

THE PATH TO PEACE

Venerable Ajahn Chah



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by Venerable Ajahn Chah

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“It is the spirit of *dāna*, freely offered generosity, which has kept the entire Buddhist tradition alive for more than 2,500 years.”

Sabbadānam dhammadānam jīnāti
‘The gift of Dhamma excels all gifts’

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This computer edition differs from the print edition in that 2 chapters (‘Meditation’ and ‘Questions and Answers’ – which are already included in the book “Living Dhamma”) have been taken out and replaced with ‘Questions and Answers with Ajahn Chah’ and ‘The Mind Lets Go of Itself’.

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The Path to Peace

Today I will give a teaching particularly for you as monks and novices, so please determine your hearts and minds to listen. There is nothing else for us to talk about other than the practice of the *Dhamma-Vinaya* (Truth and Discipline).

Every one of you should clearly understand that now you have been ordained as Buddhist monks and novices and should be conducting yourselves appropriately. We have all experienced the lay life, which is characterised by confusion and a lack of formal Dhamma practice; now, having taken up the form of a Buddhist *samaṇa*¹, some fundamental changes have to take place in our minds so that we differ from lay people in the way we think. We must try to make all of our speech and actions – eating and drinking, moving around, coming and going – befitting for one who has been ordained as a spiritual seeker, who the Buddha referred to as a *samaṇa*. What he meant was someone who is calm and restrained. Formerly, as lay people, we didn't understand what it meant to be a *samaṇa*, that sense of peacefulness and restraint. We gave full license to our bodies and minds to have fun and games under the influence of craving and defilement. When we experienced pleasant *ārammaṇa*², these would put us into a good mood, unpleasant mind-objects would put us into a bad one – this is the way it is when we are caught in the power of mind-objects. The Buddha said that those who are still under the sway of mind-objects aren't looking after themselves. They are without a refuge, a true abiding place, and so they let their minds follow moods of sensual indulgence and pleasure-seeking and get caught into suffering, sorrow, lamentation, pain, grief and despair. They don't know how or when to stop and reflect upon their experience.

In Buddhism, once we have received ordination and taken up the life of the *samaṇa*, we have to adjust our physical appearance in accordance with the external form of the *samaṇa*: we shave our heads, trim our nails and don the brown *bhikkhus*'³ robes – the banner of the Noble Ones, the Buddha and the *Arahants*⁴. We are indebted to the Buddha for the wholesome foundations he established and handed down to us, which allow us to live as monks and find adequate support. Our lodgings were built and offered as a result of the wholesome actions of those with faith in the Buddha and His teachings. We do not have to prepare our food because we are benefiting from the roots laid down by the Buddha. Similarly, we have inherited the medicines, robes and all the other requisites that we use from the Buddha. Once ordained as Buddhist monastics, on the conventional level we are called monks and given the title

¹Recluse, monk or holy one – one who has left the home life to pursue the Higher Life.

²*Ārammaṇa*: mind-objects; the object which is presented to the mind (*citta*) at any moment. This object is derived from the five senses or direct from the mind (memory, thought, feelings). It is not the external object (in the world), but that object after having been processed by one's preconceptions and predispositions.

³*Bhikkhu*: Buddhist monk, alms mendicant.

⁴*Arahant*: Worthy one, one who is full enlightened.

'Venerable'⁵; but simply having taken on the external appearance of monks does not make us truly venerable. Being monks on the conventional level means we are monks as far as our physical appearance goes. Simply by shaving our heads and putting on brown robes we are called 'Venerable', but that which is truly worthy of veneration has not yet arisen within us – we are still only 'Venerable' in name. It's the same as when they mould cement or cast brass into a Buddha image: they call it a Buddha, but it isn't really that. It's just metal, wood, wax or stone. That's the way conventional reality is.

It's the same for us. Once we have been ordained, we are given the title Venerable *Bhikkhu*, but that alone doesn't make us venerable. On the level of ultimate reality – in other words, in the mind – the term still doesn't apply. Our minds and hearts have still not been fully perfected through the practice with such qualities as *mettā* (kindness), *karuṇā* (compassion), *muditā* (sympathetic joy) and *upekkhā* (equanimity). We haven't reached full purity within. Greed, hatred and delusion are still barring the way, not allowing that which is worthy of veneration to arise.

Our practice is to begin destroying greed, hatred and delusion – defilements which for the most part can be found within each and every one of us. These are what hold us in the round of becoming and birth and prevent us from achieving peace of mind. Greed, hatred and delusion prevent the *samaṇa* – peacefulness – from arising within us. As long as this peace does not arise, we are still not *samaṇa*; in other words, our hearts have not experienced the peace that is free from the influence of greed, hatred and delusion. This is why we practise – with the intention of expunging greed, hatred and delusion from our hearts. It is only when these defilements have been removed that we can reach purity, that which is truly venerable.

Internalising that which is venerable within your heart doesn't involve working only with the mind, but your body and speech as well. They have to work together. Before you can practise with your body and speech, you must be practising with your mind. However, if you simply practise with the mind, neglecting body and speech, that won't work either. They are inseparable. Practising with the mind until it's smooth, refined and beautiful is similar to producing a finished wooden pillar or plank: before you can obtain a pillar that is smooth, varnished and attractive, you must first go and cut a tree down. Then you must cut off the rough parts – the roots and branches – before you split it, saw it and work it. Practising with the mind is the same as working with the tree, you have to work with the coarse things first. You have to destroy the rough parts: destroy the roots, destroy the bark and everything which is unattractive, in order to obtain that which is attractive and pleasing to the eye. You have to work through the rough to reach the smooth. Dhamma practice is just the same. You aim to pacify and purify the mind, but it's difficult to do. You have to begin practising with externals – body and speech – working your way inwards until you reach that which is smooth, shining and beautiful. You can compare it with a finished piece of furniture, such as these tables and chairs. They may be attractive now, but once they were just rough bits of wood with branches and leaves, which had to be planed and worked with. This is the way you obtain furniture that is beautiful or a mind that is perfect and pure.

Therefore the right path to peace, the path the Buddha laid down, which leads to peace of mind and the pacification of the defilements, is *sīla* (moral restraint), *samādhi* (concentration) and *paññā* (wisdom). This is the path of practice. It is the path that leads you to purity and leads you to realise and embody the qualities of the *samaṇa*.

⁵Venerable: in Thai, 'Phra'.

It is the way to the complete abandonment of greed, hatred and delusion. The practice does not differ from this whether you view it internally or externally.

This way of training and maturing the mind – which involves the chanting, the meditation, the Dhamma talks and all the other parts of the practice – forces you to go against the grain of the defilements. You have to go against the tendencies of the mind, because normally we like to take things easy, to be lazy and avoid anything which causes us friction or involves suffering and difficulty. The mind simply doesn't want to make the effort or get involved. This is why you have to be ready to endure hardship and bring forth effort in the practice. You have to use the *dhamma* of endurance and really struggle. Previously your bodies were simply vehicles for having fun, and having built up all sorts of unskillful habits it's difficult for you to start practising with them. Before, you didn't restrain your speech, so now it's hard to start restraining it. But as with that wood, it doesn't matter how troublesome or hard it seems: before you can make it into tables and chairs, you have to encounter some difficulty. That's not the important thing; it's just something you have to experience along the way. You have to work through the rough wood to produce the finished pieces of furniture.

The Buddha taught that this is the way the practice is for all of us. All of his disciples who had finished their work and become fully enlightened, had, (when they first came to take ordination and practise with him) previously been *puthujjana* (ordinary worldlings). They had all been ordinary unenlightened beings like ourselves, with arms and legs, eyes and ears, greed and anger – just the same as us. They didn't have any special characteristics that made them particularly different from us. This was how both the Buddha and his disciples had been in the beginning. They practised and brought forth enlightenment from the unenlightened, beauty from the ugliness and great benefit from that which was virtually useless. This work has continued through successive generations right up to the present day. It is the children of ordinary people – farmers, traders and businessmen – who, having previously been entangled in the sensual pleasures of the world, go forth to take ordination. Those monks at the time of the Buddha were able to practise and train themselves, and you must understand that you have the same potential. You are made up of the five *khandhas*⁶ (aggregates), just the same. You also have a body, pleasant and unpleasant feelings, memory and perception, thought formations and consciousness – as well as a wandering and proliferating mind. You can be aware of good and evil. Everything's just the same. In the end, that combination of physical and mental phenomena present in each of you, as separate individuals, differs little from that found in those monastics who practised and became enlightened under the Buddha. They had all started out as ordinary, unenlightened beings. Some had even been gangsters and delinquents, while others were from good backgrounds. They were no different from us. The Buddha inspired them to go forth and practise for the attainment of *magga* (the Noble Path) and *phāla* (Fruition)⁷, and these days, in similar fashion, people like yourselves are inspired to take up the practice of *sīla*, *samādhi* and *paññā*.

Sīla, *samādhi* and *paññā* are the names given to the different aspects of the practice.

⁶*Khandhas*: Groups or aggregates: form (*rūpa*), feeling (*vedanā*), perception (*saññā*), thought formations (*saṅkhārā*) and consciousness (*viññāna*). These groups are the five groups that constitute what we call a person.

⁷*Magga-phāla*: Path and fruition: the four transcendent paths – or rather one path and four different levels of refinement – leading to 'nobility' (*ariya*) or the end of suffering, i.e., the insight knowledge which cuts through the fetters (*samyojana*); and the four corresponding fruitions arising from those paths – refers to the mental state, cutting through defilements, immediately following the attainment of any of these paths.

When you practise *sīla*, *samādhi* and *paññā*, it means you practise with yourselves. Right practice takes place here within you. Right *sīla* exists here, right *samādhi* exists here. Why? Because your body is right here. The practice of *sīla* involves every part of the body. The Buddha taught us to be careful of all our physical actions. Your body exists here! You have hands, you have legs right here. This is where you practise *sīla*. Whether your actions will be in accordance with *sīla* and Dhamma depends on how you train your body. Practising with your speech means being aware of the things you say. It includes avoiding wrong kinds of speech, namely divisive speech, coarse speech and unnecessary or frivolous speech. Wrong bodily actions include killing living beings, stealing and sexual misconduct.

It's easy to reel off the list of wrong kinds of behaviour as found in the books, but the important thing to understand is that the potential for them all lies within us. Your body and speech are with you right here and now. You practise moral restraint, which means taking care to avoid the unskillful actions of killing, stealing and sexual misconduct. The Buddha taught us to take care with our actions from the very coarsest level. In the lay life you might not have had very refined moral conduct and frequently transgressed the precepts. For instance, in the past you may have killed animals or insects by smashing them with an axe or a fist, or perhaps you didn't take much care with your speech: false speech means lying or exaggerating the truth; coarse speech means you are constantly being abusive or rude to others – 'you scum,' 'you idiot,' and so on; frivolous speech means aimless chatter, foolishly rambling on without purpose or substance. We've indulged in it all. No restraint! In short, keeping *sīla* means watching over yourself, watching over your actions and speech.

So who will do the watching over? Who will take responsibility for your actions? When you kill some animal, who is the one who knows? Is your hand the one who knows, or is it someone else? When you steal someone else's property, who is aware of the act? Is your hand the one who knows? This is where you have to develop awareness. Before you commit some act of sexual misconduct, where is your awareness? Is your body the one who knows? Who is the one who knows before you lie, swear or say something frivolous? Is your mouth aware of what it says, or is the one who knows in the words themselves? Contemplate this: whoever it is who knows is the one who has to take responsibility for your *sīla*. Bring that awareness to watch over your actions and speech. That knowing, that awareness is what you use to watch over your practice. To keep *sīla*, you use that part of the mind which directs your actions and which leads you to do good and bad. You catch the villain and transform him into a sheriff or a mayor. Take hold of the wayward mind and bring it to serve and take responsibility for all your actions and speech. Look at this and contemplate it. The Buddha taught us to take care with our actions. Who is it who does the taking care? The body doesn't know anything; it just stands, walks around and so on. The hands are the same; they don't know anything. Before they touch or take hold of anything, there has to be someone who gives them orders. As they pick things up and put them down there has to be someone telling them what to do. The hands themselves aren't aware of anything; there has to be someone giving them orders. The mouth is the same – whatever it says, whether it tells the truth or lies, is rude or divisive, there must be someone telling it what to say.

The practice involves establishing sati, mindfulness, within this 'one who knows.' The 'one who knows' is that intention of mind, which previously motivated us to kill living beings, steal other people's property, indulge in illicit sex, lie, slander, say foolish and frivolous things and engage in all the kinds of unrestrained behaviour. The 'one

who knows' led us to speak. It exists within the mind. Focus your mindfulness or sati – that constant recollectedness – on this 'one who knows.' Let the knowing look after your practice.

In practice, the most basic guidelines for moral conduct stipulated by the Buddha were: to kill is evil, a transgression of *sīla*; stealing is a transgression; sexual misconduct is a transgression; lying is a transgression; vulgar and frivolous speech are all transgressions of *sīla*. You commit all this to memory. It's the code of moral discipline, as laid down by the Buddha, which encourages you to be careful of that one inside of you who was responsible for previous transgressions of the moral precepts. That one, who was responsible for giving the orders to kill or hurt others, to steal, to have illicit sex, to say untrue or unskillful things and to be unrestrained in all sorts of ways – singing and dancing, partying and fooling around. The one who was giving the orders to indulge in all these sorts of behaviour is the one you bring to look after the mind. Use sati or awareness to keep the mind recollecting in the present moment and maintain mental composure in this way. Make the mind look after itself. Do it well.

If the mind is really able to look after itself, it is not so difficult to guard speech and actions, since they are all supervised by the mind. Keeping *sīla* – in other words taking care of your actions and speech – is not such a difficult thing. You sustain awareness at every moment and in every posture, whether standing, walking, sitting or lying down. Before you perform any action, speak or engage in conversation, establish awareness first – don't act or speak first, establish mindfulness first and then act or speak. You must have sati, be recollecting, before you do anything. It doesn't matter what you are going to say, you must first be recollecting in the mind. Practise like this until you are fluent. Practise so that you can keep abreast of what's going on in the mind; to the point where mindfulness becomes effortless and you are mindful before you act, mindful before you speak. This is the way you establish mindfulness in the heart. It is with the 'one who knows' that you look after yourself, because all your actions spring from here.

This is where the intentions for all your actions originate and this is why the practice won't work if you try to bring in someone else to do the job. The mind has to look after itself; if it can't take care of itself, nothing else can. This is why the Buddha taught that keeping *sīla* is not that difficult, because it simply means looking after your own mind. If mindfulness is fully established, whenever you say or do something harmful to yourself or others, you will know straight away. You know that which is right and that which is wrong. This is the way you keep *sīla*. You practise with your body and speech from the most basic level.

By guarding your speech and actions they become graceful and pleasing to the eye and ear, while you yourself remain comfortable and at ease within the restraint. All your behaviour, manners, movements and speech become beautiful, because you are taking care to reflect upon, adjust and correct your behaviour. You can compare this with your dwelling place or the meditation hall. If you are regularly cleaning and looking after your dwelling place, then both the interior and the area around it will be pleasant to look at, rather than a messy eyesore. This is because there is someone looking after it. Your actions and speech are similar. If you are taking care with them, they become beautiful, and that which is evil or dirty will be prevented from arising.

Adikalyāna, majjhekalyāna, paryosānakalyāna: beautiful in the beginning, beautiful in the middle and beautiful in the end; or harmonious in the beginning, harmonious in the middle and harmonious in the end. What does that mean? Precisely that the practice of *sīla*, *samādhi* and *paññā* is beautiful. The practice is beautiful in the

beginning. If the beginning is beautiful, it follows that the middle will be beautiful. If you practise mindfulness and restraint until it becomes comfortable and natural to you – so that there is a constant vigilance – the mind will become firm and resolute in the practise of *sīla* and restraint. It will be consistently paying attention to the practice and thus become concentrated. That characteristic of being firm and unshakeable in the monastic form and discipline and unwavering in the practice of mindfulness and restraint can be referred to as '*samādhi*.'

That aspect of the practice characterised by a continuous restraint, where you are consistently taking care with your actions and speech and taking responsibility for all your external behaviour, is referred to as *sīla*. The characteristic of being unwavering in the practice of mindfulness and restraint is called *samādhi*. The mind is firmly concentrated in this practice of *sīla* and restraint. Being firmly concentrated in the practice of *sīla* means that there is an evenness and consistency to the practice of mindfulness and restraint. These are the characteristics of *samādhi* as an external factor in the practice, used in keeping *sīla*. However, it also has an inner, deeper side to it. It is essential that you develop and maintain *sīla* and *samādhi* from the beginning – you have to do this before anything else.

Once the mind has an intentness in the practice and *sīla* and *samādhi* are firmly established, you will be able to investigate and reflect on that which is wholesome and unwholesome – asking yourself ...'Is this right?' ... 'Is that wrong?' – as you experience different mind-objects. When the mind makes contact with different sights, sounds, smells, tastes, tactile sensations or ideas, the 'one who knows' will arise and establish awareness of liking and disliking, happiness and suffering and the different kinds of mind-objects that you experience. You will come to see clearly, and see many different things.

If you are mindful, you will see the different objects which pass into the mind and the reaction which takes place upon experiencing them. The 'one who will automatically take them up as objects for contemplation. Once the mind is vigilant and mindfulness is firmly established, you will note all the reactions displayed through either body, speech or mind, as mind-objects are experienced. That aspect of the mind which identifies and selects the good from the bad, the right from the wrong, from amongst all the mind-objects within your field of awareness, is *pañña*. This is *pañña* in its initial stages and it matures as a result of the practice. All these different aspects of the practice arise from within the mind. The Buddha referred to these characteristics as *sīla*, *samādhi* and *paññā*. This is the way they are, as practised in the beginning.

As you continue the practice, fresh attachments and new kinds of delusion begin to arise in the mind. This means you start clinging to that which is good or wholesome. You become fearful of any blemishes or faults in the mind – anxious that your *samādhi* will be harmed by them. At the same time you begin to be diligent and hard working, and to love and nurture the practice. Whenever the mind makes contact with mind-objects, you become fearful and tense. You become aware of other people's faults as well, even the slightest things they do wrong. It's because you are concerned for your practice. This is practising *sīla*, *samādhi* and *paññā* on one level – on the outside – based on the fact that you have established your views in accordance with the form and foundations of practice laid down by the Buddha. Indeed, these are the roots of the practice and it is essential to have them established in the mind.

You continue to practise like this as much as possible, until you might even reach the point where you are constantly judging and picking fault with everyone you meet, wherever you go. You are constantly reacting with attraction and aversion to the world

around you, becoming full of all kinds of uncertainty and continually attaching to views of the right and wrong way to practise. It's as if you have become obsessed with the practice. But you don't have to worry about this yet – at that point it's better to practise too much than too little. Practise a lot and dedicate yourself to looking after body, speech and mind. You can never really do too much of this. This is said to be practising *sīla* on one level; in fact, *sīla*, *samādhi* and *paññā* are all in there together.

If you were to describe the practice of *sīla* at this stage, in terms of *pāramī*⁸ (spiritual perfections), it would be *dāna pāramī* (the spiritual perfection of giving), or *sīla pāramī* (the spiritual perfection of moral restraint). This is the practice on one level. Having developed this much, you can go deeper in the practice to the more profound level of *dāna upaparamī*⁹ and *sīla upapāramī*. These arise out of the same spiritual qualities, but the mind is practising on a more refined level. You simply concentrate and focus your efforts to obtain the refined from the coarse.

Once you have gained this foundation in your practice, there will be a strong sense of shame and fear of wrong-doing established in the heart. Whatever the time or place – in public or in private – this fear of wrong doing will always be in the mind. You become really afraid of any wrong doing. This is a quality of mind that you maintain throughout every aspect of the practice. The practice of mindfulness and restraint with body, speech and mind and the consistent distinguishing between right and wrong is what you hold as the object of mind. You become concentrated in this way and by firmly and unshakeably attaching to this way of practice, it means the mind actually becomes *sīla*, *samādhi* and *paññā* – the characteristics of the practice as described in the conventional teachings.

As you continue to develop and maintain the practice, these different characteristics and qualities are perfected together in the mind. However, practising *sīla*, *samādhi* and *paññā* at this level is still not enough to produce the factors of *jhāna*¹⁰ (meditative absorption) – the practice is still too coarse. Still, the mind is already quite refined – on the refined side of coarse! For an ordinary unenlightened person who has not been looking after the mind or practised much meditation and mindfulness, just this much is already something quite refined. It's like a poor person – owning two or three pounds can mean a lot, though for a millionaire it's almost nothing. This is the way it is. A few quid is a lot when you're down and out and hard up for cash, and in the same way, even though in the early stages of the practice you might still only be able to let go of the coarser defilements, this can still seem quite profound to one who is unenlightened and has never practised or let go of defilements before. At this level, you can feel a sense of satisfaction with being able to practise to the full extent of your ability. This is something you will see for yourself; it's something that has to be experienced within the mind of the practitioner.

If this is so, it means that you are already on the path, i.e. practising *sīla*, *samādhi* and *paññā*. These must be practised together, for if any are lacking, the practice will not develop correctly. The more your *sīla* improves, the firmer the mind becomes. The firmer the mind is, the bolder *paññā* becomes and so on... each part of the practice supporting and enhancing all the others. In the end, because the three aspects of the

⁸*Pāramī*: refers to the ten spiritual perfections: generosity, moral restraint, renunciation, wisdom, effort, patience, truthfulness, determination, kindness and equanimity.

⁹*Upapāramī*: refers to the same ten spiritual perfections, but practised on a deeper, more intense and profound level (practised to the highest degree, they are called *pāramattha pāramī*)

¹⁰*Jhāna*: Various levels of meditative absorption. The five factors of *jhāna* are initial and sustained application of mind, rapture, pleasure and equanimity.

practice are so closely related to each other, these terms virtually become synonymous. This is characteristic of *sammā patipadā* (Right Practice), when you are practising continuously, without relaxing your effort.

If you are practising in this way, it means that you have entered upon the correct path of practice. You are travelling along the very first stages of the path – the coarsest level – which is something quite difficult to sustain. As you deepen and refine the practice, *sīla*, *samādhi* and *paññā* will mature together from the same place – they are refined down from the same raw material. It's the same as our coconut palms. The coconut palm absorbs the water from the earth and pulls it up through the trunk. By the time the water reaches the coconut itself, it has become clean and sweet, even though it is derived from that plain water in the ground. The coconut palm is nourished by what are essentially the coarse earth and water elements, which it absorbs and purifies, and these are transformed into something far sweeter and purer than before. In the same way, the practice of *sīla*, *samādhi* and *paññā* – in other words *Magga* – has coarse beginnings, but, as a result of training and refining the mind through meditation and reflection, it becomes increasingly subtle.

As the mind becomes more refined, the practice of mindfulness becomes more focused, being concentrated on a more and more narrow area. The practice actually becomes easier as the mind turns more and more inwards to focus on itself. You no longer make big mistakes or go wildly wrong. Now, whenever the mind is affected by a particular matter, doubts will arise – such as whether acting or speaking in a certain way is right or wrong – you simply keep halting the mental proliferation and, through intensifying effort in the practice, continue turning your attention deeper and deeper inside. The practice of *samādhi* will become progressively firmer and more concentrated. The practice of *paññā* is enhanced so that you can see things more clearly and with increasing ease.

The end result is that you are clearly able to see the mind and its objects, without having to make any distinction between the mind, body or speech. You no longer have to separate anything at all – whether you are talking about the mind and the body or the mind and its objects. You see that it is the mind which gives orders to the body. The body has to depend on the mind before it can function. However, the mind itself is constantly subject to different objects contacting and conditioning it before it can have any effect on the body. As you continue to turn attention inwards and reflect on the Dhamma, the wisdom faculty gradually matures, and eventually you are left contemplating the mind and mind-objects – which means that you start to experience the body, *rūpadhamma* (material), as *arūpadhamma* (immaterial). Through your insight, you are no longer groping at or uncertain in your understanding of the body and the way it is. The mind experiences the body's physical characteristics as *arūpadhamma* – formless objects – which come into contact with the mind. Ultimately, you are contemplating just the mind and mind-objects – those objects which come into your consciousness.

Now, examining the true nature of the mind, you can observe that in its natural state, it has no preoccupations or issues prevailing upon it. It's like a piece of cloth or a flag that has been tied to the end of a pole. As long as it's on its own and undisturbed, nothing will happen to it. A leaf on a tree is another example – ordinarily it remains quiet and unperturbed. If it moves or flutters this must be due to the wind, an external force. Normally, nothing much happens to leaves; they remain still. They don't go looking to get involved with anything or anybody. When they start to move, it must be due to the influence of something external, such as the wind, which makes them

swing back and forth. In its natural state, the mind is the same – in it, there exists no loving or hating, nor does it seek to blame other people. It is independent, existing in a state of purity that is truly clear, radiant and untarnished. In its pure state, the mind is peaceful, without happiness or suffering – indeed, not experiencing any *viññāna* (feeling) at all. This is the true state of the mind.

The purpose of the practice, then, is to seek inwardly, searching and investigating until you reach the original mind. The original mind is also known as the pure mind. The pure mind is the mind without attachment. It doesn't get affected by mind-objects. In other words, it doesn't chase after the different kinds of pleasant and unpleasant mind-objects. Rather, the mind is in a state of continuous knowing and wakefulness – thoroughly mindful of all it is experiencing. When the mind is like this, no pleasant or unpleasant mind-objects it experiences will be able to disturb it. The mind doesn't 'become' anything. In other words, nothing can shake it. Why? Because there is awareness. The mind knows itself as pure. It has evolved its own, true independence; it has reached its original state. How is it able to bring this original state into existence? Through the faculty of mindfulness wisely reflecting and seeing that all things are merely conditions arising out of the influence of elements, without any individual being controlling them.

This is how it is with the happiness and suffering we experience. When these mental states arise, they are just 'happiness' and 'suffering'. There is no owner of the happiness. The mind is not the owner of the suffering – mental states do not belong to the mind. Look at it for yourself. In reality these are not affairs of the mind, they are separate and distinct. Happiness is just the state of happiness; suffering is just the state of suffering. You are merely the knower of these. In the past, because the roots of greed, hatred and delusion already existed in the mind, whenever you caught sight of the slightest pleasant or unpleasant mind-object, the mind would react immediately – you would take hold of it and have to experience either happiness or suffering. You would be continuously indulging in states of happiness and suffering. That's the way it is as long as the mind doesn't know itself – as long as it's not bright and illuminated. The mind is not free. It is influenced by whatever mind-objects it experiences. In other words, it is without a refuge, unable to truly depend on itself. You receive a pleasant mental impression and get into a good mood. The mind forgets itself.

In contrast, the original mind is beyond good and bad. This is the original nature of the mind. If you feel happy over experiencing a pleasant mind-object, that is delusion. If you feel unhappy over experiencing an unpleasant mind-object, that is delusion. Unpleasant mind-objects make you suffer and pleasant ones make you happy – this is the world. Mind-objects come with the world. They are the world. They give rise to happiness and suffering, good and evil, and everything that is subject to impermanence and uncertainty. When you separate from the original mind, everything becomes uncertain – there is just unending birth and death, uncertainty and apprehensiveness, suffering and hardship, without any way of halting it or bringing it to cessation. This is *vatta* (the endless round of rebirth).

Through wise reflection, you can see that you are subject to old habits and conditioning. The mind itself is actually free, but you have to suffer because of your attachments. Take, for example, praise and criticism. Suppose other people say you are stupid: why does that cause you to suffer? It's because you feel that you are being criticised. You 'pick up' this bit of information and fill the mind with it. The act of 'picking up,' accumulating and receiving that knowledge without full mindfulness, gives rise to an experience that is like stabbing yourself. This is *upādāna* (attachment). Once you

have been stabbed, there is *bhava* (becoming). *Bhava* is the cause for *jāti* (birth). If you train yourself not to take any notice of or attach importance to some of the things other people say, merely treating them as sounds contacting your ears, there won't be any strong reaction and you won't have to suffer, as nothing is created in the mind. It would be like listening to a Cambodian scolding you – you would hear the sound of his speech, but it would be just sound because you wouldn't understand the meaning of the words. You wouldn't be aware that you were being told off. The mind wouldn't receive that information, it would merely hear the sound and remain at ease. If anybody criticised you in a language that you didn't understand, you would just hear the sound of their voice and remain unperturbed. You wouldn't absorb the meaning of the words and be hurt over them. Once you have practised with the mind to this point, it becomes easier to know the arising and passing away of consciousness from moment to moment. As you reflect like this, penetrating deeper and deeper inwards, the mind becomes progressively more refined, going beyond the coarser defilements.

Samādhi means the mind that is firmly concentrated, and the more you practise the firmer the mind becomes. The more firmly the mind is concentrated, the more resolute in the practice it becomes. The more you contemplate, the more confident you become. The mind becomes truly stable – to the point where it can't be swayed by anything at all. You are absolutely confident that no single mind-object has the power to shake it. Mind-objects are mind-objects; the mind is the mind. The mind experiences good and bad mental states, happiness and suffering, because it is deluded by mind-objects. If it isn't deluded by mind-objects, there's no suffering. The undeluded mind can't be shaken. This phenomenon is a state of awareness, where all things and phenomena are viewed entirely as *dhātu*¹¹ (natural elements) arising and passing away – just that much. It might be possible to have this experience and yet still be unable to fully let go. Whether you can or can't let go, don't let this bother you. Before anything else, you must at least develop and sustain this level of awareness or fixed determination in the mind. You have to keep applying the pressure and destroying defilements through determined effort, penetrating deeper and deeper into the practice.

Having discerned the Dhamma in this way, the mind will withdraw to a less intense level of practice, which the Buddha and subsequent Buddhist scriptures describe as the *Gotrabhū citta*¹². The *Gotrabhū citta* refers to the mind which has experienced going beyond the boundaries of the ordinary human mind. It is the mind of the *puthujjana* (ordinary unenlightened individual) breaking through into the realm of the ariyan (Noble One) – however, this phenomena still takes place within the mind of the ordinary unenlightened individual like ourselves. The *Gotrabhū puggala* is someone, who, having progressed in their practice until they gain temporary experience of *Nibbāna* (enlightenment), withdraws from it and continues practising on another level, because they have not yet completely cut off all defilements. It's like someone who is in the middle of stepping across a stream, with one foot on the near bank, and the other on the far side. They know for sure that there are two sides to the stream, but are unable to cross over it completely and so step back. The understanding that there exist two sides to the stream is similar to that of the *Gotrabhū puggala* or the *Gotrabhū citta*. It means that you know the way to go beyond the defilements, but are still unable to go there, and so step back. Once you know for yourself that this state

¹¹*Dhātu*: Elements, natural essence. The elementary properties which make up the inner sense of the body and mind: earth (material), water (cohesion), fire (energy) and air (motion), space and consciousness.

¹²*Gotrabhū citta*: Change-of-lineage (state of consciousness preceding *jhāna* or Path).

truly exists, this knowledge remains with you constantly as you continue to practise meditation and develop your *pāramī*. You are both certain of the goal and the most direct way to reach it.

Simply speaking, this state that has arisen is the mind itself. If you contemplate according to the truth of the way things are, you can see that there exists just one path and it is your duty to follow it. It means that you know from the very beginning that mental states of happiness and suffering are not the path to follow. This is something that you have to know for yourself – it is the truth of the way things are. If you attach to happiness, you are off the path because attaching to happiness will cause suffering to arise. If you attach to sadness, it can be a cause for suffering to arise. You understand this – you are already mindful with right view, but at the same time, are not yet able to fully let go of your attachments.

So what is the correct way to practice? You must walk the middle path, which means keeping track of the various mental states of happiness and suffering, while at the same time keeping them at a distance, off to either side of you. This is the correct way to practise – you maintain mindfulness and awareness even though you are still unable to let go. It's the correct way, because whenever the mind attaches to states of happiness and suffering, awareness of the attachment is always there. This means that whenever the mind attaches to states of happiness, you don't praise it or give value to it, and whenever it attaches to states of suffering, you don't criticise it. This way you can actually observe the mind as it is. Happiness is not right, suffering is not right. There is the understanding that neither of these is the right path. You are aware, awareness of them is sustained, but still you can't fully abandon them. You are unable to drop them, but you can be mindful of them. With mindfulness established, you don't give undue value to happiness or suffering. You don't give importance to either of those two directions which the mind can take, and you hold no doubts about this; you know that following either of those ways is not the right path of practice, so at all times you take this middle way of equanimity as the object of mind. When you practise to the point where the mind goes beyond happiness and suffering, equanimity will necessarily arise as the path to follow, and you have to gradually move down it, little by little – the heart knowing the way to go to be beyond defilements, but, not yet being ready to finally transcend them, it withdraws and continues practising.

Whenever happiness arises and the mind attaches, you have to take that happiness up for contemplation, and whenever it attaches to suffering, you have to take that up for contemplation. Eventually, the mind reaches a stage when it is fully mindful of both happiness and suffering. That's when it will be able to lay aside the happiness and the suffering, the pleasure and the sadness, and lay aside all that is the world and so become *lokavidū* (knower of the worlds). Once the mind – 'one who knows' – can let go it will settle down at that point. Why does it settle down? Because you have done the practice and followed the path right down to that very spot. You know what you have to do to reach the end of the path, but are still unable to accomplish it. When the mind attaches to either happiness or suffering, you are not deluded by them and strive to dislodge the attachment and dig it out.

This is practising on the level of the *yogāvacara*, one who is travelling along the path of practice – striving to cut through the defilements, yet not having reached the goal. You focus upon these conditions and the way it is from moment to moment in your own mind. It's not necessary to be personally interviewed about the state of your mind or do anything special. When there is attachment to either happiness or suffering, there must be the clear and certain understanding that any attachment to

either of these states is deluded. It is attachment to the world. It is being stuck in the world. Happiness means attachment to the world, suffering means attachment to the world. This is the way worldly attachment is. What is it that creates or gives rise to the world? The world is created and established through ignorance. It's because we are not mindful that the mind attaches importance to things, fashioning and creating *saṅkhāra* (formations) the whole time.

It is here that the practice becomes really interesting. Wherever there is attachment in the mind, you keep hitting at that point, without letting up. If there is attachment to happiness, you keep pounding at it, not letting the mind get carried away with the mood. If the mind attaches to suffering, you grab hold of that, really getting to grips with it and contemplating it straight away. You are in the process of finishing the job off; the mind doesn't let a single mind-object slip by without reflecting on it. Nothing can resist the power of your mindfulness and wisdom. Even if the mind is caught in an unwholesome mental state, you know it as unwholesome and the mind is not heedless. It's like stepping on thorns: of course, you don't seek to step on thorns, you try to avoid them, but nevertheless sometimes you step on one. When you do step on one, do you feel good about it? You feel aversion when you step on a thorn. Once you know the path of practice, it means you know that which is the world, that which is suffering and that which binds us to the endless cycle of birth and death. Even though you know this, you are unable to stop stepping on those 'thorns'. The mind still follows various states of happiness and sadness, but doesn't completely indulge in them. You sustain a continuous effort to destroy any attachment in the mind – to destroy and clear all that which is the world from the mind.

You must practise right in the present moment. Meditate right there; build your *pāramī* right there. This is the heart of practice, the heart of your effort. You carry on an internal dialogue, discussing and reflecting on the Dhamma within yourself. It's something that takes place right inside the mind. As worldly attachment is uprooted, mindfulness and wisdom untiringly penetrate inwards, and the 'one who knows' sustains awareness with equanimity, mindfulness and clarity, without getting involved with or becoming enslaved to anybody or anything. Not getting involved with things means knowing without clinging – knowing while laying things aside and letting go. You still experience happiness; you still experience suffering; you still experience mind-objects and mental states, but you don't cling to them.

Once you are seeing things as they are you know the mind as it is and you know mind-objects as they are. You know the mind as separate from mind-objects and mind-objects as separate from the mind. The mind is the mind, mind-objects are mind-objects. Once you know these two phenomena as they are, whenever they come together you will be mindful of them. When the mind experiences mind-objects, mindfulness will be there. Our teacher described the practice of the *yogāvacara* who is able to sustain such awareness, whether walking, standing, sitting or lying down, as being a continuous cycle. It is *sammā paṭipadā* (Right Practice). You don't forget yourself or become heedless.

You don't simply observe the coarser parts of your practice, but also watch the mind internally, on a more refined level. That which is on the outside, you set aside. From here onwards you are just watching the body and the mind, just observing this mind and its objects arising and passing away, and understanding that having arisen they pass away. With passing away there is further arising – birth and death, death and birth; cessation followed by arising, arising followed by cessation. Ultimately, you are simply watching the act of cessation. *khayavayaṃ* means degeneration and cessation.

Degeneration and cessation are the natural way of the mind and its objects – this is *khayavayaṃ*. Once the mind is practising and experiencing this, it doesn't have to go following up on or searching for anything else – it will be keeping abreast of things with mindfulness. Seeing is just seeing. Knowing is just knowing. The mind and mind-objects are just as they are. This is the way things are. The mind isn't proliferating about or creating anything in addition.

Don't be confused or vague about the practice. Don't get caught in doubting. This applies to the practice of *sīla* just the same. As I mentioned earlier, you have to look at it and contemplate whether it's right or wrong. Having contemplated it, then leave it there. Don't doubt about it. Practising *samādhi* is the same. Keep practising, calming the mind little by little. If you start thinking, it doesn't matter; if you're not thinking, it doesn't matter. The important thing is to gain an understanding of the mind.

Some people want to make the mind peaceful, but don't know what true peace really is. They don't know the peaceful mind. There are two kinds of peacefulness – one is the peace that comes through *samādhi*, the other is the peace that comes through *paññā*. The mind that is peaceful through *samādhi* is still deluded. The peace that comes through the practice of *samādhi* alone is dependent on the mind being separated from mind-objects. When it's not experiencing any mind-objects, then there is calm, and consequently one attaches to the happiness that comes with that calm. However, whenever there is impingement through the senses, the mind gives in straight away. It's afraid of mind-objects. It's afraid of happiness and suffering; afraid of praise and criticism; afraid of forms, sounds, smells and tastes. One who is peaceful through *samādhi* alone is afraid of everything and doesn't want to get involved with anybody or anything on the outside. People practising *samādhi* in this way just want to stay isolated in a cave somewhere, where they can experience the bliss of *samādhi* without having to come out. Wherever there is a peaceful place, they sneak off and hide themselves away. This kind of *samādhi* involves a lot of suffering – they find it difficult to come out of it and be with other people. They don't want to see forms or hear sounds. They don't want to experience anything at all! They have to live in some specially preserved quiet place, where no-one will come and disturb them with conversation. They have to have really peaceful surroundings.

This kind of peacefulness can't do the job. If you have reached the necessary level of calm, then withdraw. The Buddha didn't teach to practise *samādhi* with delusion. If you are practising like that, then stop. If the mind has achieved calm, then use it as a basis for contemplation. Contemplate the peace of concentration itself and use it to connect the mind with and reflect upon the different mind-objects which it experiences. Use the calm of *samādhi* to contemplate sights, smells, tastes, tactile sensations and ideas. Use this calm to contemplate the different parts of the body, such as the hair of the head, hair of the body, nails, teeth, skin and so on. Contemplate the three characteristics of *aniccam* (impermanence), *dukkham* (suffering) and *anattā* (not-self). Reflect upon this entire world. When you have contemplated sufficiently, it is all right to reestablish the calm of *samādhi*. You can re-enter it through sitting meditation and afterwards, with calm re-established, continue with the contemplation. Use the state of calm to train and purify the mind. Use it to challenge the mind. As you gain knowledge, use it to fight the defilements, to train the mind. If you simply enter *samādhi* and stay there you don't gain any insight – you are simply making the mind calm and that's all. However, if you use the calm mind to reflect, beginning with your external experience, this calm will gradually penetrate deeper and deeper inwards, until the mind experiences the most profound peace of all.

The peace which arises through *paññā* is distinctive, because when the mind withdraws from the state of calm, the presence of *paññā* makes it unafraid of forms, sounds, smells, tastes, tactile sensations and ideas. It means that as soon as there is sense contact the mind is immediately aware of the mind-object. As soon as there is sense contact you lay it aside; as soon as there is sense contact mindfulness is sharp enough to let go right away. This is the peace that comes through *paññā*.

When you are practising with the mind in this way, the mind becomes considerably more refined than when you are developing *samādhi* alone. The mind becomes very powerful, and no longer tries to run away. With such energy you become fearless. In the past you were scared to experience anything, but now you know mind-objects as they are and are no longer afraid. You know your own strength of mind and are unafraid. When you see a form, you contemplate it. When you hear a sound, you contemplate it. You become proficient in the contemplation of mind-objects. You are established in the practice with a new boldness, which prevails whatever the conditions. Whether it be sights, sounds or smells, you see them and let go of them as they occur. Whatever it is, you can let go of it all. You clearly see happiness and let it go. You clearly see suffering and let it go. Wherever you see them, you let them go right there. That's the way! Keep letting them go and casting them aside right there. No mind-objects will be able to maintain a hold over the mind. You leave them there and stay secure in your place of abiding within the mind. As you experience, you cast aside. As you experience, you observe. Having observed, you let go. All mind-objects lose their value and are no longer able to sway you. This is the power of *vipassanā* (insight meditation). When these characteristics arise within the mind of the practitioner, it is appropriate to change the name of the practice to *vipassanā*: clear knowing in accordance with the truth. That's what it's all about – knowledge in accordance with the truth of the way things are. This is peace at the highest level, the peace of *vipassanā*. Developing peace through *samādhi* alone is very, very difficult; one is constantly petrified.

So when the mind is at its most calm, what should you do? Train it. Practise with it. Use it to contemplate. Don't be scared of things. Don't attach. Developing *samādhi* so that you can just sit there and attach to blissful mental states isn't the true purpose of the practice. You must withdraw from it. The Buddha said that you must fight this war, not just hide out in a trench trying to avoid the enemy's bullets. When it's time to fight, you really have to come out with guns blazing. Eventually you have to come out of that trench. You can't stay sleeping there when it's time to fight. This is the way the practice is. You can't allow your mind to just hide, cringing in the shadows.

Sīla and *samādhi* form the foundation of practice and it is essential to develop them before anything else. You must train yourself and investigate according to the monastic form and ways of practice which have been passed down.

Be it as it may, I have described a rough outline of the practice. You as the practitioners must avoid getting caught in doubts. Don't doubt about the way of practice. When there is happiness, watch the happiness. When there is suffering, watch the suffering. Having established awareness, make the effort to destroy both of them. Let them go. Cast them aside. Know the object of mind and keep letting it go. Whether you want to do sitting or walking meditation it doesn't matter. If you keep thinking, never mind. The important thing is to sustain moment to moment awareness of the mind. If you are really caught in mental proliferation, then gather it all together, and contemplate it in terms of being one whole, cutting it off right from the start, saying, 'All these thoughts, ideas and imaginings of mine are simply thought proliferation and nothing more. It's

all *aniccam*, *dukkham* and *anattā*. None of it is certain at all.' Discard it right there.

Evening Sitting

I would like to ask you about your practice. You have all been practising meditation here, but are you sure about the practice yet? Ask yourselves, are you confident about the practice yet? These days there are all sorts of meditation teachers around, both monks and lay teachers, and I'm afraid it will cause you to be full of doubts and uncertainty about what you are doing. This is why I am asking. As far as Buddhist practice is concerned, there is really nothing greater or higher than these teachings of the Buddha which you have been practising with here. If you have a clear understanding of them, it will give rise to an absolutely firm and unwavering peace in your heart and mind.

Making the mind peaceful is known as practising meditation, or practising *samādhi* (concentration). The mind is something which is extremely changeable and unreliable. Observing from your practice so far, have you seen this yet? Some days you sit meditation and in no time at all the mind is calm, others, you sit and whatever you do there's no calm – the mind constantly struggling to get away, until it eventually does. Some days it goes well, some days it's awful. This is the way the mind displays these different conditions for you to see. You must understand that the eight factors of the Noble Eight-fold Path (*ariya magga*) merge in *sīla* (moral restraint), *samādhi* and *paññā* (wisdom). They don't come together anywhere else. This means that when you bring the factors of your practice together, there must be *sīla*, there must be *samādhi* and there must be *paññā* present together in the mind. It means that in practising meditation right here and now, you are creating the causes for the Path to arise in a very direct way.

In sitting meditation you are taught to close your eyes, so that you don't spend your time looking at different things. This is because the Buddha was teaching that you should know your own mind. Observe the mind. If you close your eyes, your attention will naturally be turned inwards towards the mind – the source of many different kinds of knowledge. This is a way of training the mind to give rise to *samādhi*.

Once sitting with the eyes closed, establish awareness with the breath – make awareness of the breath more important than anything else. This means you bring awareness to follow the breath, and by keeping with it, you will know that place which is the focal point of *sati* (mindfulness), the focal point of the knowing and the focal point of the mind's awareness. Whenever these factors of the path are working together, you will be able to watch and see your breath, feelings, mind and *ārammaṇa* (mind-objects), as they are in the present moment. Ultimately, you will know that place which is both the focal point of *samādhi* and the unification point of the path factors.

When developing *samādhi*, fix attention on the breath and imagine that you are sitting alone with absolutely no other people and nothing else around to bother you. Develop this perception in the mind, sustaining it until the mind completely lets go of the world outside and all that is left is simply the knowing of the breath entering

and leaving. The mind must set aside the external world. Don't allow yourself to start thinking about this person who is sitting over here, or that person who is sitting over there. Don't give space to any thoughts that will give rise to confusion or agitation in the mind – it's better to throw them out and be done with them. There is no one else here, you are sitting all alone. Develop this perception until all the other memories, perceptions and thoughts concerning other people and things subside, and you're no longer doubting or wandering about the other people or things around you. Then you can fix your attention solely on the in-breaths and out-breaths. Breathe normally. Allow the in-breaths and the out-breaths to continue naturally, without forcing them to be longer or shorter, stronger or weaker than normal. Allow the breath to continue in a state of normality and balance, and then sit and observe it entering and leaving the body.

Once the mind has let go of external mind-objects, it means you will no longer feel disturbed by the sound of traffic or other noises. You won't feel irritated with anything outside. Whether it's forms, sounds or whatever, they won't be a source of disturbance, because the mind won't be paying attention to them – it will become centred upon the breath.

If the mind is agitated by different things and you can't concentrate, try taking an extra-deep breath until the lungs are completely full, and then release all the air until there is none left inside. Do this several times, then re-establish awareness and continue to develop concentration. Having re-established mindfulness, it's normal that for a period the mind will be calm, then change and become agitated again. When this happens, make the mind firm, take another deep breath and subsequently expel all the air from your lungs. Fill the lungs to capacity again for a moment and then re-establish mindfulness on the breathing. Fix *sati* on the in-breaths and the out-breaths, and continue to maintain awareness in this way.

The practice tends to be this way, so it will have to take many sittings and much effort before you become proficient. Once you are, the mind will let go of the external world and remain undisturbed. Mind-objects from the outside will be unable to penetrate inside and disturb the mind itself. Once they are unable to penetrate inside, you will see the mind. You will see the mind as one object of awareness, the breath as another and mind-objects as another. They will all be present within the field of awareness, centred at the tip of your nose. Once *sati* is firmly established with the in-breaths and out-breaths, you can continue to practise at your ease. As the mind becomes calm, the breath, which was originally coarse, correspondingly becomes lighter and more refined. The object of mind also becomes increasingly subtle and refined. The body feels lighter and the mind itself feels progressively lighter and unburdened. The mind lets go of external mind-objects and you continue to observe internally.

From here onwards your awareness will be turned away from the world outside and is directed inwards to focus on the mind. Once the mind has gathered together and become concentrated, maintain awareness at that point where the mind becomes focused. As you breathe, you will see the breath clearly as it enters and leaves, *sati* will be sharp and awareness of mind-objects and mental activity will be clearer. At that point you will see the characteristics of *sīla*, *samādhi* and *paññā* and the way in which they merge together. This is known as the unification of the Path factors. Once this unification occurs, your mind will be free from all forms of agitation and confusion. It will become one-pointed and this is what is known as *samādhi*. When you focus attention in just one place, in this case the breath, you gain a clarity and awareness because of the uninterrupted presence of *sati*. As you continue to see the breath clearly, *sati* will

become stronger and the mind will become more sensitive in many different ways. You will see the mind in the centre of that place (the breath), one-pointed with awareness focused inwards, rather than turning towards the world outside. The external world gradually disappears from your awareness and the mind will no longer be going to perform any work on the outside. It's as if you've come inside your 'house,' where all your sense faculties have come together to form one compact unit. You are at your ease and the mind is free from all external objects. Awareness remains with the breath and over time it will penetrate deeper and deeper inside, becoming progressively more refined. Ultimately, awareness of the breath becomes so refined that the sensation of the breath seems to disappear. You could say either that awareness of the sensation of the breath has disappeared, or that the breath itself has disappeared. Then there arises a new kind of awareness – awareness that the breath has disappeared. In other words, awareness of the breath becomes so refined that it's difficult to define it.

So it might be that you are just sitting there and there's no breath. Really, the breath is still there, but it has become so refined that it seems to have disappeared. Why? Because the mind is at its most refined, with a special kind of knowing. All that remains is the knowing. Even though the breath has vanished, the mind is still concentrated with the knowledge that the breath is not there. As you continue, what should you take up as the object of meditation? Take this very knowing as the meditation object – in other words the knowledge that there is no breath – and sustain this. You could say that a specific kind of knowledge has been established in the mind.

At this point, some people might have doubts arising, because it is here that *nimitta*¹³ can arise. These can be of many kinds, including both forms and sounds. It is here that all sorts of unexpected things can arise in the course of the practice. If *nimitta* do arise (some people have them, some don't) you must understand them in accordance with the truth. Don't doubt or allow yourself to become alarmed.

At this stage, you should make the mind unshakeable in its concentration and be especially mindful. Some people become startled when they notice that the breath has disappeared, because they're used to having the breath there. When it appears that the breath has gone, you might panic or become afraid that you are going to die. Here you must establish the understanding that it is just the nature of the practice to progress in this way. What will you observe as the object of meditation now? Observe this feeling that there is no breath and sustain it as the object of awareness as you continue to meditate. The Buddha described this as the firmest, most unshakeable form of *samādhi*. There is just one firm and unwavering object of mind. When your practice of *samādhi* reaches this point, there will be many unusual and refined changes and transformations taking place within the mind, which you can be aware of. The sensation of the body will feel at its lightest or might even disappear altogether. You might feel like you are floating in mid-air and seem to be completely weightless. It might be like you are in the middle of space and wherever you direct your sense faculties they don't seem to register anything at all. Even though you know the body is still sitting there, you experience complete emptiness. This feeling of emptiness can be quite strange.

As you continue to practise, understand that there is nothing to worry about. Establish this feeling of being relaxed and unworried, securely in the mind. Once the mind is concentrated and one-pointed, no mind-object will be able to penetrate or disturb it,

¹³*Nimitta*: a sign or appearance, that may take place in terms of seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting, touching or mental impression, and which arises based on the *citta* (mind), rather than the relevant sense faculty. Examples of *nimitta* include: the seeing or hearing of beings in other realms of existence, precognition, clairvoyance, etc.

and you will be able to sit like this for as long as you want. You will be able to sustain concentration without any feelings of pain and discomfort.

Having developed *samādhi* to this level, you will be able to enter or leave it at will. When you do leave it, it's at your ease and convenience. You withdraw at your ease, rather than because you are feeling lazy, unenergetic or tired. You withdraw from *samādhi* because it is the appropriate time to withdraw, and you come out of it at your will.

This is *samādhi*: you are relaxed and at your ease. You enter and leave it without any problems. The mind and heart are at ease. If you genuinely have *samādhi* like this, it means that sitting meditation and entering *samādhi* for just thirty minutes or an hour will enable you to remain cool and peaceful for many days afterwards. Experiencing the effects of *samādhi* like this for several days has a purifying effect on the mind – whatever you experience will become an object for contemplation. This is where the practice really begins. It's the fruit which arises as *samādhi* matures.

Samādhi performs the function of calming the mind. *Samādhi* performs one function, *sīla* performs one function and *paññā* performs another function. These characteristics which you are focusing attention on and developing in the practice are linked, forming a circle. This is the way they manifest in the mind. *Sīla*, *samādhi* and *paññā* arise and mature from the same place. Once the mind is calm, it will become progressively more restrained and composed due to the presence of *paññā* and the power of *samādhi*. As the mind becomes more composed and refined, this gives rise to an energy which acts to purify *sīla*. Greater purity of *sīla* facilitates the development of stronger and more refined *samādhi*, and this in turn supports the maturing of *paññā*. They assist each other in this way. Each aspect of the practice acts as a supporting factor for each other one – in the end these terms becoming synonymous. As these three factors continue to mature together, they form one complete circle, ultimately giving rise to *Magga*. *Magga* is a synthesis of these three functions of the practice working smoothly and consistently together. As you practise, you have to preserve this energy. It is the energy which will give rise to *vipassanā* (insight) or *paññā*. Having reached this stage (where *paññā* is already functioning in the mind, independent of whether the mind is peaceful or not) *paññā* will provide a consistent and independent energy in the practice. You see that whenever the mind is not peaceful, you shouldn't attach, and even when it is peaceful, you shouldn't attach. Having let go of the burden of such concerns, the heart will accordingly feel much lighter. Whether you experience pleasant mind-objects or unpleasant mind-objects, you will remain at ease. The mind will remain peaceful in this way.

Another important thing is to see that when you stop doing the formal meditation practice, if there is no wisdom functioning in the mind, you will give up the practice altogether without any further contemplation, development of awareness or thought about the work which still has to be done. In fact, when you withdraw from *samādhi*, you know clearly in the mind that you have withdrawn. Having withdrawn, continue to conduct yourself in a normal manner. Maintain mindfulness and awareness at all times. It isn't that you only practise meditation in the sitting posture – *samādhi* means the mind which is firm and unwavering. As you go about your daily life, make the mind firm and steady and maintain this sense of steadiness as the object of mind at all times. You must be practising *sati* and *sampajañña* (all round knowing) continuously. After you get up from the formal sitting practice and go about your business – walking, riding in cars and so on – whenever your eyes see a form or your ears hear a sound, maintain awareness. As you experience mind-objects which give rise to liking and

disliking, try to consistently maintain awareness of the fact that such mental states are impermanent and uncertain. In this way the mind will remain calm and in a state of 'normality'.

As long as the mind is calm, use it to contemplate mind-objects. Contemplate the whole of this form, the physical body. You can do this at any time and in any posture: whether doing formal meditation practice, relaxing at home, out at work, or in whatever situation you find yourself. Keep the meditation and the reflection going at all times. Just going for a walk and seeing dead leaves on the ground under a tree can provide an opportunity to contemplate impermanence. Both we and the leaves are the same: when we get old, we shrivel up and die. Other people are all the same. This is raising the mind to the level of *vipassanā*, contemplating the truth of the way things are, the whole time. Whether walking, standing, sitting or lying down, *sati* is sustained evenly and consistently. This is practising meditation correctly – you have to be following the mind closely, checking it at all times.

Practising here and now at seven o'clock in the evening, we have sat and meditated together for an hour and now stopped. It might be that your mind has stopped practising completely and hasn't continued with the reflection. That's the wrong way to do it. When we stop, all that should stop is the formal meeting and sitting meditation. You should continue practising and developing awareness consistently, without letting up.

I've often taught that if you don't practise consistently, it's like drops of water. It's like drops of water because the practice is not a continuous, uninterrupted flow. *Sati* is not sustained evenly. The important point is that the mind does the practice and nothing else. The body doesn't do it. The mind does the work, the mind does the practice. If you understand this clearly, you will see that you don't necessarily have to do formal sitting meditation in order for the mind to know *samādhi*. The mind is the one who does the practice. You have to experience and understand this for yourself, in your own mind.

Once you do see this for yourself, you will be developing awareness in the mind at all times and in all postures. If you are maintaining *sati* as an even and unbroken flow, it's as if the drops of water have joined to form a smooth and continuous flow of running water. *Sati* is present in the mind from moment to moment and accordingly there will be awareness of mind-objects at all times. If the mind is restrained and composed with uninterrupted *sati*, you will know mind-objects each time that wholesome and unwholesome mental states arise. You will know the mind that is calm and the mind that is confused and agitated. Wherever you go you will be practising like this. If you train the mind in this way, it means your meditation will mature quickly and successfully.

Please don't misunderstand. These days it's common for people to go on *vipassanā* courses for three or seven days, where they don't have to speak or do anything but meditate. Maybe you have gone on a silent meditation retreat for a week or two, afterwards returning to your normal daily life. You might have left thinking that you've 'done *vipassanā*' and, because you feel that you know what it's all about, then carry on going to parties, discos and indulging in different forms of sensual delight. When you do it like this, what happens? There won't be any of the fruits of *vipassanā* left by the end of it. If you go and do all sorts of unskillful things, which disturb and upset the mind, wasting everything, then next year go back again and do another retreat for seven days or a few weeks, then come out and carry on with the parties, discos and drinking, that isn't true practice. It isn't *paṭipadā* or the path to progress.

You need to make an effort to renounce. You must contemplate until you see the

harmful effects which come from such behaviour. See the harm in drinking and going out on the town. Reflect and see the harm inherent in all the different kinds of unskilful behaviour which you indulge in, until it becomes fully apparent. This would provide the impetus for you to take a step back and change your ways. Then you would find some real peace. To experience peace of mind you have to clearly see the disadvantages and danger in such forms of behaviour. This is practising in the correct way. If you do a silent retreat for seven days, where you don't have to speak to or get involved with anybody, and then go chatting, gossiping and overindulging for another seven months, how will you gain any real or lasting benefit from those seven days of practise?

I would encourage all the lay people here, who are practising to develop awareness and wisdom, to understand this point. Try to practise consistently. See the disadvantages of practising insincerely and inconsistently, and try to sustain a more dedicated and continuous effort in the practice. Just this much. It can then become a realistic possibility that you might put an end to the *kilesa* (mental defilements). But that style of not speaking and not playing around for seven days, followed by six months of complete sensual indulgence, without any mindfulness or restraint, will just lead to the squandering of any gains made from the meditation – there won't be any thing left. It's like if you were to go to work for a day and earned twenty pounds, but then went out and spent thirty pounds on food and things in the same day; where would there be any money saved? It would be all gone. It's just the same with the meditation.

This is a form of reminder to you all, so I will ask for your forgiveness. It's necessary to speak in this way, so that those aspects of the practice which are at fault will become clear to you and accordingly, you will be able to give them up. You could say that the reason why you have come to practise is to learn how to avoid doing the wrong things in the future. What happens when you do the wrong things? Doing wrong things leads you to agitation and suffering, when there's no goodness in the mind. It's not the way to peace of mind. This is the way it is. If you practise on a retreat, not talking for seven days, and then go indulging for a few months, no matter how strictly you practised for those seven days, you won't derive any lasting value from that practice. Practising that way, you don't really get anywhere. Many places where meditation is taught don't really get to grips with or get beyond this problem. Really, you have to conduct your daily life in a consistently calm and restrained way.

In meditation you have to be constantly turning your attention to the practice. It's like planting a tree. If you plant a tree in one place and after three days pull it up and plant it in a different spot, then after a further three days pull it up and plant it in yet another place, it will just die without producing anything. Practising meditation like this won't bear any fruit either. This is something you have to understand for yourselves. Contemplate it. Try it out for yourselves when you go home. Get a sapling and plant it one spot, and after every few days, go and pull it up and plant it in a different place. It will just die without ever bearing any fruit. It's the same doing a meditation retreat for seven days, followed by seven months of unrestrained behaviour, allowing the mind to become soiled, and then going back to do another retreat for a short period, practising strictly without talking and subsequently coming out and being unrestrained again. As with the tree, the meditation just dies – none of the wholesome fruits are retained. The tree doesn't grow, the meditation doesn't grow. I say practising this way doesn't bear much fruit.

Actually, I'm not fond of giving talks like this. It's because I feel sorry for you that I have to speak critically. When you are doing the wrong things, it's my duty to tell you, but I'm speaking out of compassion for you. Some people might feel uneasy and

think that I'm just scolding them. Really, I'm not just scolding you for its own sake, I'm helping to point out where you are going wrong, so that you know. Some people might think, 'Luang Por is just telling us off,' but it's not like that. It's only once in a long while that I'm able to come and give a talk – if I was to give talks like this everyday, you would really get upset! But the truth is, it's not you who gets upset, it's only the *kilesa* that are upset. I will say just this much for now.

Questions and Answers with Ajahn Chah

(Extracts from a conversation between Luang Por Chah and a lay Buddhist)

Question: There are those periods when our hearts happen to be absorbed in things and become blemished or darkened, but we are still aware of ourselves; such as when some form of greed, hatred, or delusion comes up. Although we know that these things are objectionable, we are unable to prevent them from arising. Could it be said that even as we are aware of them, this is providing the basis for increased clinging and attachment and maybe is putting us further back to where we started from?

Answer: That's it! One must keep knowing them at that point, that's the method of practice.

Q: I mean that simultaneously we are both aware of them and repelled by them, but lacking the ability to resist them, they just burst forth.

A: By then, it's already beyond one's capability to do anything. At that point one has to readjust oneself and then continue contemplation. Don't just give up on them there and then. When one sees things arise in that way one tends to get upset or feel regret, but it is possible to say that they are uncertain and subject to change. What happens is that one sees these things are wrong, but one is still not ready or able to deal with them. It's as if they are independent entities, the leftover karmic tendencies that are still creating and conditioning the state of the heart. One doesn't wish to allow the heart to become like that, but it does and it indicates that one's knowledge and awareness is still neither sufficient nor fast enough to keep abreast of things.

One must practice and develop mindfulness as much as one can in order to gain a greater and more penetrating awareness. Whether the heart is soiled or blemished in some way, it doesn't matter, whatever comes up one should contemplate the impermanence and uncertainty of it. By maintaining this contemplation at each instant that something arises, after some time one will see the impermanent nature inherent in all sense objects and mental states. Because one sees them as such, gradually they will lose their importance and one's clinging and attachment to that which is a blemish on the heart will continue to diminish. Whenever suffering arises one will be able to work through it and readjust oneself, but one shouldn't give up on this work or set it aside. One must keep up a continuity of effort and try to make one's awareness fast enough to keep in touch with the changing mental conditions. It could be said that so far one's development of the Path still lacks sufficient energy to overcome the mental defilements. Whenever

suffering arises the heart becomes clouded over, but one must keep developing that knowledge and understanding of the clouded heart; that is what one reflects on.

One must really take hold of it and repeatedly contemplate that this suffering and discontentment is just not a sure thing. It is something that is ultimately impermanent, unsatisfactory, and not-self. Focusing on these three characteristics, whenever these conditions of suffering arise again one will know them straight-away, having experienced them before.

Gradually, little by little, one's practice should gain momentum and as time passes, whatever sense objects and mental states arise will lose their value in this way. One's heart will know them for what they are and accordingly put them down. Having reached the point where one is able to know things and put them down with ease, they say that the path has matured internally and one will have the ability to swiftly bear down upon the defilements. From then on there will just be the arising and passing away in this place, the same as waves striking the seashore. When a wave comes in and finally reaches the shoreline, it just disintegrates and vanishes; a new wave comes and it happens again – the wave going no further than the limit of the shoreline. In the same way, nothing will be able to go beyond the limits established by one's own awareness.

That's the place where one will meet and come to understand impermanence, unsatisfactoriness and not-self. It is there that things will vanish – the three characteristics of impermanence, unsatisfactoriness and not self are the same as the seashore, and all sense objects and mental state that are experiences go in the same way as the waves. Happiness is uncertain, it's arisen many times before. Suffering is uncertain, it's arisen many times before; that's the way they are. In one's heart one will know that they are like that, they are "just that much". The heart will experience these conditions in this way and they will gradually keep losing their value and importance. This is talking about the characteristics of the heart, the way it is, it is the same for everybody, even the Buddha and all his disciples were like this.

If one's practice of the Path matures it will become automatic and it will no longer be dependent on anything external. When a defilement arises, one will immediately be aware of it and accordingly be able to counteract it. However, that stage when they say that the Path is still not mature enough nor fast enough to overcome the defilements is something that everybody has to experience – it's unavoidable. But it is at that point where one must use skillful reflection. Don't go investigating elsewhere or trying to solve the problem at some other place. Cure it right there. Apply the cure at that place where things arise and pass away. Happiness arises and then passes away, doesn't it? Suffering arises and then passes away, doesn't it? One will continuously be able to see the process of arising and ceasing, and see that which is good and bad in the heart. These are phenomena that exist and are part of nature. Don't cling tightly to them or create anything out of them at all.

If one has this kind of awareness, then even though one will be coming into contact with things, there will not be any noise. In other words, one will see the arising and passing away of phenomena in a very natural and ordinary way. One will just see things arise and then cease. One will understand the process of arising and ceasing in the light of impermanence, unsatisfactoriness, and not-self.

The nature of the Dhamma is like this. When one can see things as "just that

much”, then they will remain as “just that much”. There will be none of that clinging or holding on – as soon as one becomes aware of attachment it will disappear. There will be just the arising and ceasing and that is peaceful. That it’s peaceful is not because one doesn’t hear anything; there is the hearing, but one understands the nature of it and doesn’t cling or hold on to anything. This is what they mean by peaceful – the heart is still experiencing sense objects, but it doesn’t follow or get caught up in them. A division is made between the heart sense objects and the defilements. When one’s heart comes into contact with a sense object and there is an emotional reaction of liking, this gives rise to defilement; but if one understands the process of arising and ceasing, then there is nothing that can really arise from it – it will end just there.

Q: Does one have to practise and gain *samādhi* before one can contemplate the Dhamma?

A: Here one can say that’s correct from one point of view, but talking about it from the aspect of practice, then *paññā* has to come first, but following the conventional framework it has to be *sīla*, *samādhi* and then *paññā*. If one is truly practising the Dhamma, then *paññā* comes first. If *paññā* is there from the beginning, it means that one knows that which is right and that which is wrong; and one knows the heart that is calm and the heart that is disturbed and agitated. Talking from the scriptural basis, one has to say that the practice of restraint and composure will give rise to a sense of shame and fear of any form of wrong doing that potentially may arise. Once one has established the fear of that which is wrong and one is no longer acting or behaving wrongly, then that which is a wrong will not be present within one. When there is no longer anything wrong present within, this provides the conditions from which calm will arise in its place. That calm forms a foundation from which *samādhi* will grow and develop over time.

When the heart is calm, that knowledge and understanding which arises from within that calm is called *vipassana*. This means that from moment to moment there is a knowing in accordance with the truth, and within this are contained different properties. If one was to set them down on paper they would be *sīla*, *samādhi* and *paññā*. Talking about them, one can bring them together and say that these three *dhammas* form one mass and are inseparable. But if one was to talk about them as different properties, then it would be correct to say *sīla*, *samādhi* and *paññā*.

However, if one was acting in an unwholesome way, it would be impossible for the heart to become calm. So it would be most accurate to see them as developing together and it would be right to say that this is the way that the heart will become calm. Talking about the practice of *samādhi*, it involves preserving *sīla*, which includes looking after the sphere of one’s bodily actions and speech, in order not to do anything which is unwholesome or would lead one to remorse or suffering. This provides the foundation for the practice of calm and once one has a foundation in calm this in turn provides a foundation which supports the arising of *paññā*.

In formal teaching they emphasize the importance of *sīla*. *Adikalyānam*, *majjhakalyānam*, *pariyosānakalyānam* – the practice should be beautiful in the beginning, beautiful in the middle and beautiful in the end. This is how it is. Have you ever practised *samādhi*?

Q: I am still learning. The day after I went to see Tan Ajahn at Wat Keu-an my aunt

brought a book containing some of your teaching for me to read. That morning at work I started to read some passages which contained questions and answers to different problems. In it you said that the most important point was for the heart to watch over and observe the process of cause and effect that takes place within. Just to watch and maintain the knowing of the different things that come up.

That afternoon I was practising meditation and during the sitting, the characteristics that appeared were that I felt as though my body had disappeared. I was unable to feel the hands or legs and there were no bodily sensations. I knew that the body was still there, but I couldn't feel it. In the evening I had the opportunity to go and pay respects to Tan Ajahn Tate and I described to him the details of my experience. He said that these were the characteristics of the heart that appear when it unifies in *samādhi*, and that I should continue practising. I had this experience only once; on subsequent occasions I found that sometimes I was unable to feel only certain areas of the body, such as the hands, whereas in other areas there was still feeling. Sometimes during my practice I start to wonder whether just sitting and allowing the heart to let go of everything is the correct way to practice; or else should I think over and occupy myself with the different problems or unanswered questions concerning the Dhamma, which I still have.

A: It's not necessary to keep going over or adding anything on at this stage. This is what Tan Ajahn Tate was referring to; one must not repeat or add on to that which is there already. When that particular kind of knowing is present, it means that the heart is calm and it is that state of calm which one must observe. Whatever one feels, whether it feels like there is a body or a self or not, this is not the important point. It should all come within the field of one's awareness. These conditions indicate that the heart is calm and has unified in *samādhi*.

When the heart has unified for a long period, for a few times, then there will be a change in the conditions and they say that one withdraws. That state is called *appana samādhi* (absorption) and having entered the heart will subsequently withdraw. In fact, although it would not be incorrect to say that the heart withdraws, it doesn't actually withdraw. Another way is to say that it flips back, or that it changes, but the style used by most teachers is to say that once the heart has reached the state of calm, then it will withdraw. However, people can get caught up in disagreements over the use of language. It can cause difficulties and one might start to wonder, "how on earth can it withdraw? This business of withdrawing is just confusing!" It can lead to much foolishness and misunderstanding just because of the language.

What one must understand is that the way to practice is to observe these conditions with *sati-sampajañña*. In accordance with the characteristic of impermanence, the heart will turn about and withdraw to the level of *upacāra samādhi* (access concentration). If it withdraws to this level then one can gain knowledge and understanding, because at the deeper level there is not knowledge and understanding. If there is knowledge and understanding at this point it will resemble *saṅkhārā* (thinking)*.

It will be similar to two people having a conversation and discussing the Dhamma together. One who understands this might feel disappointed that their heart is not really calm, but in fact this dialogue takes place within the confines of the calm and restraint which has developed. These are the characteristics of the heart once

it has withdrawn to the level of *upacāra* – there will be the ability to know about and understand different things.

The heart will stay in this state for a period and then it will turn inwards again. In other words, it will turn and go back into the deeper state of calm as it was before; or it is even possible that it might obtain purer and calmer levels of concentrated energy than was experienced before. If it does reach such a level of concentration, one should merely note the fact and keep observing until the time when the heart withdraws again. Once it has withdrawn one will be able to develop knowledge and understanding as different problems arise. Here is where one should investigate and examine the different matters and issues which affect the heart in order to understand and penetrate them. Once these problems are finished with, then the heart will gradually move inwards towards the deeper level of concentration again. The heart will stay there and mature, freed from any other work or external impingement. There will just be the one-point knowing and this will prepare and strengthen one's mindfulness until the time is reached to re-emerge.

These conditions of entering and leaving will appear in one's heart during the practice, but this is something that is difficult to talk about. It is not harmful or damaging to one's practice. After a period the heart will withdraw and the inner dialogue will start in that place, taking the form of *saṅkhārā* or mental formations conditioning the heart. If one doesn't know that this activity is *saṅkhārā*, one might think that it is *paññā*, or that *paññā* is arising. One must see that this activity is fashioning and conditioning the heart and the most important thing about it is that it is impermanent. One must continually keep control and not allow the heart to start following and believing in all the different creations and stories that it cooks up. All that is just *saṅkhārā*, it doesn't become *paññā*.

The way *paññā* develops is when one listens and knows the heart as the process of creating and conditioning takes it in different directions and then reflects on the instability and uncertainty of this. The realization of its impermanence will provide the cause by which one can let go of things at that point. Once the heart has let go of things and put them down at that point, it will gradually become more and more calm and steady. One must keep entering and leaving *samādhi* like this and *paññā* will arise at that point. There one will gain knowledge and understanding.

As one continues to practice, many different kinds of problems and difficulties will tend to arise in the heart; but whatever problems the world, or even the universe might bring up, one will be able to deal with them all. One's wisdom will follow them up and find answers for every question and doubt. Wherever one meditates, whatever thoughts come up, whatever happens, everything will be providing the cause for *paññā* to arise. This is a process that will take place by itself, free from external influence. *Paññā* will arise like this, but when it does, one should be careful not to become deluded and see it as *saṅkhārā*. Whenever one reflects on things and sees them as impermanent and uncertain, then one shouldn't cling or attach to them in any way. If one keeps developing this state, when *paññā* is present in the heart, it will take the place of one's normal way of thinking and reacting and the heart will become fuller and brighter in the centre of everything. As this happens – one knows and understands all things as they really are – one's heart will be able to progress with meditation in the correct way and without being deluded. That is how it should be.

The Mind Lets Go of Itself

(What follows is an extract of a conversation between Venerable Ajahn Chah and a group of Western monk disciples. It was recorded at Gor Nork Temple in northeast Thailand on the 14th August 1979. Another extract of the same conversation (translated by a different translator) was previously published under the name "What is Contemplation?")

Question: What do we have to do to get to the real mind (*citta*)?

Ajahn Chah: Firstly we follow this wandering mind. Follow this mind until we see it as uncertain and changing. The mind must clearly perceive itself, seeing that it has nothing that can be grasped. Then it will let go completely. The mind lets go of this very mind. By completely understanding this mind it abandons the mind. It exhausts the mind's ability to concoct thought. It becomes unconfused by any of this.

The Buddha was reluctant to describe this state (of Enlightenment), for whatever words are ascribed to it, they are mere conventional labels. Words are used to describe it so people can understand. Naturally it remains just as it is.

(Ajahn Chah taps the ground and continues:) Like the ground compared to that which runs around on top. It's like that. That which is the ground doesn't arise or cease. It remains as it is. That which arises and runs around on top includes the mind (*citta*), perception (*saññā*), as well as thinking (*saṅkhārā*).

In whatever way the state (of Enlightenment) is explained - the body, feeling, perception, thought and consciousness do not exist. They totally cease. They only exist by placing a conventional designation on them. Body, feeling, perception, thought and consciousness arise, then cease. Nothing! All ceased!

Have you ever read the discourse where the Venerable Sariputta enquires from his disciple, Ven. Yamaka, who is about to go off wandering through the countryside?

Ven. Sariputta asks his disciple, "Ven. Yamaka, suppose on your wanderings someone asks you the question 'Ven. Yamaka, where does the Buddha go after death?' How would you answer them?"

"I would reply that body, feeling, perception, thought and consciousness, having arisen, cease without remainder. Cease completely. Just that."

Ven. Sariputta exclaimed "That's right! You've passed the test!"

This was a question to examine a disciple before he was able to go off travelling alone. Here I ask you if you understand. Comprehend just this point and everything comes to an end. Body, feeling, perception, thought and consciousness, having arisen, cease without remainder. Knowing this go away and investigate

it, making it extremely clear. It's not just to see arising and passing away superficially, it's not like that. You must see until the path and fruit (of Enlightenment) manifest in the mind. Then, though we experience that arising and passing away are phenomena - no happiness or suffering follows because of it. There is not the continuous grasping and clinging as before. The mind must truly become like this. It must be seen in your heart this way. Don't be just empty talk! Then wherever we are we own nothing. Whatever arises ceases, arises then ceases, that's all, there is no more dependence on a speculative mind running after this.

Question: This is the original or primordial mind, isn't it?

Ajahn Chah: *Hey?*

Question: The original mind?

Ajahn Chah: The *what?*

Question: Is there anything outside these five aggregates (i.e. of body, feeling, perception, thought and consciousness)? Is there anything at all that can be called the original mind?

Ajahn Chah: They can't call it 'original', but it's all gone. Just here, it's all gone.

Question: You couldn't call this the original mind, could you?

Ajahn Chah: Label it that if you like. You could call it that. If we don't give words to things then we will have to stop talking. We haven't any words to communicate about this. There would be nothing to talk about.

(Ajahn Chah picks up a cup and moves it away, pointing to its original position:) There now is nothing of this cup there. This spot contains nothing. That which can be spoken of is all part of conventional reality, that's all. 'The primordial', 'the original' that's just a way of speech, without such conventional descriptions there can be no understandable communication. We would just sit here speechless and stare at each other, not understanding anything. But we can begin to understand something by giving it a defining word.

Question: To get to this stage, how much *samādhi* (right concentration) do you need?

Ajahn Chah: Eh? To obtain this, there already has to be a continual controlling and encompassing awareness of the mind. Without *samādhi*, right concentration, will you be able to do anything? Without *samādhi* there's absolutely no way this can be achieved regardless of what you may think.

The degree of *samādhi* needs to be enough so that phenomena can be seen. Enough that wisdom can arise. How can you qualify how much that is, or ask how peaceful does the mind have to become? Try developing enough to the extent of overcoming all your doubts! Then it will all be finished with. The mind will arrive at the truth.