

KALYĀNA

Dhamma talks from Ajahn Sucitto

AMARAVATI PUBLICATIONS

SECOND REVISED EDITION © 2002.

Publications from Amaravati are for free distribution. In most cases, this is made possible by individuals or groups making donations specifically for the publication of Buddhist teachings, to be made freely available to the public.

ISBN 1 870205 14 6

CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION	1
GOOD HEART	7
THE LEADERS OF AWAKENING	21
BREATHING INTO THE DHAMMA	37
ASSOCIATION WITH THE LOVELY	55
THE GATE OF RELATIVITY	71
EMPTINESS: THE FULLNESS OF MIND	87
THE MIND, THE WORLD, & THE DHAMMA	99
GLOSSARY	109



intentionally blank



INTRODUCTION

This book arose out of an interest that I had to celebrate my fiftieth birthday by expressing my gratitude to the many people who have made it possible for me to live the Holy Life, and in some way honour the many gifts of Dhamma that the Buddha and my own teachers have bestowed upon me. For me, the significance of the fiftieth year is that during this year (1999) I will have spent twenty-five Rains Retreats as a bhikkhu; approximately half my life will then have been spent in the training. As I was ruminating in this, it coincidentally happened that Richard Allen, a supporter and close associate of the monastery, was also entering his fiftieth year and due to celebrate his twenty-fifth wedding anniversary. So out of such a coincidence, and as a very fitting way to acknowledge both the mutuality of our interest in Dhamma and the symbiosis of lay and monastic commitment that upholds the Holy Life, this collection arose. As is often the way with work involving Dhamma, once the project got started, other people came forward to offer further donations and also the acts of service that would put the talks into the form of a printed work. This catalytic spontaneous process is something that still after many years has the flavour of a miracle, or more accurately, the 'lovely' (*kalyāṇa*) taste of the Dhamma that this book commemorates.

The material in this book comes from talks that I have given at Cittaviveka Monastery in the past few years. The first two and the last chapters are from the regular Saturday evening talks given to the general public, while the four middle chapters are based on instructions given to the resident monastic community during the extensive Winter retreats. In the process of editing, refining and asking for comments, passages have been extended here, or cut there when it seemed that it would make a meaning crisper and clearer to readers who have no opportunity to ask questions after the talk. It should be borne in mind when reading the retreat material that these were originally given to people who were in the midst of a two or three month period of intensive practice. So they would be most suited for people who have a similar opportunity or experience.

The short quotes at the beginning of each chapter have been appended in order to remind us of the scriptural context against which all contemporary teachings should be measured. These quotes were not in the forefront of my mind when the talks were given, so a talk is not meant to be a commentary on the scripture, rather that the scripture may articulate in a condensed or precise way one of the main topics that the talk moved through and thus provide the reader with a further basis for inquiry. It may well be that in articulating some of my own insights, I have only addressed an aspect of an area that a scripture deals with more thoroughly; or alternatively that the language of a scripture seems opaque whereas a contemporary usage more readily hits the mark in the reader's mind. Here and there I have added the Pali word for a term—such as 'intention' (*cetanā*). This is because different people have different ways of rendering these words into English—I even use several myself, dependent on which English word seems to bring out the meaning most clearly in a specific context.

I would like to take this opportunity to express my appreciation to Nimmala who contributed the book's cover, as well as to Phil Thompson who undertook the typesetting, and several other monastics who questioned, commented and put vital energy into this book's production in various ways. This is also a good opportunity to pay my respects to my teacher and friend, Venerable Ajahn Sumedho, who above all has translated the black and white of the Buddha's words into a living and joyful hologram for me for many years. If I extend the focus of my appreciation it must include thousands of people: enough of a mandala of goodness to give conviction to the Buddhist sentiment that to live as a human in the Buddha's dispensation is a blessing. The living support and encouragement that so many people provide also causes me to acknowledge that superior to all the words in this book is that life well-lived.

Sucitto Bhikkhu
Cittaviveka, July 2002



intentionally blank



GOOD HEART

“Then the Blessed One gave a graduated teaching; that is, talk on generosity, on virtue and on the heavens; pointing to the dangers, degradation and corruption in sensuality and the benefits of renunciation. And when he knew that Yasa’s mind was ready, receptive, free from hindrances, gladdened and steady, then he gave him the teaching that is specific to Buddhas: suffering, its origin, its cessation and the Path thereto.”

Mahāvagga



GOOD HEART

If spirituality remains in the realm of ideas, it can't evoke the feeling that uplifts us. A teaching has to be experienced, felt out, made real and fully experienced for it to work; then it works because one enters it with a sense of faith or trust. So in the Buddha's Dhamma, one is asked to get in touch with the primary quality of goodness in oneself. We enter through this immediate personal quality that we may have overlooked. Before we get involved in our notions of the goal, we are asked to recognize and trust in our own good heart as the vehicle. And the more we enter with good heart, the more it lifts us up.

Without this uplift that carries one along, Buddhist practice would not be a spiritual matter, it would be mere engineering. As we get in touch with the good heart, we can allow it to carry us in a process in which the personality system doesn't have to be the leader. It's not annihilated but put to one side. This is an ecstatic process: the word 'ecstasy' literally means 'to stand outside of,' to move out of the realm of personality. Yet it is a measured, gentle kind of ecstasy, not a crazy or frenzied experience. Rather like learning to swim: feeling out the water first, the currents, knowing the depth, learning trust, then taking one foot off the bottom—then gradually we realise the water does lift us.

The Buddhist scriptures present us with descriptions of the the weaknesses and defilements which human beings get stuck with; but they are also liberally enhanced with references to bliss, joy, delight, happiness, calm, clarity and peacefulness—to the point where language begins to fail in its ability to articulate the blissful states that are possible for a human being. This goes on to the highest kind of bliss—which

blows the fuses on the linguistic system altogether. If we consider the spiritual path like this we can be uplifted with faith and a sense of eagerness; and also see there is a measured way to get in touch with this good heart, to encourage and nurture it until eventually it gets big enough to pick us up.

For this purpose, the Buddha taught a structured process called the Graduated Teaching, through which he instructed and encouraged people. It begins from a position that a person can already understand, and draws them into reasoned self-inquiry: 'Do you think this is good, or this is better?' 'If you do this... isn't it better like that?' and so on, leading them on from a place where they are already clear in their own minds.

So first of all his teaching points towards what a person knows to be good and uplifting: generosity—a simple example of good kamma. Generosity can manifest in terms of material things or in terms of heart. Generosity is something that people feel good with, it is expansive, grand and uplifting, and it is both good for oneself and for others. It's a good feeling that isn't based on taking something out of a context or a relationship. So it goes in the way of Dhamma, which is towards purity.

Taught in this way a person tunes in to an empathetic way of living: what good one does for others is good done for oneself. This is the basis for good heart. After highlighting generosity, the Buddha would then talk on virtue: the listener is asked to consider what they would not like to have happen to themselves. Then why should we do that to any other creature? Again an empathetic note is struck. And we are also asked to notice the laws of cause and effect. What happens when we drink alcohol? What does it feel like a few hours later? What are the kind of actions or relationships that arise from it? What makes me feel good in the long-term? A person is thus encouraged to reflect and so develop wisdom.

Then the Buddha leads on with a teaching which is more difficult for human beings to hear: that seeking sensory stimulation to find a sense of well-being is unreliable. It often isn't even particularly healthy; and it can be draining and degrading. It may take some sustained introspection before we are able to recognize that the benefits of sensory stimulation are less than those of generosity and virtue.

The teaching then moves on to renunciation, which is a very difficult thing for human beings to take on, at any level, because of the systems and conditioning that we have. Sensory systems are about having, holding and accumulating. We need to realise that the highest kind of well-being comes through giving out, rather than sucking in. This realization is one of the first fruitions of goodness, wherein well-being becomes associated with our ethical and empathetic criteria, rather than with the impact of external impressions on our nervous systems. Then renunciation starts to make sense.

The Buddha taught in this way. Presenting people with a way of systematically feeling things out, looking for where the highest degree of goodness and completion in themselves is to be found. Then, when their mind was uplifted and ready, he taught the Four Noble Truths: the teaching that leads towards the ending of loss, alienation, and need. The fourth Truth, that of the Eightfold Path, provides a template of spiritual practice that can cover all aspects of our life: our emotional and psychological life, our relationships, the way we think and act, the way our minds work.

We may be familiar with the Eightfold Path, but sometimes the Buddha taught the Tenfold Path¹. The two factors that follow the normal Eight are Right Knowledge (not intellectual knowledge, but a full spiritual comprehension) and Right

¹ e.g. Majjhima Nikāya 117
Aṅguttara Nikāya Tens

Release—one is perfectly released, freed, lifted out of suffering. You could use the analogy of a skilled musician: when they learn to play a horn, they know how to find the keys, and to blow down it and make the sound. But the note is ecstatic; it leaves the instrument altogether. The Eightfold Path is the tuning and playing. Then what arises from the the Eightfold Path is Right Knowledge and Right Release. So with the eighth Path factor of collectedness (*samādhi*)—this has the power to gather and propel the other Path factors to the experience of knowledge and release.

Having the Path as a guide is something to make full use of. Do I practise Right View? Do I practise Right Thought? Do I practise Right Speech? Right Action? Right Livelihood? Do I practise Right Effort? Right Mindfulness? Right Collectedness of mind? This process of systematic enquiry is something that the Buddha encouraged. Do I hold views that are depressing, that don't lift me up, that make life seem pointless or frustrating; or do I hold views that make me feel that development is possible, that there is good kamma, and skilful results in time? This is Right View: rather than demanding to have it all now, is what I do now good or not? What are its results now or in the future? If you see that you've done wrong, can you start to put it right? To acknowledge where one has gone wrong, to try to understand it and then move towards the good is considered a very skilful act in Buddhism. It re-establishes the good heart.

Then Right Thought. The Buddha described this in terms of looking into his mind before he was enlightened and considering: which ways of thinking were concerned with cruelty, which ways were concerned with non-cruelty, which ways of thinking and acting were concerned with loving-kindness, which ways were concerned with sourness and ill-will? Which ways were about grabbing and holding, which were about letting-go and renunciation? Then he determined

to fully recognize the harmful thoughts, feel their distastefulness, and deliberately put them aside. And then pick up their opposites. This is not a complicated process, and yet in putting it into practice, it gives an example of the key feature of the Path: to establish goodness through discernment.

What sets up Right Speech? Or, considering these factors in terms of their 'Path and Fruit,' am I on the Path towards it? Am I working towards developing Right Speech? If you look at the list of subjects the Buddha determined were not worth talking about, you will notice that these are the things that most people like to talk about—because they provide a warm fuzzy blanket over the here and now of the mind. Talk about football, weather, what life is like on Jupiter, talk of heroes and celebrities etc. These are the things that people like to talk about because they cover up or act as a pleasant padding around the uncertainty of life or the wounds of our hearts and minds. And they allay some of the anxiety which occurs when we meet people and are uncertain of our common ground. Personality systems can be desperately fragile, and have a need to find assurance, be welcomed and made to look like they're going places and so on. They are endlessly hungry for these things. Often the social world is one of tossing titbits to each other's personalities.... Can we get beyond this?

Am I someone who understands the need for Right Effort? One who perhaps recognizes they haven't fulfilled the factors of Right Effort, but is interested and concerned with fulfilling them? This is the effort to bring up that which is good, to maintain and strengthen what is good, to relinquish what is bad, and to protect oneself from unskillful actions: this vigour, connectedness and commitment.

Use the Eightfold Path as a mnemonic, as something you can run through your mind and consider. There are of course a million things that one can be doing in a day, but to reflect

like that is therapeutic. It is not letting the mind dissipate, it provides a container and reminds us of training ourselves in terms of good heart. We can forget this when we get absorbed into doing things or into being somebody; into worrying about ourselves in a useless way, dwelling in guilt, pride or conceit, or dwelling in infatuations or negative thoughts about others.

When considering the Path, recognize that it all fits together. So one's view or effort will help and support one's *samādhi*; one's practice of mindfulness will support one's speech. The Path factors should all line up, rather than some factors go one way and some go another. So the image of the Path is a Wheel. The factors that are mentioned first are the ones that are necessary and supportive of the factors that are mentioned later. Consider mindfulness which is a process of clear attention; or *samādhi*—collectedness, a calm peaceful mind: how does what we think and say support those qualities?

The primary support is the good heart that is born out of Right View. It is something that we begin to recognize and share with others. When we come together in a monastery like this, we can acknowledge this good heart in each other. Instead of seeing each other with a critical eye, we should begin to see: 'This is someone with a good heart, this is my brother or sister with this particular attribute.' Try to talk to them like that, try to see that in them, rather than: 'Oh, here's that creep who is always late,' or, 'that incompetent so and so.' Look for the good heart. If you see this in yourself then you see it within others, and your mind settles into something that feels happy, and has well-being, rather than being unsettled and grumpy—which is not going to lead to mindfulness or *samādhi*.

Do things that honour and support a good heart, and live up to that in yourself. We can begin to see more clearly and intimately the difference between good and bad, wholesome and unwholesome, not from an abstract judgmental way.

Feel the difference. Whatever makes you feel whole is wholesome, whatever makes you feel bitter, regretful, unsettled, is unwholesome. No matter what people are doing to me, no matter what is going on, does a feeling of resentment make me feel good or not? The next time these things happen, notice the mood, and let go.

The Buddha says he noticed feelings of cruelty in the mind, he doesn't say 'I don't know what cruelty is about.' Knowing what ill-will, malice and dismissiveness is about, knowing we don't like them, we can more readily put them aside. Being prepared to keep that going is Right Effort. The Right Effort is not just one hour a week, but to carry on doing it, however simple or mundane it might seem, keeping it simple and steered in the right way.

You can't take short cuts, you can't say: 'I'll forget about Right View, Right Thought, Right Livelihood, just give me some *samādhi*.' Life soon becomes wretched if you consider the path to be only one factor. If you think like that then most of your day is not relevant. You end up with a little slot at the end of your week when you do your 'spiritual bit,' because you have divorced spirituality and stopped taking responsibility for the way you think, speak and act. The humble levels of thought, speech and action—if properly carried out, properly born in mind—are conducive to, and will lead to, the loftier states of *samādhi*, Knowledge and Release.

Sometimes when we practise meditation we can lose sight of this. We may feel we don't want to talk, act, speak and so on. We divorce the primary factors from the consequent factors of the path. We become dismissive: 'don't bother me.' When we're like that then ordinary life is a waste of time, dull and irritating, because we don't practise with it.

I have noticed myself the effects of being willing and having good heart in my actions. I'll be attending meet-

ings and dealing with planning and all sorts of conceptual stuff—which we could say isn't about the here and now—but if I do these things with Right View, and a good heart, then when I stop that activity, it stops there. And the good heart is there. I more readily go into clarity, peacefulness and happiness of mind. When the mind is happy and peaceful it easily concentrates. But if I go through these things in a begrudging, 'this is all a waste of time' way, then it doesn't stop when I get to the end of the work or the meeting. The mind goes on and on moaning about wasting all this time—for another six hours! Or whines: 'How am I going to get enlightened doing this!' As if the world should be set up for my own well-being! If you consider the plight of most human beings, let alone the other creatures on the planet, we are living in a very comfy little scene here in Britain, and certainly in this monastery.

The big difficulty for human beings is the vital factor of renunciation. However, as we develop the good heart we find we can relinquish. As we feel good in ourselves, we have fewer needs. Also when we feel good in ourself, we don't mind taking things on. So we can renounce things not in a dismissive or puritanical way, but because the clinging and neediness is alleviated.

There are different kinds of need. One is to have lots of things, to get things; one is to be something; another is to be removed from things. These movements of the mind are known as *kāma*, *bhava* and *vibhava*. Renunciation, which runs right through the process of Dhamma, can eventually curtail these factors. This renunciation is then an expression of fulfilment.

The first things we feel we don't require so much are the sensual objects; fine clothes, entertainment, and sexual activity. When I first entered the monastery it was easy to relinquish entertainment and relationships, I'd had enough of all that

anyway, at least for the time being! But in the monastery one also has to give up one's own time to following a routine, which is a testing thing. Giving up one's space and sharing it with other people, renouncing the need to be special, private and left alone—these are also challenging practices. But the thing that many people miss out on is giving up their views and opinions. This is the last hand-hold, which can be held extremely tightly! If you have lived with monks and nuns for a while, then you realize that the strength of character that allows them to give up sensuality makes for holding strong opinions about things!

People find a tremendous sense of positioning through holding views. In my own practice I found it quite easy to give up things, even to be quite austere, but then I'd develop critical views about everyone else. I hadn't relinquished that conceit, that way of positioning myself by judging others.

So rather than going into debates about who is right and who is wrong; which is the right meditation practice for me and so on, it's good to put down the text-book and consider: what does it feel like to look for, or hold a view? What does it feel like when I look at someone from behind the fence of a view? And what are the results? I have found that having views about other people is conducive to having views about myself. Views that one has about other people are actually far more tolerant than views one has about oneself. If one makes judgements about other people, then my experience is that one does the same to oneself.

The critical mind is then in a judgmental mode: there's no happiness, there's no gladness, there's no love, there's no trust. I am either trying to appease that factor of the mind that holds the view, live up to the view I have of myself, or trying to get a better view of myself. So meditation is not an easeful open experience. It is a performance to become and sustain

what my view-thinking mind says I should be. This is a miserable experience.

As much as one can justify, and think that one's views about other people are correct—even when they are (as views)—try feeling the mind-state, the conceit that accompanies them. Then when doing it to oneself, notice how 'I am...' leads to 'I never will be...' and 'I always am...' It's a trap. The contemplative process then gets used up in conceiving and evaluating in terms of self. That valuable system that should actually help us to collect in terms of good heart and Path factors, collects in terms of self. And this 'self-view' sustains a process of fragmentation.

Relinquishing a view is made possible by fully knowing it to be that, knowing what it feels like. Knowing the good heart, kindness and generosity on one hand; then feeling the judging, the criticising, and the forming of opinions on the other hand. Consider which feels better. Take the time to do it, rather than either suppress one's views, or justify them, or think they are irrelevant to one's practice. Views appear to be about other people, but they create the realm that one's own heart has to live in. We can learn a lot by exploring this experience.

This relinquishment stabilises and calms the mind. Ask yourself: is the mind steady and endowed with confidence in itself? Or is it jittering, going this way and that, frantic and then slumping down? What are the ways of behaviour that are conducive to a steady heart and mind? What about giving up and relinquishing a lot of the ifs, ands, maybes, if only's, what should, could and might be and so on? Then with the independence and the trust in oneself that comes from renunciation, calm arises.

Having your mind zip around, speculating and bantering, can seem harmless enough—but why is it so unsettled?

If you support your mind in zipping around, then when you sit down quietly, it will continue to do that. It will keep up the patter, the zig-zagging, the memories about this, the worrying about that, restlessly picking at this, fantasising about that, feeling irritated with oneself for a little while, then trying to do something else, then trying to meditate... that doesn't work, so back to the fantasy for a while, get irritated, form an opinion about oneself... The mind whose energy has not been properly protected and collected is like a fly on a window pane. It just buzzes, it doesn't get out, nor can it settle where it is. It's out of touch with the good heart.

So for true well-being we have to give up a lot of the speculations, choices and mental trips we can get into. If we can put things aside with a good heart, then we can dwell in good heart. The mind's ability to conceive can then be directed, and used in attending to a meditation object.

We may feel that meditation is something that we can't do. However, that thought is not a skilful thought to sustain. Meditation entails first removing mental activities from what is unskilful; this gives the openness and energy to focus and sustain the mind on a meditation object. So, let's get to know what Right Thought feels like. 'Every good action, or every good thought I bear in mind will go along the right Path.' This feels like a skilful thought to sustain: it leads to an interested joyfulness, then a sense of ease and fulfilment. 'My act of peeling a carrot with a caring heart will help me to meditate.' 'My action of forgiving someone or being grand-hearted, will give me calm and ease.' This direct good-heartedness is the means that gives us the strength, the persistence and confidence to stay with the Path as it unfolds.

«»



intentionally blank



THE LEADERS OF AWAKENING

“There are five spiritual faculties that, when maintained and developed, merge in the Deathless, reach to the Deathless and end in the Deathless.

What five? They are the faculties of faith, energy, mindfulness, concentration and wisdom.”

Saṃyutta Nikāya 48, 57



THE LEADERS OF AWAKENING

In the teaching of the Buddha the emphasis is on the cultivation of good states. There's nothing so surprising about that, but we may still miss a vital point: we can conceive that the practice is about getting rid of bad states when the cultivation of good states is more fundamental. One should refrain from picking up or acting on unwholesome states of mind, fully cultivate the good and thus purify the mind by dispelling residual bad habits. It's important to acknowledge that the Buddha's teaching is based on the human capacity to refrain from what is harmful and to cultivate that is good: on Original Purity rather than Original Sinfulness. It's only through reference to that fundamental goodness (which we get drawn away from through ignorance) that one can cultivate the good and clean out the bad. We can't clear out negative psychological or emotional habits through feeling negative about ourselves; that doesn't provide the will or capacity to dispel bad mental habits. A more positive influence is required. And for that, there has to be the presence of goodness, to give confidence and positive energy in relating to what is negative.

For example one should consider that spite or pride is unworthy of oneself rather than an honest appraisal of 'how I really am.' Otherwise, there is no dispelling of darkness from the mind; when one comes across it, one just obsesses with it, worries, punishes oneself or tries to distract or deny. These reactions are also negative, even depressing, so their overall effect is to increase the weight of negativity. Then negativity can saturate the body, and people even become physically ill with things like doubt, depression, worry or guilt. The subtle body energy is affected by negative mind states; it dwindles and the aspiration that should carry us along goes flat.

We inherit a certain amount of bad resultant kamma from negligence and not knowing. We have probably blundered through life not being that clear, and so bashed into things and got bruised and knocked around. Then, on becoming a little more conscious in the present, we begin to experience the dents and the afflictions of the heart (*citta*). This is what we inherit, the *vipāka*. So what can we use to push the dents out of the heart? What will repair its wounds? In Buddhism, the emphasis is to create good kamma in the present moment; to do good. That engenders the strength to repair the damage, the wounds, or the afflictions from the past. That encouragement requires an act of faith: faith that the state we are in now may be afflicted and negative but we can still bring around a goodness that will increase. Of the images that the Buddha used, one of the most attractive and memorable is of a trickle of water running down a hill; how that trickles and goes over the crags and drops down the gully—and gradually other streams flow into it. That image presents something that was first of all just an insignificant little trickle, then it gradually accumulates, and as it accumulates it cuts deeper, and as it cuts deeper it attracts more water to it. Just as a big river will attract other streams to it, goodness gets fuller and bigger until nothing is going to stop it. It gets so big it sweeps down to the sea; and there it can empty itself completely.

So simply from any humble beginning, good states tend to attract other good states to them. And they wear down the mass of ignorance, and the mass of doubt, or guilt, or shame, or fear, that afflict and constrict the heart. But if we try and shift all the stuff without having even a little trickle of water, then we just feel frustrated, and that tends to increase it.

Meditation itself is a skilful mental kamma. It entails the mental activities of focussing, of refining and investigating, and of gladdening and uplifting. It enables us to see through

the mass of confusion to the primary purity of the *citta*. Exactly how, when and where you meditate, is really dependent on whether it increases these skilful states. Now if your meditation causes bad states to increase so that you get more obsessive and more spaced-out or lost, then this is not right meditation. Meditation is not just about sitting, it's whether the mind can be skilful. And if at any time one can't cultivate goodness through introspective sitting this doesn't mean that there's no hope; it means that you should practise other skilful kamma. So there's always some possibility. There is always some act of generosity that you can do, some act of calming, some act of service; and the result of that will be that it will increase the sense of confidence and trust in oneself. Knowing that there is something one can do for others' well-being diminishes the sense of isolation and self-importance; it tends to open rather than constrict the mind's perspectives.

Understanding this truth of kamma can give rise to a strong sense of *saddhā* or confidence. This faith is paramount because then such issues as 'how long' or 'when will I get enlightened?' are swept away: you know there is only one thing you can do—which is to continue to cultivate. It doesn't matter if it's going to take you one year, ten years, a life-time, ten life-times. Such ideas aren't anything you can use skilfully, they're purely indirect notions. They do not in themselves foster good states, they tend to foster either arrogance, or impatience, or doubt, or worry.

When we consider good states and their cultivation, the kindling, arousing, and gladdening of the mind into brightness, there are many good opportunities. We can cultivate kindness, patience, clarity, generosity, renunciation, faith, concentration, mindfulness... and so on. You may think, 'What should I cultivate? Which one should I cultivate first? Which is the priority?'

The Buddha would say: ‘Paramount is Right View, Wrong View is the most harmful state and Right View is the pre-eminent.’ Right View includes such things as understanding this law of kamma, the law of cause and effect, that if one does good one will get good results. And in terms of the general overview, the recognition that one good state will connect to other good states—that very recognition is also an aspect of Right View. Get to know this in the heart; don’t make it more complicated than that, because kamma is that which you do, so you have to make your view clear and simple enough to act out. Then cultivate what is nearest at hand and lead from your strong point, bearing the perspective of the Eightfold Path in mind.

With Right View, as one does good and acknowledges that action, the mind becomes more settled, and meditation is a lot easier. The process can be seen in terms of accessing and developing certain spiritual faculties: faith (*saddhā*), energy (*virīya*), mindfulness (*sati*), concentration (*samādhi*) and wisdom (*paññā*). These are known as *indriya*—leaders—in the process of Awakening.

The beginning of any Path requires some sort of faith. So what is this? Whereas depression and despair mean that there’s no going forward—there are no results, you’re stuck—faith is the opposite: the sense of possibility and potential. All good states must arise from that and strengthen that. Any realizations or insights one has will deepen and strengthen one’s sense of faith.

At first faith is just an intuition: ‘There must be something better than this’; then it becomes: ‘There is a better than this,’ or, ‘Somebody does better than this,’ or, ‘There’s such a thing as a Buddha, or Dhamma,’ and then it’s: ‘I can do a little bit better than I did yesterday,’ and, ‘Yes there is, and I can.’ Then faith becomes confidence: ‘Yes, I have done better, I have steered away from a harmful habit, I’ve done it once, it can

be done.’ And perhaps when one’s practice matures further it becomes conviction: ‘It can only be this way.’ Faith encompasses the awareness of potential, the confidence both in one’s ability and in the Path, and then the conviction that accompanies accomplishment. It is a graduated process.

In the Buddha’s teaching, you can begin with any one skilful quality and see how it ties in with all the others. I use faith because this is where we have to begin to practise, with some feeling that things aren’t right, and there must be something better. Then as the Buddha explained, perhaps one meets a teacher, or in our day-and-age one reads a book, and something sparks and kindles. Faith has arisen. Then faith naturally gives rise to an interest in applying oneself to the teachings. So one does, one applies effort. So faith conditions energy and the application of energy.

Energy that comes from faith opens and extends the heart: this is the energy associated with commitment and faith. Another primary mode of energy is that which establishes a specific focus and encourages investigation: this is the energy associated with mindfulness. These are key factors in the process of meditation, and they provide one with the strength and the inclination to investigate experience.

Mindfulness is the factor that takes up a reference point—such as body or feeling—then surveys it and refers to unbiased awareness: ‘What are you doing? What’s happening?’ That must come in, otherwise the effort and the energy don’t have a direction. Mindfulness is the foundation for concentration and wisdom; it prunes away what is irrelevant or distracting, and makes one more fully aware of what is relevant at any particular time. With mindfulness, we begin to get in touch with the reality of our minds and dispense with the regrets, doubts and confusion. These are all aspects of what meditation is about.

Samādhi is very often translated as concentration, but I find this to be an inadequate expression. Rather, it's a mindful gathering of skilful qualities into the present that blends into something palpable. *Samādhi* is an established state of ease for the mind and heart to dwell upon. When the mind doesn't have *samādhi*, it dwells upon a plane of reality where things are seen as distinctly different and going off in different directions; the mind can get very scattered. There is 'tomorrow' and 'yesterday', and 'she' and 'him', and 'this' and 'that', and things are going all over the place with different energies. If your mind gets hooked by that, everything you see and feel confirms the differences in things. The mind's energy is geared to the realm in which some things are going quickly, some things are going slow, some things are out of gear altogether, so its energies are in conflict and turmoil.

The plane of *samādhi* emphasises the unity. For example a degree of *samādhi* occurs when one refers through mindfulness to what precisely is affecting the heart. This could be either a painful feeling, a neutral feeling, a pleasant feeling; a feeling associated with somebody leaving us, a feeling associated with receiving a gift, it can be a feeling associated with winning the World Cup or losing the World Cup, however instead of seeing 'World Cup,' 'man, woman,' 'coming, going,' you feel 'pleasant feeling,' 'neutral feeling,' 'painful feeling.' That's a much more simplified reality than that in which the diversity of objects is accentuated. So in meditation we are dealing with just two or three ways in which experience manifests: a sensed or conceived object, a feeling and how we react to that.

What does it mean to feel something? It means there is a certain vibration; a certain resonance occurs. Now when mindfulness has established a preliminary level of *samādhi*, it can refer to the experience directly. The mind is in a state whereby its receptivity is finely attuned — rather like a spider's

web—and it vibrates when something strikes it. With mindfulness and *samādhi*, the emphasis is on just getting to that point of vibration, because the important thing to learn is not whether it's a gnat or a bat or a raindrop, but whether there is aversion to it, or whether there is clarity or confusion around it. In this way mindfulness and *samādhi* present hindrances and joys as palpable experiences. This is a surer basis for wisdom than the many ideas and possible notions about the way out of suffering and stress.

Often in the practice of meditation the mind drops deeper into a calmer *samādhi* for a while but then it's thrown out. What happened? If you don't know what and where an obstacle is in practice, the mind loses its unity and becomes agitated. So inquire: 'What was that about?' and with mindfulness steer back to that point and review it. If the mind gets thrown out again, go back to a simple meditation object to calm and steady the mind, then review again and again, to really witness what threw it out. This is how mindfulness and *samādhi* work together. Then wisdom will arise into the momentary nature of mental stress and upheaval.

Sati and *samādhi* help the mind to hold onto itself. In *samādhi* the mind is experienced as a continuum of energy, which one can feel contract or pull out if any greed or aversion arises. But when you then investigate that greed or aversion or agitation and learn to calm or relax it, a whole personal scenario falls away. This is the process of *paññā*, wisdom. This wisdom is not the ability to juggle concepts, but the ability to discern the process of the mind clearly and know how to respond in order to end suffering and stress.

Wisdom deepens Right View to the understanding of the selfless nature of processes. That is, the heart can know a state as unskillful, but as just that: nothing but agitation, not a person, nothing special. And that any state is of the nature to

drop away. When our problems are seen in this way, we see them more as things that affect us or that momentarily occur rather than something that we are. This gives rise to faith as self-respect, and facilitates the inquiry into the nature of the mind's obstacles and suffering. In this way these five leaders support each other.

So mind-cultivation is not just a technique is it? It's a process, and involves learning how to apply ourselves. It's the skilful kamma of custodianship of faith, of mindfulness, of energy, of *samādhi*, of wisdom, within a changing mental realm.

Even when a hindrance like anger is flagrant, we can overlook it by focussing on the object of our anger and feeling certain that it is unfair, or horrible, rather than focus on the mental state itself. Again, often one doesn't really know the quality of ill-will, restlessness and doubt as such: when there is a subtle resistance or a slight disdain, it's easy to miss that and think, 'He's that kind of a person, isn't he? We all know that.' Then one can say, 'Yes, that's got an objective reality there,' because it's something we can all subscribe to. Whereas in the Buddha-Dhamma the teaching is: in whatever arises, what we have to be aware of is any quality of aversion or greed we may have for it.

One parable the Buddha gave was of the saw². 'Imagine bandits caught you at a cross-road and started sawing you apart with a big two-handed saw,' said the Buddha. 'If you experience any degree of ill-will then I don't reckon you've really penetrated this teaching.' We might think this is far-fetched—to not experience any kind of ill-will towards someone sawing us apart—but it's only a parable for a start, and what it means is that no matter how justified one's sense of aversion to something is, still the aversion to that is just

² Majjhima Nikāya 21

making it worse. When bandits are sawing you apart, aversion to it doesn't help. It is an unnecessary gloss on events and an increase in the suffering that one experiences.

In real-life circumstances our fear, aversion, or worry may have justifications that paralyse the mind from seeing the possibilities of a skilful action. I remember a bhikkhu telling me of a friend who was a doctor, a heart specialist. The doctor was out with his girlfriend, and she had a heart attack. He was so shocked that he couldn't function properly and she died. So you can see that a hindrance is more than just a little personal blemish, it can be that which literally does hinder the mind from being endowed and actuating its fullest skills.

How many times do we find ourselves psychologically crippled by a hindrance? When we're numb and shut down and there is something really bothering us, but we're too angry to even talk about it? Then things continue to go along that way because we can't get clear enough to even explain what's going wrong. Sometimes it's like that, isn't it? Stress and depression can prevent us from asking for help. In ways like this, the hindrances stop us from doing the kind of thing that would bring us out of them; they can stop us from even trusting our fellow humans, so that we start to commit the spiritual suicide of destroying our faith.

Meditation practice happens in the context of this living process—of happiness, clarity, or their absence, of physical energies; and also of whatever life brings up for us. For a start, the body adapts to sitting in meditation over the years. Speaking personally, I find it easier to meditate now than I did twenty-three years ago; it gets easier to drop things. Then as some attachments drop away, there are realizations, new vistas and new challenges to be aware of.

Meditation is rather like learning to sit: on day one you can be told 'This is how you sit, you sit in full lotus, and then

bring your back up and relax your shoulders and so forth. That's how to sit in meditation.' So you do that, but it's painful within seconds; you can't even get your legs crossed. It may take a year or more to get the posture feeling comfortable and supportive. It's the same with the mind: you can give it a teaching in a few sentences but the process described in that teaching might take five years. What you learn is to go with it, rather than setting time limits and agendas. For example, cultivating mindfulness of body entails doing it repeatedly and having faith in it. First of all having faith in just getting to your body, knowing what a hindrance feels like—not what you judge it as, but the constriction, the bondage, the pressure of a hindrance—then learning how to relax that bondage and release yourself. There's a process to go through. When we say 'focus on the breath' what does it take to focus on an inhalation and an exhalation and stay with that? It's rather like lowering yourself down a slippery rope without sliding to the bottom of it or falling off it; you have to learn to apply the right kinds of pressures so that you don't get too tight and you don't get too loose. It's a maturation of know-how, not a competition.

And one can always learn from events. Recently the event for me that was most dramatic was of Ajahn Candasiṛi suddenly being carried out to an ambulance and whisked off to hospital. Someone tells me: 'They came from the hospital to take her away,' and the mind jumps. I think: 'My goodness, what is happening?' And then somebody says: 'It was pains in the head, something wrong with the brain.' And the mind goes: 'Brain! That isn't like a sprained wrist, this is serious!' Then: 'Who knows, maybe this is it, stroke, brain tumour, head fallen off—Ajahn Candasiṛi walking around with her head in a plastic bag for the rest of her life! What's going on?' 'She could die!' Then comes the thought: 'What do you mean she could die, she *will* die. *We all will die*, what's this 'could?'

She's got no choice, we're all going to die. It's just a matter of what day is it going to be.' And the mind goes from the idea of 'Ajahn Candasirī in pain,' and the possibility—'she might die,' to the realization that we are all on Death Row. She's dead already in one way: the reality of her death is right there. It's etched in stone.

So I have to look at that, and then my own death and then everybody's death—and contemplate: 'What actually is that about in my own mind?' That is when I say the word 'Candasirī,' those four sounds evoke a picture, and then a mood. This is called *saññā*—perception—a mind object. The mood is one of warmth, trust, these kind of things; it's not a mood I want to dispel. Whereas if you said 'tarantula,' or 'Dracula,' or 'Microsoft Internet Explorer,' the mood would be: 'Oh no, get me out of here!' But when you say the word 'Candasirī,' that gives rise to a pleasant mood. And then 'Candasirī dead,' 'Candasirī agony, pain, dead:' there's resistance to that. What one is actually dealing with is a perception. And when the perception is there of something that is known, familiar and reliable then I feel at ease; I feel there is a little bit of my world that is taken care of, and there is a pleasant mood. Then if it's suddenly taken away there is a bit of that gone, and that's the thing that hurts. Yet when the perception is known directly, it's clearly not the same thing as the physical being, Candasirī, walking around, who probably has quite a different perception of herself than I do of her. Then some of you might think 'She's the nun who sits over there, and gives a talk now and then.' Or her mother, 'There was my daughter Katie who wasted her life when she could have married a banker and done all kinds of *useful* things.' So those are all different things, aren't they?

When we look here on the shrine, there is a picture which is of Venerable Ānandamaitreya. There is this image of a bhikkhu, and there he is smiling at me, but he's dead. And we

look at him and he's not dead, is he? It's not a dead body. So we look and think: 'Venerable Ānandamaitreya', and then think 'heap of dust', which is what that body is now—so where's Ānandamaitreya? Then look at the photo of Candasirī on the shrine—'is she alive or dead now?' And then, what about the bhikkhu sitting next to me here? Who's that? When the mind is settled we recognize that that's a Kāruṇiko perception, endowed with fondness and familiarity. The mind feels good, feels happy with that perception. Then take it away, and something is lost. So we can begin to recognize that we're looking at something that is part of what we are. If we'd never known Candasirī, never heard of her, there'd be nothing missing would there? But now there is the possibility to welcome or to be irritated by etc. etc., and then to lose; all that becomes possible. That's nothing to do with this human being walking around on the planet, that's to do with what the mind has taken in.

So I consider: 'What now can I do that is skilful toward this person?' Since I'm not a doctor, the perception in the mind is the thing to work on. Even more than kindness, the fundamental quality to give it is faith: not to hold or to worry, not to create unskilful mind states around that person, but to try instead to engender the mind state of faith—'You've done well; you've done many good deeds; you've accumulated good kamma, there will always be something better for you.' Then one feels uplifted. One isn't shutting oneself off from the issue, one is actually blessing and enriching the perceptions of that person with something that lifts one's own heart: 'You're someone who does well, good states have arisen, there are good results.'

Incidents like these, which are, on an ordinary level of reality, saddening, upsetting or disappointing, can actually strengthen our faith and strengthen our view, our Right View.

When we can acknowledge that we're all dead, we're all on the terminal ward, it gives us the chance to say: 'We've done well, we're doing well, there will be further goodness for us.' Whereas whenever we attach to the idea on an emotional level of people being permanent, there's the assumption that the perception we have of them in the present will persist into the future. And because of that we either take them for granted, or are anxious, or disappointed if they do not continue to support our perception of them. We're not actually feeling grateful for them. It's not, 'Oh, Kāruṇiko you're still here! Wonderful!' It's 'Here he is again, so what?' and then we can ignore him or even think of things he didn't do in accordance with our own opinions.

When we acknowledge the fragility of it all, there's a sense of enjoyment in life—we're living a miracle. And because of that, what can we do? We can only be good, we can only engender faith, we can only engender trust because there's nothing else that's reliable. The whole of the conditioned world is a tissue of perceptions and moods and memories, shuffled together to produce some sort of reality. We take it as solid, but it can be blown apart with a flicker of the mind.

So what is solid? Faith is solid. Mindfulness is solid. Energy is solid. *Samādhi* is solid. *Paññā* is solid. These are things to rest the mind upon. Not as a way of avoiding daily life issues, but as the core of what sustains life as a conscious human being. The rest of it we just get good luck with for a while. So we shouldn't take that good luck for granted, or complain about the bits and pieces where it's not perfect, but know where the core of reality is. Things such as painful feeling, pleasant feeling, neutral feeling—these are really not the issue, it's how much we stick and get stuck to feeling. How much we need feeling. Even on the level of needing feeling, there is a way of feeling that is most secure, which is the feeling of joy

in the Dhamma. This is our birthright. No pain, sickness, or death can take that away.

This Dhamma, then, is to be cultivated. And we cultivate by any good quality that's nearby—any good quality that we're intimate with. We can recognize it, rejoice in it, and then assimilate it, and then see how it connects to other good qualities. Then we experience that sense of the completeness, of the wheel of the Dhamma that leads us onwards.

«»

BREATHING INTO THE DHAMMA

“Bhikkhus, when mindfulness of breathing is developed and cultivated, it is of great fruit and great benefit... it fulfils the four foundations of mindfulness... developed and cultivated, they fulfil the seven factors of enlightenment... developed and cultivated, the seven factors of enlightenment fulfil true knowledge and deliverance.”

Majjhima Nikāya 118



BREATHING INTO THE DHAMMA

Mindfulness of breathing (*ānāpānasati*) is a thread of practice that connects us to the wisdom of the Buddha. It is an exercise of focussing that deals with our experience of life in terms of a very simple and immediate process, that of breathing in and out. Within the experience of breathing—and the contemplative structures that gather us into it—we can be aware of sensations, feelings, physical presence and what the mind makes out of them. These are the basis of our living experience. Profound changes in our response and relationship to life come around through cultivating *ānāpānasati*: it both makes us more fully aware of the stuff of experience and also enhances the awareness that receives this sensory and psychological material. Mindfulness, investigation, energy, joy, calm, concentration, equanimity: essentially the factors that are aroused in the exercise of *ānāpānasati* are the most precious treasures that any human being can bring forth.

The Buddha's guidance on living can be seen as a progressive deepening of non-attachment or *viveka*. *Viveka* can mean both non-attachment and discernment. It's a stepping-back that offers the perspective to see things clearly, and comes from a fullness in which the aware heart doesn't need to hold onto things. *Viveka* can be progressively cultivated in three modes: *kāya-viveka*, *citta-viveka* and *upadhi-viveka*. *Kāya-viveka* is concerned with liberation in terms of body—feeling physically bright and at ease. *Citta-viveka* is concerned with the liberation of the mind from negative afflicted states, and *upadhi-viveka* is the complete liberation from that which we normally experience the mind to be. So although we may imagine that non-attachment is a passive state, the great discovery of meditation is that non-attachment is the channel for spiritual vitality.

Liberation in terms of body begins with being able to bring one's attention fully into the body. Many people find being with their body difficult because there are so many resultant effects (*vipāka*) from involvement in situations of over-excitement, competition or interpersonal conflict. The result of the stress and shock that can accompany daily life can leave defensive patterns, tension and blocks in the way the body is held. When one is not guarded by virtue and mindfulness, anger and grief easily have traumatic effects on the mind and the body: they become numb or dull, or subject to stormy moods and energies.

So breath meditation begins with body-work, moving attention into the body. Finding and sustaining a good bodily posture is the key to tapping into and circulating the subtle body energy that brings around physical well-being. In sitting meditation, the balance of the body should be maintained by the full extension of the breath: so the breath has to be allowed to move through the chest and abdomen freely. This means the abdomen needs to be upright and 'open,' rather than folded in or slack. The posture muscles in the abdominal region and the sides do the work of supporting the upper body. The small of the back is curved slightly in and, with the natural curvature of the spine properly established, there is no strain in the back. The spine supports itself: this includes the neck which should be upright rather than pulled forward by the drooping head. The shoulders should rest back so that the chest is open. This buoyant uprightness allows the breath to be full and uncramped, and so it can be clearly experienced. Without this bodily balance, meditation comes from the head and the breathing may be unconsciously cramped with a sense of stress, dullness or force about it. If the posture is correct, then the breath is something that just happens. You receive it; and the experience of breathing feels relaxed. It is not something

that you do, it is something that happens through you, into you.

Such a base of physical well-being allows the mind's attention to fix on and explore the experience of breathing. This fixing is called *vitakka*; it 'defines' the mind's object. Once the mind has a distinct object, *vicāra* comes in. *Vicāra* means sensitizing to and exploring that mind-object. So one process directs attention towards the breath, and the other picks it up: 'What does it feel like?' These two work together. The object and the way of handling it don't have to be very refined at this stage: you can establish *vitakka-vicāra* with a thought, like 'Where is the breath?' and then 'What does it feel like?' — without a tremendously intense effort. Questions, rather than commands, are more helpful in terms of sustaining the training.

With these two aspects of attention, the mind goes to the sensations of breathing for a moment or two and then listens to them. If the effort to fix and hold is not balanced with picking-up, listening, and receiving the breath you become numb and dull, or we get forceful. A forceful activity of the mind brings up aggressive energies of frustration; trying to hold, grasp, or know something can make the mind quite grumpy after a while. So holding has to be balanced out with receptivity, even though this may not immediately result in a feeling of sharp one-pointedness. That comes around slowly. It's like growing anything, first one needs to establish the right conditions before growth can happen. So if the mind drifts: 'No problem: where is the breath now?' Give firm direction rather than negativity. Make meditation something that is manageable without a supreme effort of the will. Attune to the rhythm of the breath, noticing its different tones, rather than try to hold a small point at first. If we do that, then the practice will cultivate itself: the mind will calm down and be able to acquire greater dexterity in terms of focus.

If the body experiences physical tension, pain, or physical tightness, we can use the breath to lighten it. When the mind fully attends, the sensations and feelings that it receives can be experienced in themselves and brought to one point. Breathing has a subtle flowing sensation and the feelings that arise around breathing can be put on top of any restrictive or numb physical sensation. In putting those two together we begin to handle feeling rather than be held by it: the calm pleasant feeling can undo the old afflictive feelings. It's rather like a massage in the mind. A pleasant bodily state is reached.

But to arrive at this, we need to stay attentive: right through the quietening down of each breath and the pauses between one exhalation and an inhalation. What does the mind do there? Notice in the fading and the spaces in the breathing, how the mind often just jumps off into something else. We can react by tensing up in the effort to hold the breath, but it's better to simply let go of the tension and re-establish attention on the breathing sensation in the present. Actually in this training we are not trying to hold the breath, because there is no breath. There is *breathing*, which is an experience of continually changing sensations. How can we hold something that changes so much: now fading, now like empty space? So we don't hold it as a fixed thing. Instead, if we learn to sustain receptivity and exploration, the factors of mindfulness, investigation and energy start to blossom.

We train ourselves to be with a full inhalation and a full exhalation, rather than just in snatches. Consider that as a rhythm for living. One can start something, get the idea for it and then see it all the way through, rather than start off with the inspiration, then get fed up half way through and chuck it in. So the process of attention on breathing is the situation for holding and perseverance: in terms of attitude and focus. If

one learns to stay right through something, to do things in a complete way, then energy and inspiration are balanced with mindfulness and equanimity.

With the exploring aspect of *vicāra*, one can also be mindful of the quality of effort and its result: 'How is the mind being affected—does it feel tight or loose; what are the energies like?' The pattern of cause and effect becomes apparent.

In establishing a balanced awareness of breath, we extend attention over the span of a complete inhalation and an exhalation, from the sensations in the lower abdomen to those in the upper chest. Let it extend as far as possible—there are subtle effects that can be discerned even in the arms and legs. This is breathing in and out 'long.' Then as the breath calms and becomes gentler, its span shortens, and there is breathing in and out 'short.' The mental mood will become more tranquil, and we realize a sense of peacefulness and effortlessness: the mind begins to shake off its impulsiveness and the body is supported through breathing. With mindfulness of the breathing body there is no need to force the body upright; the breath holds it and balances it, and the mind realizes it can let the body be.

A mind that is relaxed but attentive in this way allows the flow of subtle body energy, and the mental and bodily energies begin to blend and merge. There is a buoyancy, a non-positional quality—the mind feels 'with' the body. This is the essence of *kāya-viveka*. The mind's relationship with the body may have been one of 'me' and 'it,' but when there is *viveka* in terms of bodily life this sense of 'me and it' in terms of body disappears.

Kāya-viveka bears fruit as bodily ease: we can feel uplifted by the experience of one breath moving through the body. If we are collected, if we are nourished in this way, then there are things that we simply don't need any more. We don't

need to take drink or drugs because we feel fine in ourselves. So the precepts become a natural expression of *kāya-viveka*. Also, we don't need to be doing lots of things because there is a contentment within the body's sphere. We become content with simple things. Walking has a kind of beauty to it as does standing, sitting, lying down, stretching, or doing whatever else one does with a body. There is the increased capacity to appreciate nature, or just to sit quietly. There is contentment in being with this bodily life.

As this process of *ānāpānasati* gets underway, we don't have to put so much directive effort into it; we don't have to think. There's no need to keep priming the mind because it is naturally more interested. However, as the directed effort of the meditation relaxes a little, the attention may feel too loose. The breath will have calmed down and although it is full, it becomes more subtle. At that juncture, turning towards one point increases the clarity and stability. Which point? You may find a point in the nostrils, the chest or the abdomen: but what I recommend is to focus on the perception of the body that is based upon energy and sensation rather than anatomy. When the breathing has calmed and the mind gathered into breathing 'short,' the sensed perception of the breathing body is one of suffusion flow, rather than a fixed lump. We can feel how the breath conditions and calms the body; and as it refreshes and relaxes the body, the mind is attracted to that brighter perception. This 'breath-body' (*kāyasāṅkhāra*) is more subtle and sensitive than the 'flesh body,' the experienced boundaries of the body are softer. Attending to the 'breath-body' will bring both energy and calm to the mind. So it's important to let go of the anatomical perception when the mind no longer needs it and becomes more settled and malleable. Then attention doesn't have to following the movement of a breath through the flesh body; it can stay one-pointed on

the arising of the breath-sensation in awareness in the present moment.

In this stage, keep going into the perception of breathing. This may be of something light or flowing, something that is not corporeal. There is a certain resistance to that, because of attachment to the old sense of the body, which allows for emotional and psychological commentary. One may feel uncertain and waver. That emotional wavering can be stabilised by bringing attention to the subtle energy flow within the breathing. This is experienced as a kind of tingling that arises as you feel the breath-body distending and contracting, arising with but separate from the normal physical sensation of breathing. When attended to, this absorbs the tendency to waver or get excited. Then the mind can be allowed to go into that suffusion and, through extending it throughout the entire field of awareness that is settled in the body, calm the breath-body. Things become very pleasant.

The subsequent stage in *ānāpānasati* works with mental feelings. Some meditators find that the mind gets very blissful and bubbly, and their attention goes into that pleasant feeling. Having this fine feeling is helpful as it counteracts the pull of sense-desire, and allays any negative states. The mind becomes bright. This is helpful when it allows us to get closer to the aware core of the mind (*citta*)³.

The *citta* is conditioned — affected, attracted, repelled — by feeling and perception. So the cultivation of pleasant bodily feeling through the practice of *ānāpānasati* attracts the *citta*. This attraction, together with the feelings, gives rise to well-being in terms of joy or rapture (*pīti*), and ease (*sukha*). Rapture, although

³“Here and throughout, I tend to use ‘mind’ in referring to the general sphere that we call ‘mental’ — i.e. including perceptions, emotions, and thoughts — and ‘*citta*’ (pronounced ‘chitta’) when I am referring to the reflective ‘knowing’ awareness.”

it is a state of well-being, is more excited; the factor of ease is enhanced by contemplating the slightly disturbing surging and waving nature of rapture. If this is experienced, the awareness will tend to go to the cooler and steadier feeling.

Mental feelings give rise to a particular perception or mood or state of consciousness. Sometimes there is the perception of being very light, or spacious, or very small and contracted. People may see refined images of light in their mind's eye. These can be steadied through calming the attracted 'pull' of the *citta*, until it lets the perceptions and feelings associated with the breath change and pass. When the mind doesn't follow feelings, the mood becomes dispassionate and equanimous. Experience can be contemplated as ephemeral—that insight brings around a cooling of the mind's activity. The *citta* more fully attunes to the 'knowing.'

As absorption deepens, the strongest forms of the hindrances—sense desire, wavering and aversion—die down because they are only really irritations, based on feeling. Their chief support is mental proliferation—psychological or emotional hunger. Why does the mind fantasize about something we want? It's because even creating a mental image of something desirable creates a pleasant mental feeling. Or, we could feel angry and irritable about something that happened ten years ago and still get energy out of that. In such cases, we are not really dealing with external objects; the mind is hungry for perceptions and feelings. Everything that comes to us comes through the medium of the mind's perceptions and feelings; this is why we have to learn to handle them: how to cultivate the skilful ones and put aside the unskilful ones.

Even within the meditation, hindrances can attack: say the mind gets calm or rapturous and the intention (*cetanā*) 'pulls'—the *citta* gets greedy for more. Or there is perhaps a tension caused by holding the feeling or the state. This

eventually leads to irritation or dullness. So, in itself, feeling doesn't lead to peace, and the joyfulness and ease that can arise through focussing and calming the mind is called a lesser, not a complete, deliverance. In terms of feeling, we are just moving into a particular corner of its realm: what really counts is whether one has developed mindfulness, investigation and the rest. The 'pull' of the *citta* has to be tamed.

Because of the power of this pull, many teachers recommend that we add complimentary meditations to check and balance perception and feeling. Then we can learn about perception and feeling. What is used depends on the hindrance. The mind that is greedy lacks discrimination, it tends to blur. For example, when there is powerful sense-desire it loses the ability to be discerning. We can just wolf down food, shovelling it in without really recognising when we have had enough, or even being able to know that. The mind can be ablaze with a particular sense experience, and unable to reflect. Such a mind can give rise to a very pleasant but unbeneficial feeling, for a while. It needs to be counteracted with an unpleasant but beneficial feeling—such as that which arises when we consider the state that food gets into within minutes of entering our bodies. So meditation on unattractive perceptions associated with food and bodies is a useful accessory to other practices.

A mind that is negative tends to be highly discerning to the point of being very critical and having a low tolerance. Things have to be exactly like this, and not like that; we want this but not that. We can get very irritable—because things don't always work within the particular definitions that the critical mind brings up. With this mind, we have to be with things that are more flowing and light, loving and formless; these bring up pleasant and beneficial feelings. We can experience the pleasantness of activity, of feeling we are doing what

is worthy and suitable. If we reflect upon being in good company, with people we can trust, those perceptions also give rise to a pleasant mental feeling. If we cultivate and meditate on loving-kindness, the heart will grow bright. These are feelings that should be encouraged because they support the practice, they don't detract from it.

In daily life, notice the particular moods that physical and mental feelings give rise to about yourself; the ideas that they bring up; and how the mind is conditioned by feeling or by its reactions to feelings. When we feel tired, that gets translated into negative attitudes, doesn't it? That particular quality of feeling may create a mental perception of being oppressed, having to put up with something, and then a reaction to that. So the mind creates negative thoughts. If we are wet and cold and tired and hungry, the mood can easily arise, 'I'm fed-up with this. I hate this. I'm oppressed!' Then we start to project all kinds of negative thoughts, and then fight with them. Feeling has created a world for us.

So in practice we learn to let our emotions come and go—not to push them away or reject them, but to recognize that we feel strongly about this, or fed-up with that, and to observe; to notice how all this is conditioned. Proper action will naturally come from that discernment.

The aim of living in the Dhamma is to watch what the stuff of life does. Once we've really seen into it, we no longer take issue with the events. Instead, we learn how an idea or a feeling gets translated into an internal activity where it churns over in the mind—how a world, and a self, and a reality get created out of a notion. But this is the *citta* being conditioned, and we can change that conditioning. We can calm it with perceptions that calm. We can brighten it, soothe it, and stabilize it, but that's as far as it goes in that calming (*samatha*) sense of the practice.

Then there is the cultivation of deeper wisdom in meditation. This practice is one of always 'onlooking' (*vipassanā*) into the conditioning that supports processes, asking what they are. By onlooking we begin to realize how feelings and perceptions trap us when we let them create ideas about ourself.

We can recognize: there is the feeling; there is the movement towards it. In monastic life, we can do this with alms food in the bowl. We try to see the food as a meditation sign: 'that's beans, that's rice, that's fruit.' When the mind registers it in that way we think 'Oh, that's nice!' With the feeling and perception of hunger, the perception of food in the mind creates mental excitement, anticipation of pleasure, and a strong pull towards that expected pleasure. The aim of renunciation is to help us to see how perceptions and feeling arise and condition impulses. In a monastery, if someone says, 'We'll have some ice-cream today,' some people would get a kind of high. However, if you went down to the Stock Exchange and said, 'We'll have some ice-cream today,' it wouldn't mean anything. But if you were to say, 'Shares in an ice-cream company have risen by ten percent,' people would be excited in a stock exchange—but disinterested in a monastery! The significant difference is that in a monastery, you would learn *citta-viveka* and progressively step back from the impulse to grasp the pleasant perception and feeling. *Citta-viveka* is even more easeful and uplifting than *kāya-viveka*. The mind can stand up for itself, and is content with itself.

So we transcend feeling not by cutting it out but by acknowledging, and working with it until we know it as ephemeral. As in daily life, so with the breath. Pleasant or unpleasant feeling doesn't have to give rise to the activity of excitement or the sense of being oppressed when it is just seen as a feeling. The *citta* becomes independent from the feeling. It doesn't create a 'world' out of perception and feeling. This is

citta-viveka. The mind is radiant, not worried about the future or dreading the past, or hung up about things. We can live in any old place; any food is all right; we can wear any old cloth; whatever, we feel good.

In the third stage of *ānāpānasati* we have the opportunity to fully know the mind; to arouse it, gladden it and to focus on it so that there is the freeing of the mind from its psychology. This is something that is not easily done, but it can be done through the practice of meditation and through the self-discipline that the Buddha taught. These two conjoined highlight attachments that flare up as hindrances when we don't follow them. All kinds of crazy moods and powerful emotions may come battling through the mind. They are too strong to be dispelled by reason or good intentions alone. This is why we are encouraged to develop *viveka* in terms of the actual energies of body, feeling and mind. *Ānāpānasati* gives us a pragmatic hold on 'letting go.'

In contemplating *citta*—this 'knowing'—it is useful to consider the way in which the Buddha expressed it. His instruction was to contemplate the *citta* with greed, as the *citta* affected by greed; and the *citta* with fear as the *citta* affected by fear. This particular expression is a clue, indicating that what we take the mind to be is not really the true mind—that the mind is not actually fear, or fascination or aversion; it is not its psychological habits. It's not any of these but it is habitually conjoined with them, and this conjoining can be relaxed. Just as we can experience bodily contentment by liberating the body from the moods and perceptions of the mind, we can also liberate the mind from our normal, 'held' way of experiencing it, where it is the frantic 'doer,' or the opinionated 'watcher,' or the self-important 'meditator.'

'I feel sad,' 'I feel fed-up'—but what is the 'I?' The aim of *ānāpānasati* is to use a calm and penetrating focus to know

the mind. We say, 'I feel fed-up,' but a contemplative will also attend, not to 'Why I feel fed up,' but 'What is it that is fed up?' What does that rest upon? It rests upon a perception, or a memory, or a notion doesn't it? The notion is not really the mind; the mind can witness a memory; and a perception changes. We return to the 'knowingness' of mind. Hence, in *ānāpānasati*, train to discern the 'knowing' of the breathing.

This state of reflectiveness is subtle, but it's easy to fake it philosophically. 'It's just a feeling—just a thought.' 'It's just the way the world is.' We can get into a state of stoicism, indifference or mild contempt. In fact this state still takes a position—one allied to estrangement or dissociation. The *citta* is conjoined with its own position and its own importance. It has a sense of being something: 'I am not the feeling, I am not the thought, I am other than that, I am watching this going on.' So it is important to really check this out in the experience of *ānāpānasati*. There will not be that fullness of mind with this attitude; and one can recognize the awareness resisting rather than relinquishing feelings.

If there is adequate mindfulness and *samādhi* it then becomes possible to inflect in terms of gladdening and steadying the knowing. This happens in an intuitive and even devotional way. Within the context of breathing, you feel out how the mind is, whether it's stressful, agitated, or wavering, and incline towards the knowing of the experience. The 'intent' of the *citta* uplifts. Then as awareness is furthered, it holds on to the purpose of the practice, and contemplates the mental realm. This gives rise to wisdom: understanding the ephemeral nature of experience and the stopping of instinctive drives.

This is expressed in the fourth stage of *ānāpānasati*: contemplating impermanence, contemplating dispassion, contemplating cessation, contemplating abandonment. Impermanence (*anicca*) refers to the ephemeral, relative nature of things.

Things neither exist nor don't exist, they have a virtual existence: relative, not absolutely so, uncertain. If you say 'I'm a man,' that's obviously *anicca* as I have been a boy, and then a youth and then a man. It is also *anicca* in that it is only relative. It only pertains to certain particular traits and characteristics when they are compared to the female. And men also have other, non-gender, features: the breath is not male breath, happiness is not male happiness, warmth is not male warmth. So the experience of *anicca* is not positional. All we can say is that whatever arises, whatever the mind is concerned with being, it is not absolutely so. We can't say that we're a part of things neither can we say that we're independent from things, nor a combination of both; but we can know that when things have a relative existence, they don't arouse conviction and passion anymore.

We can contemplate everything in this way: our body, our breath, our opinions, our happiness; so then happiness is not happiness but it's not unhappiness, it's relatively so. If we don't see happiness as relative then we always swing between happiness and unhappiness; but when we see it is only relative, it doesn't intoxicate us any more. We can feel contented and happy with ourselves and we can recognize the extreme pain and anguish that people go through. We can see the happiness of feeling that we are achieving something and yet see the enormous things that are not achieved and the failures and unhappinesses of life. It is like that.

We can see that the mind is free in some respects, but as long as there is attachment to that freedom, it is not free. Even freedom in terms of the absence of hindrances is a relative statement: as long as one holds a state, there is attachment and the hindrances return. So there comes a dispassion or coolness in making any statement about the mind at all. 'Are you enlightened?' 'Are you not enlightened?' To answer these in terms of self falls short of the Truth.

And because of that, consciousness—the discriminative, defining process—turns back. It comes to a stand-still, it doesn't create a self. No particular image, not a perception, not even a mood of wondering what we are arises in the mind. That way of referring to things ceases and there is the quality of abandonment, of letting-go into the moment.

This is the essence of *upadhi-viveka*: the detachment from rebirth, the discernment, the clear understanding of what birth is about—what taking up a position or making any personal statement or even personal impression is about. And whenever we realize that, we can stop holding experience; the data drop away into silence.

The whole training of our life is learning to listen, to feel things out, to begin to question our assumptions, our self-positions, our 'me' and 'thems,' our designations of what we are as individuals, the hardness of our relationships with one another, our sense of indifference to the world of creatures and our obsessions in relation to the world of materials. We are in a process of changing our relationship to one that is in true alignment. 'What is suitable now?' 'What is the right way now, with this person, at this time?' and so on. That's the essence of the training, so that the *citta* can be found, released and activated in terms of wisdom.

In Zen, the ox-herding images are emblematic of the Path. The person is searching for the ox, and sees its tracks. He is like a person looking for the mind, trying to realize an enlightened mind. He searches for the ox, finds it, and struggles with it. He traps it, tames it, and rides away serenely on it. This is like the person who finds *kāya-viveka*, the sense of buoyancy. And then the purification of the mind: the ox becomes docile and the rider lets the ox free. The mind is free and light. And then there is a picture which is just an empty space, like a circle with nothing in it. No ox, no rider: liberation

from mind. The final picture is called going back to the market place with helping hands—it depicts a simple-looking man with a big beam on his face wandering into the market place to do whatever needs to be done.

Abandonment and compassion have met. This, as I understand it, is the main thread of the Buddha's teaching.

«»

ASSOCIATION WITH THE LOVELY

“And how does a bhikkhu who is an associate with the lovely develop and pursue the Noble Eightfold Path? In such an instance, he develops Right View, Right Thought, Right Speech, Right Action, Right Livelihood, Right Effort, Right Mindfulness and Right Concentration dependent on detachment, on dispassion and cessation, and ripening in relinquishment.”

Samyutta Nikāya 45, 2



ASSOCIATION WITH THE LOVELY

The second month of the retreat is coming to an end, so wherever one is in one's practice after months or years, it's important to recognize that there are fruits, and these fruits have to be properly acknowledged, understood, and reintegrated. Even the small fruits have to be consciously recognized, because one tends to always think of the big picture—of the end of all problems and flawless *samādhi* or *nibbāna*—and doesn't recognize the fact that one is a little more patient than one was ten years ago, or something of that nature. And if we don't acknowledge the tangible, specific results of practice, then we lose touch with the uplifting consequences of Dhamma practice, and are liable to lose heart.

The Dhamma is referred to as that which is 'lovely (*kalyāṇa*) in the beginning, lovely in the middle and lovely in the end.' *Kalyāṇa* means 'that which is uplifting, nourishing, strengthening,' 'that which causes delight to the heart.' It is a spiritual rather than a sensory quality.

In this context it refers first to the factors of inspiration (*saddhā*) and interest (*chanda*), particularly when they ripen into an interest to practise the teachings. One aspires, one is interested: thus there is this lovely quality in the beginning. In 'the middle' are the factors of persisting, of establishing mindfulness, of repeatedly working against the hindrances. And 'in the end' are the results—of purity, of clarity, of freedom, even when these do not amount to a complete liberation; that is, one is at least liberated from unscrupulousness or from acting on malicious intent. In all these instances, uplift and steadiness arise in the heart. There is a scripture, a *sutta*⁴, associated

⁴ Saṃyutta Nikāya 45, 2 (as above)

particularly with the word *kalyāṇa*. It involves Venerable Ānanda, the Buddha's cousin and associate. He was not, at this time, completely enlightened but was willing and totally committed to the Dhamma. One day, feeling inspired by his fellow disciples, he commented to the Buddha, '*kalyāṇamitta* (by which he meant lovely associates, i.e. good companions) must be what half of the practice is about.' He was commenting on the value of having inspiring companions. The Buddha said, 'No, don't say that Ānanda, it's not half: *kalyāṇamitta* is the whole of the Holy Life.' Often people leave it there, thinking, 'Oh, this means the Buddha agreed that to have good friends in the Holy Life is what it's all about.' This is unlikely, especially in Ānanda's case: the Buddha occasionally rebuked him for his fondness of company. So it's unlikely that the Buddha would be endorsing Ānanda's view—he wasn't fully enlightened at the time. Then the Buddha goes on to say that *kalyāṇamitta* comprises cultivating the Eightfold Path—dependent on detachment, dispassion, cessation and complete relinquishment. This demonstrates the Buddha's word-play: *kalyāṇamitta* means 'lovely associate,' and although Ānanda was referring to people, the Buddha was referring to aspects of the Path; lovely factors that one should always be associating with.

These words indicate an ongoing process in cultivating the Eightfold Path, and that it has a continually gladdening aspect. Something inspires so you draw close, you're interested—this is the first sign of the lovely. Then you get involved; also a lovely quality. You practise; and even struggle with yourself, not from a negative position but because you really want to pull out of dullness and delusion. So this energy is also beautiful. And as much as anyone else can inspire, advise or encourage, once you're involved, you have to find the *kalyāṇamitta* in yourself. You have to develop the moral qualities and conscientiousness in yourself. An external

kalyāṇamitta can remind you of that spiritual friend in yourself, by helping you attune to your own core values. The spiritual friend reminds you of things you know and hold dear in your own heart.

This is what the Sangha Refuge is about; it is the company of the accomplished disciples. Of course there may be lay people who fulfil this function for you; but the Samaṇa (monastic) Sangha serves as an emblem of accomplishment by enacting and typifying particular qualities of morality, commitment and renunciation. It is beautiful to recollect what an enlightened being typifies in terms of conduct and to relate to people who are trying to live in that way. The presence of a monk or nun can help one to recollect how the loveliness of the spirit manifests; and to see such qualities in your own heart.

This is something we should remember, particularly in a retreat situation when we aren't talking or engaging very much. To keep witnessing and remembering each other as meditators, as people who keep the moral precepts, helps to purify the perceptions we may have of each other. Attune your mind to that rather than keep thinking 'Well, you know, she's always sleepy,' or 'Someone like him is not going to get very far, is he.' Recognize 'that's someone who keeps the Precepts, and that's what I do.' That's much more useful; that way your own quality of virtue is amplified and uplifted. So it helps you to regain and establish and steady the confidence in yourself, especially when your meditation isn't going so well.

And just as we may be helped by focussing on the exemplary qualities in another, it's also important to reflect that our own practice may and should present the *kalyāṇadhamma* to others. Try to live out the uplifting; it helps to support others, and having that inclination to be a support for others gives one's own heart an added sense of purpose. In a group or a community instead of forming personality bonds or cliques,

or competing and showing off, we can catalyse, enhance and dwell in what is beautiful in each other. Then this loveliness has a holistic quality and it's not about personalities; it's a mind-stream that we enter into.

The particular terms that the Buddha used may sound strange: how can cessation or relinquishment be lovely? But this particular sequence—detachment, dispassion, cessation and relinquishment—is applied many times to the enlightenment factors to describe the maturation of the practice: 'dependent on detachment, dependent on dispassion, dependent on cessation and ripening or maturing into complete relinquishment.' The mood is of a flowering or blossoming through associating with these.

It begins with 'detachment' or *viveka* in Pāli. In the Buddha's Way, meditation practices are prefaced by *viveka*, which is the standing back from unskillfulness. It is a withdrawal from counter-productive energies and aims. It allows you to get in touch with your values and see things in perspective. Then, without pretending that there is no potential for evil, you don't get overwhelmed by it either. In many ways, formal meditation provides exercises in developing that particular perspective and ability to shift and stabilise attention so that you can see mind stuff, body stuff, memories and so on, in perspective. Then you no longer 'are' them, they're something you can now witness and work with. It means you get some way of deciding what you want to act on, what you don't; you get some sense of judging what's worthy of you and what's not. So when you focus on a particular meditation object like a sensation in your body, a word or the breath, then that quality of *viveka* makes it possible to get a reference point, to establish a steady watchfulness.

Then that point has to be repeatedly established and sustained. This has to be done through energy; it doesn't just

happen, it has to be energetically brought around. And the application to that has to be uplifting because you can't get the energy through aversion to things or not wanting things. So you need to gladden that application by making it lovely and acknowledging it as such. This refers both to the meditation object and then to the effort to release oneself from the influence of any hindrances that may arise and make you feel dejected and bad-hearted. To associate with the aspiration to overcome hindrances, rather than to identify with the hindrances: this is *kalyāṇamitta*.

When you use a meditation object as a way of establishing that steady perspective, you can begin to see that things change. Things arise and pass: you see through the window of impermanence (*anicca*). One of the fruits of that perspective is that you begin to see points in that flux of mind where there is a moment of emptiness when something stops; when a mind-flow stops or mental activity stops, you see the ending of something. If you're following the breath you are able to follow the ending of the breath and notice the pause at the end of the breath. There's a certain lightness about an experience of impermanence; the mind is flowing and it opens into a realm that people ordinarily wouldn't have any language for. That flow and the letting-go into it isn't present when life is experienced as continual activity, wall-to-wall noise or endless thinking. So this is a fruition that comes dependent on *viveka*.

There is a further fruition, which is dependent on dispassion—*virāga*. The language that is commonly used to describe meditation refers to 'watching things:' it uses a visual metaphor. But if this notion is not qualified, it may lead to a separatist position, 'things are there and I'm here'—which makes the relationship with phenomena very stale. You may lose the direct responsiveness and sensitivity that is necessary for further cultivation. Behind that position of watching, the

watcher may contain residual stuff such as hesitancy, fear and doubt, or lethargy. And if you have strong concentration then what can come up is a sense of conceit, 'I have done this, I am this, I am watching.' That sense of being stabilised then acts as the breeding ground for a certain abstractedness, a lack of vitality or specific response to things.

A certain amount of the psychological stuff that goes on in people is about wanting to not exist. We have a life instinct, we have a death instinct. The life instinct is the thing that wants to go out and enjoy, it's expansive. The death instinct wants to contract, fade out, stop everything. This is *bhava* and *vibhava* in Buddhism. *Bhava* is the inclination to grow, and extend in time into happier states; *vibhava* inclines to getting away. We have to channel and purify these energies through Dhamma practice until they are redundant. If the *bhava* instinct is not properly cultivated, we don't have a direction, we lack aspiration. Also as *bhava* will still be operative anyway, if we don't use it, it will go into immature goals—towards greed and selfishness. The *vibhava* instinct which can lead us on to relinquishing what is unnecessary or unskilful, if not cultivated properly will go into sourness of mind, or ideas about 'killing the ego.'

Many people who become monks and nuns have a good amount of death in them, because renunciation can attract that 'get away from it all' instinct. Words like 'cessation, extinction' really appeal to the 'drop dead, get out of it' attitude of mind; you don't become a monk or nun because you wish to fulfill yourself with erotic delight. But this factor of delight, the erotic instinct, has to be acknowledged, directed into the practice and purified of clinging.

It's the difference between desire as craving (*taṇhā*) and desire as a willingness to do (*chanda*). The *bhava* instinct gets caught up with craving and attachment, or the search for status and achievement. However, if we can purify the *chanda*, that

willingness goes into appreciation and enjoyment: such as the contentment, uplift or happiness associated with good deeds or meditative skill. These are the Dhamma channels whereby association with the lovely diverts enjoyment energy into the Eightfold Path. I would say it is impossible to be able to sustain the Holy Life, or deepen Dhamma practice, if one is not able to make that connection, if you're just into 'getting away from it all.' The *vibhava* attitude perceives the dominance of defilements and attachment, and getting away from 'the world;' so it starts as heroic and renunciate then it just gets downright mean-hearted.

Now when there is detachment, you can begin to bring the subject into the picture. Instead of only watching things, you also investigate: 'Who is watching?' Just to be able to check how one is witnessing, what kind of energy is there. Are you witnessing things in a casual way? Are you witnessing things like a rabbit does a snake, hypnotised? Is the meditator, the subject, very intense, highly critical, restless, inadequate? In other words, begin to touch into things that may not even be that obvious when you were not able to focus on an object very well. You may not even really be that clearly aware of the subject. But the sense of the subject is centred around volition or intention (*cetanā*); objects are based on attention (*manasikāra*) which is the action of consciousness in focussing and forming an object.

'Intention'—or 'intent'—here doesn't quite carry the meaning of the word in everyday language when it is applied to more deliberate acts of thought; in the context of Dhamma it means something much more primary—a basic volitional urge, movement, whether it's weak, agitated, demanding, threatening, loving, skilful or unskilful. It is *cetanā*, the urge to do. And so when that begins to be acknowledged, then that very light of acknowledgement clears away some of the blind-

ness from intention. With introspection you realize you are tensed up, or that you were only half there, or you are meditating or doing something out of a sense of duty—you are not really with it. Getting in touch can help to tune you up again: it brings around an authenticity and gives you the opportunity to associate with that. It may enable you to see that you need to use a different meditation theme. It both cools down that which is over-intense or demanding and it lifts that which is flaccid or weak. This balancing of intention is *virāga*, dispassion. It gives you a fuller picture.

And so as a process, meditation includes the balancing of intention and attention. If the primary action of *viveka* finds a position from which you can see things in perspective, when it ripens into *virāga* it assists finer balance, and leads to a subtler, more holistic experience.

Dispassion evens out an unbalanced intensity. So the intensity of one's drive, the fascination or the disgust, start to get lightened. The coarsest forms of desire/aversion begin to fade out. As desire always associates vitality with the presence or absence of a particular object, when that is relinquished then that energy, that vitality, is left free and the experience is of a suffusion. Instead of the experience of an object in a separate field, there is a suffusion through the whole field of mind-consciousness. This is blissful. So the fulfilment of dispassion is not a cold, bleached-out feeling, it's an experience of bliss and ease. Although passion can seem very powerful—as bright or dark and with a lot of movement—it's actually shallow because it always has to depend upon some particular thought, feeling, or sense object. And these objects are of the nature to change. Dispassion is much more profound because it does not depend upon any particular object, but on the practice of non-attachment. It's rather like the difference between the waves and the ocean. The ocean is the dispassion which

has the depth to it, the waves just splash around on the surface. Admittedly waves can be overwhelming, and one does have to develop the practice of *viveka* to the point where one can experience moods, feelings, thoughts, and sense objects as changing. Then the fruition of this is dispassion.

Most of us need to work around cultivating *viveka* and *virāga*, internally and externally in our meditation, in what we do, what we aim for, how we remember things, how we form opinions of others and so on. Be very specific with it. These are not ethereal spaced-out states, they entail the activity of acknowledging an attachment, and then, having got it in perspective, not creating habitual psychological or emotional patterns around it. Those habitual intentions and attentions that we call 'myself' get released. Rather than 'I've got to be someone who doesn't have this feeling' or 'I want more of that feeling' or 'This feeling is me or mine' or something like that, these can be gradually relinquished. In this way the sign of non-self (*anattā*) becomes established.

Rather than feel helpless because all our problems seem to be due to things out there, we can recognize that anxiety, distaste, and so on are our unreleased stuff. We can bring the reflection: 'There's nothing else here but me,' into the mind. This means we stop transferring the vitality and responsibility of our lives to other people and external situations. Whatever's happening—'it's here where the liking and the disliking is.' It doesn't mean nobody else counts, it means that I'm trying to work immediately with what I'm putting forth no matter what everybody else seems to be doing. It means acknowledging how I am interpreting a situation. My interpretations, my projections, my responses, are happening here. So who is here? The 'I' that is here is just a changing conglomerate of forces and energies. There's a physical form which is experienced moment after moment in consciousness, there are thoughts and impres-

sions which also occur momentarily, there are moods and instincts, there are drives and urges. So I'm not here either. I'm not here and there is nobody else here either: there's an awareness of these particular kammic energies and forces.

We can also take this investigation into the inner sphere. Now say you are meditating, and on the edge of what you assume this meditation is about there is a nattering circle of onlookers. There are these things in the background going 'blah, blah, nah, nah.' They don't always get words out, they often take the form of disparaging (or occasionally congratulatory) moods. Occasionally they've got faces—father, partner etc.—you have a ghostly audience. So you bring them in. There is a resistance to acknowledging that the 'over the border' stuff is of fringe perceptions and feelings that form a commentary on your central activity. There's something in you that doesn't want to be with that, so you keep pushing it away and saying, 'it's him or her,' 'it happened all those years ago,' 'it's not relevant to the meditation' and 'snap out of it.' Around that border there's all kinds of shame and not wanting to go into it. Now when we can open up and say 'OK come in;' that's powerful. We have abandoned a border that was part of our identity. Not having that position any more, we have to start some dialogue going. This is where we begin to resolve backlogs of *vipāka*, of old inherited stuff. Fear and worry have got locked up and become people on the edge of our mind. Sometimes they're just nebulous perceptions, forces called 'them' or 'it.' And you carry them around and they say 'It must be done' and 'They want you to do this' and 'They would never understand,' whoever these 'its' and 'theys' are. Who are they?

This inquiry only becomes possible when one has developed contemplative skills because if you don't have enough steadiness to sustain attention, the whole field breaks up into a riot. So just to be able to do this is a sign of some kind of frui-

tion. To be able to receive with equal heart the things that I call 'me' and things that I call 'not me:' this is dispassion. And the result of it is a kind of wholeness. When all the inner divisions begin to be dissipated then there is an experience of completion and wholeness. The complaining mind, the muttering mind, the raging mind, the weeping mind—bring them in with generous hands. This is where you regain your vitality. As long as you're divided inwardly by shame or by fear or by dismissiveness then your energy gets blocked.

In the case when the mind is less afflicted with *vipāka*, wholeness happens through balancing the perceptions and feelings that arise within the meditation object. So with *ānāpānasati* for example—when calm deepens, you may experience the breath as a perception of light or softness; then by inclining to the knowing, the *citta*, you can balance its energies, and its relationship with the breath-impression. It can be gladdened and steadied. When you do that, the meditation object suffuses the mind. This is an example of the experience of wholeness. You have a unified mind which is blissful and dispassionate.

In terms of the Buddha's teachings this is not a complete end in itself. Wholeness is, of course, a valuable and beautiful experience. But it acts as the ground for the arising of consciousness and identification in that particular mode: a birth in the pure abiding. But there is a further beyond that, which is when the process moves into cessation, when that experience of wholeness is established and there is a stilling of activity around it.

Anything that's delightful or blissful brings with it the subtle suggestion 'I am this, I've got this, I'm here' and then the tendency to delve into it and to cleave to it, to delight in it. But when the mind is calm, any further activity to make more or know more is experienced as a disturbance. The Buddha's advice was that even equanimity is not something to attach to.

Cessation, *nirodha*, can be seen as the stopping of that tendency to hold a mind-state. Which doesn't mean not experiencing anything. Again it's about the quality of intent. As the mind purifies, then the very vehicle of intent feels like a disturbance, so 'stopping' refers to the fading out of the intent.

Relinquishment, *vossagga*, as the final aspect of that process, is an abandonment of the subject. This quality of self-relinquishment is good to bear in mind as a general theme, even though it bears its most profound fruit when associated in the sequence of *viveka*, *virāga* and *nirodha*. It applies to the whole of the practice in subtler ways. Self-relinquishment we can see as a kind of self-offering, a reminder that the idea of getting anything, being anywhere, getting in or getting out of anything is only a half-truth. In other words, relinquishment purifies the notion of attainment. Now this idea of attainment is useful at first, you need that kind of thing to keep going on. But then the problem with it is that as long as there remains that volitional drive to become something, even on a subtle level where the mind feels quite blissful, then there's a feeling of stress. So that kind of volition goes so far, and then it has to be relinquished. The underlying notion of being something has to be seen through.

If we have a delightful experience, the mind produces a particular pattern or mind-set as a synopsis, the mind's 'take' on things. This 'taking' is the process of clinging. What we feel ourselves to be based on that is the inference of becoming, the life-instinct, or *bhava*. Becoming is about stretching an experience through time. That is, maybe you get an experience of wholeness and then there's an inclination to hold onto that. Now this becoming process is so familiar to us that we don't ever question the presumption that there is such a thing as time that we stretch through. But really there's just a moment, and that moment doesn't stretch anywhere. So when there's

keen discernment there is the ability to sense consciousness itself as continually, momentarily, arising and ceasing. For example if you are practising *ānāpānasati*, the consciousness associated with the in-breath is different from the consciousness associated with the out-breath. If you sense it very closely then it's a whole process of flickering grains of consciousness or flickering ripples of consciousness. Time, like space, is an inference produced by the activity of consciousness. The becoming instinct builds these as realities.

So, that stretching in time is one of the primary expressions of 'I am,' 'I am a coherent continuing entity.' And conversely, there is the loss of time, time rushing past; or the weight of time moving too slowly. All connected to 'I am.'

So relinquishment deals with that piece of mythology. It begins with the capacity to understand the notion in theory and feel some interest in it. That's what association means. You can have association that's quite remote or association that's very intimate, but whether you see it directly, indirectly or vaguely, still relinquishment is something that, once you've heard it and you've met it, then your life is never the same again. Your practice can never be the same again; you can't use a 'here we go on a chariot to *nibbāna*' style. And the beauty of that is that you see that the heart of practice, on any level, is self-emptying. This is what *vossagga* means, it means this final emptying out. And it's a beautiful experience because then there is a kind of bliss, a delight which is freed. You can see that experience is actually empty or transparent; what you make it to be is dependent on how you paint it through often unacknowledged qualities of disturbance, aggravation, fear, need. What is something other than my opinion, my feeling, my reaction, my intent? What is something other than my shaping of it? In other words if all that were put down or diminished, what is a thing? When that's put down, it's not

that things don't exist, but they are ontologically transparent, and empty.

Now this may seem very refined but it points out that the continuum, this mind-stream of freedom, is potentially present in all things. The Buddha himself said that of all things—sensual form, subtle form and formlessness—of all things to feed on or cling to, formlessness is the best, but 'the Deathless is the mind's not clinging to anything'⁵. So any time, in any situation that we do not feed upon, or depend upon, or cling with either fascination or aversion, then in some degree we are associating with the Deathless. This is *kalyāṇamitta*, association with the lovely, the whole of the Holy Life.

If this Deathlessness is inherent in the proper apprehension of and non-clinging to all dhammas⁶, this grants us the confidence to apply non-clinging to the specifications of conventional existence. We can begin to bestow rather than to seize, and to get in touch with that mind-stream of the Dhamma which the Buddha expounded thousands of years ago. If we do this with confidence, then our lives are not wasted. We have stepped into the stream and we won't go out again. To associate with what is beautiful will always bear fruit.

«»

⁵ Majjhima Nikāya 106

⁶ As in *Āṅguttara Nikāya* 10, 58: '...headed by concentration, are all things; dominated by mindfulness, are all things; surmountable by wisdom, are all things; with deliverance as essence, are all things; merging in the Deathless, are all things; terminating in *nibbāna*, are all things.'

THE GATE OF RELATIVITY

“I have won through to the Way of Awakening, thus: with the stopping of name-and-form is the stopping of consciousness; with the stopping of consciousness is the stopping of name-and-form; with the stopping of name-and-form is the stopping of sense-fields; with the stopping of sense-fields is the stopping of sense-impression... of feeling, craving, attaching, becoming, birth, ageing and death, sorrow, lamentation, pain, grief and despair.”

Saṃyutta Nikāya 12, 65



THE GATE OF RELATIVITY

The more you enter into and fully give yourself to the experience of *anicca*—impermanence and relativity—the more you pass through the patterns that bind awareness. Bodily experience, the experience of feeling, the experience of mind-states—even the experience of holding on is an impermanent one. Every now and then the grip slips on things: even uncertainty or dread can't be held onto for ever, they start wearing out. Acknowledge this, because the mind continues to interpret things in terms of permanence; it doesn't notice the spaces and the pauses. For example, if you set a line of skittles up you'd recognize the skittles and form a pattern out of that line-up—but if you focussed on the gaps, your experience of the pattern would be radically affected. So with the moments of worry, pain, fear or stress—notice the spaces in-between, like the gaps between the skittles. It's not that they're invisible, they're detectable, but they're not manifest in the same way.

It is through the sign of impermanence that the mind inclines towards the non-manifest. The manifest is only a series of signs, markers like skittles, within the non-manifest. The non-manifest is far greater. As we attend to the passing of phenomena and to the spaces between thoughts and moods, we can discern that gap, that spaciousness at the heart of things. All conditions ebb into that and flow out of that. And, as the mind tends to take on the quality of what it attends to, the contemplation of impermanence makes the mind very spacious.

When one enters into this contemplation, the experience of pleasure and pain is felt in a more relative way. When you contemplate agreeable and disagreeable mental or physical feelings, you notice that any diminution in what is agreeable

is felt as disagreeable—the unpleasantness is related to the retained impression of the pleasant. Similarly, any diminution in the disagreeable is felt as pleasant. Say one has a headache, or an itch—the moment when that wanes or disappears is such a relief. But if one hadn't been suffering, a similar normative state would have been experienced as neutral, tedious—or not noticed. Or if one was returning to that normative state after a pleasant experience of warmth and relaxation, it would be experienced as less pleasant than.... And so on. Feeling is never permanent or substantial—it arises dependent on relating to another impression, and it cannot be sustained in any sense object. One gets used to what was initially a delightful flavour, and that object ceases to delight; and one can acclimatise to discomfort. Although this may sound bleak if one depends on feelings for well-being, actually if we can realize and enter into the impermanence of feelings, it makes things freer and lighter. Whatever comes up won't be an issue, one can be flexible, there's no need to tighten up and manipulate. That freedom itself is a more useful and far-reaching source of well-being.

As well as feeling, there are the perceptions, the 'meanings' conjoined with them. These also affect us powerfully. We form perceptions based on eye contact, and upon mental activities, but what are things actually? If you've been brought up on Yogi Bear, Koala bears and Pooh Bear, then bears are lovely fluffy creatures that eat honey, but if you're with a wild bear then it's a very different animal. These things are relative. Now, if you direct this realization towards the perception of yourself—what then?

There are different ways through which self is experienced, and they are all relative. There is the localised coming together of particular factors at this point in time, 'I am this state:' the flow is localised to the point 'I am,' which thereby becomes a substantial entity. Let's call this 'I.' 'I feel happy.'

'I am' is also experienced as non-localised, some vaguely defined psycho-physical awareness that persists through time, came from somewhere and is going somewhere else; a field rather than a point. Just for the sake of clarity, call this 'myself.' So 'I am' has a local, specific, but momentary dimension of 'I', and a general, non-specific, temporal dimension, 'myself.' Trying to bring them together, or, to ignore one and concentrate on the other, is quite a strain. Can you remember the stress that occurs when 'I don't quite feel myself today?'

They don't even add up in themselves: the sense of being a solid, specific thing right now is really dependent on the field of changing processes that are happening to it. For example what one experiences one's self as being is different in a group from when one is alone. We attempt to establish an identity around favoured contexts such as friendships or situations in which we perform well. 'I' attempt to establish 'myself' in terms of localised activities and structures. Maybe one is very good at doing a particular thing, and experiences oneself in that light. But in terms of other activities, perhaps that same light can't shine. That same self isn't there. It was dependent on a particular set of 'I' activities and a context. So the sense of a locatable, independent and substantial self doesn't remain the same. It is relative.

The sense of being some field of experience that does persist is vaguely defined and uncertain. We may imagine we could separate 'myself' from 'I' and activities. However the field is quite alive with activities, which, even if they are familiar, are unpredictable. Then again the boundaries shift: I seem to be an entity defined sometimes by bodily sensations and sometimes by moods, and sometimes by an awareness of these. The most reliable definition is that I am a series of processes that change through time. This hardly makes for much of an identity: so why am 'I' so obstinately present and active?

When we attune to *anicca*, we begin to penetrate the illusion of time. Time occurs through relating to impressions that are imagined as outside the present. It's a building up of a pattern of past, present and future—of linear progression—an activity that is always present. And the cause of that activity is the requirement to establish a sense of a manifest reality—either oneself or one's world—that is permanent and persisting. When we think about the future, it's always about establishing a definite point in the indefinite unknown to move towards—ideally, in a step-by-step way. But reality outside of the present is an indefinite unknown. Ideas of the future don't count for much. The past is just a random peek through the kaleidoscope; you turn the particles of memory around and 'you could say this, you could say that.' You can draw all kinds of inferences and conclusions, but it is the mood with which you are turning the kaleidoscope that creates the memories. If you look with a worried mind then you tend to see things that substantiate that particular way of looking at things.

The manifest reality is therefore a relative one based on an unexamined requirement; its 'sign' is relativity: relatively pleasant, experienced by a subject that is a process that varies in accordance with a changing context. Things (*dhammā*) arise dependently on a range of factors, such as the appearance of a sense-object, the quality of attention and the motive or 'intent' of the mind. It comes down to a triad of object, subject and relating consciousness—neither of which can exist independent of the others. Most crucial in terms of liberation is the quality of intention (*cetanā*), which is where the requiring and relating come in. When intention is biased by that wrong-seeing (*avijjā*) it has requirements: to imagine signs of permanence, substantiality and pleasurability where they are not. It doesn't see these signs as dependently arisen on attitudes and

intentions. So one gets confused and disappointed that the 'constants' change.

To enter into the Dhamma is to really look into co-dependency (*idappaccayatā*). Try and remember things in this light: 'What does this depend upon?' 'How does this external reality depend on my mind-state? How does my mind-state depend upon the external reality?' What's it like when there's blue sky and clear space, what's your mind-state then? What's it like when there's seven of you working in the kitchen? What's it like when it's silent? What's it like when my intention is to serve? This is investigating co-dependency in a very simple way.

Co-dependency describes the interconnectedness of experience. In terms of understanding the dependent arising and ceasing of suffering and stress, it has a two-fold and interconnected modality. One mode is the process of present activity, whereby dependently-arisen factors give rise to the impression of 'I,' at a point of becoming something in the future. The other is resultant and potential: this mode concerns the sense of a dependently-arisen awareness in the present that inherits effects: 'my self.'

The mode that is easiest to recognize is the one which is to do with our present actions: that we are a point moving towards a future point. This process is triggered off by sense impingement, contact impressions (*phassa*). Contact impressions within a sense sphere give rise to pleasantness and unpleasantness, which gives rise to inclination or disinclination. Then, because of that, the mind latches on, and because of that, a psychological 'pattern' is formed which inclines towards some result in the future.

For example, out of the flux of sense-impressions arising in the present, the eye recognizes a favourite fruit: perception and pleasant mental feeling. That fruit becomes the focus for

the eye and pleasant associations, and how to obtain the fruit become the principle concerns (*cetanā*) of the mind—so there is a latching on, and the attractive notion of what will occur when ‘I’ obtain the fruit stimulates a process of activity aimed at arriving at that point. This is the process of becoming and further becoming, but its only immediate and seemingly inevitable results is the ‘field’ of these very effects. We may or may not obtain the fruit, and it might or might not be a pleasant as we imagined it. Arrival at the desired point is uncertain and temporary. And the result is an unsatisfied ‘field’: ‘my (insatiable) self.’

In Dhamma practice, we can work with this experience of impingement. Sense-restraint, meditation, quiet, calm, orderliness, cleanliness, gentleness—all these things have an effect. Calmer impingement calms the process and makes it more easy to see through. This is the process of *samatha*. When one’s inclination is towards that calm, then mindfulness is established in order to bring around those signs that gladden and settle the mind. In this instance, the activity of wise attention (*yoniso manasikāra*) is to regard and conceive things thus: ‘Which is the way that I can do this that is contented, calm, or benevolent?’ If it’s not calm and quiet then can one do it in a way that is at least good-hearted? One can’t expect a kitchen scene to be idyllically tranquil but it can be good-hearted because it’s a place of nourishment and of helping each other. So that characteristic is to be focussed on, rather than ‘I don’t like the sound of pots and pans.’ Then if one focuses on the good-heartedness, the mind can settle on a gladdening object. In this way, wise attention picks up a particular skilful facet or feature for mindfulness to incline towards and attend to. Skilful one-pointedness gives rise to a skilful, though not completely liberated, field of awareness.

Of course, you could focus on the defilements of other people: people getting it wrong, people turning up late, or

people making unfortunate remarks on odd occasions. You can notice these things in yourself and in others. But there's no *samatha* in that. So if you keep getting irritated, then try to focus in a way that inclines towards calm and happy states. Try to see other people in terms of what it would be like to be in their position: 'Have *I* never done anything wrong? Have *I* never been late? Have *I* never said silly things?' This way is more spacious and compassionate. Train yourself to do this instead of following the worldly way which sees things in terms of efficiency or desirability, or who's better or quicker. The worldly way always breaks everything up; it tends towards diffusion and separateness rather than unification and harmony. But if you work with dependent arising in the way of *samatha*, you can actually bring around a beneficial future arising at this moment. And in terms of further liberation: it is only when the mind has a sense of ease that it will ever settle so that you can clearly review the process of 'I am.'

Now with the second modality of dependent arising — that of being a field of effects — the focus is on consciousness, *viññāna*. Consciousness is the activity of awareness which is programmed through birth and inherited kammic tendencies. Its fundamental activity is to define reality through the six senses. It establishes a six-fold 'field.' Secondly, mind-consciousness infers a self that is separate from, but associated with, the senses. Consciousness refers to a particular object and describes it in a particular way. Then out of that experience of an object and a description, arises the sense of being somebody seeing something, being somebody hearing something, or being somebody thinking something, etc. An object arises with the eye seeing it, the ear hearing it, the mind thinking it; what is thus detected, that is called *rūpa* — 'form' or 'shape.' *Rūpa* is then described in terms of memories, associations, or perceptions; and described dependent upon impression,

dependent upon attending to it, and dependent on particular feelings; all this is *nāma*—the naming or describing of things.

Visual consciousness describes things in terms of distance and shape. It differentiates between foreground and background, between an object and a field within which an object stands. Mind consciousness discriminates between an 'in here' and 'out there.' Ear consciousness discriminates between silence and sound, so you get the experience of rhythm and pitch. When these activities are known, when one puts aside involvement with their objects, the consciousness can stop.

Before I went to Thailand I'd been very fond of music, I listened to it all the time. For the first year or so when I was living in the monastery every time I'd sit down I'd hear music in my head—continually—until I hated it. But I couldn't make it go away. Eventually after about a year and a half of non-stop noise in my head and fighting with it, and gradually cooling down about it all, it began to die away. By the time I came to England, my mind had cleared out, like a squeezed sponge. But then one day I was walking down a street and there was some music playing and my ear picked it up. I could feel the experience of consciousness dancing around the music, so much that it was difficult not to start physically dancing. The mind was gyrating, stimulated by this auditory experience and the consciousness fluctuating with it. So I explored; I listened deliberately and tried to go to what the sound really was—and when I focussed very strongly on the sound, the music and the listener stopped!

The music was dependent on a particular mode of attention whereby consciousness wasn't held clearly, firmly or incisively onto an object, it was allowed to play on it. The experience of music was this playing: not an external experience nor an internal experience but the two coming together.

And I really saw that what one could do something about was the stirring of consciousness, the stirring of the mind and moods—when that stopped, the music stopped. There was still the sound but it was empty, it was hollow. That was very significant for me because then that was it as far as music went. I could see that the music was just the movement of the mind. We can allow that movement to happen if we want to, but its reality, its ability to grip, fades.

Similarly with visual things, art, paintings and so on: now I experience it more often as that willingness to allow oneself to be moved by something; there has to be permission to be stimulated. If one withholds that permission, things are neither beautiful nor ugly—that doesn't enter in. Of course there can be that allowing, that permission, if it seems suitable: 'This is a very beautiful flower arrangement' or whatever.

The activity of consciousness on *rūpa* is *nāma*: this is the arising of the world. The naming, the playing, the movement of impressions, the movement of attention, intention, perception, and feeling—it's that play that makes things what they are, gives them their colour and tone. It can be stopped. If you really hold your attention onto a visual form, as visual form, and keep relinquishing and letting-go of things other than the form, then you find that the form empties. You're not getting rid of it, but it doesn't enter into you. The experience of 'myself,' that depends on an 'external' object, stops.

For freedom, for liberation from the experience of being grabbed by everything, this is good news. It means we don't have to run away from things. The more specifically, clearly and fully we can focus on what is happening then the more we can be free from it. That's a paradox. It's only through the experience of mind-cultivation that you'd arrive at that conclusion because you'd think exactly the opposite. But if the mind can be trained and sustained, then there's that possibility for

freedom within things—by experiencing their relativity. The quality of becoming that establishes substantiality in the present can therefore be stopped. Contact impressions, the apparent root cause of the kamma-active modality of dependent arising, are themselves dependent on consciousness and form. It is the link of *nāma* that is most significant: the impressionability of consciousness is the hinge point.

When we have experienced and cultivated the stopping of apparent object and subject, the grosser forms of aversion and need can be checked. What remains as the focus for practice is the subtler need—that of consciousness to proclaim itself as ‘myself.’ A self dependent on an internal sense.

The area of work with this is in the impressionability that we call ‘mind.’ That is where the attitudes, the assumptions, and the proclivities manifest that make us susceptible or resistant, and give sense-impression its ‘signs.’ These signs are the basis for our attempts to seek, or to shield ourselves. And dependent on these signs of what we experience ourselves as receiving are our activities towards a future. Although one can calm this future, this on-going, and even temporarily halt it, that tendency persists unless what one has become, the mind state at this particular moment, is also understood and seen through. So this matrix of *nāma-rūpa-viññāṇa* (name, form and consciousness) is the focus. It is where both modalities of dependent arising play.

Consider the structure of this matrix. The set up is: ‘I’m in here, these are my thoughts and the sensed-world is out there.’ With that, there is the inner world and the outer world; already that’s suffering, isn’t it? Because there is self-consciousness and anxiety over what ‘that or those out there’ might do to ‘this one in here,’ and the discrepancies between the internal world of thoughts and feelings and then the programmed social reactions of what one should be thinking

or feeling about 'them out there,' then the self-consciousness about being looked at or noted by other people, by things 'out there.' 'Are you the same as me? Are you different from me? Are you better than me? How do I relate to you?' This kind of thing keeps going on. This is suffering, isn't it? And this is a continuing experience that occurs for us. But, if you look through your eyes, if you look at what the eye sees there is nothing 'in here,' it's all 'out there,' there is only one dimension on that level. Even with thoughts, there is the thought and then something watching the thought, isn't there? Just as the eye must see things in terms of distance and outlines, the mind sees things in terms of 'here' and 'there.' The mind operating in its habitual way can't cognize in any other way.

This mind-field of consciousness continually fragments: there is a border between the 'here' and the 'there' that moves in and out, dependent on where and how attention is placed. Focussed on thoughts, one has attitudes towards one's thoughts, then one may have attitudes about one's attitudes toward thoughts; it's attitude all the way down the line! We can spend a lifetime with this particular kaleidoscope, shifting the patterns around; but in terms of meditation or mind cultivation—we focus on the matrix of consciousness: 'this here is mind-consciousness.' The proliferating diffusion effect is then checked. It's not 'here and there,' it's all here. The good, the bad and the lovely, 'It's all here.' The defiled, the wise, the profound, the foolish, 'It's all here.'

Sometimes we don't even enter into the mind properly, we just look through the fence. We never get to know what those creatures in the mind are about; naming some of them as 'dangerous animal!', we poke them with a stick and they get annoyed. So we can splutter: 'There goes my dread, my neurotic behaviour patterns', reacting towards those mental experiences without realising that they are dependently arisen,

and that they are intensified by this process of naming them as such. Just try to attend to the energy of fear, because as soon as you think of it as fear then it's something you shouldn't have, so the fence goes up and that thing is left really 'out there.' And some of those creatures are pleasant ones that longing throttles by grasping at them.

In meditation we can experience a mind-object as a pattern and explore the way we react and move around it. What one begins to realize is that the confused impressibility of consciousness is the seed-point for the arising of conditions. If one is uptight about one's nervousness then it gets worse. If we see things in negative ways, then they will increasingly be negative and we'll continue to see the negative side. If we are a little more generous, a little more allowing, a little more dispassionate about the things that we habitually don't favour, or lighter and cooler about what we favour, then the quality of dispassion is engendered. Because of dispassion there is more ease and the mind doesn't go into those twisted states which are the source and sustenance of afflicted energies. Just as things dependently arise based on wrong-seeing, they dependently cease dependent upon wisdom, upon wise attention, mindfulness and looking at things in the way of good heart. Ultimately we don't have to get rid of things, their shape changes under the influence of wisdom.

With doubt, for example, there is a good side to it; doubt has scrupulousness. If you always regard doubt with a negative attention, then of course that impression pertains and it goes along that way. 'Snap out of it! Make your mind up!' But just barking out orders, or any psychological action that is just a reaction, cannot introduce the healing condition of wisdom. On the other hand, when you can regard doubt more dispassionately, you can note that is just an imbalance of a scrupulousness to know what is right and wrong. The imbal-

ance comes through not knowing the relativity of the choices that one is conjuring with. But when you go to the state in itself, rather than the object of doubt then doubt will tend towards scrupulousness, *hiri-ottappa*, which is a support for the ending of stress and suffering. If you go into that then your heart feels steady, and because of that steadying of the heart, the shaking, the wavering and the doubt disappears.

Anger cuts off things, pushes things away. There is something good about its ability to determine quickly and decisively. Greed collects the mind to one point. Restlessness investigates. Dullness can be purified into equanimity. Try looking at these energies in this way rather than absorb into their objects, blindly react or create attitudes around them.

So even with afflicted energies, recognize that they're impermanent and they are relative: that is, their manifestation is dependent on how we respond to and handle them. If we penetrate the perceptions that they manifest and the activities that they engender, they don't mean anything really. Look at the very vibration of mind-consciousness as a wavering that re-establishes perceptions of, 'I should be this' or 'He's always doing that.' If you go to the thing itself and drop the perceptions, it can be transformed.

It is through experiencing the relativity of whatever field has come to 'be' that the activity 'to be' ceases. So we have to let everything good and bad change; to not hang on to who we were, good or bad. Don't dismiss it, but don't hang on to it. We will habitually hang onto things because we don't want to let go, we don't want to be insecure; so very stubborn patterns get laid down: 'that's the way I am,' 'being myself,' 'just an ordinary bloke.' Therefore renunciation is essential—to abandon the impressions of the past. We have to acknowledge the personality habits, but we don't need to be them, we don't need to be the star, or the loser, any more. Be very flexible about the

changes and the roles you go through. In Sangha life, we have conventional forms and performance—duties and relationships and so on; make use of those in order to see through the habits of being independent or being dependent, being junior or being senior. Come out of these niches.

It's almost comfortable to be able to feel inadequate—in our little burrow of inadequacy we can tunnel down and pull the wool over our heads. We go down into that musty little burrow rather than come out. But living in Dhamma is about stopping. It's about stopping feigning and perpetuating ignorance. It is about coming out into a place where the only horizons, the only limitations are the ones we create, the ones that are dependently arisen.

However when we can abandon perceptions of the future—what we will be or where we are going to be and so on, then the present formation is seen just as a process. Consciousness is not a fixed or fixing thing, it's a tendency to keep forming. Which is OK when we let it keep forming out of a context and a situation rather than be something that enters into situations with a pre-cast mould of who we are and how things are going to be. We can let the person be the result of a wise context rather than something that intrudes into it. We can allow wisdom and compassion to flow into the events of our lives, rather than react out of wrong-seeing. So our responsibility is literally the ability to respond. This is the beauty of the Dhamma as it appears in the manifest world.

EMPTINESS: THE FULLNESS OF MIND

'Sāriputta, your faculties are clear. The colour of your skin is pure and bright. In what abiding do you often abide in now, Sāriputta?'

'Now, venerable sir, I often abide in emptiness.'

'Good, good, Sāriputta! Now, indeed, you often abide in the abiding of a Great Being, that is emptiness.'

Majjhima Nikāya 151



EMPTINESS: THE FULLNESS OF MIND

This Dhamma, this teaching and practice, goes to *suññatā*—emptiness. So what's the good of that? In brief, in the Buddhist sense of the word, emptiness is the very brilliance of the Awakened mind. Emptiness is not a barren experience, it's an experience of non-differentiation, in which there is an undifferentiated wholeness empty of greed, empty of hatred, and empty of delusion. It is empty of ignorance, empty of self, in that there is nothing there that separates from that whole and says, 'I'm this,' 'that's that.'

Buddhas are those who dwell in this *suññatā vihāra*, the place of emptiness. We should therefore understand that liberating the mind is about emptying it. And that this is something that can be progressively cultivated. The simplest entry to that place is through recognizing what is absent when it is absent—noticing the ending of things, letting things end when they end, noticing that ending, that absence before picking something else up. These are times we are able to recognize, when we can refrain from the impulses of beginning, of clinging, of starting something—the itching impulsiveness to get on, get to the next thing, remember the past or whatever. This emptying out of compulsion is what our practice is about; then the awareness is left bright rather than with this unnecessary notion which always opinionates, subtracts and worries.

The fundamental quality of all the hindrances is restlessness in some form or another. Restlessness is also the mark of self—the need to establish oneself by doing something. It is said that even the refined Brahma deities hold a view of self, so they still have to be proclaiming that they're Brahmas and how radiant and great they are, how all-seeing and all-knowing. Even the Brahma realms are not completely empty, so emp-

tiness of what constitutes self is not experienced through refining the mind. The self notion, as a conceit, as a view, is only cleaned out through not clinging, not taking a position. In immediate terms, this means not adding the dimension of self to the five categories (*khandha*) of form, feeling, perception, mental activation and consciousness.

In Buddhist practice we contemplate the experience of form or *rūpa*. Form, notably bodily form, is seen as being just that, as solidity, plasticity, movability and caloricity, rather than signifying something delightful or repulsive. It's just form, a play of elemental qualities and nothing more. This insight empties form, so that form is seen through. It's just like a line in air. Form is one-dimensional rather than 'self.' Form is just form, free from suppositions, assumptions and values.

Perceptions (*saññā*) are the contact impressions, the images, the associations that flash through and suffuse the mind, giving rise to a feeling tone. They sum up an experience, they tell us what it means, they say: 'This is this,' 'It's time for this,' 'It's this situation now.' And they catalyse an impulse or reflex, the mental activation (*saṅkhāra*) to 'get going,' 'do this,' 'think this,' 'don't do that.'

The feeling tone, or *vedanā*, occurs through the stimulation of the sense bases; it is part of bodily life. When we see it as empty, even if the stimulation is there, the feeling tone is known for what it is, as a vibration in awareness rather than as something substantial and evocative. Then pleasant feeling does not give rise to the reaction: 'Oh, I must have more of that, let's do it again!', it's just pleasant feeling. Painful feeling is not something that's 'shocking! dreadful! It shouldn't happen!', it's just painful feeling. Neutral feeling is not just something that is rested upon as 'everything's okay,' 'keep going, no need to attend,' it's just neutral feeling. When these are seen for what they are then those *saṅkhārā*, those impulse reactions, can be

checked and can cease. This is the requirement for the cessation of *kamma*, of habits and psychological proliferation. With the cessation of these impulses, with the calming down of these impulses, the consciousness calms down.

Consciousness (*viññāṇa*) in the Buddhist sense of the word is a discriminative mode of awareness which takes form as an object. It discriminates into six bodily and mental sense-fields, scanning them with perception and feeling and reacting with mental activities. When these five *khandha* connect, the notion is 'I am doing this,' 'I must do this,' 'I shouldn't feel this,' 'I'd like more of that.' This 'I' arises with reference to form, perception and feeling as the agent (or passive subject), rather than the result of those experiences. 'I' arises slightly backdated, as the agent of something that has just occurred—but because it's so quick it doesn't seem like that. Form, feeling, perception, mental activation and discriminative awareness: these five *khandha* trick us with their sleight of hand.

So how to see through the trick that even the most refined beings in the Cosmos fall for? Every attempt to create a position outside the five *khandha* is itself an aspect of the mental activity of the *sankhara khandha*. But when the mind is steadied by attention, we can start to play our own tricks... riddles that can't be answered but can reveal the structure and the emptiness of the *khandha*. We can ask, 'Who is thinking? Who wants to do this?' When we ask that with sustained attention, there is no sensible answer. We don't find a person. Yet when we don't ask that question it's: 'I'm thinking. I'm going to do this. I'm going there.' I am very much there. So although the sense of self is very strong, we notice that it's something that depends on inattention. It requires support, expects to be listened to, to be needed and taken seriously. When we ask 'Who is it?' the mind can say: '...I don't know who it is... it's just... silly question, let's get on and do something important.' But try asking yourself,

‘Are the perceptions, the notion or image I have of myself, are they constant?’ Do they fluctuate when you’re happy, when you’re sick, when you’re getting up in the morning, when you’re having your tea? Are there residual tendencies, repetitive experiences in your self-image? When you meditate you can see that it is a fluctuating thing, but it also has particular repetitive patterns in it: of feeling buoyant, or complaining about yourself or others, feeling you are this or that. The core of your assumed identity is just an unexamined familiarity.

Really, ‘yourself’ must be something that is in the present: the future isn’t here yet and the past is gone. If you take away any perception of the future—of becoming something, of what you will, could or should be; if you take away any perception of the past, what you always have been, never did, used to be good at—just yourself in the present without comparing it with something else, what is that? When you take away any ideas about what other people think about you, or have said, or you hope they will say—in other words, when you drop any deflected image—what is there? When you recognize these images and put them aside, what’s left in-and-of-itself? Pure presence: here and now.

Try practising like this, pulling your focal point out of that realm where it is always shifting: the *saṃsāra*, the struggling, the tangledness, the heaviness, the complexity, the trying to find an answer to it. Keep bringing it back to ‘Who?’

Contemplate *viññāṇa*—consciousness or discriminative awareness through the six senses: eye, ear, nose, tongue, body and mind. Are you all of those or one of them? You must be all of them surely? So when you are walking on your meditation path, how much of your taste is walking? Does your hearing walk? Does your thinking walk? What’s walking? Probably what is walking is your visual consciousness; that experiences the trees moving past and creates the sense of perspective that

gives you the sense of going somewhere. What is the difference between walking along and just standing on one spot lifting your feet and putting them down again? In body consciousness it's probably experienced slightly differently if the path is uneven—you get subtle changes of pressure—but mostly it's your visual consciousness that is walking. Now if you are all of these consciousnesses then wouldn't they be doing the same thing? Why is it your hearing doesn't walk? Contemplate 'I am walking' and what that brings up in your mind: 'going places.' But your thinking doesn't walk, does it?

Notice that the sense of 'I am' is really just a mental approximation, a sense of familiarity that latches on to whatever sense base dominates at any particular moment. Most often it's the thinking or the visual consciousness, and occasionally hearing. The 'I am' is dependent on an external sense-base and a familiar mind-set; thinking, with visual consciousness lending some background decorations: 'Here am I disgruntled in Sussex,' 'Here am I disgruntled in London,' 'Here am I disgruntled in Fiji'—a stage for it all, a change of scene to keep the whole thing alive. Sense-consciousness gets used as a basis for these mental patterns. That is: instead of there being a focus on the mental dynamic in what is going on, the core of the experience is projected as occurring outside the mind. My psychological and emotional glosses are taken to be aspects of something 'out there.' So a mental perception or activity is happening, but because of seeing, touching, hearing, etc., we can put it 'out there.' 'That thing out there I'm seeing is the problem.'

Consciousness is activated to diffuse into this and into that, and bounce feelings and a range of thoughts and moods off an external sense-object. Thus what is established is a moment-by-moment read-out of a three-dimensional being. But it is a confused being: although we may have denied

responsibility, we have missed an opportunity to acknowledge and investigate our psychological roots. We've lost touch.

But if you bring your attention back to investigating 'Who?' in the eagerness, the joyfulness, or the restlessness, when you touch in directly with experience, then where are you in that?

The Buddha pointed to latent or unresolved tendencies (*anusaya*) of the unawakened mind: the tendency towards sensual greed, irritation, doubt, conceit, becoming and ignorance. Bearing these in mind, how much of the external world of problems is the latent tendency in the mind to be irritated or to doubt? Much of our difficulty with other people is the latent tendency towards becoming something that other people seem to obstruct. The sense of self always requires a context, such as a perception or activity, to support it. The *anusaya* create them. For example if I'm in a bad mood then the sense of self goes into irritation and conceit: 'She doesn't do this, he's always like that.' It will tend to go out and see all the things around that will support it.

What about returning to the centre of this contextual world? Who is always at the centre of that world? Try running 'there's no-one else here' through the mind. Then the substantiality of that world collapses. It is created by mental diffusion. There is visual consciousness—but the visual awareness has no greed or doubt in it. And the mental dimension stands out as itself, it is not someone else 'out there.' So all those irritating or confusing situations 'out there' are really the result of this proliferation (*papañca*), this projecting out from a mind consciousness which feels unhappy, worried, restless and so on.

When something is experienced as self, the result (*vipāka*) acts as the base for fresh kamma. Based upon the *vipāka* of the physical condition—which is the base for sensations and feelings, perceptions, and the experience of form—there

is the latent tendency towards greed, towards confusion and so on. But we don't have to act upon them. Instead they are to be investigated insightfully. Then they can be seen as empty of the three-dimensional self of other people 'out there,' and the familiar time-bound 'self' in here. The latent tendency can be penetrated and de-activated.

So it's important to be able to acknowledge the *saṅkhāra*, the activating tendency—this is the source of fresh kamma—as distinct from the *vipāka* of form and feeling. This is the basic renunciation of a practitioner; it is always the checking, letting-go discipline that separates moods and feelings from activation principles. When we empty out, then there is refraining from kamma or fresh action based upon impulses, and we can acknowledge and make peace with the past.

Then we can begin to look more clearly. If volition is seen for what it is—as that twitch or that itching—and it is seen in its own terms, it has no significance, it is what it is. It's like water bubbling, it doesn't mean anything. It's when you act upon it, when it is referred to 'I am' that it becomes something 'important,' 'delightful,' 'terrible.' In itself it's just a twitch. It can come out with all kinds of noises and sounds: monkey mind, chattering mind, but you can contemplate it just as so much: 'the parrot having a little chirp again.'

This contemplation is not a harsh. It enables one to apply the medicine that is necessary to calm or release the mind. The medicine of Dhamma releases the mind from cruelty and ill-will, and releases it from being fondled as 'self.' Dhamma opens the cage. Don't get mesmerised, just let these things go. Which is not to crush or criticize: it's so you can hear things as they are. Just: 'Who is this?' Get to know it then apply the medicine of Dhamma.

This kind of responsiveness is important to cultivate because the other way in which emptiness is not realized is

through the assumption that there is an 'I am' separate from all this; the assumption that somewhere there is an 'I am' that is not bothered, there's an 'I am' somewhere that's all right, blissful, 'I'm all right on my own, thank you,' 'I'm all right on my own provided with everything I want as long as nobody bothers me.' That'd be good news, wouldn't it? Meanwhile, welcome to planetary life with seven billion other human beings and the rest of incarnation. But the notion that one can extract an 'I am' from the senses, from the *khandha*, that there can be an 'I am' that is other than pleasant or unpleasant feeling, other than perception, other than mental formations, other than consciousness: this is the tendency towards becoming 'out of it all' (*vibhava*). And the 'I am' that wants to be other than that really doesn't like feelings, it doesn't want to have mental formations, it doesn't want to have perceptions, it wants to be left alone by these things. So it is not free from irritation and conceit.

The tone of practice that we undertake for the realization of emptiness has to be warm and clear. It is not possible to empty out irritation and conceit by being bland or uninvolved. The path of emptying is a compassionate responsiveness which doesn't believe and doesn't deny, doesn't reject, doesn't hold: 'It's this way now, this is what's happening now. There is nothing else that should be happening now, right now it couldn't be any other way.' Although the habit is to focus on 'what I should be,' and 'what they should do,' the path of emptying is to locate the 'I am' tucked within the *khandha*, and clean it out.

Liberation is just this the cleaning-out of self from these five *khandha*. This is through neither favouring nor being averse to form; and the same for perception, feeling, activating impulses and the discriminating awareness. This is all we need to know. We don't need to know emptiness, know *nibbāna*, we have to do it.

In the cultivation of *ānāpānasati*, we can measure and explore the five *khandha*. First in terms of form: as we cultivate *samādhi*, the form of the breath highlights and then calms the experience of body. This enables us to experience form purely as a flowing cascade of sensations. The experience of form thus changes: so what essentially is form? Form is ephemeral; there's nothing truly that can be made out of it. Then sensation: the experience of pleasant feeling and whatever perceptions the breathing gets denoted by are also fully entered into in meditation. And as the modalities of feeling and perception are focussed on, they are steadied and released from the impulse to make something out of them. And so on with the mind-consciousness and its discriminations and activities: fully entering into an experience, calming it, steadying it, and releasing it. So this process is not about dumbing things down, creating other worlds, or denying this one. It is about fully entering into this world rather than getting over it or finding an answer to it. The attention can be steadied at the point of the arising and passing of the world of phenomena. What arises? The five *khandha*, or what is called the world, arise, that's all. That's what they are supposed to do. And they pass.

This emptying does not lead to a negative state, it leads to brilliance, competence, and potential because there is no particular position that one is pushed into. Then there is an unbiased awareness, and we don't have to prove ourselves by accumulating things physical, sensed, or psychological. Even true joy and compassion are 'empty:' experienced as aspects of awareness rather than as aspects of self. This emptiness is the fullness of the mind freed from being stuck onto objects. And the leading edge of its practice is where that clinging, that tackiness, that persistence to hold to the 'I am,' is arising. At that place of arising is the edge of liberation.

intentionally blank

THE MIND, THE WORLD, AND THE DHAMMA

“When one with true insight sees the arising of the world, one does not hold to the idea of the world’s non-existence. And when one with true insight sees the ceasing of the world, one does not hold to the idea of the world’s existence.”

The world in general is stuck in attachment, positions and biases. But one who doesn’t get involved with or cling to these attachments, standpoints, dogmatic biases or latent tendencies doesn’t get stuck in some position of identity.”

Saṃyutta Nikāya 12, 15



THE MIND, THE WORLD, AND THE DHAMMA

Learning to settle the mind can be very difficult. It's not always easy to find a way of stopping the mind from chasing things, or to shake off a grudge or obsession. How can we calm down, and feel a sense of balanced well-being in ourselves? Can we make the mind attend to itself, and be fit for wise reflection and realization; are we capable of contemplating what is happening to us, what our weaknesses are in terms of moods and emotions, and how we can allay them? Do we have some say over whether we are needy, sorrowful or joyful—or is it something that just happens? The path of liberation is about having a free choice to experience what we would like to experience in terms of goodness, harmony and happiness.

Freedom begins with the freedom to choose the Path, it's not a compulsion. It's the Buddha's invitation: 'You're welcome to pick this up.' So the very beginnings of the Path are offerings and possibilities. This freedom to choose causes faith and interest to arise. We always have to remember that to put a teaching into practice requires these because of the nature of mind. The mind cannot operate properly unless there is freedom: the 'heart' of the mind (*citta*) does not follow orders.

The problem is that we are often in a situation where the mind is not allowed to be unoccupied for very much of the time: it is thrown around by sensory stimulation, and there are all kinds of social pressures to engage and act in certain ways. The mind is grabbed and thrown from this point to that point: to this sound, to this mood, to this urgent duty. For many people the mind is something that is activated by these forces and pressures that are outside it, rather than something that freely acts—like a dead fish in a washing machine, it may be moving around a lot, but that doesn't mean it's alive. The

mind can be like this, acting and reacting to circumstances that it is carried along by—so we think it's really active, but we can't get it to act upon itself. We can't get it to abide in a peaceful state or to let go of an agitated one. We can't, purely by will-power, cause a state of well-being to arise. And we don't even fully understand why—the mind is too caught to know what it's caught by. Just as someone dragged along in a state of fear by a gang of pirates may not be able to describe them very well or where they came from, so a mind when it's hijacked can hardly see what it's captured by. We may just get the general feeling of sadness or stress. So we can't establish authority in our lives.

We may consider that this process is dependent upon external forces, such as money or work; one can get gripped by getting this or that done, eager for achievement, fearful of failure. If there is a personal emotional bondage to worldly forces then the mind will be always caught in them. So there's a lot to be said for learning to recollect what we already do have and being content with that; renunciation, just living modestly, loosens the hold of materialism. We also have to practise with our own anxiety by coming to terms with the insecurity of the world. The world of social and economic forces is really beyond our control. We have to see its growth and decline as not essentially ours. Even this body, its shape, its health and vigour are things we have little say over: we can adjust it within a certain range, but its nature is to be other. It declines, you can't stop it. You can douse it with scents and perfumes, but its odours break through. Its hungers, its tiredness, its hurtness comes through. Just notice how much one's attention is caught in this phenomenal world—trying to make it comfortable and convenient, then getting irritated and despairing when it won't be what we want it to be—often in ways that cause pain and distress for ourselves and others.

To establish authority we have to know what is ours, and get in touch with a more fundamental reality. Where do we start? People who look for freedom within themselves always go toward mind, consciousness, heart or soul. These are some of the terms that are used—but, while there is still unknowing, we only have a partial idea of what heart or soul or mind actually is. We think of an ‘inner path’ and so get the feeling that mind is inside something, so it must be inside our bodies, and everything else which is not mind and therefore of a lesser, non-spiritual, nature is ‘out there.’ That way of looking at things certainly gives us something to work on in terms of being more aware of our psychological and emotional processes, but it leads to the idea that one is an entity dwelling apart from everything else. It brings around an uncertainty as to how to relate this mind to the everything that it’s apart from. The dualistic effect continues: the mind is inside the body, so the mind is separate from the body; the mind can watch thoughts and feelings, so it’s separate from them. So what do we do with the stuff on the other side of the fence? Does it not matter any more? There’s a solipsism there: nothing else exists but my mind, I’m in here, everything out there is just a dream. With that view we dissociate; there can be a patronising attitude towards the phenomenal world which taints the experience with the quality of dislike or self-centredness. And what about other people? If we relate to them in this way, then this is not going to give rise to much mutual understanding.

Also, imagining that the mind is inside something makes the focus of meditation very tight. One tries to shut things out, the mind becomes dull and cramped. It can also be the case that this gesture of moving inwards brings around a very strong self-consciousness. And there can be various attitudes associated with that: one may feel threatened or feel the need to put on a front, as in the case of being pointed at in a

group. So self-consciousness is separative; it doesn't stimulate benevolence or trust, so it makes it difficult to acknowledge one's weaknesses. Meditation when it is done like that can be very difficult; the mind doesn't want to open, it won't settle.

The place of peaceful attention is ultimately neither external nor internal. We can get caught on the external or internal level. If we get caught on the external, the attention span is erratic: there is the feeling of being tugged around by social, sensory or economic forces. Focussed on an internal state, our intentions can get twisted into self-conscious patterns such as conceit, doubt, and fear. Both of these failings are associated with an inability to stabilise, comprehend or empathise with experience. There is a sense of separation which infers two substantial realities. So: the mind is held as an immaterial thing, and the body is a material thing—they are different. Then again, the mind itself has separate rational and irrational modes that don't dialogue with each other. In all instances of division, the result is one aspect attempts to dominate and control the other. But mind can't control or suppress the body's feelings, sickness, and ageing. Rationality can't skip over grief, loneliness and passion; and without happiness we wither away. So, with division, there's inadequacy and conflict.

This dissonant experience is what our language and culture is based upon, but the experience which the Buddha taught and encouraged is of a different and comprehensive reality, which co-dependently arises. Co-dependent arising means that what is experienced is not objectively real, nor subjectively induced. It's not 'out there' nor is it 'just stuff in my head.' Nor can it be attributed to any single agent—god, self, or demon—or single agency—fate, kamma, ignorance, etc. 'Inwards', and 'outwards' are just modes of attention; and all agents, forces and affects are variable. We can't categori-

cally deny the effect of kamma, or the existence of self, gods and the rest of it, but their effects depend on the attention and authority that we give them. If they were ultimate or absolute truths, liberation would be depend on them rather than on the way that they are handled. In other words the experience of Ultimate Truth or Freedom would be depend on forces greater than itself—which would thereby deny ultimacy to that Truth—and there would be no practice-path in the present. Conversely, to deny the relative existence of gods, selves, demons, kamma, ignorance, virtue and the rest would be to nullify the need for, and features of, the Path.

So co-dependent arising is the Middle Way. It allows relative existence and discernable effects to whatever arises, thereby locating the Path in the manifest world of experience. Consequently this very context of life requires careful attention and mindful participation if we are to follow a Path and avoid the extremes of ‘existence’ (things are independently real) and ‘non-existence’ (things are a complete illusion).

Therefore, when we approach the arena of the mind, we should not make the mind into a demon, a god, or a self. Mind is not a thing, but not nothing: it is a knowing wherein relating factors arise and cease. Mind is more like a resonance, an empathetic vibration than a thing. Each moment the resonance depends upon and expresses itself in terms of forms, feeling, perceptions, mental activities and the process of consciousness—which is of sensory and mental discrimination. This experienced stuff occurs through a process in which consciousness, sensory impression and volition play key roles—and these factors them-selves affect and determine each other.

Form is the initial impression that we detect and gives us the inference of physical matter. We understand that there is a physical lump ‘out there’ but what is experienced is a form, ‘here.’ Visual consciousness discriminates a form from a

background; mental consciousness discriminates an 'out there' from an 'in here.' The consciousnesses work together through perception: through this, we understand that a sound comes from a string when it's plucked because the movement of the string and the sound arise together with the acquired knowledge that sound is made that way.

Look clearly at what you experience: form only implies matter. That implication is the moment of recognition when the form is known as red or as a man or as a car, and a feeling arises which is pleasant, unpleasant or neutral. Then the mental activities are: the impression that this perception gives rise to, and the inclinations that come up from those impressions—how the focus of attention is going to swing. There is interest or not, an inclination towards something, or away from it. This is the nature of what is experienced; and that's not 'in here' or 'out there.' Understanding this, you don't have to point forwards or outwards or inwards because the focus is always on that which is arising. So that means that the quality of attention is upright and settled. You're not straining to perceive something or to feel something because the point where the mind settles is the touchstone of actuality at this time. Of course the kind of acceptance that settledness (*samatha*) requires itself takes cultivation; there is so much programming in terms of not settling, not receiving things as they are.

Hence the practice of devotion. In order to meditate we have to begin with settling or opening into a place where we can receive what impressions arise. So, devotion is a vital factor. Shrines and chanting help to support this initial invitation, the initial beckoning to the present moment. They provide the context within which we can open the heart to what we hold as sacred. This opening is then supported by what we hold with respect, and that allows us the strength to be touched by what's occurring—whether it's pleasant or painful, or what-

ever it brings up. At this point the techniques and systems of meditation provide the skills to stabilise and guide ourselves, but those techniques can only be handled properly if we have trained in morality, generosity and benevolence.

Naturally enough, I'd like the mind to be happy or at least co-operative, and may assume that that necessitates being in a good mood. There's attachment to pleasant contact, or contact with things that we understand and feel familiar with. There is a powerful inclination to just contact that which is stable and secure. There is a middle way here: it's not that one should be choiceless and unguarded, but one's choice should be based on inclination towards what is wholesome, rather than desirable on other counts. There is a kind of ease that arises from being blameless or at least 'facing up to the music': provided that one is 'in tune' and can contemplate uncomfortable states in terms of Dhamma. So we guard ourselves from greed, jealousy and spite, but not from insecurity or uncertainty. The variability that occurs in terms of situations, people, moods and states is a sign of Dhamma. It provides the right focus for the heart. There can be a lot of seeking to find stability or permanence in an idea or a system or a group or a community, a job, a position—or a meditation practice. We can try to mould ourselves upon it and then try to bend life around to fit. This is a hindrance to the path, although quite a subtle one. It's only when we realize that all security is really taking away freedom and purity of presence that relinquishment comes about and we enter the Dhamma at a deep level.

Consider how much of one's thinking is about trying to establish permanence. How much of one's planning sees a future with certainty? How many activities are supposed to sort things out so that we never have to deal with them again—and how much of our disappointment is because we thought we had something solid and then it changed? All that

breeds an unwillingness to enter into something unknown, even a fear of it. The immediate emotional reaction can be that we will be unable to cope with something unknown. This is why so much of our lives can be taken up with the need for reassurance and security—and this takes away the authority that would give us authentic stability. We seek stability in something that can never be stable, security in something that can never be secure, permanence in something that can never be permanent.

Recognising that, establish yourself in terms of virtue, to not intentionally do things that are harmful. Look for stability or permanence in this. This is something that you have to be actively engaged for; you do not do this passively, you have to keep re-establishing yourself in this responsive relationship. This is what you should seek permanence in if you seek it in anything, because it is not something that is substantially out there or in here; it is a response—something that is continually engaged and activated. Rather than looking to perfect the conditions around you by finding perfect places to live in, perfect people to be with, and an end of problems on this level, you should perfect this kind of response. Then there is energy, brightness, sensitivity and clarity. Otherwise, there will always be the needing and the complaining and the unhappiness and the depression because things have gone wrong again—as if they were going to do anything else but go wrong. The word ‘wrong’ is redundant: things follow their nature. When a light-bulb blows its not gone wrong, it gets old, then it blows—that’s just its nature, its gone right, it’s involved in a pattern and a process of change, doing what it perfectly does.

When we understand things with Right View then we can engage with these things actively, out of compassion, to help bring goodness, comfort and well-being to creatures

and to the planet. This is the great heart, the good heart. This is what all our requisites and duties are about really, from a spiritual point of view, so we have the means and occasion to do good, enjoy doing good, and bring that across. The mind can then be a sensitivity arising from the plane of goodness, rather than a thing seeking a nest. The mind is not a thing that sits or hides somewhere—or will get anywhere. It is a resonance dependent on the kind of activity and engagement that we bring into life. When we engage clearly, the resonance is clarity; when we engage generously or fearfully, the resonance corresponds. If we engage carelessly there is a dull, discordant twanging.

Can we do this in our lives? How does this create a field of action? There will be times when the response gives rise to action in the world, times when it gives rise to action in the mind. In this way the fixed dualism of the mind and the world can be dissolved by understanding. When they do seem separated we can explore—is there fear? or conceit?—and remember what we need to do to return to a state of balance.

Understand: form is something that arises dependent on consciousness, and perception; and vice versa. Feelings are fluctuating and variable. What is of core significance are the mental activities of intention and attention: how we incline or divert and how we focus. We are our intention: that's what forms us; and the world is the span and quality of our attention. Thus arises the experience we are a part of. But the process of training the mind gives us a choice. When we enter into this interweave of the mind and the world, the place of release, the place of truth, is intention and focus. We can choose to focus on the good, on the bright, in a way of self-relinquishment. This is our freedom, our possibility is there.

This is what we develop in meditation. Nothing else that is done in it will bear great fruit.



GLOSSARY

The main body of the text contains some of the pedagogical structures that were used by the Buddha and which are frequently alluded to by Buddhist teachers. These are listed below for clarity and easy reference:

Cause and Result:

cause, intended action—physical, verbal or mental: *kamma*
result of that action: *vipāka*

The Eight- (and Ten-)Fold Path:

Right View: *sammā diṭṭhi*
Right Thought: *sammā saṅkappa*
Right Speech: *sammā vācā*
Right Action: *sammā kammanta*
Right Livelihood: *sammā ājīva*
Right Effort: *sammā vāyāma*
Right Mindfulness: *sammā sati*
Right Concentration (Collectedness): *sammā samādhi*
Right Knowledge: *sammā ñāṇa*
Right Release: *sammā vimutti*

The Five Spiritual Faculties (*indriya*):

faith: *saddhā*
energy: *virīya*
mindfulness: *sati*
concentration: *samādhi*
wisdom: *paññā*

The Four Stages of Breath-Meditation (corresponding to the Four Foundations of Mindfulness):

- 1 Body: knowing one is breathing in and out long
knowing one is breathing in and out short
fully sensitive to the 'breath-body'
tranquillising the 'breath-body'
- 2 Feeling: fully sensitive to rapture
fully sensitive to ease
fully sensitive to these effects on the *citta*
tranquillising these effects on the *citta*

- 3 Mind (*citta*): fully sensitive to the *citta*
 uplifting the *citta*
 steadying the *citta*
 freeing the *citta*
- 4 Processes (*dhammā*): contemplating impermanence
 contemplating dispassion
 contemplating stopping
 contemplating abandonment

The Seven Factors of Awakening (*bojjhaṅga*):

- mindfulness: *sati*
 investigation of process: *dhamma-vicaya*
 energy: *virīya*
 rapture: *pīti*
 tranquillity: *passaddhi*
 concentration: *samādhi*
 equanimity: *upekkhā*

Dependent Arising (*paṭiccasammuppāda*)

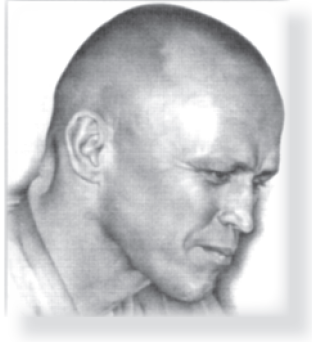
Wrong-seeing (*avijjā*) is a factor that supports the determinations (*saṅkhārā*) of consciousness (*viññāṇa*); consciousness (*viññāṇa*) thus operates in terms of knowing (*nāma*) an object (*rūpa*) which occurs in one of six sense-fields (*saḷāyatana*) which arise dependent on contact impression (*phassa*); these contact impressions are registered in terms of feeling (*vedanā*) which arouse degrees of inclination (*taṇhā*) which in turn stimulates attachment (*upādāna*); this attachment fixes the conscious mind into a certain pattern that extends (*bhava*) to be the basis for a future arising or birth (*jāti*) which must be followed by the process of ageing and death (*jarā-maraṇa*); this is the basis for sorrow, lamentation, pain, grief and despair (*soka-parīdeva-dukka-domanassa-upāyāsā*).

But with the complete and dispassionate stopping of wrong-seeing, the determinations stop... thus there is the stopping of sorrow, lamentation, pain, grief and despair.

The Five *Khandha*:

- form: *rūpa*
 feeling: *vedanā*
 perception: *saññā*
 activities/determinants: *saṅkhārā*
 consciousness: *viññāṇa*





Kalyāṇa: 'beautiful,' 'uplifting,' 'lovely' is the epithet that the Buddha applied both to his Teaching and to those ideal companions who act as guides to its practice. It is a striking reminder that far from being a cold or nihilistic doctrine, Buddhism is a Path that begins with the finest aspirations and integrity, is travelled with courage and sensitivity, and arrives at a place where all conflicts fall away. To illustrate this point, this book brings together a selection of talks which stem from the contemporary practice of the ancient Theravada Buddhist teachings.

Ajahn Sucitto became a Theravada Buddhist monk (bhikkhu) in Thailand in 1976. After returning to England in 1978, he trained as a disciple of Ajahn Sumedho for 14 years before being asked to supervise the teaching and training of the community at Cittaviveka Monastery in West Sussex. Although he also travels to give teachings, Cittaviveka is where he currently resides and where the talks that form the substance of this book were given.

AMARAVATI PUBLICATIONS

For free distribution