

The Island: An Anthology of the Buddha's Teachings on Nibbāna
Commentary on Chapter 1 [What is It? \(Part 2\)](#)
Ajahn Amaro

1. Ajahn Amaro states that from the cited text, one can see "...that realization of the dhamma is synonymous with the experience of nibbāna". What is meant here by "realization"?
2. The experience of mountain-like immovability is described as a profound quality of non-entanglement; an absence of the entanglement that arises in dependence upon one's sense faculties and their objects (i.e., the sense world). What is it to be non-entangled with the sense world?
3. Of the epithets listed for nibbāna, which epithets do you find to be the most helpful for your own practice?
4. Of the epithets listed for nibbāna, which do you think are the most evocative? What specifically does each evoke for you?
5. Of the epithets listed for nibbāna, are there any that you find particularly interesting or hard to understand and why?
6. Ajahn Amaro remarks that these epithets are variously: exalted/glorious; terminal/a cessation; a brightness/freedom; subtle/hard to see. How does he characterize these qualities in whole? How would you characterize these qualities in whole?
7. In addition to offering a multiplicity of descriptors, what mnemonic devices did the Buddha employ to help listeners grasp and retain what was taught?
8. Cite a dictionary definition of Vibhajjavada. Cite a dictionary definition of Theravada.
9. What is the etymology of the term "nibbāna"? Why did the Buddha choose that term?
10. In his discussion of the term "nibbāna" not being the principal designation for the goal in early Buddhism, what point is Ajahn Amaro making when he remarks that the term "nibbāna" is analogous to the term "Theravada"?

The Island: An Anthology of the Buddha's Teachings on Nibbāna
 Commentary on Chapter 2; [Fire, Heat & Coolness \(Part 2\)](#)
 Ajahn Amaro

1. To counter lust (Pali: *rāga*), hatred (Pali: *dosa*), and delusion (Pali: *moha*) the Buddha advised contemplation of the unattractiveness of the body, cultivation of kindness, and the development of wisdom leading to penetration, respectively. While the latter two methods are taught commonly today, the contemplation of the unattractiveness of the body is infrequently taught. Can you think of any contemplations that are comparable to it? In what way is that contemplation effective in countering lust and mistaken views based on a perceived attractiveness?
2. In any given situation with other people, what might one gain by considering one's own status in terms of the nine-fold conceit?
3. Consider Ajahn Amaro's reply to the question "If all Dhammas are not-self, what is it that gets reborn?": what gets reborn "is habits, good habits, bad habits or just familiarity...so that *tanha*, that craving, not [only] liking....but also disliking...and familiarity". Does this reply make sense to you? Why or why not?
4. What is the distinction between fear as a useful, while painful, feeling and neurotic fear? Give an example that illustrates the distinction.
5. What point does Ajahn Amaro bring out in his comment on the line "See through the glamour igniting lust" when he likens "glamour" to a "magical appearance", a "veneer", a "layer of projection"?
6. How do Patācārā and Anuruddha's verses on liberation evoke the imagery of fire extinguished? Why do you think some later commentators mistake the imagery as representative of self-annihilation?
7. If you wish, following Ajahn Amaro's instructions, choose a recurring emotional-fixation, and in a coming meditation period, or periods, do the contemplation as he instructs. What was your experience?

Note : If you have an interest in the meditation on 'nada', see this article by Ajahn Amaro, titled [The Sound of Silence](#).

The Island: An Anthology of the Buddha's Teachings on Nibbāna
 Commentary on Chapter 3; [This and That and Other Things \(Part 2\)](#)
 Ajahn Amaro

1. From a web search, cite a description of the Abhidhamma Pitaka's Paṭṭhāna, listing the 24 categories of conditional relations, which are summarized in the lines:

“When this is, that is.
 From the arising of this, comes the arising of that.
 When this isn't, that isn't.
 From the stopping of this, comes the stopping of that.”

2. The authors have organized the cited verses in this third chapter into an organic order of ground, path, and fruition. Why in this chapter on “this and that and other things” are the selections on *idappaccayatā* (i.e., the natural law of causes and conditions) and *paticcasamuppāda* (dependent co-origination; that from which *dukkha* arises) presented just before the Buddha's instruction to the adept Bāhiya Dārucīriya?

3. In addition to the instruction to Bāhiya in our text, consider this alternate translation from [Small Boat Great Mountain](#). How would you in your own words, or in the words of another, describe this awareness?

In the seen there is only the seen
 in the heard, there is only the heard
 in the sensed, there is only the sensed
 in the cognized, there is only the cognized
 Thus you should see that
 indeed, there is no thing here;
 this Bāhiya, is how you should train yourself

Since Bāhiya, there is for you
 in the seen, only the seen
 in the heard, only the heard
 in the sensed, only the sensed
 in the cognized, only the cognized,
 and you see that there is no thing here,
 you will therefore see that there is no thing there.

As you see that there is no thing there,
 you will see that
 you are therefore located neither in the world of this
 nor in the world of that

nor in any place
betwixt the two.

This alone is the end of suffering.

(Amaro, Ajahn, Small Boat, Great Mountain: Theravadin Reflections on the Natural Great Perfection. Abhayagiri Monastery, 2003.)

4. Ajahn Amaro describes two phases of meditation that precipitate arriving at “the end of suffering” as follows:

When the mind reflects on there [being only] hearing, seeing, smelling, touching, tasting, thinking, then first of all, there’s this emptying out of the self. There’s no me who’s the hearer; there’s no me who’s the seer; there’s no me who’s the thinker. There’s a letting go of the sense of subject..... and [secondly] further reflecting on the flow of the sense objects [of] seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting, touching, then there’s no thing that’s permanent or solid there either. So it’s an emptying out of the object.

How is it that one realizes the emptiness of a self through this reflection on the perceptual-conceptual process? Likewise, how is it that one realizes the emptiness of the objects of the senses through reflection on the nature of their appearance?

5. Following on his remarks on emotional reactivity around differing textual interpretations, what point does Ajahn Amaro make in recounting how someone mistook two verses as “In the scene there is only the scene. In the herd there is only the herd”?

6. Commenting on a section of the Kālakārāma Sutta, page 120, 2nd paragraph, (“... the Tathagatha does not conceive of a visible thing as apart from sight; he does not conceive of an unseen...”), Ajahn Amaro states that this “is not to say that there isn’t a basis upon which our perceptions are formed.” What is the basis upon which our perceptions are formed?

7. Remarking on text selection 9.2 (beginning “There is that sphere where there is no...”), Ajahn Amaro states that non-locality means not fixed in space, that it is only material form (Pali: *rūpa*) that has a relationship to three-dimensional space. How does he support the claim that “mind doesn’t have a relationship to space”?

8. Referencing Ajahn Mahā Boowa’s pithy description of the insight preceding his awakening (text selection 9.1 beginning “If there is a point or a center....”), how does Ajahn Amaro paraphrase “essence of a level of being”?

9. This chapter closes with a summation on “this and that and other things” with: “(A)ny

clinging whatsoever to this/that, here/there, subject/object, inside/outside or anything in between is synonymous with dukkha; abandon such clinging and dukkha necessarily ceases." How is it that through investigating the nature of the perceiving mind and not finding a self, does one then abandon clinging (with the result that dukkha ceases)? If this practice doesn't appear to be a cause for your abandonment of clinging, how would you account for that?

10. At the end of the Śhūrangama Sūtra, Ananda asks the Buddha "If it is not my mind, what is it?" What is the Buddha's reply to Ananda?

11. In an upcoming meditation period or two, do the practice of grasping/inflating as Ajahn Amaro instructs here. What was your experience?

12. In an upcoming meditation period or two, do the practice of reciting to yourself your own name, as Ajahn Amaro instructs here. What was your experience?

The Island: An Anthology of the Buddha's Teachings on Nibbāna
 Commentary on Chapter 4; ["All That is Conditioned..." \(Part 2\)](#)
 Ajahn Amaro

1. Cite a definition of the Pali *sankhāra*, both as a noun and as a verb, here translated as "formation".
2. Cite a definition of the Pali *āsava*.
3. The visceral sense that one's body "is me", "is mine", is a mental formation (*sankhāra*). What is the cause of this formation, i.e., the conceiving of a "self" as being one's body? With respect to the four *khandhas* of feeling, perception, mental formations, and consciousness: what is the cause of conceiving that the self is the same as/undivided from feeling; the self is the same as/undivided from perception; the self is the same as/undivided from mental formations; the self is the same as/undivided from consciousness?
4. Do any one of the other configurations of such formations strike you as true: the self being identical to a *khandha*; the self possessing a *khandha*; the self being within a *khandha*; the *khandha* being within the self? Or the self being identical/undivided from the universe, i.e., all phenomena? If so, which feels true, and why?
5. Recount Ajahn Sumedho's instruction on what one would do well to contemplate when lost in doubt? If you wish, the next time you're lost in perplexity, do that contemplation. What was your experience?
6. In the Dhātuvibhanga Sutta, the progressive refinement of gold is analogous to the accomplishment of the arūpa jhanas in their four aspects. By this analogy, what recognition is pointed to as a necessity for the practitioner who desires liberation?
7. Cite a dictionary definition of the ten fetters. How is the ninth fetter defined here? Give an example from your own experience of a noticed absence of the ninth fetter.
8. Ajahn Amaro defines *sankhāranirodha*, i.e., the cessation of formations, not as referring to formations which arise and subsequently cease but "the checking of the formations, or the correct holding of the formations, or the not creating a problem with formations..... that aspect of mind which is not entangled with formations." What do you think is the distinction that he is making in this definition?
9. What is signified by the thought/felt sense "I am"? Why do you think Ajahn Amaro characterizes it as a "helpful sign"?
10. What is signified by the thought/felt sense that "that which is transitory is

unsatisfactory and is without self"? What do you think Ajahn Amaro points to in his statement that one can "use a view without attaching to it"?

11. What are righteous views as opposed to right view? How would you characterize each?

The Island: An Anthology of the Buddha's Teachings on Nibbāna
 Commentary on Chapter 5; ["To Be or Not to Be" – Is That the Question? \(Part 2\)](#)
 Ajahn Amaro

1. To one who describes an absorption in which they conceive that for them "there is peace" (i.e., one's mental state is absent sense desire, ill will, dullness, restlessness, and doubt), what is this declaration a sign of?
2. How does Ajahn Amaro define "I and mine"? How do you think it is that breaking the conceit (Pali : *māna*) of "I am" is the end of dukkha?
3. Do you have a sense that your ownership of what you've produced or accomplished is a barb, a source of dukkha? Give an example to support how that is so or is not so for you.
4. What point does Ajahn Amaro make about conceit in his detailed account of the production of *The Island*?
5. What two definitions of *sakkāyadiṭṭhi* are offered here? In terms of release from the ten fetters, where does *sakkāyadiṭṭhi* fall? In terms of release from the ten fetters, where does conceit fall?
6. What distinguishes release from self-view and release from conceit?
7. What do the two translations of *tathāgata* as "come to suchness/thus-ness" and as "gone to thus-ness/thus gone" evoke for you?
8. Ajahn Amaro remarks that the release from conceit is attendant on a change in vision/understanding; it is a letting go of ignorance (Pali : *avijja*). For the practitioner, what three factors does the accomplishment of this change in vision depend upon.
9. In a few words each, list the six mistaken views which, when cut through, precipitate release from the āsavas (translated variously as: outflows; taints; effluents; corruptions; cankers).
10. Choosing either the most logical of the self-views or the self-view that accords with your own felt sense of self, how do you defend it?
11. Considering the elements, the immaterial realms, etc., choose either the most logical of these claims for an existent self in phenomena or that which accords with your own sense of self in relationship to this world. How do you defend it?
12. What point does Ajahn Amaro make in his remark that the "Buddha was like a clinician rather than a theoretician"?

The Island: An Anthology of the Buddha's Teachings on Nibbāna
 Commentary on Chapter 6; [Atammayatā: "Not Made of That" \(Part 1\)](#)
 Ajahn Amaro

1. Aside from Ajahn Amaro's commentary on origin stories in theistic and non-theistic traditions, in your own Dhamma practice, how would you answer the three questions:

- 1) Where are you coming from?
- 2) Where are you going?
- 3) What are you doing now?

2. The paraphrases offered for the defining quality of *atammayatā* are: awareness that is free from the subject-object duality; an awareness where subject-object division collapses; awareness that is aware of itself; a self-aware quality; an awareness that knows it's aware without creating an inside-outside/subject-object division. Is this language evocative for you, and how?

3. From a web search, read a biography or two of Ajahn Buddhadasa. What strikes you about his life and teachings?

4. From a Buddhist dictionary, cite definitions of the three realms or worlds (Pali: *loka*) of:

- 1) *Kāma-loka*: sensual realm; sensuous realm; desire realm
- 2) *Rūpa-loka*: pure material realm; fine material realm; form
- 3) *Arūpa-loka*: non material realm; immaterial realm; formless

5. In the progressive stages of meditation culminating in the realization of *atammayatā*, what distinctions are made between multifaceted equanimity (Pali: *nānattā-upekkhā*) and one-pointed equanimity (Pali: *ekattā-upekkhā*)?

6. How does Ajahn Amaro paraphrase the descriptors in our text of the realization of *atammayatā*?

7. Ajahn Amaro remarks that realization of these degrees of equanimity and *atammayatā* do not necessarily depend on deep states of concentration. Realization arises "...when there's a lesser degree of concentration through the development of insight in relationship to sense experience and feeling". While he doesn't offer a reason, why do you think that this is so? What do you think comprises insight into "sense experience and feeling"?

8. Contrast and compare the mind burdened by the *āsavas* with the mind of *atammayatā* as paraphrased by Ajahn Amaro: Mind states "all of which are impermanent, undependable, oppressive, uncontrollable, and unownable, that is, void of selfhood" and "the mind, knowing its' own nature, is not flowing out into any object, sense perception,

or feeling or thought, or even an exalted state of blissfulness”.

9. Contemplate the lines which state that the mind with atammayatā knows “there is no conditioned thing...[that conditioned things] are powerless to concoct or affect us. They have no power to make us happy, safe, free from death or whatever else we might desire. Then why get concocted by them through foolishly relying upon them?” Given the capacity to rest within atammayatā, what undependable and oppressive habitual patterns are the most common obstacles to this aspect of mind?

10. How would one’s practice be refined through reflection on the statement, “for however they conceive it, the fact is ever other than that”?

The Island: An Anthology of the Buddha's Teachings on Nibbāna
Commentary on Chapter 7; [Attending to the Deathless \(Part 2\)](#)
Ajahn Amaro

1. Cite dictionary definitions for the five faculties, which “when maintained in being and developed, merge into the Deathless and end in the Deathless”.
2. The description of the maturation from focus (beginning with interest) and ending with fruition (nibbāna) is characterized as an “alternative to dependent origination as we know it”. Ajahn Amaro summarizes this as: interest → contact → diverging into feeling (pleasant/unpleasant/neither) → the factors of 1) concentration 2) mindfulness 3) wisdom → deliverance → merging into the deathless → nibbāna. While he doesn't comment on it, why do you think these aspects are qualified as “things”?
3. What is the assumption in the question, “Where does an enlightened being go after the death of the body?”
4. What point does Ajahn Amaro make in quoting Master Hsuan Hua's counsel to “Truly recognize your own faults. Do not criticize the faults of others. Others' faults are just your own. Being one with everyone is called the great compassion.”?
5. What is a skillful understanding of interdependence? What might be an unskillful way to hold interdependence?
6. What distinguishes the following two analogies for merging with, or awakening to, the deathless: a river merging with the sea and waking from a dream?

The Island: An Anthology of the Buddha's Teachings on Nibbāna
 Commentary on Chapter 8; [Unsupported and Unsupportive](#)
[Consciousness \(Part 1\)](#) Ajahn Amaro

1. How is *viññāṇa* defined in its aspects as "unsupported" and "unsupportive"?
2. In the suttas, *viññāṇa* is rarely used in reference to a liberated awareness but is referenced more commonly as the conditioned activity of the six senses. What are the three defining qualities of *viññāṇa* as liberated awareness?
3. Find a definition for consciousness from another spiritual tradition or a discipline such as psychology. Compare that definition with the multiple defining aspects of consciousness offered in our text.
4. What point does Ajahn Amaro make in again commenting on the verses to Bāhiya?
5. What is the assumption in the question "Where do the four great elements - the earth element, the water element, the fire element and the air element - cease without remainder?"
6. Ajahn Amaro references "awakened awareness...where the sense world, body and mind, and subject and object can't find a footing. They can't grip. It's like Teflon. Not sticky. They can't find a place to land. There's no thing (name and form) to hold them." Is this description of consciousness meaningful to you, and how?
7. What is Ajahn Amaro's explanation for the line, "when consciousness comes to cease, these are all held in check therein"?
8. From the subtle meanings of *nirodha* (per P.A. Payutto), Ajahn Amaro summarizes consciousness ceasing (*viññāṇa-nirodha*) as when "there's no longer any problem with consciousness." What is the "problem" that is "no longer"?
9. Consider the following comparison between the Tibetan *dzogchen* and Theravada Pali in their translators' choice of terms and characterizations for awakened awareness:

| <u>Tradition</u> | Tibetan | Pali |
|-------------------------|---|--|
| <u>Word</u> | <i>rigpa</i> | <i>vijjā</i> |
| <u>Translation</u> | non-dual awareness | transcendent knowing |
| <u>Characterization</u> | Pure being that is : - empty of essence - unconfined in capacity - cognizant in nature | Awareness that is : - signless/non-manifestive - boundless - luminous |

What view and/or path factor do you think distinguishes awakened awareness as it is used in dzogchen compared to the Theravada teachings?

10. In Ajahn Amaro's rephrasing of the following lines, what does he point out that one could experience consequent to a recognition of "this world"?

It is true that one cannot reach the end of the world by walking but, unless one reaches the end of the world, one will not reach the end of dukkha. It is in this fathom-long body, with its perceptions and ideas, that this world, its origin, its cessation and the way leading to its cessation are to be found:

One who knows the world goes to the world's end,
 One who lives the holy life.
 With heart serene, they understand the world's end
 And do not hanker for this world or another.

11. What do you think the respective foci are of *atammayatā* and *anidassana-viññāṇa*? How are they similar and different?

The Island: An Anthology of the Buddha's Teachings on Nibbāna
 Commentary on Chapter 9; [The Unconditioned and Non-locality \(Part 2\)](#)
 Ajahn Amaro

1. As paraphrased by Ajahn Amaro, what does Bhikkhu Ñāṇananda mean when speaking of one who “has discovered a basis for firmness which never betrays”?
2. Cite a dictionary definition of Abhidhamma.
3. In response to a participant’s question, “What realizes nibbāna?”, Ajahn Amaro replies, “the *citta*” in an “awakened awareness, vijjā, that which is transcendent of the five khandhas...liberation is possible”, he remarks that the Abhidhamma view differs. What is that differing view?
4. To the same questioner who offers the term “the natural state” as a synonym for vijjā, Ajahn Amaro replies, “This is the minefield..with both meanings of the word ‘mine’, meaning you have to tread carefully.” What do you think the issue is upon which one must tread carefully?
5. *In Self-Liberation through Seeing with Naked Awareness* by Karma Lingpa and translated by John Myrdhin Reynolds, the multiple iterations of the Buddha’s teachings on “awareness” are ordered sequentially with the Theravada being the inferior to the superior dzogchen. What is the author’s premise and what point does Ajahn Amaro make about it?
6. What is to be gained in contemplating Nagarjuna’s middle way reasonings with respect to understanding the nature of the “uninfluenced mind of the emancipated one”?
7. How do the opening bars of Beethoven’s 5th Symphony illustrate the nature of emptiness (Pali: suññatā)?
8. In Ajahn Chah’s teaching titled *Living with the Cobra*, what is the view (or method) that when realized enables one to dwell free from the extremes of existing/non-existing, adopting/abandoning, and good/evil? How is such dwelling experienced?
9. How is fire analogous to nirvana and fire’s potential analogous to morality (Pali: *sīla*) i.e., “practicing wisely”?
10. Ajahn Chah’s last instructions to his student, Ajahn Sumedho, are characterized by Ajahn Amaro as “advice that encompasses every situation.” How do love and hate become “aides and partners in building paramita” and lead to a “place of non-abiding”?

The Island: An Anthology of the Buddha's Teachings on Nibbāna
 Commentary on Chapter 10; [The Unapprehendability of the Enlightened](#)
 (Part 2)

Ajahn Amaro

1. What is the import of Sāriputta's response to the Buddha when asked, "Do you accept the fact that by meditating on the senses one can realize nibbāna?" to which Sariputta replies, "It is not that I accept it because I have faith in you. It is only those who have not personally realized it that accept the fact from others".
2. How do you typically contemplate teachings which point to knowledge or realization which you do not already have? Give an example which illustrates.
3. How does Ajahn Amaro rephrase this text: "Firm in the Dhamma, knowledge perfect, they classify but cannot be classified"?
4. What do you hear in Ajahn Amaro's commentary on the text from Majjhima Nikaya 72.20, page 170, that expresses why he likes this teaching?
5. While *tathāgatha* refers to liberated beings, from *arhats* to Buddhas, *tathāgatha* also refers to "your mind...the awake quality of your mind". How does Ajahn Amaro describe the nature of the *tathāgatha* of mind?
6. Ajahn Chah was described as taking many forms, displaying "gestures of humility to gestures of intense authority". If you've been so fortunate to know such a person as Ajahn Chah, were there instructions that were given just through the manner in which they related to you or to others?
7. In Itivuttaka 63, page 170, with respect to the phrase, "can't be classified", how does Ajahn Amaro speak to the conceit that "the world of thought is the closest you can get to reality"?
8. Do you recognize in yourself strong conditioning which moves you to resignation; feeling unable to penetrate a knowing independent of concept? Describe this felt sense?
9. While the Buddha had extraordinary skill with words, he recognized that words pointed to what is finally inexpressible. The "miracle of instruction" is "arranging the conditioned realm in certain ways [so that] the mind can awaken to the unconditioned". How is this miracle of instruction affected in the phrase and meditation on "don't know mind"? How is this miracle of instruction affected in the phrase "however one may conceive it, it is ever other than that"?

The Island: An Anthology of the Buddha's Teachings on Nibbāna
 Commentary on Chapter 11; ["Reappears' Does Not Apply..."](#)
 Ajahn Amaro

1. How does Ajahn Amaro neatly summarize by pun the thrust of this chapter?
2. What is a frequent but mistaken definition of *parinibbāna* (sometimes found in commentarial literature) and what is the definition according to the early suttas? Cite the first dictionary definition of *parinibbāna* that you find through a web search.
3. What is the reasoning for the claim that one who has attained to *nibbāna* in this life, at death cannot be said to have died?
4. What reasoning is offered for why those attained to stream entry (Pali: *sotāpanna*) do not ask the Buddha what happens to enlightened beings after death?
5. How is "something [having] passed by the event horizon" analogous to a being having passed into *parinibbāna*?
6. How do you imagine your own post-mortem state to come, and is the event horizon analogy appropriate?
7. Paraphrase Ajahn Amaro's explanation of the Buddha's answer to Vacchagotta on liberated beings' post-mortem state (i.e., reappears does not apply; does not reappear does not apply; both does and does not reappear does not apply; neither does nor does not reappear does not apply).
8. Ajahn Amaro remarks that in certain texts the Buddha is describing his subjective experience. What are the descriptors that are offered here from which one can infer the Buddha's "subjective experience"?
9. What does Ajahn Amaro suggest one contemplate to precipitate awareness (described as being unbounded by space, time and identity) within your own experience?
10. Given the multiple arguments in this chapter for non-identification with, or reification of, *parinibbāna*, what is your response to Ajahn Amaro's answer to the questioner who asks for confirmation of his understanding that it is the *citta* that realizes *nibbāna*?
11. To close this chapter by pointing out the method, what is the definition Ajahn Amaro gives of "emptiness", this view being "the way one is above & beyond death"?
12. In response to a question, Ajahn Amaro defines "emptiness" per the Pali Canon. His response implies that this definition (i.e., "empty of") is distinct from definitions that are frequently promulgated in later commentarial traditions. Broadly, what is the distinction?

The Island: An Anthology of the Buddha's Teachings on Nibbāna

Commentary on Chapter 12; [Knowing, Emptiness and the Radiant Mind \(Part 3\)](#)
 & Dhamma talk titled [Mind Tells A Story](#)
 Ajahn Amaro

Knowing, Emptiness and the Radiant Mind

1. In addition to asserting the insight into emptiness, how does the sutta about the drum of the *Dasārahas* (text 12.15) point to the import of not papering over with embellishments the simple profundity of the Buddha's teachings? Give a relevant contemporary example.

2. What does one come to know through contemplating the analogies to the five khandhas, i.e., of a lump of foam to form (*rūpa*), a water bubble to feeling (*vedanā*), a mirage to perception (*saññā*), a plantain tree to mental formations (*sankhāra*), a magical illusion to consciousness (*viññāṇa*)?

3. Does knowing the desired result of the above contemplation inspire you to exert yourself in practice? Why or why not?

4. With respect to the relationship between the khandhas of feeling, perception, and consciousness, Ajahn Amaro remarks that they are conjoined: that which you feel, you perceive; that which you perceive, you cognize; and cognition is "the mind's capacity to distinguish one thing from another". Given these defining characteristics of feeling, perception, and consciousness, how then is "awareness" described?

5. What aids one's facility in letting go of the certainty of a self in a world of existent, separate things (i.e., in letting go of the consciousness that discriminates a self from that which is other than self)?

6. In response to a comment that an understanding of "discrimination/form" is that it arises within "emptiness/space", Ajahn Amaro remarks that space "is a sensory representation of the quality of awareness so that the mind can know a sensation, it can know a sound, it can know a thought. So those arise within the space of the mind and the more that mind is free from biases and preferences and attachments, then the more that space can accommodate everything." Is this response instructive to you, and how?

7. In response to the practitioner who asks for clarification of "awareness of awareness", Ajahn Amaro states that Luang Por Sumedho refers to this awareness of awareness as "apperception". How is Ajahn Amaro defining "apperception" here?

8. *Vipassana*, or insight, is outlined here as seeing the nature of conditioned phenomena, looking into one's perceptions of good and bad, helpful and harmful. What does Ajahn Amaro point to as one result of an ardent cultivation of insight?

Mind Tells a Story

1. Consider Ajahn Amaro's account of being temporarily freed of papanca through utter exhaustion. Have you had an experience of such a silence which he likens to "sitting in a gray box" and "watching a TV which has no program on it"? If you've had a similar experience, how would you describe it?
2. What is *yoniso manasikāra*?
3. What method does Ajahn Amaro offer for use when one has lost one's mindfulness in investigating dhammas?
4. "Thought" is here defined as a sense object not different from the objects of the other five sense faculties. What is the instruction offered here for cutting through dukkha, i.e., of the dukkha attendant on *papañcasankhāra*?
5. How does wise reflection (*yoniso manasikāra*) serve as a basis for stream entry?
6. What are the "two kinds" or "two categories" of thinking? What is to be gained by categorizing and contemplating the habitual tendencies of mind?

The Island: An Anthology of the Buddha's Teachings on Nibbāna

Chapter 13; Practices & Perspectives I - The Gradual Path

Reading and contemplating the points offered in this chapter, draft at least one question for discussion.

Chapter 14; Practices & Perspectives II - Sudden Penetration

Reading and contemplating the points offered in this chapter, draft at least one question for discussion.

Chapter 15; Practices & Perspectives III - Path and Goal

Reading and contemplating the points offered in this chapter, draft at least one question for discussion.

Note : There are not any audio files for these three chapters.

The Island: An Anthology of the Buddha's Teachings on Nibbāna
 Commentary on Chapter 16; The Spiritual Turning Point I - [Entering the Stream \(Part 1\)](#)
 Ajahn Amaro

“Entering the stream”, characterized in our text as “the spiritual turning point”, is grounded in an awareness that is a knowledge which is empty and radiant. We discussed this in our study of Chapter 12. Reread that chapter before turning to Chapter 16.

1. In the text recitation on “puns” in which the Buddha replies to those critical of his speech and conduct, what did you gain from this reading?
2. Entering the stream (i.e., seeing the deathless) is first characterized in our text as having two aspects: a breakthrough to the four noble truths which is accompanied by happiness and joy as well as the insight that all that is subject to arising is subject to cessation. What do you think the relationship is between these two aspects? Do you think that one aspect precipitates the other or that the two are co-arising?
3. In addition to the joy and insight (i.e., of seeing the deathless and the certainty that that which is subject to arising is subject to cessation), what are the two other commonly cited attributes of stream entry?
4. Ajahn Amaro offers a rationale for his co-author, Ajahn Pasanno’s extensive presentation on stream entry (Chapters 16 thru 19). Why does Ajahn Pasanno value these teachings as highly as he does?
5. Cite dictionary definitions of the two fetters of *rūparāga* and *arūparāga*. Cite the definitions Ajahn Amaro offers.
6. In answer to the question on what fuels the aspiration to nibbāna of beings who dwell in the pure abodes, Ajahn Amaro replies that it is not dukkha (which fuels the aspiration of beings in the desire realm/*kāmaloka*) that is the cause for the breakthrough to nibbāna. What then is the means for the breakthrough from the pure abodes to nibbāna?
7. How does Ajahn Amaro compare the suttas with the Abhidhamma (the doctrinal compilations and subsequent commentarial literature composed from the 3rd Century BCE through the 5th Century CE)? How does he portray the Thai Forest Tradition’s perspective to these?
8. What counsel does Ajahn Amaro offer to the questioner who, on hearing the teaching on stages and signs of accomplishment, feels that she is failing?

The Island: An Anthology of the Buddha's Teachings on Nibbāna
 Commentary on Chapter 17; The Spiritual Turning Point II - [What is Seen](#)
 Ajahn Amaro

1. Restate the concise summary of dependent origination that Ajahn Amaro offers. Cite one definition of dependent origination that is common in the later commentarial traditions. Describe the similarities and differences between these two definitions?
2. What is the relationship between the two collections of teachings: the four noble truths and dependent origination?
3. With respect to a person who knows the four noble truths/dependent origination, this person is referred to as having knowledge "that is independent of others". What does this phrase evoke for you?
4. In the phrase "coming to the end of the world", what is pointed to in terms of view and in terms of the fruition of practice?
5. What description is offered of the vision of the world enjoyed by a practitioner who has entered the stream? Why would this breakthrough precipitate joy and happiness?
6. One who understands the khandhas "as they really are" knows the khandhas' origin and their passing away, their gratification, their danger, and the escape from the attendant clinging (i.e., dukkha). Give an account of your own experience which illustrates this contemplation of origin, disappearance, gratification, danger, and escape.
7. What strikes you as potent in the characterization of stream entry as being a "change of clan" or "change of lineage"?
8. Give an example from your own experience of "being right in fact, but wrong in dhamma". What did you gain, if anything, from this incident?
9. In closing, we return to the theme of coming to the end of the world, which Ajahn Amaro discussed earlier in this chapter's audio in terms of breaking through to the deathless. What is the certainty held by one who has entered the stream, given a world at its end?

The Island: An Anthology of the Buddha's Teachings on Nibbāna
 Commentary on Chapter 18; [Sotapanna: III What are the Results? \(Audio Part 1 & Part 2\)](#)
 Ajahn Amaro

Audio Part 1

1. Ajahn Amaro begins his commentary with multiple summaries of suttas that detail how one takes the self to be true. What words does he use to summarize the many summaries?
2. Regarding Ajahn Chah's approach of teaching what is to be abandoned and what is to be cultivated, although he rarely spoke of the results, how was his approach kind and beneficial to those who trained with him?
3. Reread the text selection 8.4 (p. 137) on the meaning of nirodha (cessation). Ajahn Amaro states that the experience of nirodha is one in which the "mind is not giving credibility to the whole array of the *nāma-rūpa* (name-form or mind-body), i.e., the six-senses, and the realm of feeling and perception as it arises; [one's experience] is not being solidified and held in terms of self-view." Can you describe this in your own language?
4. What is the crux of Ajahn Amaro's critique of the interpretation of dependent origination as a "map of reality or a creation story"?
5. What are three aspects of "doubt" named here? Do you prefer any of these aspects, and why?
6. "The human tendency to fill in the blanks and then cling to what we've constructed" is born of clinging to the khandhas (form, feeling, perception, formations, and consciousness). Given that clinging (Pali: *upādāna*) is inevitably dukkha, what is the method for cutting through this clinging and being freed of the dukkha that arises from it?
7. What wrong understanding of how an accomplished practitioner "should be" is addressed in Ajahn Amaro's comment that the objective is not to "nullify your emotions and personal characteristics" with experience "turning into a mush of sense data"? What correct understanding of how an accomplished practitioner "could be" is addressed in this same comment.
8. How does one distinguish between wise consideration (Pali: *yoniso-manasikāra*) and chattering mind (Pali: *papañca*)?

Audio Part 2

9. Give an example of a practice of which you once had a distorted grasp, having mistakenly thought it a means to liberation? What knowledge did you gain from this recognition?

10. How is it that one who has relinquished the fetter of clinging to a distorted grasp of precepts and practices becomes more assiduous in observing precepts and practices?

11. What cause for conceit is absent for the one who “possesses virtues dear to the noble ones – unbroken, untorn, unblemished, unmottled, freeing, praised by the wise, ungrasped, leading to concentration”? How, in particular, is the last attribute of concentration protected by the absence of this cause for conceit?

12. What point does Ajahn Amaro make about the nature of realization in his analogy of a horse declining the offer of a hamburger?

13. List the eight precepts referred to here. What is to be gained by periodic observance of the eight precepts?

14. What are the external and internal forms of the Buddha, Dhamma and Sangha, respectively?

15. How is one’s insight advanced by deliberately letting another misrepresent you or misunderstand what you’ve said?

16. Why are the eight streams of merit (i.e., confidence in the Buddha, the Dhamma and the Sangha, conjoined with the observance of the five precepts) referred to by the Buddha as “great gifts” (Pali: *mahādāna*)?

The Island: An Anthology of the Buddha's Teachings on Nibbāna
Commentary on Chapter 19; The Spiritual Turning Point IV - [What is Reaped \(Part 2\)](#)
Ajahn Amaro

1. List the four causal factors that are the basis for attaining stream entry. For each one of the four, give an example of when that factor was present in your own life. For each one of the four, give an example of when that factor was lacking in your own life.
2. Subsequent to an unpleasant incident, while staying with your discomfort, contemplate the precursors to ignorance and then take the incident apart using this scheme, identifying each of the precursors. (I.e., ignorance is born of the five hindrances; the five hindrances are born of the three kinds of misconduct; the three kinds of misconduct are born of lack of sense restraint; lack of sense restraint is born of lack of mindfulness and clear comprehension; lack of mindfulness and clear comprehension is born of lack of careful attention; lack of careful attention is born of lack of faith; lack of faith is born of the lack of hearing the Dhamma; lack of hearing the Dhamma is born of lack of association with good people) How was this approach useful or not?
3. Define and compare the characteristics of “faith followers” and “Dhamma followers”. What are the respective strengths and weaknesses of each type? Do you recognize in yourself one type or the other?
4. Why is it that “the worst kind of thief is the thief of faith”? Has your faith in another’s stated or implied attainments ever turned out to have been mistaken? What was your experience?

The Island: An Anthology of the Buddha's Teachings on Nibbāna
 Commentary on Chapter 20; ["Ah, What Bliss!"-The Blessing of Nibbāna](#)
 Ajahn Amaro

1. Ajahn Amaro comments on Ajahn Chah's teaching (text selection 20.11, page 344) that all dhammas "are of the same fundamental nature... they are empty, [so] we have neither love nor hate for them. We have peace... Liking and disliking, they are of equal value." Ajahn Amaro then contrasts this peace with that of worldly happiness. What is the distinction?

2. This final chapter closes with the following verse:

So there is no pointing to the bourn [the destination]
 Of those perfectly released,
 Who have crossed the flood
 Of bondage to sense desires
 And attained unshakeable bliss.

Which is followed by the timeless wisdom of Yogi Berra: "If you don't know where you are going, you will wind up somewhere else."

Why do you think our authors chose to conclude the text in this way?