

from heart and hand

Vol.II

by Ajahn Jayasaro

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*by Ajahn Jayasaro* ISBN : 978-616-7930-20-6

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Website : jayasaro.panyaprateep.org

Publishing by : Panyaprateep Foundation

First Printing : September 2019 5,000 copies

Cover Design : Phāsuko Bhikkhu

Coordinator : Ananya Kuaiem

Printing : Akson Samphan Press 1987 Co., Ltd. Tel. +66-2428-7500

Print production coordinator : Q Print Management Co., Ltd. Tel. +66-2800-2292

## 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

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 Gen guide and protect you all

> Ajahn Jeyasaro Janamara Hermitaye Ayyıst 2019

## Everything is teaching us.

Everything. Open your eyes, open your ears, open your heart.

Put down your fears and desires. Allow yourself to learn.

Ajahn Chah once addressed the Songha: A large number of monks doesn't have to lead to sloppiness and disorder. It's like a millipede. A milliped has lots of legs and looks awkward, as if the legs should get all snarled up. But, in fact, because there is a rhythm and order to its movements, the millipede moves around without difficulty. Its the same in Buddhism. If you practise like disciples of the Buddha, its easy. That means practising well, practising directly, practising in order to be free of suffering, practising with integrity. Then if there are hundreds of manks, or even thousands - no matter how many there are it doesn't matter, because they all form into one harmonious whole.

linagure you have just made a Skype call to a loved one far away and you are feeling very happy. Then some people accuse you of being a superstitious fool. They say that you have been deluding yourself. What you have been looking at is not really your loved one at all, but simply a pattern of pixels on the screen. It is a ridiculous accusation, isn't it? The critics have some logic on their side, but only of the most narrow and superficial kind. When people criticize Buddhists for bowing to Buddha statues, saying they are bolishly prostrating themselves before lumps of stone or metal or wood, it is as ridiculous as criticizing a Skype caller Br giving so much importance to pixels on a screen. Just as the pixels can represent human beings in a very satisfying way, so Buddha statues can bring to our munds in a very vivid way, the inspiring qualities of the Buddha.

The more you think about the things you desire, the more dissatisfied you become with the things you have already.

The more you think about the things in your life that you dislike or worry you, the more you will feel oppressed by them.

The more you think with mistaken ideas and beliefs, the more confused you will become.

Meditation is not meant to remove thought from the mind altogether - that would be impossible - but is meant to aver us of our addiction to thought. We learn how to avoid thinking in ways that make us hel tired and depressed, and which obstruct the arising of peace and wisdom. When we remember a painful event in our life, our mind becomes flooded with the emotions that were aroused at the time, making it very difficult to forgive and let go.

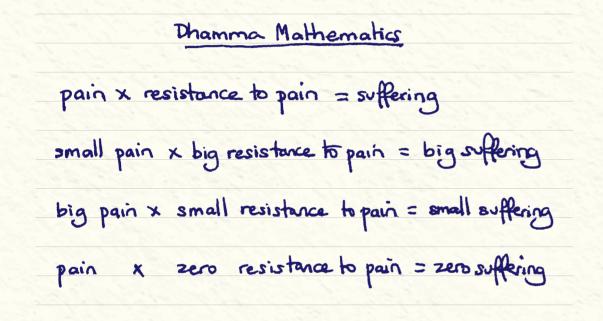
Here is a remody for meditators: After you have withdrawn from a period of meditation, and if your mind feals calm and steady, deliberately recall the painful event. If your samadhi is strong enough, it will prevent negative emotions from arising and you will only remember the event itself without the voval teelings. This will create a new calm memory of the event. If you repeat this practice enough times the calm memory will replace the painful memory, and letting go will naturally occur. In meditation practice be observant of the quality of your attention to the object. If attention is too tight and controlling, the breath becomes uneven and you may develop a headache or feelings of constriction in the chest area. If the attention is too relaxed, the mind will drift into daydreams or become dull and sleepy.

Meditators often look on feelings of tension and dullness that arise during meditation as evenies, but they can also be seen as important feedback letting us know that we need to adjust the quality of attention. Ajahn Sumedho is the serior Western disciple of Ajahn Chah and has now been a monk for fifty years. One of his teachings that I like very much concerns patient endurance (Päli: khanti). He defines it as 'peaceful co-existence with the urpleasant'. In other words, being patient does not just mean gritting your teeth until the urpleasant experience comes to an end, but also involves changing your attitude bowards the experience. You have to make friends with it.

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It is fortunate to be able to make a living in a job that is of true benefit to others. One such job is that of the school teacher. Transmitting knowledge is a wonderful thing to do, but even more wonderful is transmitting a love of learning and a love of truth. Knowledge that is learnt at school may one day become obsolete. But a child who has been equipped with both a joy in learning and the skills to learn, will always be ready to thrive, no matter in what environment they find themselves, and no matter how the world changes. School teachers who help to inspire these qualities in their students make great merit. Today, the full-moon day of July, Theravada Biddhists commemorate the occasion on which the Buddha delivered his first discourse. The discourse begins with the declaration that the Buddha's teachings follow a Middle Way between the extremes of sensuality and ascetusern. The main boby of the text explains the four Noble Truths: suffering, its cause, its cessation and the path leading to its cessation.

At the end of the discouse, Kondanya, the most senior of the five ascetus who made up the audience, realized Stream Entry, the first lavel of enlightenment. The knowledge that produced his realization is both the most simple and the most profound over uttered. 'All that is of the nature to arise is of the nature to pass away'.



When we're young time seems to flow as slowly as a meandering river. As we get older we realise that, in fact, time flows as swifty as a waterfall. Fast or slow, time never stops flowing, even for a moment. The Buddha said that we should ask ourselves every day. Time is relentlessly passing. What am I doing with my life. There is nothing wrong with the world. Our problem is that we have unrealistic expectations of it. The world is inherently unstable and impermanent. We desire a happiness that is stable and permanent. If we seek that stable and permanent happiness where it does not exist, we set ourselves up for suffering. Without harming ourselves or others, we can enjoy the world for what it is, with all its limitations. But to satisfy the deepest needs of the heart, and to be free from feelings of incompleteness, we must look within. People can conceal the conscious but not the unconscious. A wise person creates the conditions for the unconscious to manifest, in order to reveal hidden truths.

One day, Akbar, the great Muslim emperor of India, lost a valuable ring. He was sure that it had been stolen by one of his courtiers, but when he questioned them they all denied responsibility. He appealed to the great sage, Birbal, for assistance. Birbal stood in front of the group of courtiers, and after a moment's thought, announced that the thief was the one with straw in his beard. One of the courtiers instinctively touched his beard. Birbal pointed to him: 'There is the thief.'

Letting go doesn't mean letting go of our responsibilities; it means letting go of the defilements that arise in our minds while we are Rikilling our responsibilities. On one occasion Ajahn Chah went on an inspection tour of the monks' dwellings. In one hut he discovered a hole in the roof. The monk had simply placed a bucket under the hole to catch any rain water that fell inside, and moved his steeping mat into a dry corner. Ajahn Chah asked the monk why he hadn't repaired the roof. The monk replied proudly that he was practising letting go. Ajahn Chah said "That is not the letting go of the wise person. It is the belting go of a water buffalo." An experiment was once performed in which office workers were offered two hypothetical choices: a big raise in their wages or a small raise. It would seem obvious which one everybody would choose, but there was a condition. Each person wastold that if they accepted the big raise, everyonealse in their office would be given an even bigger raise. If the person accepted the small raise, everyone else in the office would be given an even smaller raise. The majority of the office workers chose the small raise. By constantly comparing ourselves to other we can act in ways that are in conflict with our best interests. Ajahn Chah once gave a simile to illustrate the contradictions he saw in people who develop their intellects to a high level but never develop themselves morally or spiritually. He said that they are like vultures who fly very high in the sky, but whenever they feel hungry, swoop down to the ground to feast on rotting flesh.

An imbalanced development can never lead to true happiness or peace.

When a cow drinks fresh water, the water turns into milk. When a snake drinks the same water it turns into poison. The Dhamma is like fresh pure water. In studying and practising the teachings its as if we drink the pure Dhamma. The important thing is that we drink the Dhamma like a cow and not like a snake.

If we become arrogant and conceited because of our Knowledge of the teachings, or become attached to our understanding, holding that only I (or only my teacher) am right; everyone else is wrong?, then, like a snake, we are making poison from pure water. Resentment makes us stupid. Resentment stops us from finding lasting solutions to problems. Here are nine thoughts that tend to provoke resentment and which should not be welcomed into the mind:

1) They acted for my harm.

2) They are acting for my harm.

3) They will act for my ham.

4) They acted for the harm of one dear to me.

5) They are acting Br the harm of one dear to me.

6) They will act for the harm of one dear to me.

7) They acted for the benefit of one disagreeable to me.

8). They are acting for the benefit of one disagreeable to me.

9) They will act for the benefit of one disagreeable to me.

Let go of the resertment. Deal with the causes and conditions.

Through the practice of meditation, learn to experience and appreciate the mind that appears in the absence of words and images. Then seek to recognize that mind within words and images.

Loving-kindness is our greatest protection. The Buddha declared that one who has cultivated a heart of loving-kindness is 'beloved of human and non-human beings' With a heart RUI of love and compassion for all beings, we can enter into places believed to be full of ghosts and feel completely safe. Most people find public speaking very challenging because of the intense self-consciousness it provokes There is the anxiety about being judged, the desire to be liked and admired, and the fear of failure, of being rejected or dismissed. The way to deal with the situation is to replace the self-consciousness with the wish to benefit others. Turn attention from imagining how people are looking at you, and focus on your intentions towards them. If you fill your mind with the desire that your words will help your listeness to learn and flourish, this pure uish to give and share something you believe to be useful and

valvable will wash away the self-consciousness and the stress. Say to yourself, 'May my audience benefit from my words! May my words be of true help to them! The Buddha taught us that our suffering is conditioned by defilements. Defilements are not fixed unalterable aspects of the mind. They grow when we feed them and shrink when we starre them. Defilements can be completely eliminated from the human mind through practice of the Noble Eightfold Path. The effoct to abandon defilements gives true meaning and purpose to human existence. It creates happiness and benefit for ourselves and provides us with the wisdom and compassion to help others. Whatever our livelihood, whatever our personal situation, this is the most important work of our lives. The Buddha once revealed the causes for fearlessness in the face of impending death. When suffering from a terminal illness: those people freed from attachment to the physical body feel no fear at the approaching separation from it; those people freed from attachment to sense pleasures feel no fear at the approaching separation from them; those who are aware that they have done many good things in their life and few bad ones are confident of a good rebirth; those freed from databts and confusion with regard to

the true nature of things feel secure in the Three Religer.

Bowing with awareness, we remind ourselves of our highest values. We how with love and respect to a Buddha statue as the supreme symbol of those values. Bowing to a Buddha statue means howing to wisdom, compassion and purity, becaue these are the qualities that define a Buddha. Bowing to a Buddha statue, we also profess our determination to cultivate these Buddha qualities in our own heart.

The objects of Buddhist faith are not found in the dogmas of a holy book. As Buddhists, our belief is in the human potential to abandon the unwholesome, develop the wholesome and prify the mind. For this reason, the objects of Buddhist faith can and should be put to the test of experience. Through wise effort we become confident enough to let go of the words 'I cannot' and say only, 'I cannot yet but I will'. On one occasion the Buddha picked up a handful of leaves from the forest floor. He said that the things that he knew were as many as the leaves in the forest, but the things he taught were as few on the leaves in his hand. He chose to reveal only those things that were of genuine assistance on the path from ignorance and suffering to peace, wisdom and compassion

Life is so unreliable and short. We must keep questioning our priorities. We don't need to gather all the leaves in the forest.

Food plays an important part in peoples lives. Apart from nutrition it also provides much pleasure. Some people even take photos of the food in front of them and post them on social media. However, as far as I know, nobody takes photos of their excrement in the toilet bowl, or invites other people to look at them. But beautiful, delicious food and ugly, badsmelling excrement are not too completely different things. One becomes the other through contact with the humanbody. All things that come into contact with this body become soiled by it. Clean and freshsmelling clathes and bedding are other examples. Try to observe and learn from everyday experience. The more rounded and comprehensive our view of the body, the less likely we are to become foolishly attached to it.

One small tree seems insignificant when compared with the might of the sur. But to a traveller walking in an open area in very hot weather, that single tree can provide refreshing, even life-saving, shade. Thoughts of kindness may seem insignificant when compared to the power of anger. But a mind on fire with anger which is able to turn to loving-kindness may discover a coolness and shade within them that would have seemed impossible only moments before. As few Buddhists have memories of previous lives The teachings on rebirth must, for most of us, remain a matter of faith. Buddhist faith is humble: we don't claim that something must necessarily be true simply because we believe it to be so. We place a reasoned confidence in the Buddha's enlightened knowledge. This confidence grows by putting all the teachings that we are capable of verifying to the test of expenence. On finding that every single one of them stands up to that test we conclude that we are able to trust the Buddha in those areas, such as rebirth, which we are, as yet, unable to prove. The Buddha's teachings are like a bottle of wonderful medicine. Some people only memorise the label on the bottle, and argue about its meaning with others. Some people put the bottle on a shrine, bow to it, and ask it to bless them with all the things they want. The wise person takes the medicine even if, at first, it may taste a little bitter. Remember: the Buddha's medicine has no expiry date, but we do. As young monks we were told to model ourselves on earthworms. Many people might find this suprising and not very inspiring. But think about it: how tirelessly the earthworm works and how selflessly! The earthworm has no desire for the limelight. But if there were no earthworms there would be no soil, and then where would we get food for our bodies? If there were no monks and nuns then who would give us the profound food for our hearts?

The Buddha taught that the unenlightened relationship to the agreeable aspects of life such as youth and good health, may be best characterized as a kind of intoxication. We take the good things in life for granted, forget their impermanent nature, and as a result, act, speak and think in ways that cause suffering to ourseives and others.

For this reason the Buddha taught us to constantly remind ourselves:

I am subject to old age. I am not exempt from old age.
 I am subject to illness. I am not exempt from illness.
 I am subject to death I am not exempt from death.
 Sooner or later, I will be separated from everyone and everything dear and agreeable to me.

5. I an the owner of my kamma, heir to my kamma; I have kamma as my origin, kamma as my relative, kamma as my support. I will be the heir of whatever kamma that I do, good or bad.

The strength of resistance we feel towards these reflections is a measure of the strength of the intoxication. It is dwelling on the truth that makes us sober and clear-minded.

In practising mindfulness we try to be clearly present to all of our experience. Pleasant, inpleasant and neutral states each offer their own particular challenges. We need to be patient with ourselves when we lose our mindfulness, and never tire of starting alresh with a humble heart. It is also important to be aware of what is not happening. Noting an absence of compassion in the face of suffering reminds us to work harder on this aspect of practice. Observing a lack of stress in a situation that formerly caused us much difficulty brings joy to the mind, confidence in the practice. and a renewed enthusiasm for the path toliberation. 2018 marks the 100th anniversary of the birth of Lvang Br Chah. The 16th January, Teachers' Day have in Thailand, is the day that we commemorate his passing away. Almost 2600 years since the Buddha left the world, Luang Por Chah proved through his practice of Dhamma that complete liberation from suffering is as possible today on it was in the time of the Buddha.

Luang Por Chah compared the true nature of all things to underground water. Anyone who is willing to keep digging down into the earth, without succumbing to distraction or discouragement, will surely reach the sweet, pure water of truth and quench their thirst once and for all. When problems arise, the visual tendency is to look for someone or something to blame. Most people try to shift the blame away from themselves, saying: 'It was their fault,' a 'I was just following orders'. Some people automatically blame themselves when things go wrong; 'I'm so stupid'; 'I'm so bad'; 'I always do this'

Blaming is not an intelligent way to react to difficulties. As Buddhists we must learn to map out all the factors that have contributed to a problem. The habit of assigning blame for failures often overloaks the complex causes of problems and in organizations creates a climate of fear. Assessing contributions leads to learning and long-lasting improvements. Kamma refers to intention expressed through body, speech or mind. Moment by moment, our lives are shaped and sustained by Kamma. Every intentional action affects the quality of our life, both in the present and the fiture. Meditation practices are so important because they allow us to systematically train intention. In our efforts to keep the mind on the meditation object, we learn how to strengthen wholesome intentions. In our efforts to let go of the hindrances to meditation we learn how to weaker and abandon unwholesome intentions. Meditation skills become life skills.

Phamma practice requires a great deal of trial and error. We learn best by trying things out and seeing what works. Each error gives us important information that we can use to improve the quality of our effort. If we can recognize errors as useful feedback rather than as proof that we are stupid or full of defilements, we will swifty progress.

Over and over again in our meditation practice we return to the breath with an unwavering determination to free the mind from all that imprisons it. We relate to the experience of the breath with a mind that is bright, attentive and wakeful, firm and kind. We observe the quality and intensity of our effort and adjust it when necessary. We abandon all love for distraction. Learning how to be with the breath, we learn how to be with all experience. As we progress, the distinction between the mind in meditation and in daily life begins to dispotre.

Turning the mind to the impermanence of the world around us gives rise to a fundamental wisdom. Recognizing how fragile are all the things we hold most dear, and how little control we have over our surroundings, we become determined to make the best possible use of our life For who can tell when death will come? But the most profound wisdom comes from looking within. By looking again and again at the impermanence of every aspect of the physical body, of teelings, perceptions thoughts, emotions, views and beliefs are realise how our most deeply cherished ideas about who we are, have no-foundation. This is the beginning of the journey of discovery that lies at the heart of the Buddha's path to liberation.

Anger makes us stupid. Our perception of situations becomes coarse and distorted. We say and do things that we feel bad about afterwards. Being a prey to anger undermines our self-respect. When any we can make serious bad kamma. Our actions and speech not only create long-lasting problems in our relationships with those around us, but also - if we believe the testimony of the enlightened ones - have grave consequences for future lives. Please reflect on all the suffering you have created for yourself and others through anger, and resolve to free yourself from it. This freedom is not bayond you to realize, but is only possible through following the Buddha's path of training. The training involves mindfulness and restraint of conduct and speech, systematic cultivation of positive mental states such as bring-kindness, and the investigation and abandonment of the craving and attachments that lie behind anger.

A man driving a cartload of coconuts to a market for the first time realized that he was late, and started to look for a shortcut. He asked a teenage boy how long it would take to get to the market if he took the small lane to one side of him. The youth replied Half an hour if you go slowly. An hour if you go quickly. The man glared at the boy for being so insolent and drove his cart down the lane as fast as he could. He soon found that the lane was full of potholes. The cart tipped over to one side and many co consts fell to the ground. By the time he had gathered them up and driven to the market exactly an hour had passed. This story does not only teach us that hurrying does not necessarily get us to our goal more quickly, and that

rushing often leads to mistakes. It also warns us not to allow our feelings for an informant to influence how seriously we take his information.

For many people protecting their ideas and beliefs is more important than putting them to the test of truth. One common strategy for doing this involves what is called closed loop thinking. This refers to creating a position that cannot be overturned. For example, some people convince thanselves that any evidence that disproves their belief must be false. It has either been planted by their enemies or designed by their god as a test of faith. Thus, no unwelcome evidence is taken seriously. To such people, feeling right means that they are right. To a Buddhist, feeling right is just a feeling. Feeling completely convinced is just a feeling. No feeling is a proof. Only the mind that has been trained to let go of identification with feelings can know what is true and what is false.

A long time ago, in one of his lives as a bodh.sattva, the Buddha-to-be was born as a dog. One day, the straps and leather covering the King's chariot were chewed up. The King became very angry. He was informed that the alprits were dogs who had got into the palace stable through the drains. The King ordered that all dogs except those of the Royal Household were to be killed as a punishment. When he heard the news the Buddha-to-be felt great compassion for all those about to lose their lives. With great courage he set off to the palace to confront the King. He told the King that his punishment was unfair because it involved the slaughter of many innocent beings, and because it omitted the king's own dogs. In fact, said the Buddha-to-be, it was the King's dogs that were guilty. He then proved it by asking that they be fed with an emetic. When the dogs started to vomit, pieces of leather appeared in the vomit, proving their guilt. The King apologized and cancelled his order for the slaughter of dogs. Already in this life as a dog, the bodhisattva was showing the compassion allied with wisdom and compassion that would flower at his enlightenment.

The ancient sages have reminded us to look at the moon, not the finger pointing to the moon. They mean that we should not allow ourselves to become obsessed with words and terminology, but focus on the truth that the words refer to. And it is not only words that lead us to the Dhamma,

As we learn how to let go of socing everything that happens in terms of 'me' and 'mine', more and more of our daily experiences of pair and pteasure, gain and loss are revealed as being also like fingers pointing to the moon. I once woke up in a bus in the middle of a desert in southern Iran. Outside the window, I saw to my amazement that hundreds of brightly coloured flowers were blooming amongst the rocks and sand. At first I thought that I must be dreaming. Then I realized that during the night some rain had fallen. It was astonishing to me that those flowers could have sprung up so quickly in such a severe environment.

Often, over the years, I have reflected on that scene when meeting unkind and unfriendly people. Perhaps, in spite of their harshness, all they need is a small shower of kindness for some flowers of goodness to grow inside them.

Sometimes people behaving badly can be of as much benefit to us as those who behave well and are our role models. At least this is true when we can put down any personal feelings of aversion towards them. Looking wisely at a very selfish person, for example, practitioners ash themselves with sincerity 'Selfishness is such an ugly destructive thing. Am I also selfish like this! How can I free myself from it. They make a determination. 'Although I can do little to get other people to let go of their selfishness, at least I will let go of the selfishness in my own mind, and be a good example to others. Looking at the world around us in this way, we do not become depressed. We see all the people acting in foolish and harmful ways as reminding us how not to lead our lives; we feel strengthened in our resolve to follow the path of the Buddha. These people are also our teachers.

Reophe become indifferent to the sufferings of others by turning their back on them, or by hardening their hearts. In making themselves indifferent to the pair of their fellow beings, people lose a vital part of what makes them truly human.

The Pali word 'upekkha' means equanimity. Superficially, it may look like indifference but in fact it is for from it. We cultivate equanimity at those times when we have no power to help those who are suffering, and our hearts are close to despair. We do this by reflecting on the law of kamma, and reminding ourselves that each parson has their own kamma to work through. But having made peace with the situation our equanimity is not static. It monitors the situation for any signs of change. When the opportunity arises we return to our efforts to relieve the pain of our fellow beings.

In every relationship there are many meetings and many partings, many hellos and many goodbyes. One who sees the parting made certain by every meeting, and the goodbye hidden within every hello, sees both the sadness inherent in our lives, and the need to spend the short time we have together in the best possible way. If your main meditation object is the breath,
I would suggest at least three auxiliary objects to be used at appropriate times.
MindRulness of death to overcome laziness and heedlessness.
Diving-kindness meditation to overcome negativity and depression.
Meditation on the unattractive parts of the human body to overcome sexual and sensual obsessions.

If you are being unfairly criticized by someone with unkind intentions towards you, tocus on breathing normally and keeping your mind free from anger and ill-will. If you are being fairly criticized by someone with unkind intentions, ignore those intentions and receive the information with gratitude as providing an opportunity to remedy mistakes. If you are being unfairly criticized by someone with kind intentions towards you, focus on the good intentions behind the hurthel words.

If you are being fairly criticized by someone with kind intentions, then lister carefully and rejoice that you have such a good friend who is willing to point out mistakes that you could not see yourself.

One year a woman from Bangkok came to stay in our monastery. At first everything went well, but after a time she started to become very bossy in the kitchen and upset a number of the local villagers. Finally, she decided to leave and on paying respects to me prior to her departure, she lamented the kamma that she must have created in previous lives. She said that as a result of it, wherever she went, after a short happy period, people turned against her. She wondered how much longer she would have to deal with this old kamma It was apparent to me that this woman's problems were due to the unskilled way she related to those around herin other words the new tramma she was creating day by day - rather than the effects of old tramma. It was a good example of how people can use Dhamma teachings as a means to conceal the touth from themselves, rather than as tools to uncover the truth.

Telling small lies for the sake of getting something we want or in order to avoid something we don't want, soon creates the need to tell further levels of lies to protect those that have already been told. The more we repeat a lie the more real it seems to us, and the more we lose the sense of telling a lie as we speak it. We begin to believe our own lies, and to feel hurt and angry when they are challenged. This is a dangenous state of affairs. Devotion to the truth as we know it may lead to occasional embarrorment, losses and difficulty. But it gives our words weight and gains us the trust and respect of those around us. The sense of inkegrity we feel within our hearts is a true inner refuge.

The moment at which we identify with a mental state as 'me' or 'mine' is a kind of birth. Seeing something we desire, for example, we are born as a greedy person. Unable to enjoy the desired object that greedy person dies and a disappointed person is born in his place. This kind of birth and death takes place many times throughout the day. But as our mindfulness and wisdom develop it takes place less often. For an enlightened being this reblirth process does not take place at all.

When we hear that Nibbana is the end of rebirth it can sound intimidating and not so inspiring. By looking at the births and deaths in daily life, however, we can see the suffering involved in it more clearly. and the sublime peace that comes with freedom from all attachment.

At the end of last year, as I wandered through some of the most remote villages in Bihar State in northeast India I was surprised by the dogs. Usually, village dogs are taught to be suspicious of strangers and to bark loudly if an unfamiliar figure approaches their master's house. These dogs simply looked at me for a moment with lazy eyes, and then returned to what they were doing, or went back to sleep.

It soon became clear to me that these animals had not been trained as guard dogs because the houses contained nothing to be stolen. These people were so poor that they had no need to be afraid of thieves.

As I walked on I reflected how much peoples' fear and aggression is due to their need to protect an image of themselves. When we feel no need to hide or protect anything about ourselves, we feel as free and relaxed as a sleepy dog in front of an empty house.

Meditating on a mountainside in the middle of the jungle there can be few more innitating sounds than that of a chainsaw The sound itself is unpleasantly loud and too irregular to become background noise. What is especially upsetting is the awareness that someone is illegally withing down a beautiful tree for profit. Meditating on a mountainside in the middle of the jungle there can be few more refreshing sounds than that of the cessation of a chainsaw's buzz. The silence which follows is not absolute : it includes the sound of the birds and insects and the wind in the trees. But in that silence there is a profound sense of liberation from all that is hereful and wrong. It is a glimpse of enlightenment.

We can always find a good excuse not to meditate. It's too early or it's too late. We're too hungry or too full. We're too tired or too restless. We're too busy or we just want to relax.

But meditation does not have to yield a particular result to be worthwhile. Our practice becomes strong through steady, consistent effort, rather than through rare peak experiences. It is the sincerity, the trying, that is important. When the mind starts to produce its usual excuses, we can tell ourselves, Yes, conditions are not ideal, but I will meditate, at least for a short-time, anyway. I will make this effort as an offering to the Buddha, Dhamma and Sangha. And sometimes, having overcome the initial resistance, the mind becomes very bright and clear.

A master asked his student to describe everything he could see in front of him. The student corefully described the mountains, the trees, the streams, the sky, the clouds. The master was not satisfied. The student went into greater detail. He described the movement of the leaves as the mountain breeze swept through the trees, the ripples of water in the streams, the patterns of shade on the cart track. The student added more and more details but the master remained unsatisfied, insisting that the student was missing something. Finally, the student admitted defeat and asked the master what it was that he was missing. The master replied, The most important thing of all: light. Without light you would see nothing at all. We grasp at the objects of the senses because we don't see the mind. But the mind is the most important thing of all. Without it, nothing could be perceived. Keep returning to the mind.

There are many ways to how. But for me, the essence of the bow is the contact between the Forehead and the floor. What a wonderful feeling that is! Our sense of identity is so bound up with our face, and with the acts of seeing, hearing, touching and smelling, all of which take place in the head. The head is the seat of the brain. So, bowing with awareness is to bring all that is most meaningful in our life to the floor, as an expression of humility and devotion We how before a symbol of peace, wisdom, compassion and purity renewing our commitment to those virtues as our guides through life, and our ultimate goals.

After Thai people have received blessings from their elders and teachers on auspicious occasions such as Thai New Year, they often say in reply, "May you continue to be the shade of a bodhi tree, the shade of a banyon tree, for all of us, for a long time to come."

The Buddha did not consider long life to be a good thing in itself. Quality is more important than quantity. He said "Better than a hundred years lived in vice and without restraint is one day lived with virtue and inner peace," and "Better than a hundred years lived in idleness and inactivity is one day lived with courageous effort."

So as we get older, let us determine that our life will be of such a quality that our family members and friends will feel more and more in our presence, a sense of coolness and refuge, as if, on a hot day, they have entered into the shade of a large and beautiful tree. As long as we only pay attention to beginnings. greed will always be our master. And so in order to master greed, the wise turn their minds towards endings. They Avily experience the feeling between the ending of one thing and the beginning of another.

Every single experience we have ever had or ever will have

has come to an end

or will do so.

Nothing lasts,

How simple a truth !

How profound an insight!

There is no need to fight with greed; simply open the mind to impermanence Greed feeds on narrow and distorted perceptions. Looking more closely at the body and mind, greed begins to fade.

We feel envy when we desire to enjoy something that someone else is enjoying. We think that it only we had that thing, that experience, that kinding relationship, then we would be trily happy. We feel jealousy when we feel upset that someone else is enjoying something that we would like to enjoy, or - even more painfully - something we once enjoyed but have now lost. Envy is rooted in greed. Jealousy is rooted in aversion Observing endings allows us to see envy and jeaboxey as simply impermanent mental states, and allows us to bet go of our identification with them. Revewing them, we see. how toxic they are, pacticularly jeakusy. Jealoury can become obsessive, almost a kind of madricss. Jealous people destroy their own happiness for more effectively than the person they are jealous of could ever do. It is vital that people prone to jealousy should see their danger and wholeheartedly cultivate the meditation on sympathetic joy (muditá).

Metaphors are powerful things. They are very persuasive. The Buddha's teachings began with the metaphor of the path, and he used similes and metaphors with great skill throughout his years of teaching. But metaphors, used by less wise people can be dangerous. We often forget that metaphors cannot prove the truth of any proposition, they can only illustrate. When we find a metaphor that provides a clear picture of an abstract matter that we have been unable to understand, it feels good. And its here that we need to be especially mindful. We must remind ourselves that this good feeling is not a sure indication that the clear picture is an accurate representation of the matter in hand.

Meditation reveals how our suffering is conditioned by mental defilements . We learn how to recognize those defilements, how to protect the mind against them, and when they do penetrate our defences, how to deal with them effectively. As our suffering decreases we become more pleasant to be around. Our families are the first beneficiaries. As understanding of the way suffering arises and ceases becomes more profound our relationship to the world around us changes. We open our cyes to the breadth and depth of human suffering Now rather than feeling sadress or despair we feel compassion. We want to do whatever we can, in our own small way, to help reduce the pair of our fellow beings. Thus, meditation, is as far away from being a selfish occupation as could be imagined.

Most people want to live a long life. But, in fact, when you consider it, that implies wanting to be old for a long time. I'm not sure that's always such a desirable thing.

There is a better way of extending our life span. When we look at our mind, we can observe how much time every day we get lost in memory and desire and mental chatter. Ajahn Chah used to say that at such mindless moments it is as if we are dead, and that we are only truly alive when we are fully awake. If we can accept the truth of his words then we will see that the best way of living a long happy life is to extend the time every day when we are awake and aware.

People have been found to become more honest in a room in which a photograph of a pair of eyes is displayed on the wall. People who cannot resist eating unhealthy toods have been helped by a requirement that they look into a mirror as they choose their food. People who must sign a declaration of honesty at the top of a tax form rather than at the bottom, tend to fill it in more accurately. In such cases, a timely external reminder of agreements, of values or goals can help people to make wiser choices How much more so when we are able to cultivate a constant inner awareness of our values and aspirations, independent of external support. MindRhass is not simply a non-judgemental awareness of the present moment. It includes bearing in mind the principles on which we seek to found our life, even

when - or especially when - we are subject to pressure or temptation.

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Reading and memorizing stories of the lives and practices of the great masters can be greatly uplifting and remind us of the Dhamma when defilements threaten to overwhelm our minds.

On one occasion, the commentary tells us, Venerable Sariputta was attacked while walking on almoround. A brahmin decided to test if the great monk was truly as patient as everyone believed him to be. He ran up behind Ven. Sariputta and struck him on the back as hard as he could. Ven. Sariputta continued on his almoround without even looking around. Suddenly Alled with remorse, the brahmin chased after the great month and begged for forgiveness, which he immediately received. The brahmin then said that if Ven, Sariputta really torgave him, then he would like to invite him to take his daily meal in his house. Ver. Sariputta accepted the invitation, and after finishing his meal, he gave an inspiring Dhamma talk to the brahmin and his family.

Meanwhile, news had spread that someone had attacked Ven. Sariputta and an angry crowd armed with sticks, clubs and rocks gathered outside the brahmin's house. Realising this, Ven. Sariputta asked the man to carry his bowl for him on his walk back to the monastery. As they left the house, nobody dared to attack the brahmin because he was carrying the muster's bowl. Ven. Sariputta addressed the crowd. 'This man attacked me, not you, and I have forgiven him. New all of you go home in peace. One of the means by which the Buddha taught us to see through the false idea of self is by dividing the human being into five aggregates' (Mhanda). He encouraged us to examine our experience in order to see how the sense of self is always based upon identification with one or more of these selfless aggregates. A simple example of their characteristics at the moment of hearing a sound is as follows: The physical base of hearing : the aggregate of form.

Awareness of the presence of a sound; the aggregate of consciousness.

Recognition of the mind, interpretation of its meaning: the aggregate of perception. Pleasant, impleasant or neutral feeling arising on hearing the sound: the aggregate of feeling. Thoughts, emotions, intentions, desires ansing dependent on the sound: the aggregate of mental formations. It is not just a matter of knowing the theory, knowing the method, that is important. Of course, knowing the exact means by which we can let go the defilements that are fuelling our suffering is essential. But it is equally important to maintain the will to apply that knowledge.

Sometimes, we can be blind to the truth that one part of us does not want to be free. Maybe we believe that we deserve the suffering, or want to punish ourself for past misdeeds, or fear that letting go of the suffering would lead to even greater pain. As a result, something inside us holds onto our suffering as if it was a precious thing.

We all have the capacity to abandon the causes of suffering But we must be utterly sincere. We have to recognize that there is nothing whatsoever noble, intelligent or appropriate about mental pain. It is completely worthless. Let it go. For most people, thinking becomes an addiction. And it is an addiction that is particularly difficult to deal with, because thinking cannot be abandoned altogether like a drug. Thinking is obviously, a necessary and invaluable tool without which we cannot function in the world.

The good of meditation is, thus, not to eliminate thinking. It is to cultivate a more healthy relationship to it. In meditation we develop mindfulness of an object such as the breath to give the mind an anchor and refuge as it seeks to let go of its fascination with mental activity.

Inevitably, the mind will struggle when first deprived of thought, but with patience and persistence we can experience more and more moments in which there is no thinking in the mind and discover a deep sense of well-being and clarity when we do so. This insight that we are not our thinking, and that addiction to thinking confines us to a very superficial and unsatisfactory level of existence is life-changing. Wastehiness is so much part of our world these days that we are often blind to it, or even consider it a sign of progress. It is good to remind ourselves of the practices of our great teachers.

One day King Udena heard that his concubines had offered 500 outer robes to Venerable Ananda. He became angry and upset: "How can this monk accept so many robes? Is he going to be a clother merchant, or open a store'

When King Udena approached Ven. Ananda and asked him why he had accepted so many robes, Ven. Ananda replied: "Maharaja, we distribute them to monks with robes that are worn out. Those wom-out robes we turn into cover-sheets. The old cover-sheets we turn into floor-sheets. Old floor sheets are made into covers for mattresses. Those old covers are used as dusters. As for the dusters 'having shredded them up, we knead them into the mud, and then spread them out on the flooring.' King Udena thought: 'These Buddhist monks proceed very wisely; nothing is wasted. And he offered Ven. Ananda another 500 pieceo of cloth.

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One person expresses disappointment on arriving at a holiday destination reputed to be 'unspoilt' and finding it packed with toucists. Another groans at how much traffic there is on the road as they return home after work. A third complains about the long queue at the check-in counter at the airport. In each case the dissolisfied person perceives themself as separate from everyone else involved. He or she is the hero or heroine of their story and is being given a hard time. They forget that they themself are one of the tourists, a part of the traffic, and one of many people who travel by plane. And so they suffer. When these kinds of thoughts and feelings arise, gain a new perspective by imagining yourself through the eyes of a bird - or the lens of a drone - as just one of many beings, not the centre of the universe Changing the perception from 'me' to 'we, all of us together can release a great deal of negativity in the mind.

Today is Visākha Pija (Vesak Day), the day on which Theravada Buddhists commemorate the birth, enlightenment and death (parinibbano) of the Buddha. It is a day on which we should find time to reflect on the virtues of the Buddha, and his timeless teachings. It is also a day on which we can express our gratitude to the Buddha by an offering to him of our Dhamma practice. While the Buddha acknowledged that much merit could be made by the offering of material things, he declared that of all offerings, the offering of Dhamma is supreme.

We practise thamma as an offering by giving great care to our actions and speech; not acting or speaking in ways that cause pain and distress to self and others, but rather in ways that promote the material, emotional and spiritual welfare of all. We make an offering to the Buddha by training our mind how to protect itself against the defilements, and how to cultivate good and noble qualities. And we make an offering to the Buddha by seeking to fullow in his footsteps and awaken to the Four Noble Truths.

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During the ordination caremony, a Buddhist montr receives his first meditation object from his preceptor. He repeats a list of five Pali words torwards and backwards. These words translate as "hair of the head", "hair of the body", "nails", teeth and "skin". The montr is expected to make the reflection on these five body parts as impermenent, unattractive and impersonal, a daily practice for the rest of his life.

Being able to perceive hair os just hair, nails as just nails, teeth as just teeth and skin as just skin is a suprisingly powerful practice. It cuts right through our instinctual attachment to the body as 'me' and 'mine'. It protects against all the commercial forces that encourage us to become obsessed with physical attractiveness. Recollect a bad habit that caused you suffering in the past, but from which you are now free. Remember how it seemed as if that habit world always be a part of your life, that it was a part of who you are. Now it is gone. Ask yourself: if that negative quality can disappear from my life through practice of the Dhanna, then why can the others that still remain, not also disappear.

Recollect a good habit that wrrently brings you happiness, but which was Brmechy not presents. Recall how the you of some years ago would hardly believe that this good quality could be present in your life in the way it is today. Ask yourself: if this good quality can appear in my life through practice of the Dhamma, than why can other good qualities that are not yet present, not also appear.

There is no predetermined fiture. There is no god with a plan for you. Things get better or worse according to your actions. It is as simple or as difficult as that. A certain child likes sweets. His mother buys sweets for him every day, because she wants him to be happy. When the child has no sweets he cries as if his heart is broken. Unable to bear her child's suffering she always finds some for him. After some years, the child's teeth are all rotten.

Kindness and compassion must always be governed by wisdom. With wisdom we look at the larger context of peoples behaviour, and consider it in terms of the law of kamma. Take the example of people who continue to cheat us, even after we have forgiven then for previous offences. Allowing them to continue in their old ways without taking appropriate action is irresponsible. Seeing no consequences to their action, these people can become even more heedless, and create even more bad kamma, for which they will have to suffer in the filture. The response that is both comparsionate and wise may require inflicting some short-term pain for long-term benefit.

Jesterday, the Friday evening Bangkok traffic was made even worse than usual by a rainstorm. I was on my way to Ubon for the annual general meeting of the Ajahn Chah Songha. The trip to the airport that usually takes thirty minutes took almost two hours. I missed my plane. It was another two haves before I got back to where I began my journey. My Dhamma practice in the car was to protect my mind from feelings of frustration, and ideas about wasting time. I reflected that although I had no control over traffic and weather, I could choose whether to dwell in wholosome mental states or unwholesome ones. Whatever the external circumstances, every moment in which the mind has calm, clear awareness is time well spent. I got out of the car in front of my kuti in Bangkok feeling a little tired, but with a light heart.

(I am writing this as my re-scheduled flight passes over the rice fields of northeast Thailand) Recognizing connections is an important life skill.

When we perceive ourselves as separate beings, we feel lonely and insecure. Our mind falls prey to selfishness, arrogance and depression.

When we consider how all beings, without exception, want to be happy and fear suffering; when we consider that all beings are subject to birth, old age, sickness and death; when we reflect on all the kindness and support we have received throughat our life, we discover profound connections.

When we parceive ourselves as connected beings, feelings of gratitude and empathy arise. Our mind feels stable, it sees more clearly and with greater compassion. As Buddhist meditators we must constantly observe how suffering is caused by craving and ceases through the letting go of craving. We suffer when we crave a particular experience through the senses, and suffer even more when we cannot yet that

## experience.

We suffer when we crave to be something (powerful, loved, respected, admired, famous etc.) and suffer even more it we are not that thing, or not seen to be. We suffer when we want to get rid of something (in ourself,

in others, in a situation) and even more if we cannot get rid of it

See this craving. See the poison with in it. Let it go.

It is not just a matter of knowing the theory, knowing the method, that is important. Of course, knowing the exact means by which we can let go the defilements that are fuelling our suffering is essential. But it is equally important to maintain the will to apply that knowledge.

Sometimes, we can be blind to the truth that one part of us does not want to be free. Maybe we believe that we deserve the suffering, or want to punish avself for past misdeeds, or fear that letting go of the suffering would lead to even greater pain. As a result, something inside us holds onto our suffering as if it was a precious thing.

We all have the capacity to abandon the causes of suffering. But we must be utterly sincere. We have to recognize that there is nothing whatsoever noble, intelligent or appropriate about mental pain. It is completely worthless. Let it go.

These days we have access to information about the world around us that would have been unimaginable. to people of former times. Information has become a lucrative commodity and we have become its consumers. But as with all other kinds of consumption, we need to constantly monitor the quality and quantity of our consumption of information. Over-consumption of trivial information leads to a scattered trivial mind. Over-consumption of disturbing news leads to an anxious, fearful and disturbed mind. When consuming information, it is unnecessary and harmful to watch upsetting unages over and over again. In cases of violent aggression, generate thoughts of loving kindness for the victims and, if possible, compassion for the perpetrators. See what lessons may be learnt to reduce such occurrences in the future. Always take good care of your heart.

It is not so much the problem itself that disturos us. It is the not wanting to have the problem. It is the Reeling that "it shouldn't be like this! Its not fair!" or the child-like cry from the heart. 'Why always me?' The more we identify with the thought 'I don't need this in my life - Go away! ' the worse it gets. The more we try to drive the problem away, the more we feed it.

If you lose a key under water, the more you grope, around blindly in search of its the more you muddy the water, and the less likely you are to find the key. Allow the water to become colm, and then you can look right through it and see the key clearly. Behind the different forms of craving, lies a basic discontent. We feel that there is something wrong with the present moment. Sometimes we feel that something is missing, something that we need to get hold of. At other times we feel that there is something present that should not be, something that we need to get rid of. Learning to be content with a meditation object, we learn how to be content with the present moment. Being content with the present moment, we see so much of our craving to get and get rid of, simply fall away.

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Meditation skills are life skills.

During meditation we train ourselves to become sensitive to the arising of distraction and agitation, and learn how to calm the mind.

We train ourselves to become sensitive to the arising of dullness and laziness, and learn how to encourage and uplift the mind.

We train ourselves to become sensitive to the arising of greed and aversion, and learn how to dwell in equanimity We train ourselves to balance effort and relaxation, until we are able to hold the object like a bird in the hand: not so tightly as to hurt it, not so loosely as to allow it to fly away.

Such qualities are a great blessing in daily life. Through long-term application to meditation practice, we become resourceful. We do not seek out problems, but when they do occur we meet them with the confidence that we have the tools we need to deal with them wisely.

There are many ways of talking about the functioning - or, more accurately, the misfunctioning - of the unenlightened mind For example, we can say that as soon as the mind grasps onto mental states as me or 'mine', the mind becomes 'defiled or 'stained'. Here the emphasis is on a purity that becomes sullied Or we can say that the mind becomes afflicted by grasping Here the emphasis is on the suffering that ensues. Whatever words we use, the vital thing is that through seeing the effect of grasping and attachment on the mind we develop a strong wish to be free of it liner liberation only becomes possible when we gain a profound sense of the ways in which we are unfree, and as a result feel a great cool sadness. That sadness leads to an unslakeable determination to find a way out of our self-created pasor.

Many problems that arise during meditation are. indicators of an imbalance in lifestyte that needs to be rectified, rather than a technique that needs to be refined. In the modern world it is common for our senses to become accustomed to an unhealthy level of stimulation. As a consequence, when we restrict attention to one object, we tend to provoke one of two reactions : either the mind rebels and churns out a stream of random thoughts, or else it shuts down out of boredom. Mental agitation -"the montrey mind - and sleepiness are thus two of the now meditator's most common challenges. Progress in meditation is not just a matter of putting sufficient time into formal practice. It also requires a constant effort to live our life in a way that supports rather than undermines that practice. Reducing unnecessary stimulation and finding joy in simplicity are keyelements. of this effort.

Dwalling in the present moment, in the Buddhist sense, does not mean that there must be no thoughts of the past and future in the mind at all. It means that there is no entanglement with those thoughts It means that we learn how to relinquish our habit of escaping into memory and funtasy as a means of avoiding present discomfort. The Buddha himself spoke of the past and fiture when there was a good reason to do so. He related stories from his past lives to edify the monks, and spoke on many occasion of the causes and conditions that would lead to future flourishing or decline. On uppropriate occasions he drew upon memory and projected causal relationships into the fiture. But while he was doing this, he never slipped from the present moment.

It is related that a great sculptor was once asked how he was able to create such an exquisite and life-like horse. from a mere lump of rock. He replied that he simply chipped away everything that was not the horse. Peace is like the sculptor's horse. Its not something that you have to strive to achieve. Just chip away at everything that is not peace.

One common tendency of the mind is to overly complicate simple matters. As a result we get bogged down in details and make little progress. Another tendency is to overly simplify complex matters. As a result we make fast progress for a while but then have to correct for distortions and omissions of key information. Ultimately, little progress is made. The middle way becomes clear through necognising our attitude to simplicity and complexity. If we find ourselves feeling threatened by simplicity we must be patient with that feeling, and refrain from using thought as a means of procrastination. If we find ourselves impatient with complexity we must be patient with that feeling and refrain from taking action as a means to avoid the need to think something through.

The first rule of meditation, like that of war, is know your enemy. We can't use a meditation technique to bypass all the negative mental states that we have been harbouring for lifetimes. But by focusing on an object such as the breath, we can uncover the negative montal states, and know them for what they are. Then we can find ways to let them go. To begin with a great deal of patience is needed, and also a great deal of faith: faith that the mental defilements can be abandoned, and faith that we can abandon them. By not feeling oppressed by the defilements. or discouraged by them, we are ready to learn from them, and ultimately, to transcend them.

Giving und sharing lie at the root of the Buddhist path In giving, we go against the self centred idea: "what's in it forme?" We realise that rather than being the most realistic and practical approach to life, "looking out for number one" is the most miserable and reductive By giving importance to contributing what we can to reduce the suffering and increase the happiness of others, we discover a simple and beautiful joy. It is like breathing fresh mountain air after being confined in the stifling polluted smag of self-concern. The five hindrances (nivāranā) are mental factors that prevent the mind from realizing peace and wisdom. Progress in meditation may be gauged by the extents to which the mind can free itself of these hindrances. The Buddha revealed the ways in which the hindrances prevent clear vision by comparing the mind to a bowl of pure water and the hindrances to various distortions of the stillness and transparency of the water. Sensual desires are compared to various coloured dyes added to the water. Aversion is compared to heat that boils the water and

makes it bubble violently.

Shoth and torpor are compared to water-plants that grow over the water and conceal it. Restlessness is compared to a wind disturbing the surface of the water. Doubt is like mud in the water and darkness around it, rendering the water invisible. The path of meditation includes learning how to protect the mind from these hindrances, and when unable to do so, how to let them go. Mindfulness is not simply a matter of a non-judgemental present moment awareness. It involves an awakening to context, consequences, meaning and purpose. One common mistake made by Buddhist practitioners is to assume that the path they are walking is flat, and that if they stop for a rest that they will merely stand still. In fact the path is a long slippery slope leading upwards, and the moment we stop climbing we immediately start to slip down. The Buddha taught that if we are unable to find our joy in the wholesome then we will inevitably find our joy in the unwholesome. The Buddha explained the relationship between virtuous conduct (sita) and the higher stages of the path to liberation as follows:

Virtuous conduct leads to absence of guilt and regret, and this leads to feelings of well-being, which lead to joy, Joy leads to blass which leads to concentration Concentration provides the condition for knowing and seeing things in their true light. That clear knowing leads to disenchantment with defilements, which leads to dispassion, the transcendence of ignorant desires. That transcendence leads to the knowledge and vision of complete liberation.

I recently spoke with a lay Buddhist couple who were, for some years, generous supporters of a certain monastery near their home. They had quietly cut their ties with the monastery when they saw that the conduct of the abbot conflicted with the values that he taught in his sermons. This mont was famous for his criticisms of other months and monasteries He would say that these days everyone has forsaken the the Dhamma. It was time to return to the original teachings of the Buddha. And, of course, he was the one who could guide everyone on that pure path. The couple said to me that the first warning sign came when they realized that through this kind of preaching they were starting to see everyone outside their group as inferior.

The Buddha often spoke about the dangers of the view, 'Only I am right. Everyone else is wrong. Whenever we feel the need to promote our own views and beliefs by denigrating others, we can be sure that we are on the wrong path. Being sure of being right is one of the most dangerous of mind-states. Merit (punna) refers to actions of body, speech and mind that brighten, elevate and purify the mind. In the short term, meritorious actions make us happy. They increase the quality of both our inner life, and our relations with those around us. In the long term, by devoting ourselves to goodness, we create the necessary kammic conditions for a good rebirth. Most importantly, the mind which loves goodness and kindness will turn naturally towards the inner peace which is the fourt of liberating wisdom.

Psycotherapy can be an effective means of dealing with particular traumas and deep-seated mental disorders. In some cases, this kind of work must be done before meditation can be useful and un some cases may accompany it. Therapy is, however, much more limited than Buddhist training. Whereas therapy is capable of solving a particular problem, meditation is able to provide a general solution for all problems. Whereas therapy can uncover how a particular problem arises, meditation reveals how the very idea of being a person with a problem to solve arises, and how to free oneself from identification with it.

On one occasion the Buddha taught the seven qualities of the wise:

1. They know the principles, actions, causes and conditions leading to Rifilment of their goals.

2. They know the meaning, the purpose, the goal, the outcome of their actions and of prevailing conditions.

3. They know themselves, their roles and responsibilities, the present extent of their knowledge and abilities, their strengths and weaknesses.

4. They know the right or optimum amount - not too much or too little - in actions of body and speech, in consumption and expenditure. 5. They know the right time and place to speak and act. They act and speak in a way appropriate to time and place. They are on time for appointments and the completion of tasks.

6. They know groups of people: in a given group or meeting or community they know the most appropriate way to conduct themselves.

7. They know people : they can recognize an individual's temperament, abilities, virtues and vices. They know who to associate with and the best way to associate with others 102

I have always loved the big stone Buddhas dotted across the Thai landscape. Two years ago a generous lay supporter donated one such Buddha to my hermitage. As the sun moves steadily towards the west, the wind blows clouds across the sky towards the south, and makes the branches of the tree behind this Buddha shiver and sway. I love to look at the Buddha's face and see the interplay between the changeless stillness and peace of the stone from which it has been sculpted and the patterns of light and shade that play upon it, conditioned by sun and wind. It seems to me that when Buddhas are out in the open in this way they can teach us many things, Without words, this beautiful white Buddha teaches all who see it that in the collightened mind the ups and downs of daily life are merely superficial patterns playing upon the surface of an awareness that is unmoving and filled with a timeless peace, wisdom and compassion.

The senses in their natural state pull us here and there without cease. Unless we learn how to discipline, the senses with mindfulness we will never find peace. The Buddha illustrated this point with a memorable simile.

Imagine six animals - a crocodile, a fox, a dog, a bird, a monkey and a snake - each with one end of a piece of rope tied to their tail and the other end joined in a common knot. Chaos ensues as each creature pulls on the rope. The crocodile tries to get to water, the bird tries to thy into the sky, the dog tries to run into the village and the fox tries to get to the woods; the monkey tries to get up a tree and the snake tries to get into a hole. Each creature tries to drag the others with it, but none can do so for long, and as the strongest tires, another takes its place. Eventually, a man attaches the central knot to a post fixed firmly in the ground. At first, the creatures struggle frantically, but in the and they realize the futility of their struggle, and lie down on the ground, at peace at last.

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Jesterday, a lay supporter told me about a day when he took his employees to offer a meal at a school for physically handicapped children. He said one sight brought many people to tears : they noticed an older boy with no arms, tenderly feeding a smaller child with a spoon held expertly between his toes. It is a simple point, but one that we need to remind ourselves of every day. It is a complete wester of time. brooding over what we don't have, or what we have not been given. Allowing a place in our heart for resentment and self-pity brings nothing but misery. By being grated for what we do have and trying to make the best use of it, we can find joy in our life, and inspire joy in others.

Zhuangzi once told the story of how a rore and beaut ful seabird blown off course by a storm came to earth in the capital of Lu. The Marguis of Lu was so delighted that he declared the seabird his special guest. He had performers sing and dance for the bird day and night, and presented it with fine roast meats and the choicest wines. But the bird was terrified and confused by this kindness. It atc and drank nothing. After three days it died.

What we think is good for another and will make them happy is not always the case. In seeking to help others always ask yourself: "What assumptions an I making? What an I taking for granted." One definition of mindfulness is to not forget, moment by moment, what needs to be remembered. But what exactly do we need to remember or, in other words, to bear in mind? In daily life, the following themes are of central importance: Presently manifesting physical and mental phenomena. The situation.

The law of kamma.

Cur long-term goals and aspirations.

Late last year as I walked along a minor road in northeast India, a young man approached me. He said that I should cross over and walk on the other side of the road I thanked him for his concern but told him that I liked to walk on the rightside, facing oncoming traffic. He became quite upset and insisted, "No, you do not understand. In my India we are walking on the left side of the road Please you cross over!" Seeing the young maa's growing arger, I crossed the road

It was the words "My India' that warned me that this was not a simple disagreement about the best side of the road to walk on Few ideas are as toxic as 'me' and 'mine'. As soon as they are taken he be ultimate realities, 'then' and 'theirs' appear, and a whole world of fear and distrust arises. It may seen ridiculous that a young man should feel so strongly about the correct side of a quiet lane to walk in 'his' country. But it is important to note how prone we all are to the foolish way of thirting that make such a position seen reasonable. The Buddha's great rhetorical skills are dearly revealed in his use of simile and metaphor. In his first sermon he referred to the Dhamma as a wheel, without beginning or end, but moving purposefully, and revolving around an unmoving centre. The Buddha's similes clarified abstract truths and gave emotional weight to his teachings, Some similes were intended to anuse and others to wake his listeners from delusion, Of the latter kind, one of the most powerful and poignant is found in verse 155 of the Dhammapada:

"Those who while young have neither ted the holy life nor acquired riches, pine away like aged herons around a fishless pond."

Endings have a powerful effect on the mind. If a difficult conversation ends well, for example, we usually recall it as basically positive. If a friendly conversation ends badly, our abiding memory tends to be a negative one. For this reason we should be very mindful of the quality of the endings in our life. A good ending can salvage a difficult experience. A bad ending can spoil a good one. At the end of the day, before going to sleep, pay homage to the Buddha, the Dhamma and the Sangha. Calm your mind with meditation on the breath. Recall the things and people that you feel grateful for Spread thoughts of loving hindness to all beings, and dedicate the frits of your good actions to them. End this day well, and tomorrow well begin well.

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Ajahn Chah once taught that a person's wisdom may be measured by the extent to which their speech reflects the truths of impermanence and uncertainty An example: Mr Li is discovered to have given two conflicting reasons for his absence from an annual meeting of friends.

An angry Mr Liu, accuses Mr Li of lying in order to cover up his lack of interest in attending the gathering. Meanwhile, the more circunspect Mr. Chen agrees that Mr. Li has contradicted himself, but reminds himself that he cannot be sue that Mr. Li's intention was to lie, because he does not have the power to read his mind. Maybe Mr. Li deliberately told a lie; maybe he did not. With an open mind, he politely asks Mr Li why his two accounts differ.

The ease and the speed with which Mr Liv concludes that Mr Li has lied, together with the tenacity with which he insists his conclusion is surely correct all point to Mr Liv's lack of wisdom

Maintaining mind Rulness during conversations is difficult. They are unpredictable. Within a second a conversation can change in tone or content, and we can lose our way. It is easy to fall into old unskilled speech babits, especially when our emotions are provoked In meditation, we can re-establish our attention on our object as soon as we realize that we have wandered. But in conversation, at least one other person is involved, and getting back on the right track is not up to us alone. Even with those we love, conversations can be a minefield An unwavering commitment to the truth as we know it is an essential element of right speech. Our fundamental object of mindfulness must be

the Intention to refrain from all falsehood, not only outright

lying but also exaggeration and distortion of the truth.

There are many other things to bear in mind during a

conversation. They include body language, maintaining

a genuine and respectful interest in the other person's

an even and natural breath, an appropriate tone of voice,

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views and feelings. But it is the intention to retrain from

all falsenood that constitutes the bedrock of skilled speech.

One of my favourite Mahahma Gandhi stories relates how as he was boarding a very overcrowded train, one of his sandals fell off and down onto the track. Immediately he threw his remaining sandal after it.

Most peoples' reactions in such a situation would include grief at the loss of the sondal, anger at the jostling crowd, and anxiety about how they would get about until they could buy a new pair. But Mahahma Gandhi was free of such concerns. What is so moving to me is the speed with which he reacted. Only a heart completely imbred with love and concern for others could have acted so instinctively. If you are accustomed to eating very spicy food, food prepared without spices seems bland and boring. But if you persevere over a certain period of time, the subtle tovous of such natural food begun to emerge, and the feeling that something is missing from it disappears. A quiet mind can at first seem like natural food leaking spice. It provides none of the excitement and drama given by constant stimulation of the senses. But if you persevere you will discover a beauty and profundity in the clear, quiet mind that is truly satisfying.

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There is a story about a thirsty crow who is happy to see a jug containing a small amount of water. However, when the crow perches on the jug and bends down to drink, it finds that it cannot reach the water. The row does not become discouraged. It considers the problem for a moment and then starts to fly to and fro, picking up small pebbles and dropping them into the jug. Eventually, the water level in the potrises enough for the crow to quench its thirst. We are like the thirsty row. The water in the jug is like the peace that we hope to experience through meditation. It seens just a little too far away. Like the crow, we should not become discouraged. In our daily life we should keep gathening the pebbles of mindfulness and sense restraint, patience and effort, generosity and kindness. Evenhally cool peace of mind will be within our reach.

The Buddha taught that mental suffering is a consequence of mental defilements, and that no defilement ever goes away by itself; defilements can only be abandoned through practice of the Eightfold Path. If that is twe, then the sooner we start to practise the Dhamma with sincerity and a sense of urgency, the better. Sooner or later this work will have to be done. If not today, then tomorrow. If not tomorrow, then the day after tomorrow. If not the day after tomorrow, then next week. If not next week, then next month. If not next month, then next year. If not next year. then in a later year. If not in this life, then in a future life. As we have no guarantees as to our physical health, our access to the teachings or over a human birth in the future, it makes sense to apply ouselves while we are benefiting from supportive conditions Time is preclous; use it wisely.

After every meeting there must be a parting After every hello, a goodbye. This is the nature of things. Ajahn Chah once said that when we cannot be at peace with this truth it is like wanting an overlasting unhalation, and feeling sad at the need to exhale. Samādhi gives calm, stability and clarity to the mind. It provides a source of happiness and well-being that is independent of the sensory world. By conferring access to a superior form of happiness samādhi facilitates a letting go of attachment to worldly pleasures. By conferring access to the innate purity of the mind, samādhi leads to disenchantment with mental defilements and strengthens the motivation to free oneself from them. Many years ago I was climbing up a mountain stream by stepping and sometimes jumping from boulder to boulder. At one point, I completely lost my balance on a slippery boulder. I could easily have been left with broken bones and nobody to miss me before the next days almoround. Instead, I found myself on my back in the stream, almost unhurt. Reviewing what had happened, I realized that my body had just succeeded in a feat of gymnastics on a level that I could never have achieved through deliberate effort.

The mind can also attain this same kind of spontaneous athteticism, not through instinct, but by training. Suddenly, and without warning, we may be faced with a severe challenge. The next thing we know is that we have emerged from it with barely a mental scratch. Only a review do we see how the Dhamma has protected our mind. It is at such moments that the results of our steady practice manifests. Jay fully we recollect the Buddha's words. "The Dhamma protects those who practise the Phainma" We have two minds: one big and one small. The big mind has no beginning. This mind existed before the Big Bang. The small mind goes up and down and round and round. Recognize the big mind and you will not be dragged around by the small one

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There is a modern tendency to portray the Buddha as simply a very wise and compassionate human being. Students of Buddhism with a scientific background are often most comfortable with this version of the Buddha. But to adopt such a view of the Buddha means to place more faith in what we perceive to be rational and reasonable than in the recorded words of the Buddha himself. I do not share this confidence. Looking back over more than forty years of practice, I see that I have been misled by my rational mind a great many times, but not even once by the teachings of the Buddha. When the Buddha says that he can remember in detail his past lives covering many acons of cosmic contraction, many acons of cosmic expansion, many acons of cosmic contraction and expansion I take the impossibility of imagining such a feat not as proof that the passage may be ignored, but as an indication of the limits of human imagination.

Nobody will change unless they see and feel the reed for change. No matter how much you care for somebody you can't make them change. What you can do is to encourage someone to reflect upon the suffering resulting from their actions, speech and thinking, and to consider the benefits of making a change. You can inspire them with the confidence that they can change. If they want to change, and believe they can change, and request your support and guidance in making that change, then help them as best you may.

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In times of conflict and danger it is unwise to place too much trust in a fearless person. Those without fear are usually reckless and endanger all those around them, Their fearlessness tends to come from a moral deficiency rather than a nobility of mind. True heroes are not those who feel no fear, but those who do not allow their actions to be determined by the fears that arise and pass away in their hearts. They constantly seek the right thing to do, or at least the most right, and to take that as their guide. They are firm and resolute but not inflexible.

On one occasion the Buddha instructed the monks how to nurse each other in times of sickness. He listed five qualities that qualified a monk to act as a nurse: 1) He is able to prepare medicine.

2) He knows what is beneficial and harmful, and is thus. able to withhold the harmful and offer what is beneficial. 3) He takes care of the patient with a mind of loving-

kindness, not for the sake of material rewards.

4) He is not disgusted at having to remove feces, urine, vomit or spittle.

5) He is able from time to time to instruct, encourage. inspire and gladden the patient with talk on Dhamma. ANS. 1214

In other words the nurse needs the requisite knowledge and skills, must be grounded in loving kindness and patience, and must give attention to the patients emotional and spiritual needs in addition to the physical,

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It is common for meditators to lament that when their mind becomes calm it enters an empty state that feels like a dead end. Their mistake is to assume that the calm experienced through the absence of words and images in the mind is a level of samadhi. It must be inderstood that the indifferent feeling being experienced is not anothing. It is a something that needs to be recognized for what it is. Attention should now be placed on the mood, the texture of the mind, the mental canvas itself on which the world of experience is painted. If there is even a slight stiffness or dullness in the mind, the meditator is still caught in the realm of the hindrances. A more vigorous effort is needed. Identification with neutral feeling must be abandoned. Clarity and discrimination of mental states much be enhanced.

Jesterday, while I was visiting my mother in hospital an old lady in the bed opposite to hers lay staring into space and repeating over and over again words from an old Elton John song: It's sad, so sad (so sad)

It's a sad situation

And its getting more and more absurd. Sometimes she switched to other charts. These mostly started with the refrain "No, no, no, as in "No, no, no, I won't do anymore. The old ledy chanted her words without visible emotion. Fortunately, my mether, whose hearing is not so good, thought that she was singing . She never stops, my mother said, "night or day". As I sat there in the hospital, I reflected that moment by moment, each one of us creates the inner world we live in. As we reach the end of our life, and our contact with the outer world becomes more and more weak, our inner world is all that we have left. How important it is to patiently and consistently create a bright and happy iner world through practice of the Dhamma.

One day, many years ago, I asked a young monk who was learning Thai how much of my morning Dhamma talk he had understood. He replied. '80-90'/.' But when I asked him to translate

into English some of the key concepts of the talk he was unable to do so.

I cartioned him about the dangers facing language learners,

At a certain level of fluency, the temptation is to create meaning by passing over unknown words and stringing known words together in a plausible sequence.

The fallacy lies in the assumption that the missing words are not vital to the overall meaning of the passage. Language learners can believe that they have gained a basic understanding of a matter when, in fact, they have developed a possibly serious misunderstanding. In so many situations in life we lack access to all the information we need to fully understand what is going on. The danger is that we act like the young monk learning Thai and assume that our interpretation of a matter is essentially correct, and that what we don't know is not vital to understanding it. A wise person learns how to hold views and opinions lightly, and to be always ready to accompdate new information. A chronic sense of lack, of something always being not quite right, lies at the heart of our suffering. It leads us to see happiness in terms of "when-then". When I get that, then I will be happy. The Buddhish practitioner needs to examine this sense of lack and ask the question, "What is it that right now, at this very moment, prevents me from being at peace"

Letting go of memories and imagination, and returning again and ugain to the meditation object is a fundamental part of the training of the mind. But how, exactly, do we let go of the distraction? If we brush it aside roughly and force the mind back to the object. we often carry with us a sense of unfinished business. Before long, the mind returns to the distraction. So, as the mind becomes aware of the distraction, it is better to simply hold it in tull awareness for a moment without aversion, seeing it as a more thought, and then letting it go whole-heartedly, without regret. Remind yourself that no matter how fascinating or enjoyable the thought might be, ultimately it is a dead end. No passing mental state can lead you to you. true good, which is liberation.

The Buddha taught that the two key factors enabling us to deal well with unticism are a deep commitment to truth, however uncomfortable, and a determination to protect the mind from anger

On one occasion he said we should reflect: "If others should reprove me - whether at a proper time or an improper time, whether about what is true or about what is false; whether gently or harshly; whether in a constructive way or a destructive way, whether with a mind of loving-kindness or while harbouring ill-will - I should be established in two things: in truth and in non-anger. If I know that there is such a quality in me, I will admit, "It exists This quality is found in me" If I know that there is no such quality in me I will say, "It does not exist: This quality is not found in me" "

There is great joy to be found in hearing a profound teaching for the first time, or in finally understanding a teaching that has always seemed too difficult to make sense of. But there is a danger here: we can begin to vrave that joy to the extent that we become almost indifferent to fundamental teachings that we learnt long ago. Now these teachings can seem obvious and uninteresting. That is why one master spoke of the importance of maintaining 'a beginner's mind. He meant by this that we should try to approach every teaching with a mind that is fresh and tree of pre-conceived ideas. When we cultivate the beginners mud, even teachings such as that actions of body, speech and mind motivated by goodness have good results, those motivated by defilement have bad results, can give us feelings of Dhamma bliss.

A study found that when people were seated in front of a mirror and presented with different food choices, their consumption of unhealthy foods decreased by 32%. Seeing their reflection in the mirror made people more aware of their bodies and more likely to eat food that is good for them. Long before this study was performed the Buddha taught us that if we establish an internal mirror and keep returning our attention to it, our indulgence in unhealthy mented states will decrease, and may eventually disappear altogether. Then we will enjoy to the full extent the taste of the Buddha's heart food.

The first decision to be made regarding a particular pleasure is whether or not to experience it at all. The criterion here is whether or not doing so will lead to harm to oneself or others, in the short or long-term We may examine this question, for example, in terms of physical harm, mental horm, harm to relationships, harm to wealth and harm to reputation. Our bottom line as Buddhists is that we renounce any pleasure that would involve breaking our precepts. The second decision concerns to what extent a pleasure that passes the non-harm tests may or should be pursued by one who is devoted to the Buddha's path of awakening Some pleasurable experiences are more uplifting than others. to our time is short and unpredictable, it makes serve to give most importance to those pleasurable expenences that directly contribute to the basic sense of well-being that provides the foundation for effective Phamma practice. These are, in short, to be found in the feelings of pleasure expenenced through acts of generosity, feelings of pleasure accompanying the freedom from remarse, and sense of self-respect that arise from keeping precepts, and the joy and bluss arwing through meditation.

As a small boy, finding out that there was no such person as Santa Claus was for me a deeply significant experience. I discovered for the first time in my life that it was possible to have an inquestioning belief in a complete fiction. I discovered that adults, even the ones that loved you, were not always to be trusted. It signalled the beginning of a life-long interest in the nature of belief and trust.

h Buddhism our faith is not in dogmas, but in verifiable statements about the human condition. The Buddha revealed how faith simplifies and clarifies our life, but also reminds us to constantly be putting our baliefs to the test of experience. Can we see our practice reducing mental defilements? Can we see our practice increasing inner virtues? Can we see a connection between suffering and craving, between the cessation of suffering and the eightfold path? As we progress we realize that the Buddha never lies to us, never mioleads us, never lets us down. A deep trust in the Three Refuges grows within our heart.

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Belief in untrue things feels exactly the same as belief in true things. Don't trust your beliefs too much. Attachment to views and opinions makes your mind rigid and unable to learn. Don't trust your views and opinions too much. An acceptable reason for acting badly canalways be found. Don't trust your reasoning too much. It's easy to give too much attention to the faults of others

Don't trust your distrust too much.

We can test whether we are attached to something by observing our reaction to its absence.

If we are attached to goodness, we feel upset with people who act badly.

If we are attached to our teachers, we feel angry with people who criticize them.

If we are attached to our views, we feel frustrated with

people who oppose them.

If we are attached to peace, we feel aversion to unpeaceful cituations situations

IP we devote ourselves to goodness wisely, we feel compassion for people who act badly. If we devote ourselves to our teachers wisely, we are patient with people who criticize them. If we hold our views lightly, we find ourselves stimulated by people who oppose them. If we follow the path of peace wisely, we see unpeaceful situations as a challenge.

Shorty before he passed away, the Buddha gave his last instructions to his disciples. He simply reminded them of the impermanent nature of all things, and encouraged them to perfect themselves in heed filness (Pali; 'appamada') To be heedful means to take nothing for granted. Heed RI people have no sense of entitlement. They do not expect that things will just work out by themselves. They do not look to comfort themselves with prayers and ceremonies. They seek to create an inner refuge. Heedful people do not fall into the traps of pointless worry or unrealistic hopes about the Riture. They put their energy into creating a readiness to face up to whatever life brings them with calm patience, kindness and wisdom. My new year's blessing is then not that everything in your life goes the way you want it to go. It won't. My heartfelt wish is that you can develop the inner resources to deal wisely with all of your challenges and to flavish both in the arter world of duties and responsibilities and the inner world of the mind.

Every time, without exception, someone (unintoxicated) drives a car in this country, they do so on the leftside of the road. People in Thailand are aware that driving on the right - side of the road every now and again, in order to express their free will and creativity, would not be a wise idea. It would be abound to claim that this habit of keeping to the left-hand side of the road at all times is evidence of attachment. Similarly, it would not be fair to assume that simply because people keep their precepts without exceptions throughout their lives that they must be attached to precepts. The word 'attachment' can be used far too loosely. At the very least, it needs to be distinguished from wholesome qualities such as unwavering commitment, devotion and loyalty.

Dhamma practice consists of developing the ability to be present to our experience in order to learn from it. What do we seek to learn from experience. The Four Noble Truths: how the presence of defilements causes suffering in the mind, and how the abaadonment of defilements leads to the cessation of suffering, Look. Inquire. Where is the suffering right now? Examine your mind dosely. Suffering can range from severe anguish to the subtlest discontent. Ask yourself: where is the craving. Look for the connection. Learn to let go of the craving to get and consume. Lean to let go of the crowing to be, to be seen as, to be known as, to become. beam to let go of the craving to get rid of, to escape from. Wherever you are, whatever you are doing, whoever you are with, this is the practice.

When a masseur discovers a painful place, the person being massaged usually winces, but then says, 'Yes, that's it. Right there.' He does not want the masseur to avoid that area. On the contrary, he wants him to give particular attention to it. Only by so doing, will the pain be relieved.

The interactions with those around us every day produce effects rather similar to those evoked by the probing fingers of the masseur. For the practitioner, any mental discomfort that arises is a useful indication of where work needs to be done. We become conscious of our pride and concait, our fears and attachments at such moments. We don't dismiss or repress such fealings. We say, Yes, that's it. Right there. We know that unless we address these things and deal with then skillelly our minds will never know true peace.

There is a story of a traveller walking through the mountains who saves the life of a great sage. The sage says that he would like to express his gratitude by granting him a wish. The traveller notices that the ring on the old man's finger holds a precious stane of great value. He asks for the ring. The sage gives it to him without a second thought. After walking some way down the road the travellar returns to the sage and asks if he could change his wish. The old man agraes. to his request. The traveller says that what he would like more than the precious stone is to learn how to train his mind so that he also could give away such a precious stone without regret. The sage accepts the traveller as his student.

True and nourishing wealth is not to be found in possessions. The truly wealthy person is one who knows how to live with their possessions - whether they be many or few, of good quality or poor - with respect, appreciation and gratitude. Such a person knows how to protect their mind from the poisons of greed and indulgence, jealowy, anxiety and discontant A teacher teaches us by who they are, how they live their life, how they embody the teachings, as much as by their words. Jails are full of people who know they are not free. The teacher reveals that most people are like prisoners who believe themselves to be free. In fact, they are confined within the self-created jail of their defilements. A teacher holds up a mirror to our faults and weaknesses, not to depress or share us, but to remind us of the work that still remains.

How wonderful it is that the great teachers never give up on their students, no matter how dull, lazy and stubborn we can sometimes be!

No deflement can withstand the power of the well-practised Dhamma. If not for the great teachers, would we really believe this? Craving sweeps us dong like a swifty Howing stream sweeps a flinsy boat. The teacher encourages wto paddle against the stream. We don't think we can dorit. But we can.

Hard it is to be born as a human being. Even harder to come into contact with the Buddha's teachings. Hardest is to find a teacher who teaches us how to teach ourselves and realize the profound truth of Dhamma A teacher is like a doctor who does not give us the sweet things that we desire, but the medicinesometimes, but not always, bitter - that we need. Helping others is the natural expression of the teacher's wisdom, just as mangas are the natural expression of the margo tree's maturity.

I have just been reading with much admiration about the amazing achievement of Jasmin Paris, an English vet and PhD student, mother of a baby girl. A few days ago she won the 2019 Montane Spine Race held in the hills of northern England. She ran the 430 km course in 83 hours. The man who finished second was Rifteen hours behind. In very long races like this one, the physical advantages that men have over women lose their importance. The most vital factor is strength of mind. Strength of mind does not mean the ability to ignore unpleasant feelings. It means that when it is appropriate or unavoidable, we know how to peacefully co-exist with them, without letting the mind become anxious or depressed, without falling prey to panic or fear. It is possible to do this because of the simple fact that discomfort and the knowing of discomfort are two different things.

Those who take on the training of the mind soon find that it is the great creator. The mind can create stories, soap operas and movies from a single thought. Drama, horror, romance and pornography the mind is fluent in every genre. But this kind of creativity is in fact, a form of montal stagnation. Beneath the fascinating surface movement of the mind lie the same old desires and fears, endlessly churning When we see how the enchanting diversity of the mind conceals a dreary samenest, we can draw back from it, and seek for a more profound and fulfilling refuge.

It may be surprising to know that a central element of a novice months ordination ceremony consists of him reciting the Pali language names of five body parts: head hair, body hair, nails, teeth and skin. The reason for the inclusion of this list is that it provides the basis for the most fundamental of all monastic meditation techniques. Lust is the most disturbing and dictatorial of all emotions, and its intensity is conditioned by the degree to which we project certain ideas, desires and perceptions onto the physical body Monastics are encouraged to constantly examine how hair, nails, teeth and skin are simply impermanent, conditioned phenomena that, seen free of positive bies, are not inherently attractive. By doing so lust is reduced and perhaps completely eliminated from the mind. Reflecting on these five body parts is also a useful contemplation for lay Buddhists. Although the elimination of lust may not be a goal in lay life, the ability to govern sexual desires wisely, not to be a slave to them, is much enhanced by this practice.

The comprehension of suffering is the comprehension of the suffering not my suffering. The awareness of defilements arising in the mind is the awareness of the deflements not my deflements. As soon as we create the sense of me and mine and impose it upon experience, we have lost the path.

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In the children's story, 'The Three Little Pigs, the two foolish and lazy pigs make their houses out of straw and sticks. These a wicked wolf blows down before eating them up. The third hard-working pig makes his house out of bricks. The wicked wolf is unable to blow it down. Undeterred, the wolf tries to get down into the house through the chimney. But the clover pig anticipates this more. He boils water in the fireplace, and the wicked wolf falls into the pot and receives the results of its bad kamma, A house is a refuge. A refuge needs to be able to withstand the eight worldly winds of gain and loss, status and loss of status, praise and blame, pleasure and pain. It is the wisdom which clearly recognizes the impermanent and unreliable nature of worldy experiences that gives us our strong brick house. And when the world tries to find a more subtle way through our defences it is our Dhamma practice alone that enables us to deal effectively with whatever challenges arise. Happy New Year everyone! In this coming year may you all be as wise as the third little pig.

If we leave the doors and windows of our house open then any kind of creature, including the most dangerous area, can enter it. Some may make a home or nest there. If we want our house to be clean and healthy, we need to find humane ways to remove the creatures already there and to prevent others from entering in the future. While they are in our house the trespassing creatures act according to their nature, and cause many problems. It is not a fault of the house itself that these creatures have looked for shelter within it, or that they act in the way that they do. The mistake lies in not taking care of the house properly. Fortunately, that is a mistake which can be rechified.

Just as invading creatures do not make a house bad, defilements don't make us bad people. Our mistake has been to allow the defilements to make a home in the house of our mind. If we are patient and sincare, it is a problem that can be rectified.

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It is not always possible to answer questions in the same form that they are asked. Sometimes people want a yes or no answer to a complex matter that cannot be reduced to yes or no. Sometimes people ask a question unaware of another more important one lying behind it; in such a case the teacher may answer that hidden question rather than the spoken one. Sometimes people's questions are based upon so many false assumptions that whatever answer they receive will increase their confusion rather than remove it. In that case the teacher may give no answer at all. Sometimes a question deserves a counter-question. If someone asks, "Where will I go after I diel", the teacher may reply, "To whom does death occur? Rather than providing a statement that the questioner can only choose to believe or reject, the teacher issues a challenge. He says that only by looking closely at our present experience. can we truly understand the process of life and death. All also is belief and superstition.

Baradom and excitements condition each other. Baradom arises when we feel a lack of excitement. Without mindfulness we react to that feeling by seeking some form of stimulation. But when the excitement produced by that stimulation fades we feel bared again, and the process is repeated. Again and again. The two escape from baredom is not through more stimulation; it occurs when we are brave enough to let go of our addiction to excitement. Simply being present to the sense of lack and making friends with it, the mind becomes content.

Today, on Magha Rija, we commemorate an event that took place on the full moon day of February in the first year after the Buddha's enlightenment. On that day, 1,250 archants came together without prior agreement at the Bamboo Grove Monastery in Rajagaha. Addressing them, the Buddha summarised the basic principles of monastic training in a teaching that has become known as the Ovada Patimokkha. This short instruction served as an easily memorised checklist Kr all the great months as they set off to spread the Dhamma throughout India and beyond The Orada Patimoktha affirms that Nibbana is the ultimate goal, and torbearance (trhanti) the most powerful purifying virtue. It lays down non-violence by body and speech as the defining feature of a Buddhist monastic. It encourages monks to live within the boundaries of correct behaviour, to be frugal in consumption of food, to live in secluded dwellings and to be denoted to the training of the mind.

One short verse in the Ovada Patimokkha has come to be seen as the heart of the path Br all Buddhists, monastic and lay:

Perfecting one self in virtue Purifying the mind This is the teaching of all the Buddha A postmortem usually refers to the examination of a dead body in order to determine the time and cause of death. Less well-known is the 'premortem'. This is a managerial strategy aimed at preventing poor decisions being made due to people swallowing their doubts in order to maintain group harmony or out of deference to leaders. In a premortem, decision matters are astred to imagine that a year has gone by since their decision was implemented, and it was a complete disaster. Their task is to analyse the causes of the failure. This exercise frees people to make conscious their concerns and bote more closely at their validity before an agreement is made.

When we are making a decision as a group, it is vise to create an environment in which everyone feals able to voice reasoned ariticism, without being seen as difficult, disruptive or disloyal. Group harmony should be emphasised in the stage of implementation rather than during the decision making process itself. As long as the principles of mutual respect and right speech are maintained, a little disagreement is not a bad thing.

Well-educated meditators have a particular difficulty in letting go of their attachment to thought. Trying to do so brings up fear and resistance. They feel as if they are attempting to abandon an essential part of themselves. One simple exercise to reduce this attachment is to ask oneself a question. to it possible to predict with any confidence what thoughts will be in our mind in exactly one year from now? Or one month? One week? One day! One hour! One minute! Or overthe next feu seconds! If we have so little control and so little ability to predict the content of our thoughts, how valid is it to consider our thought as a vital constituent of who we are.

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There is a story about a great monk who liked to live very simply. Although this monk had been given the highest monastic rank of Somdet, he would travel to distant provinces alone in the third class carriage of the train. Most people who saw him would assume that he was a luang Ta, an elderly man who had recently entered the monthood in order to make merit at the end of his life. On one such journey, a wealthy man who had been drinking elcohal since the train left the station, bumped into the month, and spoke to him in a crude and disrespectful way.

The following day in the town of their destination, the house-warming party of one of the province's most wealthy landowners took place. The man had received an invitation and as he walked into the house he saw with horror that the guest of honour was no other than the old mank from the train. Having quickly borrowed some candles and flowers, the man bawed deaply to the Somdets, and humbly asked forgiveness for his rudeness on the previous day. The mank said to him gravely that there was no need to ask forgoreness from the Somdet as he had never acted badly towards him. He should instead seets out the old mank on the train and ask forgiveness from him.

It is often close family members who are must blind to the positive changes that take place in their loved ones. Nowhere is the fixed belief in the truth of ones perceptions about other people so clearly revealed as within families Venerable Sariputta was praised by the Buddha as foremost in wisdom, second only to himself. Ven. Sariputta was renowned in the Buddhist community for his kindness, compassion and humility. And yet his mother considered him a deluded fool. On one occasion, Ver, Sariputta was walking through the countryside with a group of his discuples when he realised that he was close to his mothers house, and on the following morning went there for alms food. His mother offered food to her son and his disciples, but as she did so she abused him with harsh and contemptuous words, Ven. Sariputta listened calmly without response, and after chanting a blessing, left in silence. It was only at the very end of his life that Ven. Sariputta was able to repay his debt of gratitude to his mother and lead her to the Phamma.

A teacher once told me that when she admonished a certain student for ignoring community rules, he replied sumply that he did so because of his personality. In other words, asking him to conform to rules he did not want to keep was pointless. He was polite, he sympathised with the teacher's concerns, but what could he do? Conforming would be denying his identity, who he really was. He was an artist, a free-thunker, a non-conformist. He made the teacher feel almost as if she was asking a bird not to sing.

Defilements are never easy to abandon. But what makes it especially difficult is when we hold fast to a view that a defilement is an essential part of who we are. Self-discipline is a challenge for almost everyone. However if we perservere with patience, intelligence and self-forgiveness, we can soon see improvements. It is when someone takes pride in a weakness and considers it one of their defining qualities that progress in Dhamma becomes next to impossible.

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Feeling (vedanta) refers to the tone of experience. In Dhamma practice we seek to be aware of pleasant feeling as pleasant feeling be aware of unpleasant feeling as unpleasant feeling. be aware of neutral feeling as neutral feeling Through being constantly aware of the fluctualing tone of expensence, as simply pleasant, unpleasant or neutral, without identifying with it as me' or mine' craving is cut off at its root.

A teacher sitting with his student on a mountain top asked him, "What do you see?" The student replied that he saw mountains and trees and rocks and sky and clouds and birds. The master said, "What else do you see?" The student described the scene in more detail The master said. 'What else do you see?' This went on For some time until finally, the student could think of no more to add. The teacher told him that he was missing the most important thing of all. The student, now quite confused, asked 'But Master, what is that ?, and the teacher replied, "Light". On another occasion the teacher said to his student "Close your eyes. Look within, What do you see?" The student raplied, Images, thoughts, emotions, memories, desires. The teacher said, "What also do you see? ......

When you are in the presence of a teacher like Ajahn Chah you feel completely exposed. It is as if he is holding up a big mirror in which you can see every deAlement as soon as it appears in your mind. Some people might that you would feel ashamed or discouraged, but you don't. You feel grateful. You think, 'So this is the work that I need to do. I will doit'. Many years ago a great teacher was astred whether. women could realise enlighterment. With a stern face he replied emphatically, 'No!' There was a shocked silence amongst the many women in the room. Then he added, 'And neither can men.' With all of his audience now thoroughly confused, he elaborated: 'One who identifies with being either a man or a woman can never find the liberation'

The Buddha once said that a key factor in the long-term well-being of a society is the degree of respect and fairness with which men treat women. Helping to foster wise, appropriate and compassionate relationships between men and women is an important part of helping to make the world a better place to live in. At the same time, as Buddhist practitioners, we should constantly seek to access that simple, always available owareness that is gender-free.

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A simple technique by which we can re-establish mindfulness in daily life is to stop for a moment at regular intervals and label our current mental state. This should be done in a calm matter-of-fact way, without judgement: 'worry mind', 'fearth' mind restless mind dull mind or joyful mind 'contenred mind; and so on. By doing this we remind ourselves of a simple but profound truth : these are simply impermanent mental states, nothing more and nothing less. In many cases, the bare knowing of a negative mental state, and calling it by its name, takes away its power over us. The more often we do this prechice the more sensitive we become to the arising of mental states, and the easier it becomes to help of our identification with them. Interestingly, the recognition of positive mental states and labeling then does not lead to their disappearance. On the contrary they seen to thrive under such actrowledge. ment, like a plant exposed to the sun.

On the 5th December 1973 Ajahn Chah received from King Bhumibol Adulyade the monastic honour of Chao khun and the title Phre Bodhinyana Thera On his return to his monastery many hundreds of people gathered to welcome him back and express their appreciation of the honour done to him. A grand merit-making ceremony took place. Throughout it all, Ajahn Chah remained a still, cool centre at the heart of the excitement and joy. He told his disciples that the title of Chao Khun was a workly convention. He was the same wang Por that he had been a few days before. Worldly dhammar of gain and loss, fame and obscurity, pleasure and pain, praise and blame, are all fickle and changing. Knowing the nature of wordly dhammas, the mind is not moved by them. The bridge over the River Moon that flowed through their city always remains the same. The bridge does not arch up if the waters rise. It does not sag if the waters fall.

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When I was a young monk candles were sometimes hard to come by. I remember, on accasions, walking out into a clear patch in the forest and reading suttas by the light of the Rill moon. It was hard to believe that none of the incredibly bright light came from the moon itself but was all, in fact, reflected from the

invisible sun.

This is my 40th Rains Retreat as a monk. As time passes we Western monks become more well-known in Thailand and may even receive official recognition. As this has now happened to me, I am rominded that my teacher, Ajahn Chah, has been like a sun illuminating my adult life. If there is anything in my life worthy of praise then it is in those small ways that I have been able to reflect the light of my teachers wisdom and compassion for the benefit of others.



## Ajahn Jayasaro

Birth name:	Shaun Chiverton	
1958:	: Born in England	
1978:	Became an anagarika with Ajahn Sumedho's community	
3.12.0	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.	

## **Panyaprateep Foundation**



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.

## **Objectives of Panyaprateep Foundation**

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. **Organizational Structure of Panyaprateep Foundation** 

## Members of the Executive Committee

Phra Ajahn Jayasaro	Chairman of the Advisory Board
Assoc. Prof. Prida Tasanapradit, M.D.	Chairman of Committee
Dr.Witit Rachatatanun	Vice Chairman
Mrs. Srivara Issara	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 Rachatatanun	Member and Secretary General

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.

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.

