained, the deception seems so obvious. We wonder how we could have missed it. Once we know how the trick is performed we never want to watch it ever again.

Samsāra is like a magic trick. We get caught up in it again and again. As Buddhists we may have learnt that the five aggregates of form, feeling, perception, mental formations and sense-consciousness are not self, but we can't see it. The illusion of self is too convincing. But for those who practise the eightfold path diligently, there comes a day when their vision is sharp enough to see the deception. Now it seems so obvious. Nibbidā (disenchantment) arises. The fascination is gone. They know that they won't get fooled again.





Whatever form of meditation we practise, it is vitally important that we learn how to sustain clarity of mind throughout the session. Without that emphasis, the physical and mental relaxation that occurs as the meditation proceeds will result in dullness or sleepiness rather than samādhi. Without clarity, the mind feels heavy and clumsy. With clarity, it feels supple, stable and strong. The word 'Buddha' means 'the awakened one'. In its most profound sense, going for refuge to the Buddha means establishing our mind in a Buddha-like alertness and wakefulness. It is in being awake to the true nature of all mental states that liberation is realised, not through attaining an endlessly blissful state of peace.



Many years ago I walked on pilgrimage from Bodh Gaya, where the Buddha was enlightened, to Sarnath, where he gave his first teaching. I took a long route that kept me far from busy highways. As I walked through the remote countryside I felt a great exhilaration: surely this was how it must have felt to be a monk in the time of the Buddha! But, unfortunately, the modern world was not so far away. I had a plane ticket in my bag and a deadline to keep. On the last part of the journey I walked along the railway line. One night, I met two railway workers out checking the track. They said that it was dangerous to walk at night and insisted on accompanying me to the next station. There they invited me to spend the night with them in a concrete shed at the end of the platform. It was a bitterly cold night and I accepted. One of the men then disappeared. A few minutes later he came back into the shed with a shy smile on his face, carrying a large brick. With great respect he offered me the brick, pointing at my head and saying, 'Pillow'. It was one of the most heart-warming gifts that I have ever received.



There is something so marvellous about such acts of kindness. I doubt whether any of my readers have ever been offered a brick pillow, but I'm sure everybody has at one time or other been treated with unexpected kindness. Remembering such occasions and bringing them to mind can calm an agitated mind and give joy at a time of low spirits.



Conceit (māna) is one of the most subtle of defilements — so much so that some of its forms tend to be considered as virtues. Etymologically, conceit is related to the idea of measurement. Conceit arises when we form an idea of self based upon measuring ourselves against others. The image given in the texts is of raising a flag, where the flag is our self-importance.

There are three kinds of conceit :

- 1) Superiority conceit : comparing oneself with others in terms of race, nationality, family, wealth, power, status, physical appearance, intelligence, morality, spirituality etc, one believes 'I am superior to them'
- 2) Inferiority conceit : based upon the same comparisons, one believes : 'I am inferior to them', This kind of conceit is often confused with humility.



3) Equality conceit: based upon the same comparisons one believes 'I am equal to them,' This kind of conceit is often praised as an antidote to the first two kinds.

In Buddhism, all three kinds of conceit are considered obstacles to wisdom because when comparing oneself to others in these ways one feeds the illusory sense of a solid separate, permanent self, 'me'. And it is this false idea of self, the Buddha revealed, that lies at the root of human suffering



Most visitors to the Wat Pa Pong museum climb straight up to the third floor. It is there that the prize exhibit of the museum is to be found: an uncannily realistic life-size model of Ajahn Cha. Many statues of Ajahn Cha are to be found in monasteries in Thailand, and many paintings. None of them provide a fraction of the impact of this model.

Yesterday, I helped to carry the model down to the ground floor so that it could form the central focus of a special exhibition. With old memories flooding my mind, I felt close to tears. As all the things that I have received from my teacher came into my mind, one in particular struck me forcibly: From the moment I met him I realised that I would never again despair over the greed, selfishness, cruelty and foolishness of my fellow human beings. To be in his presence was to be convinced of the human potential for peace, compassion and wisdom. The world is certainly a mess, I concluded, but by following the Buddha's teachings and those of his great disciples, there is still hope for it to be a great deal better than it is.





One year, while I was leading the monastic community at Wat Pah Nanachat, a certain young monk would regularly miss the early morning chanting/meditation sessions and the afternoon work periods. When I spoke to him about it he told me that the source of his problems was the monastery bell. He said that when he heard the sound of the bell it seemed to him as if he was being ordered to go to group activities, and he was feeling a lot of resistance to that sense of being forced. He said that it wasn't that he didn't want to join in group activities, but that he couldn't bear being told what to do in that way. He knew it wasn't a very mature reaction, but he couldn't help himself.

I gave the young monk the following advice: "The morning bell is rung at 3am and the afternoon bell at 3pm. Set your alarm clock for 2.45 and arrive at the Dhamma Hall before the bell is struck. If you do that, you will be able to fulfil your duties without feeling that you are being told what to do." I said that a wiser way of dealing with the pressure of legitimate expectations is not to rebel or do less than is required, but to do slightly more.



The Buddha once taught that just as the water in every sea and ocean in the world shares the single taste of salt, so all of his teachings share the single taste of liberation (vimutti). In the light of this saying, perhaps we may re-formulate the most succinct summary of the Dhamma, which states that it is concerned with just two topics: suffering and the end of suffering. We may say instead that the Dhamma is solely concerned with mapping the nature of our imprisonment and the path to liberation.

A firm commitment to Dhamma practice comes about when we see the true nature and extent of our incarceration. Looking within, we see the degree to which we live our lives as the prisoner of our desires and fears, our blind beliefs and prejudices, our greed and lust, our pride and arrogance, our confusion, our passing likes and dislikes.



Facing up to this truth is a sobering experience. But it's not without hope. Fortunately, the Buddha's teachings are like a map showing the way out of our underground prison. This imprisonment is not fate, it's not our kamma, it's not part of a divine plan. All that is needed to find freedom is to put the Buddha's map to the test of experience.



The Buddha did not try to convert members of other sects or religions to his teachings. Nevertheless, on a number of occasions during his life he was slandered and reviled by those who were jealous of him or who felt threatened by the truths he taught. On one such occasion, he reminded his disciples of two important reasons for maintaining their mindfulness when such attacks were made. Firstly, if they gave way to anger - for whatever reason - they would be feeding a powerful defilement in their mind. Secondly, if they reacted with anger to false accusations, they would be unable to calmly point out for what reasons the criticisms were ill-founded.

"If, bhikkhus, others speak in dispraise of me, or in dispraise of the Dhamma, or in dispraise of the Sangha, you should not give way to resentment, displeasure or animosity. For if you were to become angry or upset in such a situation, you would only be creating an obstacle for yourself. If you were to become angry or upset when others speak in dispraise of us, would you be able to recognize whether their statements are rightly or wrongly spoken?"

"Certainly not, Lord"



° If, bhikkhus, others speak in dispraise of me, or in dispraise of the Dhamma, or in dispraise of the Sangha, you should unravel what is false and point it out as false, saying: 'For such and such a reason this is false, this is untrue, there is no such thing in us, this is not found among us'.

(Brahmajāla Sutta)



So much human effort is misdirected and reaps unnecessary frustration. Four kinds of effort stand out:

- (i) Trying to get rid of or escape from present suffering, without understanding it.
- (ii) Trying to find protection from the threat of future suffering, without understanding it.
- (iii) Trying to find happiness by pursuing pleasure.
- (iv) Trying to hold onto happiness and pleasures already gained, to prevent them disappearing.

The Buddha taught us to change the focus of our efforts to:

- (i) learning how to let go of present defilements, the root cause of present suffering.
- (ii) learning how to protect the mind from as-yet unarisen defilement, the root cause of future suffering.



(iii) learning how to bring kusala dhammas, the  
· root cause of true happiness, into the mind.

(iv) learning how to nurture and bring to maturity  
the arisen kusala dhammas that are the  
root cause of true happiness.



In daily life we take the Buddha as our refuge when we identify the inner sense of calm, stable awareness and learn how to dwell in it.

The word 'Buddha' means 'awake'. When we refrain from getting lost in the endless dramas of thought, feeling and emotion, and turn towards the vivid sky-like wakefulness within which all activity takes place, we take the Buddha as our refuge.

When we don't look on sensual pleasures, fame, status or power as life goals; when we don't look to belief, prayer or ceremonies as a path beyond suffering; when we know how to use the Buddha's teachings as tools to reveal the true nature of things — then we take the Dhamma as our refuge.



When we make a consistent effort to abandon all that is unwholesome in our hearts, when we make a consistent effort to cultivate all that is wholesome, when we devote ourselves to the purification of the heart, then by seeking to embody the qualities of the Noble Ones, we take the Sangha as our refuge.



The more we identify with the various aspects of body and mind — our health, our appearance, our thoughts, emotions and beliefs, our personality — the more we feel ourselves to be separate from those around us and the world we live in. This sense of separation can lead to feelings of loneliness, inadequacy and depression. It can lead to a reckless drive for pleasure as a means of forgetting oneself. It can lead to selfishness and narcissism.

Finding time to be in nature with no special task to achieve is healing. Giving the mind permission to slow down and shift its focus from 'doing' to 'being' makes us feel as if we are waking from a fever dream. We observe that the stronger our awareness, the less the sense of separation; we realise how many of the walls and moats around us are imaginary. Silencing the busy chatter in our mind allows for the perception of unity and connection to manifest. We experience an exhilarating joy.





When people say they don't believe in other realms of existence, what they usually mean is that they cannot form a mental picture of them, or that the picture that appears in their mind cannot be reconciled with all that they have come to know as real. In other words, their faith in the power of their imagination to determine what is true, is stronger than their faith in the Buddha. Thus, I am suggesting, opposition to the teachings on rebirth amongst modern Buddhists is based on confidence in human memory and perception rather than any profound understanding of causality. I do not mean to suggest that this observation is proof that, therefore, rebirth must be true. I intend it simply as an invitation to investigate the root causes of resistance to this aspect of the Buddha's teachings.



In one of my childhood's favourite comedy sketches a man is imprisoned in a small, bare cell in Revolutionary Russia. At dawn, he will face a firing squad. Finally, late at night, he manages to fall asleep. Immediately, he wakes up in a chair in the garden of his family home, a beautiful large house deep in the English countryside.

It is a beautiful day, birds are singing, and his mother, smiling, is walking towards him carrying a tray of tea and scones. He heaves a huge sigh of relief, "Oh! It was all a dream." "No," says his mother, "this is the dream. You are still in Russia." Next moment, soldiers come crashing through the door of his cell and drag him outside. (He doesn't die - the soldiers all miss their shots - but that's another story)



So much comedy is derived from confounding expectation. Apart from meditation, it is probably the most enjoyable source of lessons about impermanence and the unreliable nature of phenomena. Comedy is far from being a path to enlightenment, but it may, on occasions, thin out the darkness. Comedy can remind us that we have no right at all to expect things to carry on as they have been. Even tragedies, after a sufficient time has passed, can provide us with comedy and healing laughter.



Recently, a monk told me about an experience he had while walking through the countryside in Europe. He said that one day, on almsround in a small town, a man approached him with money in his hand. The man assumed that the monk's bowl lid must have a slit in it like a piggy bank, and intended to make a donation. When the monk informed him that he could not receive money, the man would not believe him - perhaps he thought he was uttering some fake piety: 'No, no. Really. I could not!,' and he continued to search for the slit. A small struggle ensued. Eventually, the man accepted that the monk was indeed determined to refuse the money. Realising this he became very moved and tears filled his eyes. He had never dreamed that in this modern world there were still people who would refuse a gift of money, with no strings attached. He hurried off to the nearby supermarket to buy some food to offer instead.



It is not only monastics who can inspire people— even non-Buddhists — simply by keeping their precepts and trying to apply the Buddha's teachings in their daily life as best they can. We can all propagate the Dhamma through being honest, generous, kind and considerate, mindful and calm.



When speaking about mindfulness, Ajahn Choh would often make use of similes. One of his favourites compared the mind to a room and the sense faculties to six doors leading into it. He said that at the centre of the room is a chair. Every day many people walk in and out of these doors. If the chair is empty, then any one of them may sit down on it, and make a nuisance of themselves. But as long as you keep sitting on that chair, none of the guests will stay for very long, for there will be nowhere for them to rest. In other words, we should firmly establish mindfulness to prevent passing thoughts, memories and emotions from seizing control of our household.

In more active situations we might extend the simile to that of a vehicle. In this case, we have a destination that we are moving towards, and we must keep our eyes on the road at all times, not allowing any of our passengers to seize hold of the steering wheel.

In both cases, the key idea is that it is mindfulness that gives us autonomy and allows us to live our lives in harmony with our ideals. Without it, our house can always be seized by intruders, and our vehicle can be hijacked.



Most people find public speaking very stressful. The night before having to speak in front of a large audience, they often sleep badly. They may even feel like vomiting before going onto the stage. But why does public speaking affect us so strongly? What can be done about it?

I see the suffering here arising from the powerful sense of 'me' and 'mine' that is provoked by being the centre of attention. The strong desire for acceptance and praise, and the fear of rejection and criticism, can be crippling. My advice is to establish the mind in loving kindness. Meditate on the sincere wish that whatever you say may be of benefit to your audience. By doing this you replace your anxiety about how people see you, with the beautiful wish to share whatever you know - however much or little it might be - for the welfare of all. When 'me' and 'mine' are dissolved in loving kindness, how could there be stress?



One of the questions that Ajahn Chah would sometimes ask his students was 'Do you know how to be right?'

The way he posed this question made clear that he was not inquiring whether they knew how to find the right answers to problems. The verb 'to know how to' he used is the same as would be used to ask, 'Do you know how to swim? Do you know how to use a map?' He was asking about his students' relationship to being right.

If we are right about something and as a result consider ourselves superior to people who are wrong, then we don't know how to be right. If we feel anger, frustration or depression at all the people who have wrong ideas about an issue, then we don't know how to be right.



There is another question that might be added to that of Ajahn Chah: 'Do you know how to believe in something that you have not yet proved conclusively?' Not so elegant a question, but an important one, nevertheless. If we assume that the strong feeling that we are right is the same thing as knowing that we are right, then we are on shaky ground. If our confidence in our belief is so strong that we reject opposing arguments without listening to them with respect, we become fools. The wise know beliefs as beliefs and — humbly aware that they could be wrong — hold them lightly.



Too much teaching of morality and virtue consists of simply telling people how they should be. The results are not impressive.

Most common are blind conformity to a moral code, blind rebellion against it, and patchy conformity accompanied by guilt.

It is such a shame that Buddhist morality is commonly taught in this way. I have often heard of the Five Precepts referred to as the Five Prohibitions, even though the concept of 'prohibition' is nowhere to be found in the Buddha's teachings. In fact, we are encouraged to undertake the Five Precepts as a means to train or educate the way that we relate to the world we live in and the people around us. In Buddha Dhamma abstaining from certain kinds of behaviour out of fear of punishment or desire for reward is a counterfeit morality. For true morality to manifest, we must become inspired by a basic premise: our potential as human beings can only be realised by abandoning the unwholesome, cultivating the wholesome and purifying the mind.





## A few thoughts on obstacles.

Be flexible in your approach. Ajahn Chah once said: 'If obstacles come low, jump over them. If they come high, duck under them.

Don't try to get rid of thoughts during meditation; it gives them too much importance. Simply shine the light of awareness on thoughts and they will disappear by themselves.

It is not the problem that is the problem. The problem is not wanting to have the problem.

If you make peace the goal of meditation you will find the five hindrances depressing. If you make moment-by-moment clarity of mind your goal, the five hindrances will appear as challenges and teachers.

Develop the skill of being fully awake to experience. If you do this the blind grasping onto pleasant feeling and the instinctive rejection of unpleasant feeling will fade. The true nature of things will manifest.



When I was younger I would sometimes go on long walks through the Thai countryside. I liked to walk in the evenings when the sun was not so hot. The only drawback I found to walking after dark was the aggressive dogs in the farms and villages along the way. Two things helped to keep me safe: loving kindness and a big stick to sternly wave about. Recently, a rather large Malaysian pit viper has come to live under the tree at the front of my kuti. We keep to ourselves and live in harmony together.

Nevertheless, at night time I stay safe with both loving kindness and a bright flashlight.

I have strong faith in the protective power of loving kindness, but this does not mean that I necessarily object to sticks and flashlights. Reasonable caution and common sense also have their place in the Dhamma





Meditation is the cultivation of wakefulness. It begins with us learning how to be awake to our meditation object, moment by moment. As it progresses we learn to be awake to the whole of our body and mind. We observe, for example, how the posture of the body and its aches and pains affect the mind. We observe the various ways in which mental agitation and its absence affect the body. We observe how a sound can trigger a memory, how a memory can trigger an emotion, and how an emotion can plunge us into a whole inner world that, for its duration, seems very real. We observe the craving for distraction and, if we persevere, the simple joy of non-distraction. We begin to sense the path to inner freedom. As we gradually assimilate all this raw data about the nature of our body and mind, we find changes occurring naturally in our values and behaviour. There is, certainly, a role for faith and theory in our lives as Buddhists. But what is fundamental, I believe, is this intense curiosity about our life, and this commitment, each moment of the day, to being awake.



On the night of his enlightenment, the Buddha became awakened both to the nature of the Four Noble Truths, and to the correct way to relate towards them. Later, he summarized:

"Dukkha is to be fully understood

The cause of dukkha is to be abandoned.

The cessation of dukkha is to be realized.

The path leading to the cessation of dukkha is to be cultivated."

Thus, in our practice we should be constantly asking ourselves:

Right now, where is the dukkha?

What is the cause that needs to be abandoned?

What cessation of this dukkha may be realized?

What path factors should I be cultivating?

It is a very practical approach. Recently, a schoolboy told me he is afraid of ghosts. I asked him, 'Right now, are you suffering because of ghosts or because of your fear of ghosts?' He replied that it was the fear. I said, 'Well, then that's your problem'. I went on to teach him how to observe the physical and mental expressions of fear, and how to let them go.



I've rarely heard of ghosts oppressing human beings, other than in books or on screens. But I hear of people being oppressed by fear every day. In dealing with our daily challenges, it's important to determine the real issues.



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## Ajahn Jayasaro

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- 
- Birth name: Shaun Chiverton
- 
- 1958: Born in England
- 
- 1978: Became an anagarika with Ajahn Sumedho's community  
in England, then travelled to Thailand for further ordination
- 
- 1979: Became a novice monk at Nong Pah Pong Monastery,  
Ubon Ratchathani Province, Thailand
- 
- 1980: Took full Bhikkhu ordination at Nong Pah Pong Monastery,  
with the Venerable Ajahn Chah as his preceptor
- 
- 1997 – 2001: Abbot, Wat Pah Nanachat (International Forest Monastery),  
Ubon Ratchathani Province, Thailand
- 
- 2002-present: Resident at a hermitage in Pak Chong District,  
Nakhon Ratchasima Province, Thailand
- 
- 2019: Received monastic title of Phra Rajabajaramanit
- 
- 2020: Received monastic title of Phra Thepphacharayanamuni
- 
- 2021: Received monastic title of Phra Dhammaphacharayanamuni
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# Panyaprateep Foundation

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Panyaprateep Foundation is a non-profit organization set up in 2008 by the founders, administrators, teachers and friends of Thawsi Buddhist Wisdom School community in Bangkok. On the 1st April 2008 it was officially registered by the Ministry of Interior with Registration Number of Kor Thor 1405. Since 2009 Panyaprateep Foundation has been instrumental in the establishment and support of Panyaprateep Buddhist Wisdom Boarding School, which is situated in the district of Pak Chong, Nakhon Ratchasima.

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## Objectives of Panyaprateep Foundation

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1) To support the development of Buddhist education based on the Buddhist principle of the integrated Three-Fold Training of conduct, emotional well-being and wisdom (*sīla samādhi and paññā*).

2) To propagate Buddhist wisdom and developmental principles through organization of retreat programs, training workshops and through the dissemination of Dhamma media such as books, and through other social media.

3) To create understanding of humanity's relationship to the natural world, to promote eco-friendly learning activities, and renewable energy for sustainable development, and a way of life based on His Majesty King Bhumibol Ajdulyadej's Philosophy of Sufficiency Economy.

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## Organizational Structure of Panyaprateep Foundation

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### *Members of the Executive Committee*

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Phra Ajahn Jayasaro	Chairman of the Advisory Board
Assoc. Prof. Prida Tasanapradit, M.D.	Chairman of Committee
Dr. Witit Rachatanun	Vice Chairman
Mrs. Srivara Issara	Member
Mr. Chumpichai Svasti-Xuto	Member
Mrs. Busarin Ransewa	Member
Ms. Patchana Mahapan	Member
Ms. Apapatra Chaiprasit	Member
Ms. Siriporn Leabchant	Member
Mrs. Lertluk Thamawuit	Member
Mrs. Jurarat Intharamaha	Member
Mr. Wichet Phothiwisutwathee	Member
Mrs. Pakkawadee Svasti Xuto	Member and Treasurer
Mrs. Bupaswat Rachatanun	Member and Secretary General

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The Chief Spiritual Advisor of the Foundation is Venerable Ajahn Jayasaro, a monk disciple of Ajahn Chah of the Thai Forest Tradition, and leading figure in the Buddhist education movement. The Foundation is also honoured to have Assoc. Prof. Prida Tasanapradit, M.D. as Chairman of the Executive Committee. Furthermore, the Foundation has sought and received the kind blessing and pledges of support from a number of distinguished experts in diverse fields to help as advisors.

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To date the Foundation has supported the consistent growth of Panyaprateep School to serve as a prototype of Buddhist wisdom education and to share the learning experiences with society at large. Furthermore, dhamma books In Thai and English are published for free distribution with support of the Foundation.

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