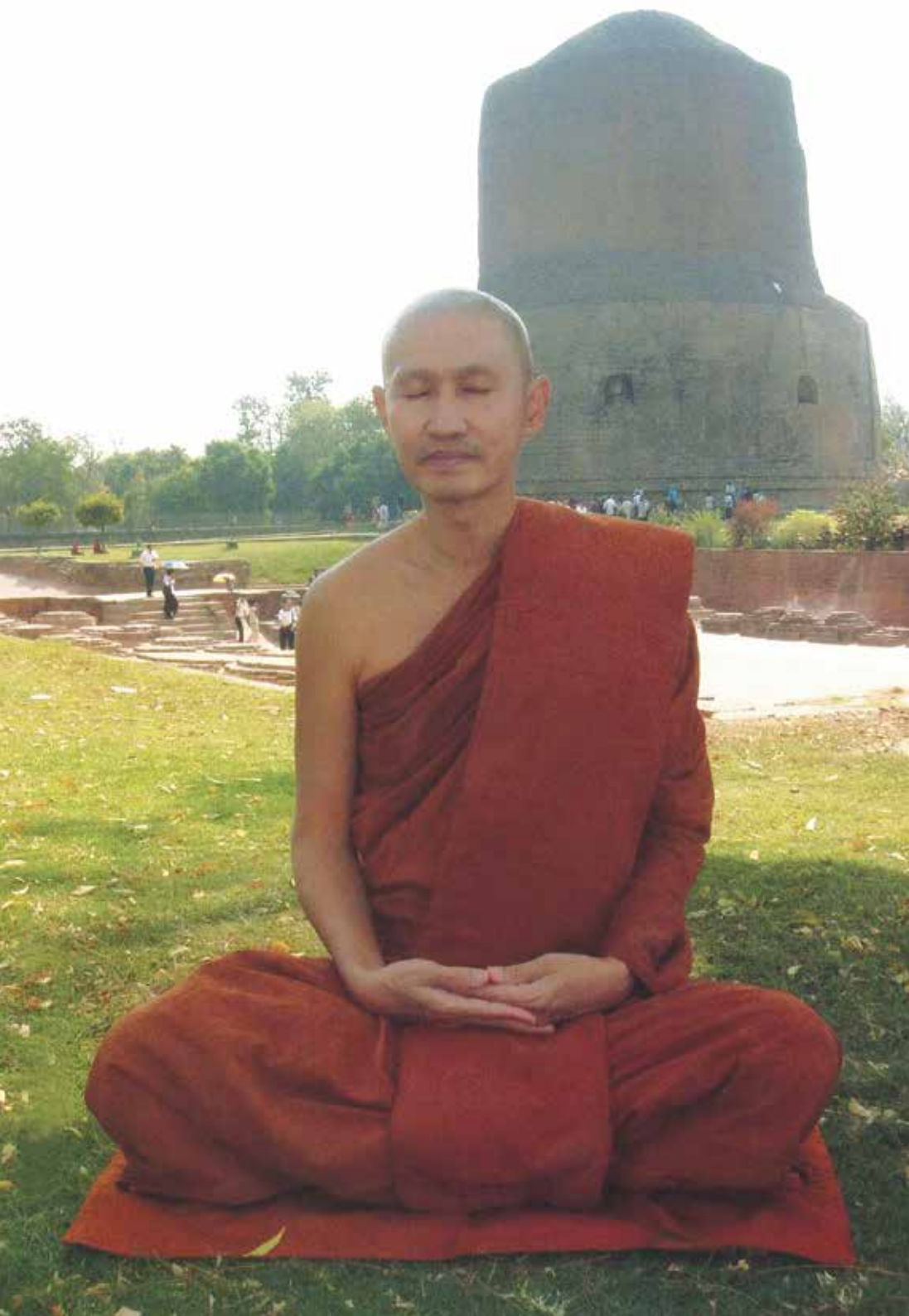


THE SACRED EQUATION

AJAHN DTUN



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Translated from talks given in Thai by

AJAHN DTUN (THIRACITTO)



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BY AJAHN DTUN

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PREFACE

At the heart of the Buddha's teaching is the Noble Eightfold Path, which is divided into the threefold training of *sīla*, *samādhi* and *paññā*, moral virtue, concentration and wisdom. The combination of all three path factors is commonly known as the Middle Way, and it is this very combination which forms a sacred equation that ultimately results in peace, freedom from suffering, liberation and *Nibbāna*. The three factors are mutually supportive of each other: moral virtue is a foundation for concentration, concentration the foundation for wisdom, and wisdom is the tool that works for one's deliverance. Removing any one factor from this sacred equation will prevent one from reaching the path that leads to true happiness, *Nibbāna*.

The main part of this teaching begins with a very simple question which Ajahn Dtun asked a group of laypeople whom he knew to be students of a teacher who emphasizes the practice of 'watching the mind'. This practice focuses on watching the arising and ceasing of all the objects of the mind's

awareness, with the view that this is the most effective way to give rise to wisdom and thereby cleanse the mind of the mental defilements. Those practising this particular method tend to overlook or underrate the role that concentration plays in the development of wisdom.

Over the last 15 years this practice of watching the mind, while by no means new or modern, has attracted a great deal of interest and become very popular in Thailand. However, this new-found popularity has created concern among the more traditional forest masters, who stress that believing that the practice of just watching the mind can free it from the mental defilements is a great mistake. On many occasions over many years, the translator has listened to Ajahn Dtun as he patiently gives advice to steer these practitioners back to the correct path of practice of moral virtue, concentration and wisdom, the Middle Way as taught by the Buddha. He also explains to practitioners that in no way whatsoever can concentration be taken out of the equation.

It is hoped that by reading this teaching the reader will gain a clear view of the complete path of meditation practice, and understand that solely contemplating the mind is not sufficient to free it from the mental defilements. The assumption that the mental defilements arise within the mind,

and so must be dealt with solely by contemplating the mind, is true but not altogether correct. It is true that mental defilements do arise within the mind and so must be let go of within the mind, but it is not correct to believe that one can start the work of cleansing the mind at this point. This practice, as Ajahn Dtun clearly shows, is for those already highly advanced on the path to liberation, as they push forward to reach the final stage of enlightenment.

Finally, I would like to acknowledge my debt of gratitude to all who have helped in bringing this book to fruition. For any errors that may still remain in either text or translation, the translator accepts full responsibility and humbly begs both Ajahn Dtun's and the reader's forgiveness.

The translator
Wat Boonyawad
2557 (September 2014)

PART I

Ajahn Dtun: Do you practise sitting in meditation at home?

Layperson: Not really, I'm a bit slack.

Ajahn Dtun: You have to reflect on death because it arouses the mind, warning it to not be heedless. Death is something we must frequently recollect, for if we don't we will just go about occupying ourselves happily throughout our days and nights, letting time drift by as days turn into weeks, weeks into months and months into years, allowing our thoughts to proliferate about 'at the end of the year...' or 'at the start of next year...' without ever giving any consideration at all to death. Contemplating death brings our awareness back to the present moment. We will realize that the future is uncertain, so there is no need to be too worried or concerned about it. If we need to make plans of any kind, that's fine. But once any plans for the future have been made, we return to establishing

our mindfulness in the present, because it is right here in the present moment that the causes which determine our future originate. Hence we have to live skilfully in the present moment.

We mostly like to think about the future and forget to reflect that our lives are uncertain. This being so, we become careless and unconcerned, allowing our days to pass by in vain. And it is this laxness that causes us not to put effort into the practice of sitting meditation. Each of us should try asking ourselves: ‘Have I developed wholesome, virtuous qualities to the utmost of my ability throughout my entire life or not?’ or ‘If I were to die right now, would my heart¹ be prepared for this?’ or ‘Does my heart possess sufficient merit to be born into a heavenly realm or not?’ or ‘Have I developed the spiritual perfections² (*pāramī*) sufficiently or not?’ If we realize this isn’t yet so, we should take up the practice of contemplating on death so as not to be heedless. We should frequently think to ourselves: ‘I could die any time soon’.

If we remain too contented with ourselves

¹ As with most Dhamma teachings translated from Thai, the word ‘heart’ is used interchangeably with the word ‘mind’. The Pali word is *citta*. The *citta* is that which knows or that which feels.

² Ten spiritual perfections (*pāramī*) cultivated as a support for realizing enlightenment: 1) generosity; 2) morality; 3) renunciation; 4) wisdom; 5) effort; 6) patient endurance; 7) truthfulness (being true to one’s word); 8) resolution/determination; 9) loving-kindness; 10) equanimity.

by failing to develop goodness and observe correct moral behaviour (*sīla*), and neglect to cultivate our minds through practising meditation, then should we meet with a fatal accident or develop a terminal illness, we won't have developed any real goodness or virtue in our lives. However, reflecting on death gives us a prod and reminds us to go about the present as well as we possibly can. We will therefore search for ways to cultivate any good that we are able to perform.

When we live by a correct moral code of behaviour, that serves as the basis for the goodness and virtue that make us good, decent human beings. The moral standard that is appropriate or befitting for humans is to observe the five moral precepts.³ Observing these precepts makes one a good human being. When maintaining the moral precepts has become normal, our hearts will experience a degree of coolness and peacefulness because they are free from the distress and remorse that come from improper or immoral behaviour.

The moral precepts aid us in restraining our actions and speech. They work to control the mind so that we do not speak or behave improperly.

³ The five precepts are: to refrain from destroying living creatures; to refrain from taking that which is not given; to refrain from sexual misconduct; to refrain from wrong speech; to refrain from intoxicating drink and drugs which lead to carelessness.

For example, if greed or desire arise in our mind we can restrain ourselves so as not to break any of the precepts. Similarly, if anger arises we won't physically harm another person. All our actions and speech will remain within the bounds of the moral precepts. We will be content with what we have. This means that if desire arises we won't compete ruthlessly with others or resort to violence and killing in order to obtain the objects we desire, but instead only go about seeking wealth or goods according to our intelligence and ability. Similarly, if anger arises we won't physically attack or kill someone, as we are observing the moral precepts. They therefore protect and control us by subduing our actions and speech.

However, even though we are keeping the five precepts, if we look closely at ourselves we will see that our mind is not yet calm. It is still restless and unfocused, actively thinking about all kinds of things: things to do with the past, things to do with the future. Sometimes the mind will think about unwholesome things, and at times it will even think about things that we don't want it to think about. This is all due to the restlessness of the mind. If we are perceptive enough, a small insight may dawn on us: 'Why is it that I can't take control of this mind?' When our hearts wish for happiness, why is it that we still experience unhappiness or feelings

of anxiety, agitation and a lack of peace? We will see that the moral precepts can't stop unhappiness and suffering from arising in our hearts. They only serve to control our bodily actions by preventing us from:

- taking the life of other living creatures;
- taking what has not been given;
- all actions which are deceptive or insincere, which would mistreat the heart of another person in whom one has a sexual interest, or already share sexual relations;
- taking any type of intoxicating drink or drug.

Hence moral behaviour calms our bodily actions. As for our speech, it is calmed by refraining from speaking any falsehood that would be to the detriment of others.

So by observing moral precepts we are able to control our actions and speech. Our mind, however, is still not peaceful. It remains worked up and restless, always beguiled by or lost in its thoughts and emotions. So once we've realized that our mind is agitated, we have to find a way to make it peaceful. But what must we do to restrain the mind, to prevent it from thinking all the meaningless things it wants, and from thinking unduly about the past or future? How do we stop all its restlessness, distress and uneasiness? To

have the mindfulness and wisdom to govern the heart and to filter out all the bad, unwholesome things within it, including all our unhappiness and discontent, it is necessary for us to practise meditation so as to develop concentration. It is the practice of meditation that enables us to take control of our hearts.

Concentration is developed by bringing mindfulness to focus on a meditation object that is suited to one's temperament, such as being mindful of the in and out breath or internally reciting the meditation word 'Buddho'. When we have free time we should cultivate mindfulness and develop concentration in either of the formal postures of sitting or walking, practising for as long as time permits. Try to practise frequently. Work at it, really develop it. When it's time to break from sitting or walking meditation, we must always try to sustain our mindfulness by being attentive to the mind's thoughts and emotions. The common expression used for this is 'to watch the mind' (in Thai: *Do jit*). However, it isn't really the mind that is being watched, but rather the contents of the mind, its thoughts and emotions. This is why you must have mindfulness by watching the thoughts and emotions within your mind: they are not the mind, they are just its contents, or mere states of mind.

All our thinking, whether it be about good things or bad things, or thoughts which generate greed, anger and suffering, is all just states of mind arising due to the mental defilements. They are not the actual mind itself. It is said: 'Watch the mind', but really it is the emotions or all the mental activity that are being watched. We go about identifying with our thoughts and emotions, believing them to be the mind. Whether it's emotions of greed, anger or suffering, we say they are 'us' or our mind, but they are not. What happens is that we let our minds blend in with these emotions, and then we go calling the emotions 'our mind'. That's why I'm telling you to mindfully watch the thoughts and emotions within your heart.

With frequent meditation practice our mindfulness will become firmly established, and it can be put to use by 'watching the mind' or, more correctly, watching the mental and emotional activity within the mind. We will see what the objects of the mind's awareness are and the effect they have on the mind. Whenever the eyes see forms, the ears hear sounds, the nose smells odours, the tongue tastes flavours or the body feels sensations of heat, cold, softness or hardness, the mind will be affected and will give rise to feelings of liking or disliking, happiness or unhappiness. We therefore use mindfulness to keep a watch on our

sensory impressions and their resulting emotions. The mental strength acquired from practising concentration supports and firmly anchors one's mindfulness. This in turn enables us to witness all the mind's movements and feelings.

If we don't develop concentration our mindfulness will be adrift, allowing the mind to be easily moved by its sensory impressions, moods and emotions. This state can be compared to a tall clump of grass. From whatever direction the wind blows, north, south, east or west, the grass bends and sways along with the wind. Our minds are no different from the grass, blown about by all the arising sensory impressions, emotions and thoughts. We need our minds to be strong, rock-solid, like a huge, towering mountain that remains unaffected by any storm. Send in any storm, even a violent tornado, and such a mountain remains unmoved by the wind and rain. The hearts of *anāgāmi*s and *arahants*⁴ are rock-solid, just like a mountain. If we are to make our minds firm and strong like theirs, we too must develop concentration. Through the practice of concentration the mind

⁴ In Buddhism there are four progressive stages of enlightenment: the first stage of stream-entry (*sotāpanna*); the second stage of returning once to the human world (*sakādāgāmi*); the third stage of non-returning to the human world (*anāgāmi*); and the fourth and final stage of full enlightenment (*arahant*).

becomes peaceful, causing the body and the mind to feel light. Rapture, happiness and equanimity also then arise. At that time the mind will be perfectly still because it has been absorbed into its meditation object, becoming one with it or one-pointed. Outside formal meditation practice our mindfulness will be firmly established in the present moment, owing to the strength gained from developing concentration.

When sensory contact occurs it gives rise to a feeling of either pleasure or displeasure. Our faculties of mindfulness and wisdom will then examine this feeling with the aim of seeing its impermanence and thereby letting it go. The mind will remain unaffected because it can see that the thoughts and emotions are separate from itself; the mind is one thing, its thoughts and emotions another. They are seen as separate because of the mental strength and clarity which come to a mind that has developed concentration. This strength establishes the mind in the present and enables our wisdom faculty to assist by screening all our thoughts and emotions. We then see suffering or discontent whenever they arise, and search for their cause and a way to bring them to an end.

If we are not truly mindful we will be just

like everybody else and unaware of the *dukkha*⁵ in our lives. On the whole our minds rarely see or comprehend *dukkha*. They much prefer just to think and be occupied and unaware, though we like to say we are mindful. So whenever greed arises it will know no limit, and when we are angry or have feelings of ill-will and vengefulness, our hearts will enter into these emotions, believing them to be ourselves. Nevertheless, we say we are being mindful. Thieves are mindful too. They lie in wait, ready to prey on some unwitting victim, watching this or that house to see if anyone is at home. Mindfully the thief watches, waiting for somebody to put something down or for the owner of an object to be off-guard. However, this is the wrong kind of mindfulness because it is based on wrong view.⁶

So what we have to do is use our *sati-paññā* (mindfulness and wisdom) to cultivate right

⁵ The Pāli word *dukkha* is generally translated as ‘suffering’ or sometimes as ‘unsatisfactoriness’. At times it is better left untranslated so as to capture the depth or broadness of its meaning. It covers the whole array of emotions, from the subtlest discontent to the strongest mental anguish and physical pain. Even pleasant or desirable states have *dukkha* inherent within them due to their impermanent nature. In general *dukkha* refers to the basic discontent running through the lives of all but the fully enlightened.

⁶ The opposite of right view, the insightful understanding that sees things as they really are: impermanent (*aniccā*), unsatisfactory (*dukkha*) and not-self (*anattā*). Ultimately right view can be reduced to understanding the Four Noble Truths: the truth of *dukkha*, its cause, its cessation, and the path of practice that leads to the cessation of *dukkha*.

mindfulness and right view or understanding. We also have to train our minds and make them peaceful through practising concentration. Once our mind has been made peaceful, it will cause both mindfulness and wisdom to arise. *Sati-paññā* will take care of and safeguard our hearts by filtering out the emotions of greed, anger and suffering. *Sati-paññā* will also clearly see any *dukkha* that has arisen and seek out its cause, and will search for a means to weaken these negative emotions or cause them to cease. However, if mindfulness is lacking we will be left totally at the mercy of the *kilesas*, the mental defilements of greed, anger and delusion. It is due to our not developing concentration that the mind wanders away, lost in its own thoughts, with its awareness ever drifting. If the mind has no brake, when one train of thought stops another immediately starts up; it's never-ending. This is why we have to establish mindfulness here in the present moment. When we do so and the mind starts to think, our mindfulness and wisdom will be hot on its tail. As soon as one train of thought has come to an end the mind will begin with another, but it is at that precise moment that we introduce the meditation word 'Buddho' or bring our attention to focus on the breath. In doing so we interrupt those trains of thought, causing them to come to an end all by themselves. By continually

re-establishing mindfulness in the present moment, our minds will begin to develop and improve. We have to build up *sati-paññā* in order to be in control of the mind.

And to what extent must we be in control? To the extent that we will only think about good, wholesome things, without thinking any bad or unwholesome thoughts. To have this amount of control over the mind requires us to develop concentration to an equivalent degree. What should we do when bad thoughts arise? We must use our mindfulness and wisdom to single them out and let them go, discarding them by not holding onto them. Those bad thoughts are not the mind. We don't have to keep holding onto them. When we have bad thoughts, we don't have to speak or act on them. When such thoughts begin to arise in the mind we must use our *sati-paññā* to examine them closely. *Sati-paññā* will further consider the thought or emotion by asking: 'Is this a good thought?' or 'Should I speak feeling the way I do?' If we see the mood or thought isn't good, we shouldn't speak. Instead we just let it cease within the mind. We must rush to put out the fire, for if we don't it will spread in an instant, to be expressed in our actions and speech, creating harm along the way. Just have a look for yourselves.

When we lack mindfulness and entertain

bad thoughts which we express in our speech, we will think: ‘Oh, I shouldn’t really have said that.’ This is our conscience talking to us. In our heart of hearts we all wish for happiness and goodness. ‘I shouldn’t really have said that’, because we will see that having done so creates harm and gives rise to misunderstandings and arguments. It all happens because the mind doesn’t first screen its thoughts and emotions. This is why we have to develop concentration, so that we can have the mindfulness and wisdom to screen our thoughts and thus know whether we should express them or not. We have to be aware of the mind when it begins to move with feelings of anger or displeasure. The mind will want us to express those feelings, so we must restrain ourselves, enduring the impulse with mindfulness, concentration and patience. Use your *sati-paññā* to examine your thoughts. Think to yourself beforehand that this thought will be dismissed if it proves inappropriate to express it.

What should we do when we are feeling angry or displeased? We should cultivate *mettā* (kind-heartedness, goodwill) and forgiveness for others. Why are we angry anyway? Think about it first. We are angry because they did this or did that. Even so, why do we have to be angry? Can we not forgive them? We must look for ways to teach our heart to keep laying the anger down. Mindfulness

and wisdom can resolve every problem, but they first have to be developed.

Ordinary human intelligence is completely incapable of abandoning the mental defilements. People can study as much and as long as they wish, graduating with a Masters degree, a Doctorate or even several degrees, but if they don't keep the five moral precepts and thus lack a foundation in virtue and integrity, they will be at a total loss. Their intelligence will be nothing more than the intelligence of the *kilesas*, and those mental defilements are capable of corrupting everything. Regardless of how much they study, whether it be for a Masters or a Ph.D, or even if they have a high rank or position, if they have no moral principles their intelligence will easily find ways to make them behave dishonestly or corruptly. On the other hand, if we hold to moral principles the mind will think in an altogether different way. When feelings of greed arise and we desire to obtain something, we will think: 'I don't want that, I'm content with what I already have'.

In those who lack moral standards the mental defilements will be given a clear opening to function freely. If they occupy an important position, their mindfulness and intelligence may well lead them into dishonest or criminal dealings. This is their intelligence at work. It is not *sati-*

paññā, mindfulness and wisdom. If those important people were insulted by someone, they might feel that their position gave them the power to order a gunman to do away with that person, because they don't know how to control their anger and displeasure. We must therefore first curb our anger by way of moral restraint, observing the moral precepts, so that regardless of how angry we become we won't kill or harm another person. So what should you do when you become angry? Be patient and endure it. Use your mindfulness and wisdom to reflect on why you are angry. Look for its cause and a way to let it go. There is a way out; there is a solution to everything. However, we have to start with a foundation of moral standards in our lives. Moral conduct is absolutely essential, but it is mostly overlooked.

We should consider having taken birth as humans most dignifying, since we generally regard humans as highly cultivated and superior beings. However, most people's minds are not yet truly human. There are billions of people living in the world and a great many, despite their human bodies, do not possess minds that make them worthy of being called human. Instead they behave more like fiends from hell. They go about their lives robbing, mugging, harming and killing each other. Some will go as far as to be violent towards their

parents, and some are even prepared to harm an *arahant* or the Lord Buddha himself. This is more like the behaviour of demons,⁷ ghosts, animals or some kind of being from hell; with all the ruthless competing, violence and killing in their lives, they're not human at all!

If our minds are to possess the qualities that will make us fully human, we must observe the five precepts. These precepts civilize humans by making our hearts good and wholesome. However, if we want to possess the mind state of a *devatā* (celestial being), not only must we maintain the five precepts, but we will also need to cultivate a sense of moral conscience and a wholesome fear of the consequences of bad actions. We must also regularly practise generosity. For those who wish to develop their minds further so that they possess the qualities of a Brahma god,⁸ it is necessary to cultivate both concentration and the four *Brahma Vihāras*, the sublime states of abiding. These four

⁷ In Buddhist cosmology these four kinds of beings abide in the *apāyabhūmi*, the planes of great sorrow and unhappiness. They are the four sub-human levels of existence into which beings can be reborn as a result of their past negative actions. They are listed in descending order: Demons (*Asura*), Ghosts (*Peta*), common animals and, finally, Hell. None of these states are eternal.

⁸ Heavenly beings composed of purest light. Their existence is more subtle than that of the *devātās*, celestial beings who experience pleasure through the five senses, as due to the refinement of their minds they are able to access states of mental absorption (*jhāna*); thus they abide in the highest heavens.

states are kind-heartedness and goodwill (*mettā*), compassion (*karunā*), sympathetic joy (*muditā*), and equanimity (*upekkhā*). When we develop these qualities we will have goodwill and friendliness towards our fellow humans and all other sentient beings. Within our hearts there will be a feeling of compassion and the aspiration to find ways to be truly helpful to others. We will also delight with other people when they experience success and happiness in their lives. And if it happens that we are unable to offer any real assistance to other people who are in need, we will let our hearts rest equanimously. Even we ourselves may feel distressed and uneasy, in which case we also have to learn to bring our mind to an equanimous state.

The *Brahma Vihāras* nurture our hearts by giving rise to peacefulness and coolness. They function as an antidote for the mental defilements, their purpose being none other than to counteract the *kilesas*. If our heart is full of defilements we will tend to be selfish and inconsiderate, thinking only of our own benefit. But if we cultivate *mettā* towards others we will have an antidote for any feelings of anger and ill-will we may have, thus making our hearts cool and peaceful, and less inclined to feel angry. When we have feelings of compassion and kindness in our hearts we will wish to help each other, assisting our families and friends according

to our ability and means. However, if we are unable to be of any help, we must remain equanimous. By doing so we will be learning how to protect and take care of our hearts. There are some people who know no limits when it comes to wanting to help others. Whenever they know of somebody who is experiencing hardship, even if it is somebody far away, they still feel sorry for them and want to help. But what about themselves? They experience difficulties in their own lives. If we are not in a position to help somebody, we must assume an equanimous attitude. This is how *upekkhā*, equanimity, resolves such situations, thereby cultivating peacefulness and coolness in our hearts. This is how those who wish to transform their minds to be like those of a Brahma god have to practise.

However, if you want to become an *ariya-puggala*,⁹ a Noble One, you must cultivate the path of *sīla*, *samādhi* and *paññā*, moral virtue, concentration and wisdom. To start with, a firm foundation of *sīla* must be established within the heart. For laypeople this can be done by keeping the five precepts, or if you are particularly determined you might try

⁹ A Noble One is someone who has attained one of the four levels of enlightenment.

keeping the eight precepts.¹⁰ Novice monks keep ten precepts, while fully ordained monks must observe 227 training rules. The observance of moral precepts creates a strong foundation on which we can establish our concentration practice. The strength of concentration in turn gives rise to *sati-paññā*, mindfulness and wisdom. Once mindfulness and wisdom have arisen, the transcendent path that leads to liberation becomes established. The path is none other than *sīla*, *samādhi* and *paññā*, which we develop in order to eradicate greed, anger, sexual lust and delusion from our minds. All three path factors must be present for this to be effective. Moral virtue alone cannot take us along the path; neither can wisdom and moral virtue without concentration.

Some people like to think that all they need for insight to arise is to *do jit* or watch the mind in the present moment to see the thoughts and emotions as they arise and cease. But in fact they are not insightfully seeing the arising and ceasing; it is only a momentary or superficial kind of seeing,

¹⁰ The sixth precept is to refrain from eating at the wrong time, i.e. the period from noon until the following dawn. The seventh precept is to refrain from entertainment, beautification and adornment. The eighth precept is to refrain from lying on a high or luxurious sleeping place, i.e. from giving too much importance to sleep. Observing the eight precepts also involves a significant revision of the third precept, which changes from refraining from sexual misconduct to refraining from any kind of intentional sexual behaviour.

because it doesn't take very long before the mind returns to being occupied with all its thoughts and emotions again. This method cannot lead to a state of emptiness of mind, that is, a state where the mind is free of thoughts and emotion. True insight, *vipassanā*, depends on the working of mindfulness and wisdom to contemplate phenomena and let them go.¹¹ The aim of the contemplation is to see the impermanence and absence of self of both the physical body and the thoughts and emotions.

The practice of *sīla* alone does not give the mind enough strength to generate mindfulness and wisdom. We have to develop concentration because this is what strengthens mindfulness and wisdom, making the mind stronger and more resolute so that we can clearly examine and cut away the defilements. A mind strengthened by concentration will possess the mindfulness and wisdom to deal with any suffering or discontent that arises from the emotions of greed, anger and sexual desire, by contemplating and examining them to see their impermanence and thereby letting them go. On an external level the emotion of greed can be let go by practising generosity,

¹¹ Vipassanā: insight into the true nature of phenomena as being inherently impermanent, unsatisfactory (unable to offer enduring happiness), and not-self. It also implies the methods of investigation that lead to such an understanding. True insight is born of concentration and is not a mere intellectual exercise.

learning to give as a way of developing one's *dāna*¹² *pāramī*. We cultivate this quality so as to not allow any miserly or ungenerous tendencies to remain within our hearts. To let go of anger requires us to develop goodwill and forgiveness towards one another. Sensual desire or feelings of satisfaction and dissatisfaction regarding our sensory contacts can be let go of through contemplating to see the impermanence of all forms, sounds, odours, flavours and bodily sensations. Sexual desire is to be countered by reflecting on the body, in particular one's own body, to see that it is impermanent and devoid of any entity that could be regarded as the self.

Body contemplation is a skill that we have to develop because it is the way to counteract sexual desire. Sexual desire is a natural feeling shared by humans and other animals alike, regardless of whether they are male or female. Still, we need to know how to keep this emotion under control, so that it remains within the bounds of correct moral behaviour. If you are married or in a stable relationship, you should be content with the partner you already have. Those who are single shouldn't deceive or mistreat the heart of another. This is the extent to which we must control our minds, and

¹² Dāna is the act of giving or being generous. Dāna pāramī is the first of the ten spiritual perfections cultivated as a support for realizing enlightenment.

it can be done if we develop concentration. That's the way to make our hearts cool and peaceful. In addition, we should investigate our body by contemplating one of several themes: the 32 parts;¹³ the *asubha*¹⁴ (unattractive) nature of the body; or the four primary elements that make up a human body: earth, water, air and fire. Such reflections provide our mindfulness and wisdom with a means to counter the mental defilements by not allowing them to develop to such an extent that we overstep the limits of correct moral behaviour.

All the trouble and disorder that we see in our societies are due to the lack of virtuous, disciplined behaviour. When sexual desire arises

¹³ An analytical contemplation where one mentally dissects the body into its components with the intention of exposing the body's true nature: impermanent, unsatisfactory and not-self. The thirty-two parts as listed in the Buddhist Canon are as follows: head-hairs, body-hairs, nails, teeth, skin, flesh, sinews, bones, bone marrow, kidneys, heart, liver, membranes, spleen, lungs, large intestines, small intestines, stomach contents, excrement, bile, phlegm, pus, blood, sweat, fat, tears, skin-oil, spittle, mucus, oil in the joints, urine, and brain.

¹⁴ *Asubha*, literally 'the unbeautiful', is the contemplation of the inherent unattractiveness or loathsomeness of the body. Technically it refers to the ten contemplations of the decomposition of a dead body. Many teachers also generally refer to the 32 parts of the body as being included in the theme of *asubha*. A meditator who has developed sufficient skill in concentration may cultivate any of these ten contemplations to counteract sexual lust or attraction towards other people. They are also very effective in helping to see the body's impermanence and absence of self. Once the meditator is skilled in this practice, images of body parts or whole corpses decomposing may arise quite spontaneously, or even instantly on demand, depending on the skill of the meditator.

in the heart of someone lacking in morals, such a person is quite capable of physically harming someone else or doing things that will abuse and hurt the heart of another person. However, people who have moral principles will not go about deceiving members of the opposite sex. If we're without moral restraint, we're done for! Then at any time when the defilements arise in such force that we become blinded by them, the result is only shame for ourselves and grief for others and their families. People tend to be selfish, especially those who deceive the opposite sex. Just think how you would feel if some man were to deceive your sister; would you like that? If we think just this much, we already know the answer. What about your brother? If some woman were to be untruthful to him, would you approve? Nobody would, would they? Just ask your own heart and you know. When the mental defilements are in control they will always misguide us, misleading us to think, speak or act in bad and immoral ways.

The reason I'm telling you to develop concentration is because you are not practising enough; you have to give more time to it than you already are doing. It is something we have to do because if we're lacking in mindfulness and wisdom, the instant that bad or unskilful thoughts arise we will speak and behave improperly or

unskillfully. However, if we practise concentration our mindfulness will become stronger and better established, giving us the patience and self-control to endure all our moods and thoughts. Concentration also provides us with the skilful means needed to reflect on any unwholesome thoughts and to let them go from the mind. When our mindfulness and concentration are weak, the mind will blend together with its moods and thoughts so much that whatever the mood, the mind will assume the same tone; they will become one and the same until the two cannot be told apart. When the eyes see forms or the ears hear sounds, a whole flow of mental impressions will arise within the mind, together with their subsequent emotions. When the mind perceives this flow of mental impressions, it will be unable to remain still because it lacks mindfulness and concentration. As a result the mind will flow together with the stream of thoughts and emotions, because it believes they are the actual mind itself. This makes the mind so familiar with all its emotions that it attaches to and identifies with them as being the self.

We have been deceived by the contents of our mind, the thoughts, moods and emotions, for who knows how many lifetimes, right up to the present. It has become normal for us to think that our thoughts and mental states are the mind, but

they definitely are not. Nevertheless, the mind likes to think they are. That's a delusion. The flow of thoughts and emotions is just conditions or states of mind, but the mind attaches to this flow, believing it to be the mind itself. This being so, whenever we experience feelings of greed, anger, satisfaction or dissatisfaction, we will consider the emotion to be the self, to be 'me'. We continue to suffer for our entire lives, all because the mind believes its thoughts and emotions are the self. What we need, therefore, is to have mindfulness and wisdom contemplate our moods and emotions to see their impermanence as they arise and cease. We must try to separate the mind from the stream of thoughts and emotions, but to do so we have to develop mindfulness and concentration. Once the mind is peaceful and concentrated, it will naturally separate from this stream all by itself and remain detached or neutral whenever thoughts and emotions arise. As a consequence, when the eyes see forms, the feelings of either attraction or aversion that arise will not affect the mind. The mind will remain unmoved, settled in the present moment.¹⁵

¹⁵ The present moment implies the mind not moving from its base of neutrality or centredness. If it moves from its base to link up with thoughts and emotions, it not only loses its neutrality but also becomes prone to falling back into the past or moving forward into the future.

When the mind perceives a form such as another person, this may arouse feelings of attraction within the mind. We must use our mindfulness and wisdom to reflect on that person with the aim of seeing the impermanence of their body. Alternatively, we could use the *asubha* contemplations to reflect on the inherent unattractiveness of their body. Owing to the strength of mindfulness and concentration, the mind will offer no resistance to our reflections; instead it will accept them as being the truth and thereby remain settled in the present moment. If feelings of aversion arise towards that person, we can reflect on the impermanence of their body and our mind will again remain in the present. If the form is a material object, we can reflect on it to see that its nature is to change and deteriorate. This will once again keep the mind in the present, because the contemplation will abandon the feeling of attraction or aversion which arose towards that object. However, we tend not to see things in line with the truth, and so when we see a form and it gives rise to attraction, our thoughts begin to proliferate about that form, generating more feelings of attraction, desire and lust. This all happens because the mind moves from its base of neutrality. This is why I'm telling you to be diligent in your meditation practice. Concentration must be developed.

If you want to make your body strong so it can lift very heavy objects weighing 30 to 40 kilos, you will need to play sports or do physical exercise. Once the body is strong you will be able to lift any heavy objects with ease. With our minds it is just the same. They are in a weak condition at present, not strong enough to lift up and throw off all the greed, anger, restlessness and delusion that are weighing them down. If we hope to make our minds stronger, they must be exercised through practising concentration. Once we have made our minds strong, when we experience sensory impressions and the subsequent feelings of pleasure or displeasure, our mindfulness and wisdom will have the strength to push those feelings aside and let them go. Otherwise our moods and emotions will just keep piling up on the mind and maintaining it in a weak condition. Have you ever noticed that sometimes your heart has little strength, causing you to be too soft-hearted and submissive, as well as lacking in resolve, purpose, and the strength to stick to your word or to do the work of building up the spiritual perfections? This is all due to the mind being weak. We really must do everything we can to strengthen the mind and all the spiritual perfections. Go about it gradually, little by little, and you will build up the strength of your mind. A strong mind has the patience and self-control

to endure all thoughts and emotions. Mindfulness and wisdom will also reflect on them so as to let them go from the mind.

This is why I keep saying that you must develop concentration. You eat three or four meals a day to nourish your body, and yet you rarely think to nourish your heart, your mind. Rather than sit in meditation just once, you make all kinds of excuses as to why you don't have time. Ajahn Chah would ask people who liked to make such excuses: 'Do you have the time to breathe?' He also said: 'If you have time to breathe, you have time to meditate', meaning that in truth we always have the time to focus our mindfulness on the breath. The wise know that the practice can be done at all times. Nevertheless, people always say they are too busy with their work and duties, with no time to practise meditation. They work seven to eight hours a day, maybe more if they do overtime, but they have no time to meditate. They can find the time to work seven or eight hours a day, yet they won't give one hour or even half an hour to the practice of meditation. And why is that? It's simple really. For our work we are paid at the end of each week or month: we get something for our effort. However, we don't see anything tangible coming from the practice of meditation. People tend to think only about seeking out material wealth and

possessions, with the hope of being wealthy and having a strong, secure financial standing, but when the body stops breathing all our wealth is merely just that much; it ends right there. If we breathe in but don't breathe out, or breathe out and fail to breathe in again, that's it, the end!

Is our wealth truly ours? At the time of death can we take it with us? And our bodies, can we take them with us? Not long after death the body is either cremated to ashes or perhaps buried, as the Chinese tend to do. And once buried, what becomes of it? It decomposes, returning to its elemental form of earth, water, air and fire, with nothing remaining. We cannot take anything with us! That's why I tell you to contemplate on the imminence of death. Don't go indulging too much in the world. Anyone living in the world should have the mindfulness and wisdom to know that all forms of worldly happiness merely serve to ease our suffering and unhappiness temporarily. It's just a trifle of happiness; it is certainly not the kind of happiness that can bring the greed, anger and suffering within our hearts to their cessation. However, to view things in this way requires wisdom.

The Lord Buddha taught us to cultivate the spiritual perfections so as to bring an end to all the greed, anger and suffering in our hearts. It is through

the practice of his teaching, through internalizing it, that we can develop our minds. The heart is made good by practising generosity, observing the moral precepts, developing concentration and cultivating wisdom. This and only this can bring an end to the suffering and unhappiness in our hearts. The seeking of external or worldly wealth cannot do this, it merely eases them. People have suffering in their hearts but they don't see it. When we are unhappy or feel uneasy, we try to change our mood by doing something, such as going out for some fun or arranging to meet up with friends somewhere, or perhaps we go to the movies, or go on a holiday. But as soon as we finish doing all that and go back home, we experience the suffering once again because we didn't correct the problem in the right place. All we did was run away from it, avoid it temporarily, without actually remedying our heart in any way. This is how people live and behave.

The mental defilements are extremely clever at trapping the hearts of people. This is what they call Māra's¹⁶ snare. And what is Māra's snare? It is

¹⁶ Māra is the demonic personification of the defilements of greed, anger, and delusion, and by extension the personification of the insidious hold which the senses have on the mind. Māra is a force antagonistic to enlightenment or the development of moral virtue, concentration and wisdom. Māra works to prevent beings from gaining insight into the true nature of the sensual realm, thus confining them to the realm of samsāra and leaving them unable to find the path that leads to the cessation of suffering.

the temptation or seductiveness of forms, sounds, odours, flavours, physical sensations and material objects. All these will charm and allure the mind into the snare. It's no different from the traps and nets used to catch animals. The snare is set and at birth we become ensnared. It is Māra tempting us to seek pleasure from sensory experience and from wealth, status and praise. This is the snare that the *kilesas* have laid and trapped us in. Once caught, we can't set ourselves free because we take pleasure and delight in the sensory world. As a result we are unable to leave *samsāra*¹⁷ because the mind is content to be reborn into each lifetime. There happen to be billions living here in this world because they are content to be reborn again.

If you were to tell all those people to follow the path taught by the Buddha, they wouldn't be interested. Thailand is generally regarded as a Buddhist country, as 90% of its population is Buddhist. Even so, people are not truly interested in their religion. They are Buddhist in name only. Buddhism is not the official state religion in Thailand, but the vast majority of Thais consider their country to be a Buddhist nation. But what do people actually believe in? One minute they are

¹⁷ Samsāra: the continuity of existence i.e. the uninterrupted succession of births, deaths and rebirths within the numerous realms of sentient existence.

robbing and mugging each other, the next they are cheating and lying. Such people have very few if any morals. It's actually a rather small number of people who are willing to come to monasteries or to make offerings and observe the moral precepts. Those who come and listen to a Dhamma¹⁸ talk are also very few; you get maybe 10, 20 or possibly up to a hundred people coming to listen. On the other hand, if you were to organize a rock concert people would come by the thousands! Then they'd jump about to the music like vultures and crows, or maybe it's more like hungry ghosts (*petas*). I really don't know what you would call them. What they're doing is merely indulging in their emotions.

Ajahn Chah would say: 'Those who indulge in the world¹⁹ are deluded by their emotions; those who indulge in their emotions are deluded by the world.' Those who are deluded by the world are those who indulge in their emotions or feelings, especially feelings of pleasure and happiness. When we indulge in those feelings we become stuck in the world. Actually the state of indulging and being stuck are exactly the same, but people seldom

¹⁸ Supreme truth: the right natural order underlying everything; the teaching of the Buddha.

¹⁹ When speaking of the world Ajahn Chah is referring to one's sensory environment (forms, sounds, odours, flavours and physical sensations) and the corresponding emotions or feelings of liking and disliking that arise on sense contact.

see this. By failing to see the *dukkha* or inherent unsatisfactoriness of this situation we become stuck on worldly pleasures and therefore unable to find a way out of this predicament. To transcend suffering we must first see or comprehend it. When we do so, our mindfulness and wisdom will search out its cause and a way to bring it to cessation.

Nowadays people are carrying around so much suffering that it's almost killing them, and still they don't see it. The Buddha didn't actually have to experience any real suffering, yet his wisdom was still able to comprehend its existence. Why didn't he have to suffer? Being human is *dukkha*, right? But not for the Buddha. He was born into royalty, with many attendants serving him. He could do as he pleased, thus encountering very little suffering or discontent in his life. There were only happiness and sensual pleasures, with the joy of having his every wish fulfilled. Despite all this, deep within his heart he comprehended suffering when he realized that beings are incapable of escaping ageing, sickness and death.

One day the Buddha travelled out of the palace. He was curious to see what the lives of ordinary folk were like. His own life in the palace was surrounded by beautiful objects and many beautiful royal concubines and maidservants. He first came across an old and decrepit man. Just

seeing this much causes a wise person to begin reflecting. He enquired of himself: 'Is it thus that we humans must grow old?' Then he encountered a sick person lying at the side of the road. He asked himself: 'Why is it that I am strong, healthy and fresh in complexion?' He realized: 'One day I too will not escape from sickness and pain.' Lastly he saw a dead body being cremated and realized that all beings must die. He saw ageing, sickness and death and considered them *dukkha*, suffering. Even though he himself was not yet old, sick or near death, his wisdom could still see this clearly. He had seen suffering and desired to seek out its cause. Had he remained as he was, caught in Māra's snare, he would have been unable to find the cause of suffering. Instead he decided to seek liberation, freedom from suffering. He fled the royal palace on a quest for the transcendence of suffering, searching for its fundamental cause and the path that leads to its cessation. He travelled about trying different practices until he met with two hermits, Alara Kalama and Udaka Ramaputta. They had both developed the meditative absorptions to their highest level, and instructed the Buddha accordingly until he too had reached their same level. But still he could see that concentration alone was not the path for the transcendence of suffering; while it temporarily suppressed thoughts and emotions,

it did not extinguish the mental defilements. Thus he searched on until he realized the Noble Eightfold Path; that is, *sīla*, *samādhi* and *paññā*, the development of moral virtue, concentration and wisdom. He had discovered the Middle Way for the abandoning of the mental defilements.

For us it's quite the opposite. We can work all day in the blazing sun or pouring rain, even be up working on roofs, exposed to the elements and enduring great hardships, and yet we still don't see suffering. What's the matter with us? The wise ones, the noble or spiritually attained ones, can perceive suffering with their wisdom without having to experience it as such. However, the vast majority of people don't see suffering because they're so completely attached to their comforts and pleasures. For instance, here in Thailand we are blessed with the teaching of the Lord Buddha, and yet people pay it no attention. If they are not interested in his teaching and have no intention of taking it up and putting it into practice, it can't be used to help ease their suffering and unhappiness. They're no different from chickens foraging for food, scraping away looking for worms and ants; if they were to come across a diamond they would kick it away because it's not food. People are just the same. They search for happiness and pleasure through their five senses, yet they turn their backs

on the Dhamma. The Dhamma is of immense value, but they think otherwise; they consider it to be of no use at all. They're more inclined to think: 'Going out for some fun is better than that', or 'Not having moral principles and restraint appears to be a much more desirable option'; or maybe they think: 'Getting drunk is more appealing than that.' This is the happiness of deluded people.

This is why I maintain that if you don't develop concentration you will never progress in your Dhamma practice. You have to start developing it. People are mostly too lazy to keep up a regular meditation practice. They may have given it a try but didn't achieve any peace, so they look for an easier way to practise and become content with just 'watching the mind'. This is nice and easy to do, and they believe it will also rid the mind of the mental defilements. Developing concentration is something they don't want to do because their previous efforts were unsuccessful; they achieved no peace or stillness because their minds were restlessly thinking. So they turn to watching the mind, or more correctly, watching its thoughts and emotions, because it's much easier. Go ahead! Watch them all day if you like, but this will never cause them to cease, it doesn't get rid of them. The stream of emotions arising and ceasing can pass by uninterrupted only when our mindfulness has the

strength to remain objective. Otherwise, as soon as we have a lapse of mindfulness the mind will drift off, indulging in its emotions again. Today we have experienced all kinds of sensory impressions and the emotions of liking and disliking that arose dependent on them. Now they have all passed by. But tomorrow there will be new impressions: new images, sounds, odours, tastes and bodily sensations, and their subsequent feelings. The day after tomorrow will be the same, and so on. The mind will patiently and continuously let them go, but they will never cease because their cause isn't being suppressed, they're not being dealt with at their source.

What causes moods or emotions of greed, anger or sexual attraction to arise? It's the mind's deluded attachment to one's own body as being one's 'self' or belonging to oneself that causes them to arise. It is the sense of self which creates the defilements of greed, anger and sexual attraction, and it all starts with the body. To counter this habitual flow of the mind, we need to contemplate the body. To do so will uproot all identification with the body as being oneself. However, body contemplation cannot be done if the mind is lacking in the mental strength derived from concentration. If our concentration is weak, our mindfulness and wisdom will not be sharp enough to do their work.

Concentration is like a knife. If we use a blunt knife and try to cut branches and vines, will it cut through them? Our minds are just the same. Without concentration, our mindfulness and wisdom are not sharp enough to penetrate their object of contemplation. So what do we do when we know we are in possession of a blunt knife? Sharpen it, of course! Mindfulness and wisdom are sharpened by developing concentration. Ordinary intelligence is not as sharp as wisdom. People who lack moral virtue can possess intelligence, but not wisdom. If we want our intelligence to have the sharpness of wisdom, we must observe the moral precepts and practise concentration. It is the continual practising of concentration that does the sharpening. Once our faculties of mindfulness and wisdom are sharp, they will probe into all our sensory experiences with the aim of seeing the impermanence of forms, sounds, odours, tastes and body sensations. Everything will be taken up for examination. *Sati-paṇṇā*, mindfulness and wisdom, originate from the power of concentration. Concentration is the strength or the energy that supports mindfulness and wisdom.

Just think of a cell phone. If we keep using it the battery will run down until eventually it is flat. We then have to recharge it. We use the phone and then recharge it, and with a continual charge the battery becomes full, ready for use again. If we

don't practise concentration the mind will just keep on thinking the whole day long about work, family hassles or the many other little things that it likes to think about. However, all this thinking leaves the mind in a weak and tired state. In other words its battery has been drained; mindfulness and wisdom have been drained of their energy. So we have to recharge our battery, and we do this by giving the mind some rest, resting it in the peacefulness of concentration. Having rested the mind will be energized, and mindfulness and wisdom will once again be able to deal with any problems.

In truth, there isn't much to the practice of Buddhism. There's no short cut or fast track; there is only the Middle Way as taught by the Buddha. It's the most direct path, but it can't be considered a short cut. The Buddha's path can be walked by everyone, for he taught only one path of practice, the Middle Way. The path of practice for laypeople is to cultivate goodness and generosity, observe the moral precepts, practice concentration and cultivate the mind²⁰ so as to give rise to mindfulness,

²⁰ The expression 'to cultivate the mind' can refer to either the development of concentration or the work of contemplation, so as to generate wisdom, or both. Thai Forest meditation masters recommend body contemplation as the only effective way to eradicate the coarse defilements of greed and anger. They teach that only an *anāgāmī* can truly contemplate the mind. The *anāgāmīs'* practice is focused solely on destroying the remaining subtle defilements, that is, the subtle delusion that still exists within their minds, so as to attain arahantship, full enlightenment.

wisdom and right view. People often like to cite individuals who have made rapid progress in meditation practice. But why was it rapid? Because those people had already developed the spiritual perfections to a great extent in their previous lives, and so in this present life their practice progressed very quickly. And why is someone's practice slow? Because in their past lives they didn't cultivate the perfections to any great extent, and so in the present life they have to do a tremendous amount of practice, thus awakening to the Dhamma more slowly. This is how it works.

We should never dispense with the fundamental guiding principles that the Buddha taught. Actually, there isn't a great deal at all to Buddhism. Even if we were to expand on his teaching, going out to the furthest reaches of the universe, we humans would still only have a body, speech and mind. This is all there is to the Buddhist universe. It can be narrowed down further to the body and the mind, and ultimately to just the mind alone. And so why must we contemplate the body? Because the mind clings to the body as being who we are, or our self. Hence we have to let it go. Once the body has been attached to or identified with as being oneself, the mind will not readily want to let go. However, this state of attachment causes nothing but suffering for us and so we have to teach

the mind to let go.

And in what way does the mind cling to the body? At present you consider your body to be yourself or as belonging to you. But at any moment you can start to feel unwell, perhaps with a headache or stomach-ache. When this happens, why don't you politely ask your body to please get better? Go ahead, try telling it to get better. Try telling it: 'I always take such good care of you and give you three or four good meals a day. Sometimes I even go to department stores to buy good clothing to dress you with. Please don't betray me like this.' But does it listen to you? You can order it to get well, but it won't do as you say. Actually, it won't believe anything you say. Our mindfulness and wisdom therefore have to become wise to the body, and realize that the body is not the mind and the mind not the body. The body is not the self, that's for certain, because it doesn't obey us. We have to teach the mind gradually in this way, employing a superficial approach to *vipassanā*. It's not that *vipassanā* can be practised only while sitting or walking in meditation; contemplation can be done at any time. Whenever you're feeling ill, just ask yourself: 'Why can't I tell the body to get better?' If you can't order it to get better, that shows it isn't 'you' or yours. Actually, whether it gets better or not is the doctor's job; your job is just to take all

the necessary care of it that you can. Put your mind at ease like this; let go of the body. However, that is difficult to do because to do so depends on the development of moral virtue, concentration and wisdom.

Apply your wisdom by contemplating the body frequently and the mind will gradually begin to let go of its hold on the body. It is similar to having a boat that you want to row across an ocean or a river. Having pushed the boat away from its mooring, you start to row. After a while you notice that the boat is leaking, so you take a bucket and start bailing out the water. Later the leaks become even more serious, and so you have to get some sealant and start making repairs to patch and stop the leaks. Once this is done you continue rowing. You depend solely on the boat to take you across to the other shore. Your boat is actually no different from your body. The mind depends on the body and so it must be cared for in times of sickness. Why should you care for it? Because you rely on it to support you in the practice of cultivating goodness and the spiritual perfections. You should care for your body as long as you are able to do so. Eventually, when it is beset by illness and disease which are too much for it to withstand any longer, the mind must let it go its natural way. It's as if you are sailing in a badly leaking boat; no matter

how much you row, it will never take you to the distant shore because it is gradually sinking until it goes under. You then have to look for another boat, a new boat to continue your journey. In other words, on the death of the body if the mind still has defilements remaining it will search for a new body.

The body is impermanent just like the boat, but if it can still be cared for we must do so accordingly. This is why we contemplate death, because to do so urges us to develop goodness and observe the moral precepts. The practice of meditation is something that we must do now, while our bodies are still strong and healthy. Practise contemplating your body in the manner that I've been describing to you. You are already observing the precepts, but you're not doing nearly enough concentration practice. You have to strengthen your *pāramīs* of morality and concentration.²¹ This is how it works; they have to be gradually strengthened. At present you would all be considered to be middle-aged, and with the passing of time you will keep getting older. Can you tell your body to return to being youthful again? Oh, but you take such good care of it by giving it three or four meals a day. When

²¹ The scriptures only refer to ten *pāramīs*. However, some Thai meditation masters refer to the development of concentration as being a *pāramī*, on account of the essential role that it plays in the arising of wisdom.

it wants to eat fine delicious foods you go and buy them. You do all this for your body because the mind is infatuated with it. You even buy good clothing for it to wear, but as soon as the body starts getting old and you tell it to be youthful again, it can't or it won't do so! Really, it's enough to make you feel indignant. All that good care we give the body, but when it is about to die and we try telling it not to, pleading with it to live longer, it won't listen to a word we say. And why won't it obey us? Because the body is nothing more than a mass of naturally existing elements, earth, water, air and fire, which have temporarily joined together. The earth element has no knowledge of anything at all. Likewise with water, air and fire: they are totally ignorant entities. They have merely joined together to make up a body; it's nothing more than that. One day the body will finally inhale but fail to exhale, or exhale without inhaling again. Subsequently the heart will stop beating and the mind will then travel out from the body.

What happens when the breath, the air element, has gone? The body's warmth, the fire element, begins to disappear, as it can no longer sustain itself without the air element. Initially, all four elements of earth, water, air and fire exist together. Once the air element has gone, the fire element will also leave the body. The body then

begins to cool; corpses are rather cold, you know. Some days after the fire element has gone out, the earth and water elements begin to react by causing the corpse to gradually fester and bloat, just like a balloon. Then after a period of time it starts to deflate as the water element, blood etc., begins to slowly seep out, leaving the body to decay and sink inwards. The remaining earth element, that is, any bodily parts that are hard or have form, such as head and body hair, nails, teeth, skin, bones and sinews, etc., finally break down and crumble away. The earth element has never proclaimed it is the self. It doesn't even know that it's a part of a body. Instead, it is we, or rather our minds, that attach to it and take it to be the self.

What is head hair anyway? Regardless of whether it is long or short, it is just the earth element, but we consider it to be our own, ourselves, and so we keep it clean and give it lots of attention and care. You have probably combed your hair and noticed that two or three hairs have fallen out. When you next see this, try reflecting on them by asking yourself: 'Are these hairs really who I am, my "self"?' When you put them down they are motionless, completely lifeless, unable to go anywhere at all. They are simply the earth element. Actually, hair is rather complex, being comprised of all four elements, but it is normally categorized

as being the earth element.

Hair is a lifeless object, and yet when it's on our heads we think it's attractive, often looking at it in the mirror, admiring its beauty. But would you believe that your hair is intrinsically dirty? Here's something you can try. When your mother is making a stew, say: 'Just a minute, I have something absolutely divine that I would like to add to it.' Then put in a pinch of seasoning powder, followed by your divine ingredient—a small handful of your hair, freshly taken from your comb. Now, would that be an appetizing stew or not? What does this show you? It should show you that hair is something that is dirty and distasteful, right? If it were truly clean you could say to yourself: 'This food is excellent.' However, it's quite the opposite, because we feel that hair in our food is something most sickening.

If we don't wash our hair for three or four days it becomes greasy due to the oil coming out from the scalp. We all consider this oil to be rather disgusting, even though it comes from our bodies. Our hair always has to be washed for us to feel good and look clean. Our bodies are no different from our hair. Believe me, whether you work all day long, play sports or simply come here to the monastery, come the evening when you arrive home, you have to shower to cleanse your body. It requires soap to remove the dirty, sweaty grime that has exuded from

our skin. The clothing that we wear is at first clean and freshly ironed, but come the evening, just try giving it a sniff to see what it's like. Whether one is male or female makes no difference at all, the body is inherently dirty. I'm just speaking rather matter-of-factly with you, it's nothing overly objectionable. But go on, just try giving your clothing a sniff; it's really quite repelling. This shows us that the body, whether male or female, is in a perpetual state of decay, but we fail to see this. Instead we see only the present condition of somebody else's skin and look on it as being attractive. And so when our eyes see other people they focus on their skin, because we see beauty there. We get stuck right there, stuck on the body as it is at present.

How do the Noble Ones, those who have attained to one of the four levels of enlightenment, deal with this problem? If they are determined to intensify their practice so that they develop or walk the path towards a higher attainment, they will try to perceive right through the person they are looking at by superimposing an image of that very same person in the ripeness of old age, and finally as a corpse. They do this with the aim of seeing the impermanence and selfless nature of the body. As a result their minds will be equanimous and feel no attraction towards the other person. Others may take the approach of instantly bringing an

asubha image into their minds by visualizing the intrinsic unattractiveness of the other person's body, regardless of whether it is male or female. As a result their minds will rest in equanimity, feeling no attraction whatsoever towards that person's body. These are the methods that the Noble Ones will use to counter the mental defilements.

Actually there are many methods, but we fail to make use of them. Instead we do quite the opposite by allowing our minds to proliferate about the body we are looking at. This only gives rise to more defilement. The *magga* (the path of practice that leads to liberation) of one who upholds moral virtue and leads a celibate²² life is to further develop *sīla*, *samādhi* and *paññā* so as to make these factors strong and stable. These three factors can be considered as three very strong armed forces, and when they join together they become one mighty military force. The Noble Ones possess this great force and so they are able to bring an *asubha* image to mind immediately. However, people lacking in moral virtue are completely unable to do this, because the sight of other people brings up nothing but defilements in their minds. If greed arises they indulge in it, knowing no limits. And if anger

²² Celibacy is a necessary support for attaining the third and fourth levels of enlightenment. For the first two levels the five precepts are the minimum moral requirement.

arises, they allow their minds to be consumed by it. Ultimately the power of the mental defilements can even cause people to physically harm or kill one another.

As I've already said, there isn't much at all to Buddhism. Even if we were to expand on the teaching, taking it to the outermost reaches of the universe, Buddhism would still only be about the body, speech and mind. These three can be further narrowed down to leave only the mind. The *kilesas* exist solely within the mind and nowhere else. They do not reside in one's house, one's wealth and possessions or any other location. They are right here in our hearts and wherever we go they go too. It all comes down to the mind, and if we are to remedy the defilements it must be done within the mind. In Buddhism we contemplate only the body and the mind, that's all there is to it. Body contemplation is practised so as to see the impermanence of the body, and that there is no existence of an abiding self to be found anywhere within it. In doing so we will come to the realization that the body is not the mind and the mind is not the body. Our thoughts and emotions are of the very same nature as the body: impermanent and devoid of any self entity.

All of us wish for happiness, so why is it that we still experience unhappiness and suffering? Whenever you are feeling unhappy or discontented,

do not take these emotions to be your mind, because they certainly are not. Try taking a step back from them by making your mind perceive them as not being the mind itself. If you experience an emotion of greed or anger, satisfaction or dissatisfaction, try telling yourself: 'This is just an emotion, it isn't my mind, it's not me. It's merely an impermanent condition that has arisen and must by nature cease.' We have to start by having mindfulness established in the present moment, so that we can work at filtering out all the unwholesome things from our minds. As laypeople you must set up mindfulness from the moment you wake in the morning and maintain it throughout the day while going about your work and duties. Always try to have mindfulness in control of your mind by keeping watch over your thoughts and emotions. Those who keep a vigilant watch on their minds will attain release from Māra's snare.

Keeping a careful watch on the mind means always trying to maintain mindfulness, regardless of whether one is standing, walking, sitting, lying down or doing some other activity. Whenever mindfulness slips away, and it will do more often than not, we must re-establish it. The best way to do this is by bringing it to focus on a meditation object. For example, we can be attentive to the breathing or the repetition of the meditation word 'Buddho'.

When you realize that you have little mindfulness because your mind keeps wandering away with all its restless thoughts and emotions, bring your mindfulness to focus on the breath. Direct your attention to the tip of your nose and simply know when the breath comes in and goes out. Just be attentive to this alone. It isn't that we can watch the breath only while practising sitting or walking meditation. Outside formal meditation practice, regardless of what you're doing, as soon as you recognize your mind is unfocused and overly active bring your attention to your breath. Focus on it for three to five minutes, and all the restless thinking will cease because you are no longer taking any interest in it; your interest is now with the breath instead. If you find watching your breath uncomfortable, try recollecting the Buddha by adopting a constant internal recitation of the word 'Buddho, Buddho, Buddho'. Focus your mindfulness right there and the mind will cease its preoccupation with all its defiled thoughts. By temporarily cutting off the flow of thoughts and emotions mindfulness can be established. Practising in this way is called *samatha*²³ meditation.

Some practitioners have already developed

²³ Samatha: the act of calming or stilling the mind, tranquillity meditation. One of the two primary types of Buddhist meditation; the other is the development of insight, vipassanā.

good, strong mindfulness. As soon as they see a form or hear a sound, it gives rise to a feeling, for example, attraction or pleasure. This feeling in turn activates the thinking processes. And do you know what they do in this situation? Once they are aware that a thought or emotion has arisen, they stop their recitation of 'Buddho' or watching the breath. On sensory contact, a fragment of their mind-stream goes out to receive or link up with the stream of emotions and thoughts; it's a habitual process. However, the remainder of their mind-stream stays fast in the present moment because they have previously developed mindfulness and concentration. They then direct their wisdom to destroy the stream of emotions and thoughts by contemplating their impermanence and absence of self. This causes the flow to cease, to drop away. It's analogous to somebody sending up a flying target which we immediately shoot at—bang!—and it falls down. We do exactly the same within our mind. As soon as a flow of sensory impressions contacts the mind, giving rise to feelings such as attraction or pleasure, a fragment of our mind-stream will go out to join with them. However, mindfulness and wisdom will perceive this movement of mind and therefore race out to destroy it at its source, by contemplating the impermanence of the particular form, sound, odour, flavour or bodily sensation

that caused the feeling to arise. Once the mind movement is destroyed, mindfulness will again return to the present moment.

If mindfulness and wisdom are lacking in strength, that is to say, if one's knife is blunt, it must be sharpened. When our faculties of mindfulness and wisdom are weak they are incapable of contemplating, because there will always be a residue of thoughts and emotions lingering in the mind. Don't go giving those emotions and thoughts any attention at all. Instead just take up the recitation of 'Buddho'. A firm and well-founded mind will have only one object in its awareness at any one time, so through taking up and firmly maintaining the recitation of 'Buddho', all other thoughts and emotions will cease. Our thoughts, moods and emotions are only conditions or states of mind which shadow the mind and work to deceive it. If we develop concentration we will gradually be able to see this deception, because our minds will naturally develop and become sharper.

As laypeople you should start by trying to sift out any bad or unwholesome thoughts from your minds. Once mindfulness is well established any unwholesome thoughts will easily be perceived. Whenever they do arise, you must use whatever skilful means you can to let them go. If your attempt proves not to be strong or

incisive enough to deal with them, re-establish your mindfulness on a meditation object such as 'Buddho'. Recite 'Buddho' or watch your breath for three to five minutes to bring the mind back to the present moment. The instant the thought or mood disappears, you can drop the recitation of 'Buddho' or watching the breath, and just have mindfulness guarding and controlling the mind, keeping it established in the present moment. After half an hour or an hour those particular thoughts or moods may re-emerge, sneaking back into the mind again. If so, try giving your *sati-paññā* another go at contemplating, because this time it may be strong enough to deal effectively with them. But should this still prove not to be the case, put the thoughts or emotions aside by returning to the recitation of 'Buddho'; keep them aside for as long as it takes to develop sufficient strength of mind to take them up for further contemplation. This is how it works. Just keep on practising like this. Always try to be mindful no matter what your bodily posture or activity may be, and whenever mindfulness lapses, re-establish it.

When you have free time, use it to sit formally in meditation. If you begin to ache or feel stiff and sore from sitting, change to walking meditation. You have to practise a lot, really develop the practice, because at present you're doing far too little! Those

who study or practise the method of Venerable Pramote²⁴ tend to do very little formal meditation practice. Many of his disciples who come here don't seem to see the benefit of developing concentration. Some of them say their minds are so lacking in peace that they can hardly concentrate. When I ask them how many hours a day they practise sitting in meditation, they reply: '15 minutes', or maybe: '30 minutes' for some. They wish for peacefulness, yet practise so little owing to their lack of patience and endurance. They are unwilling to force themselves to continue when the practice becomes difficult. If I ask whether they practise every day, they generally reply: 'No.' It's similar to somebody investing ten dollars and expecting a return of 10,000! If they invested 10,000 dollars with the expectation of receiving a return of several hundred or maybe one thousand, that would be a bit more realistic. They sit in meditation for ten minutes and if their minds don't quieten down they give up. When I ask some of them: 'Why don't you sit in meditation?' they usually reply that they don't want to focus their awareness too intensely on one given object for

²⁴ Venerable Pramote (Pamojjo) is a popular teacher whose teaching focuses predominantly on watching the mind, do jit. The way of practice as taught by Venerable Pramote is to assume the role of a passive observer who watches all that arises and ceases within the mind without interfering or taking action in any way. This is what he means when he teaches do jit or watching the mind.

fear of becoming attached to the peacefulness of concentration and getting stuck there, unable to progress any further. They're not yet even able to concentrate their minds, but already they are afraid of getting stuck by becoming addicted to the peacefulness of concentration!

So how should you go about focusing your awareness? Simply bring your mindfulness to focus on your meditation object, for example, the meditation word 'Buddho, Buddho'. Reciting 'Buddho' is no different from when we were at school and had to memorize simple English vocabulary by rote. I didn't find that stressful in any way at all, so why would repeating 'Buddho' be stressful? We gently focus the mind on the internal recitation of 'Buddho' to make the mind cool and peaceful. Before long the mind becomes cool and light with the rapture and happiness of concentration. This is how it develops.

The mental defilements (*kilesas*) are really smart when they tell us not to focus our attention on a meditation object out of fear of becoming a bit strange or unhinged. They're even so clever that as soon as the mind starts to think up ways to counteract them, they will forbid our wisdom faculty to take any such action or interfere with the natural flow of the mind in any way whatsoever. But why is it that greed and desire are nevertheless allowed to

interfere? Why is anger allowed to interfere? And why is sexual lust allowed to interfere and become involved in this natural flow, but mindfulness and wisdom are not? ‘Don’t interfere’, the *kilesas* keep telling us. ‘Just let them be.’ These defilements are really so much smarter and wiser than we humans! If we even just think of developing concentration so that we can start to counter the *kilesas*, they tell us not to practise a lot, saying that we will become attached to the peacefulness of concentration or even maybe go a little mad. They don’t want us to discover the way to peacefulness, or to tap into this source of great mental power that gives rise to mindfulness and wisdom. So as soon as the mind thinks to employ its wisdom faculty to investigate and counter the defilements, the *kilesas* will forbid us to do so by telling us that this intention to investigate or contemplate is itself a defilement, a mere proliferation of thoughts stemming from the defilements. Believe me, if you take this approach to Dhamma practice you’re as good as dead! You will progress no further than where you already are. Those who practise like this have lost the way. They don’t know the way of practice. If someone who can’t swim teaches others how to swim they will all drown together. Let the blind lead the way and together we will all drop into the abyss.

It is essential for us to develop right view

or correct understanding (*sammā-ditthi*). There's no need to go seeking out many different teachers or other Buddhist groups and sects, because the teaching of the Buddha is still here with us, it's still here in this world. He taught just one path of practice for everyone: the Middle Way. The heart of Buddhism is to refrain from all wrongdoing and to cultivate the good.²⁵ And how do we go about cultivating goodness? As laypeople you should practise generosity, cultivate everything good as best you can, observe the moral precepts and develop concentration. And why? Because to do so gives rise to mindfulness, wisdom and right view, so that we can then let go of the *kilesas* and thus purify our hearts. The essence of the Buddha's teaching is just this much; to refrain from all evil and to develop all that is good. And what's the reason for developing goodness? We do so in order to cleanse and purify our hearts. You don't have to search elsewhere for short cuts, because there aren't any. There is just this one path, the Middle Way, which is completely balanced and 'just right'. As I already said, those who in their previous lives have greatly matured the *pāramī* will be able to realize the

²⁵ The three basic categories of meritorious activities taught by the Buddha are to practise generosity (*dāna*), moral virtue (*sīla*), and meditative development (*bhāvanā*).

Dhamma²⁶ here in this present life without having to do a great deal of practice. However, those who in their past lives made very little effort to build up those perfections will have to practise hard in this present lifetime and meet with great difficulty along the way. We therefore need to be patient and have endurance. Don't just give up when your meditation is not peaceful. Such an attitude is not acceptable.

Ajahn Chah would say: 'Take it to the absolute end.²⁷ Dig down until you reach your goal.' Go on, then, take it to the absolute end! However, most people try sitting in meditation just once, twice, maybe even five or ten times; but then they give up because they cannot make their minds peaceful. You have to keep at it until you experience peacefulness. If today's meditation isn't peaceful, try again tomorrow, and if tomorrow's meditation is still not peaceful, then try again the following day. Continue like this until you achieve peace. There are some people who when they realize they are still not having much success in calming the mind will want to look for short cuts, methods that are easy and more suited to their character.

²⁶ To 'realize' or 'attain' to the Dhamma are terms that imply attaining one of the four stages of enlightenment.

²⁷ Here Ajahn Chah is referring to the completion of the Dhamma practice, i.e. full enlightenment.

But in truth the most universal of all meditation objects, suited to all people, already exist, namely, watching the breath and reciting 'Buddho'.

I often like to compare developing concentration to someone digging for water. Since ancient times it has always been said that within the ground lies water. Now, suppose two men carrying picks and spades were to come into the forest, and each was to start digging a well. One man digs down to five metres and thinks in despair: 'Could there really be water in ground as dry as this?' He continues digging down to ten metres, but still doesn't strike water. He thinks to himself: 'Who in the village said there is water to be found? I don't believe it!' He then gives up and throws down his tools. When he returns to his village he declares that he no longer believes there is water in the ground, because he has just tried digging down to ten metres and found none. 'The ground's as dry as hell!' he says, 'how could there possibly be water there? Whoever said there was must surely be an idiot!' The other man believes the people of old who said water lies in the ground. He digs down to ten metres but doesn't strike water; nevertheless, he sticks at it no matter how arduous the digging is. He perseveres, and when he tires he takes a rest. He continues digging down to 15 metres and on to 20 metres, but still doesn't hit water. 'Never mind,

just keep on digging’, he thinks to himself, ‘I’m not going to give up.’ He digs down to 30, 35 metres before finally striking a spring.

The stages of enlightenment along the noble path to liberation are not something from a bygone era. They still exist, but are you prepared to take the practice the whole way? Will you dig down until you reach the goal? Concentration is also something still in existence and there isn’t anyone who is not capable of developing it. It’s just that for some people it will be more difficult. If in our past lives we didn’t make the effort to build up the strength of concentration, we will meet with greater difficulty in this present life when trying to develop it. However, we tend to become discouraged and thereby allow the *kilesas* to get the better of us. If we are unable to settle the mind when sitting in meditation, we give up due to a lack of patience, perseverance and effort. This is why I’m telling you that we have to build up the *khanti pāramī* and the *virīya pāramī*, the perfections of patient endurance and effort. They need to be developed gradually, but we must persevere. When practising sitting meditation, first start with five minutes, then gradually increase to ten and on to 15 minutes. In this way the practice will develop by itself, and before very long the body and mind will begin to feel light and the mind will become peaceful in

meditation. As a result, the duration of our sitting will naturally increase all by itself.

Most monks didn't start off by sitting meditation for one hour. They may have started with five-minute sittings before gradually increasing the time to 10, 15 minutes, half an hour, and on to one hour. Sitting will naturally build up like this. What is important is whether you have enough persistence. If you sit for 10 or 15 minutes and then give up because the mind is still restless and distracted, you will never strike water. Your effort wanes before you come to the water's source, because you don't have the willingness to persevere and fight on. As a consequence peacefulness will never be experienced, nor will mindfulness and wisdom arise. This delights the *kilesas*, giving them cause to have a good old laugh at us.

However, if the mind were to experience peacefulness, it would enable mindfulness and wisdom to arise. The arising of these two faculties will in turn create a potent new force called the 'Dhamma Army'. This army can only come into being once all three forces of *sīla*, *samādhi* and *paññā* are united. Then the mental defilements will be done for, because the Dhamma Army will proceed to oust the forces of greed, anger and delusion which collectively form the 'Kilesa Army' from their throne. Their throne or seat of power is

none other than one's own heart. At present the *Kilesa* Army reigns over our hearts. To resist it requires us to seek out additional military support. We therefore have to call on the joint forces of *sīla*, *samādhi* and *paññā* to come to our assistance by staging frequent attacks on the enemy to drive it out of its occupied territory. Once the Dhamma Army has succeeded in its mission, it can assume possession of the heart's throne.

The situation at present is that the mental defilements hold supreme power within the 'City of the Heart', having deployed their forces of greed, anger and delusion to spread across the entire city. This is why the hearts of humans remain bound to the cycle of *samsāra*. It is therefore necessary for us to build up our own military force of *sīla*, *samādhi* and *paññā*. *Sīla*, moral virtue, will serve as our store of supplies; *samādhi*, concentration, is the strength or fighting potential of our forces; while *paññā*, wisdom, is the capability of our armaments. All three divisions of supplies, troops and munitions must be prepared, standing by ready to attack the enemy. If *sīla*, *samādhi* and *paññā* are strong, the enemy forces of greed, anger and delusion will be continually weakened by the frequent attacks they sustain. When we feel tired we can take a rest, but as soon as we have regained our strength we must continue to fight. We have to learn when to attack,

when to be evasive, when to take cover and when to build up our forces. Try first to test the enemy's strength. If it appears weak, launch an attack on it. However, sometimes when we launch a strike on the enemy it proves stronger than we are and so we must pull back, all the time attempting to steer clear of it so that we can rebuild and strengthen our forces. When *sīla*, *samādhi* and *paññā* are strong enough again, we can launch further attacks. In time the enemy will again be stronger than our forces, because we will have sustained injuries along the way. At those times we must back off and rebuild our strength. As soon as our forces appear to be stronger than the enemy, we strike back at it again. Frequent attacks will cause the enemy to be always on the retreat. It's not really difficult at all to put up a fight, because the enemy, the *kilesas*, exists here in our hearts.

As laypeople you have to be firm and constant in keeping the five precepts. You also have to develop concentration. No matter whether we practise a little or a lot, meditation is something that has to be done. All the better if we can make it a habit. Try establishing a routine for your meditation practice, because that will force you to practise at the times you have set aside for sitting and walking meditation. You can easily give yourselves 15 to 20 minutes to eat a meal, or maybe even half an

hour or an hour if you are enjoying yourself over dinner with friends. Yet when it comes to giving your hearts some nourishment by way of sitting in meditation, you don't want to do it; not even for a little as five, 10 or 15 minutes! If you eat three meals a day, try sitting in meditation three times a day. Are you able to give the same amount of time to sitting in meditation as you do to taking your meals? It's hard to do. It seems not many of you are able to do so.

As I was saying earlier, some people come and tell me: 'Ajahn, when I sit in meditation my mind isn't peaceful at all.'

'Do you sit every day?' I ask them.

'No, not every day.'

'And how long do you sit for?' I then ask.

'15 minutes', some reply. 'Half an hour' is the response of others.

Really, now! How could anyone ever wish to find peacefulness like that? Monks sit and walk in meditation much, much more than that. A monk who is dedicated to practising will try to give as much time as he can each day to sitting in meditation. You will notice that after finishing their meal, the monks go to wash and dry their bowls. If a monk is determined in his practice he will return to his dwelling place shortly after drying his bowl. This is in keeping with the tradition of the Noble Ones.

Once at his dwelling he will air his robes, go to the toilet and take care of his personal business. When he has finished he will start his practice by walking in meditation, mostly for about one hour before changing to sitting meditation. His practice will alternate like this until 3 p.m., when he will come out to help with the communal chores. However, if he didn't take much rest the night before, he might think to have a short nap after midday, but for no longer than half an hour or one hour at most. Some monks don't even bother to take a daytime rest, because they would rather continue with their practice of developing mindfulness and concentration. Just see! They really practise a lot, not a little. Nevertheless, many of you laypeople don't seem to see the benefit of it.

You have all previously listened to a lot of Dhamma teachings, and no matter how much I say to you, it's really just that much. What remains now is for you to do the practice yourselves. You have to do it. Teachers can only give directions as to the path of practice. Their teachings point out the way, but you have to do the work yourselves. Ajahn Chah would say: 'The fruit is sweet, crisp, and delicious. I know, for I have tasted it myself. You, however, still do not know its taste. You yourself must go and eat it—you have to try it for yourself.' You must taste for yourself what the coolness and

stillness of concentration are like. Taste to see what the rapture, the happiness and the equanimity of concentration are like. The Buddha simply pointed out the way to us. However, his disciples have to put his teaching into practice by following in his steps.

So do be consistent in keeping the five precepts, and also put forth effort into developing concentration. Whenever thoughts and emotions arise, use your mindfulness and wisdom to investigate and reflect on them, doing so with the aim of letting them go from the mind. Once your mind has been made free of all moods and emotions, turn to investigating your body. Body contemplation can be done at any time of the day. When bathing we can reflect on the body's intrinsic dirtiness. When washing our hair or having it cut we can reflect on the hair. When trimming our nails we can reflect on the trimmings, to see that they are merely the earth element, something hard and completely lifeless. So don't think we can only contemplate while sitting in meditation. It can be done at any time.

Well I've probably offered enough of my reflections. Do any of you have any questions?

Layperson: Yes, just continuing on from what you have been saying, I've noticed that if I develop mindfulness only, it doesn't have enough strength,

just as you have been telling us.

Ajahn Dtun: You also have to strengthen your concentration. It's what makes mindfulness strong and stable. The practice of concentration gives rise to mindfulness that is securely founded in the present moment. One's mindfulness will then be able to see whatever mental impressions arise within the mind, together with all the defiling thoughts, moods and emotions. Outside formal meditation, we should always try to have mindfulness keeping control over our mind when we are going about our daily activities. When sensory impressions contact the mind, such as when the eyes see forms or the ears hear sounds, a resultant feeling or emotion will arise in the heart. We need to be mindfully aware of this, attentively watching the arising of any emotions so that they can be immediately reflected on and let go from the heart. However, if our mindfulness and wisdom are not strong enough to do this, we must briefly return to our meditation object, whether it be the breath or the meditation word 'Buddho', for as little as four or five minutes. Very quickly the emotion will disappear. This is how to practise concentration outside one's formal practice. It helps to keep our mindfulness firmly established. It also trains us to constantly filter out all the bad or unwanted thoughts and emotions from our hearts. Don't go

allowing bad mental states to arise. But if they do we must be patient and endure with them, while also putting all our energy towards letting them go. We then try to create wholesome thoughts and moods, ones which will inspire us to cultivate our minds: to make them good, to make them clean and to make them pure. Go and give it a try.

Layperson: Yes, I'm going to try and put it into practice.

Ajahn Dtun: Any other doubts? None? So just put it into practice, but do be patient. As I mentioned at the beginning, try to reflect on death so as not to be heedless in how you live your lives. Always try to cultivate everything good and be strong in your keeping of the five precepts. Concentration must also be developed so that you will have the mindfulness and the wisdom to watch over and care for your heart. We must not allow suffering and unhappiness to enter into our hearts; nor should we allow the heart to be tainted in any way by negative emotions. When we feel unhappy or discontented those feelings should not be considered as normal because they are not the mind, they are merely conditions of the mind. We have to take a step back from our feelings and adopt the attitude that these thoughts and emotions are just states of mind, but not the actual mind itself. Likewise, we shouldn't take hold of feelings of

unhappiness or any other low-spirited moods that may arise. Always reflect to see that these feelings arise and cease; they are not the mind. If we try not to attach or identify with those feelings as being our 'self', our mind, we will gradually be able to let them go. But for us to be able to do this we must work at developing our meditation practice.

PART II

These following questions were submitted to Ajahn Dtun at the end of a Dhamma talk.

Layperson: Will we be able to attain to the Dhamma by only watching the arising and ceasing of all mental objects within the mind? I have many Dhamma-friends who say that sitting meditation isn't necessary, and that the practice of watching the mind is a more direct and effective approach. I was told that Dhamma practice for modern people should be more mind-oriented, because we are required to think a lot and have also received a better education than previous generations?

Ajahn Dtun It is true that in this modern age people have received a very good education and possess much knowledge. However, regardless of whether someone has graduated with a BA a Masters or a Ph.D, even if they are an academic, their knowledge is only the worldly kind of intelligence, it is not wisdom. Wisdom is what

enables us to free our hearts from the defilements of greed, anger and delusion. I'm sure you've seen cases of highly intelligent people, or people with a high rank and position, who when they are given the chance are quite capable of behaving corruptly because their minds are being influenced by greed. If anger dominates their mind, they might think to use their power and intelligence to take the life of somebody else. This is the intelligence of the mental defilements at work. The strength of ordinary mindfulness combined with our intelligence is not strong or incisive enough to see the mental defilements and bring about their cessation by completely letting them go from the mind. If a high level of education and much acquired knowledge were sufficient, all people in the world with those advantages would by now have attained the various stages of enlightenment and Nibbāna.

The Dhamma Army, the fighting force that battles with the *kilesas*, must comprise the forces of *sīla*, *samādhi* and *paññā*. All three forces must unite to resist the *Kilesa* Army, which is collectively formed by the forces of greed, anger, sexual lust and delusion. If it was possible to attain to the transcendent path, its fruitions and Nibbāna by merely using our mindfulness to watch the mind and our wisdom faculty to contemplate the arising and ceasing of all mental objects, the Buddha

wouldn't have taught us to cultivate moral virtue so as to create a foundation for the development of concentration. He taught that concentration ultimately gives rise to *sati-paññā*, mindfulness and wisdom.

In the higher ordination ceremony to become a Buddhist monk, the preceptor instructs the candidate on five essential meditation objects: hair, body hair, nails, teeth, and skin. Monks must reflect frequently on these five objects in their meditation practice. The purpose is to aid the meditator to see the true nature of the body: that it is impermanent and totally devoid of any 'self' entity. This insight enables the meditator to attain the Noble Path to Liberation, its fruitions and Nibbāna. If a preceptor fails to instruct a candidate on these five principal objects, that is, if he fails to make the candidate aware of their importance, that person's holy life will not be fruitful; he will be unable to attain to the Dhamma.

The view that people in this modern age need only use their mindfulness to see the arising and ceasing of all mental objects to attain to the Noble Path and ultimately realize Nibbāna is a product of the *kilesas*. These mental defilements are actually much smarter than we are, as they can convince us that it's not necessary to develop concentration because this is difficult to do. This deception will

prevent any uninformed believer from ever attaining to the Noble Path. ‘Why undergo the difficulty of developing concentration?’ our *kilesas* tell us. The defilements are so clever, they make people believe this. Actually, they want all beings to remain in saṃsāra. They don’t want us to attain to the Noble Path, its fruitions and Nibbāna. If we fail to develop concentration, we will not possess sufficient mindfulness and wisdom to let go of the *kilesas* from the mind. Simply using one’s mindfulness to watch the mind, without ever developing concentration and contemplating the body, will not take one to the transcendent path that leads to the stages of enlightenment and Nibbāna. An untrained mind, one that has not developed concentration, while sometimes aware of some of its emotions, will not perceive them with any real clarity. The untrained mind will therefore attach to the emotions in the belief that they are the self or the mind. In doing so, the mind blends together with its thoughts and emotions until they are inseparable; they become one and the same. The mind is then left incapable of separating itself from the stream of thoughts and emotions.

For a cell phone to be in good working order, it must be charged frequently. If we use the phone but never recharge the battery, its charge will run down until it can’t be used. Mindfulness is no

different from a cell phone. If we never strengthen our mind through the practice of concentration, it will gradually weaken until it is incapable of letting go the emotions from the mind. If mindfulness is used only to watch the mind and we never develop the strength of concentration to support it, our mindfulness will be unable to keep up with all our thoughts and emotions, or to know them according to the truth. Any attempts to contemplate the body will also be unsuccessful, because our mindfulness and wisdom will lack the strength and clarity needed to see body's impermanence and the absence of self.

The teaching of the Buddha is never outdated or unsuited to any age, because it is a timeless teaching. He taught a path of practice that leads beings to gain insight into the Four Noble Truths and takes them out of suffering. His path of practice consists of three factors: moral virtue, concentration and wisdom. Any being in any age or era who cultivates all three factors of the Path with the aim of achieving insight into the Four Noble Truths, that is, of fully comprehending suffering, its cause, its cessation and the path leading to its cessation, will be capable of attaining the Noble Path, its successive stages of enlightenment and, ultimately, Nibbāna. All of us must therefore remain firm in the way of practice of the Lord

Buddha and his *arahant* disciples. We have to look at how they practised to attain to the Dhamma and realize Nibbāna. All of them had to cultivate the path of *sīla*, *samādhi* and *paññā*, and also reflect on the body to realize the Dhamma—the Truth.

Layperson: My understanding is that in my meditation practice I shouldn't let my mindfulness focus on just one meditation object. Instead I should try to have a general awareness of the arising and ceasing of all mental states. Am I correct?

Ajahn Dtun: If you never train your awareness to focus on one object, will your mindfulness ever be established in the present moment? The majority of people do not remain mindful in the present. For example, as soon as our eyes see a form, the mind runs off with the arising emotion of either liking or disliking that form. The untrained mind will not remain neutrally in the present. If we are to make it do so, we have to focus our awareness on a meditation object such as the breath or 'Buddho'. Only if we train the mind in such a way and develop this skill will we be able to keep the mind separate from its emotions.

It's easy to say that it is unnecessary for us to focus our awareness on one meditation object and that we should instead just know all our mental states as they arise and cease. But, I can assure you that in that case, whenever mental

impressions arise in your mind, the mind will not remain still because you haven't yet separated it from its emotions. As a result the mind will always be moving with the emotions of attraction or aversion, because it doesn't have a foundation of concentration. If we want to develop faculties of mindfulness and wisdom capable of resisting the mental defilements and fighting them until they are thoroughly defeated and removed from the mind, our minds need to have a firm basis in moral virtue and concentration.

Layperson: Also, am I correct in thinking that I should just be an objective knower of all that arises and ceases within the mind and in no way try to let my mind unify with a meditation object?

Ajahn Dtun: If you don't develop concentration, do you really think that you will have the mindfulness to watch all the arising and ceasing to such a detailed extent? Whenever mental impressions, thoughts and emotions arise, the mind will move together with them and it will naturally proliferate on those emotions. This actually does nothing but further strengthen the emotions. It's quite easy to say that this is how we should practise, especially if at the time your mind is free of emotions, but as soon as sensory impressions arise, will your mindfulness be able to keep up with this flow of impressions and their

subsequent emotions? If our mindfulness is to clearly see the arising and ceasing of emotions, our minds need to have a foundation of concentration. If we don't develop the strength of concentration by not trying or not allowing the mind to merge with its meditation object, we will never be able to keep up with all our emotions and know them in line with the Truth.

Layperson: Should everybody do the practice of *cittanupassanā*?²⁸ I've heard a number of teachers and also Dhamma practitioners say that it is the practice most suited for people today, because our education endows us with highly developed thinking and analytical faculties and that only people of lustful temperament (*rāga-carita*) have to practise body contemplation.

Ajahn Dtun: This questioner has most probably read and studied a lot and so has become rather confused and doubtful as to how to practise. The view that people today are most suited to the practice of *cittanupassanā* because we already possess well developed faculties of mindfulness and wisdom is not correct. If we don't develop concentration, our mindfulness and wisdom will not have sufficient strength or sharpness to cut the mental defilements from the mind. The teaching

²⁸ *Cittanupassanā*: the contemplation of the mind; in particular mindfulness of one's mental states.

of the Buddha, which has now lasted for over 2,500 years, has never once been unsuited to the times, and it is certainly not the case that people of this current age have only to practise watching the mind to attain to the Dhamma or have insight into the true nature of phenomena. From time immemorial the mental defilements that reside within the hearts of all beings have remained the same: greed, anger, sexual desire and delusion. To let go of these defilements we have to develop the path of *sīla*, *samādhi* and *paññā* so as to give rise to insight into the Four Noble Truths.

Everybody in the world, whether male or female, experiences feelings of sexual desire. If you think you can use mindfulness and wisdom to contemplate the mind and let go of the mental defilements without ever contemplating the body, how will you ever gain insight into the impermanence and selfless nature of the human body? Without this insight, how will you ever let go of sexual desire? Our minds are deluded, and they attach to and identify with the body as being the self or 'us'. This delusion causes us to look on the bodies of other people as objects of beauty and desire. We also view material objects, especially the things we own, as being owned by some 'self' entity. These states of ignorance produce further greed, anger and delusion within our hearts. We therefore

have to develop concentration to give rise to the faculties of mindfulness and wisdom, so that we will be able to see the body's impermanence and its absence of self. It's not that only some people should contemplate the body; anyone who aspires to go beyond all suffering, a state where the mental defilements are brought to their complete cessation, must practise body contemplation. It is only on becoming an *anāgāmi*²⁹ that we can dispense with body contemplation.

Those who ask this question most likely don't want to practise concentration. They think they only need to use their mindfulness and wisdom to reflect on the arising and ceasing of their mental states, but if they don't develop concentration it will be extremely difficult to do this because their faculties of mindfulness and wisdom will have no strength. A weak person cannot lift heavy objects weighing 30 to 40 kilograms. To do so, they must

²⁹ *Anāgāmi*: a non-returner who has reached the third stage of enlightenment. The fundamental distinction between this stage and the first two levels of enlightenment is that the first two only weaken the defilements of greed, anger and delusion (the deluded attachment to the body as being oneself). An *anāgāmi*, however, has completely freed the mind of this delusion and consequently abandoned all greed, anger and sensual desire. All that now remains of the defilements is the subtle delusion or attachment which the mind has towards the stream of mental events (feeling, memory and perception, thinking, and consciousness) as being products of the 'self'. This stream flows within the mind, but it is not the mind. The abandoning of this subtle delusion is the path of practice for *anāgāmis* as they work towards arahantship (full enlightenment).

strengthen their body with exercise and sport. Likewise, if we don't develop the mental strength of concentration, we will be unable to contemplate all our thoughts and emotions and let them go. Concentration is a support, it bolsters and strengthens our contemplation.

Layperson: I once read that the cultivation of *mettā* (goodwill, warm-heartedness) can take one as far as the attainment of *anāgāmi* status. Do you agree?

Ajahn Dtun: When you receive any kind of instruction about the practice, you have to try it for yourself, put it into practice to see if it is correct or not. To be confident that what you have read is true, you first have to reflect upon whether, if you only practice the cultivation of *mettā*, it will enable you to abandon all sexual lust from your heart. Give it a try; practise just cultivating *mettā* towards all sentient beings and not using other meditation objects, and see if it can free your heart from all sexual desire. See if it leads to the results they say. If it does, then believe it; if it doesn't, don't believe it. You will see that it can't do so, so why believe it? If it can't remove sexual desire from your heart, why would you believe it? We have to use our discernment. The Buddha taught us not to readily believe in the authority of the text and scriptures that have been passed down to us. This is because

sometimes errors and alterations may have crept in over time. *Mettā* has to be practised at appropriate times to remedy its counterpart, anger. If we want to unravel a length of knotted rope, we must untie the knots. Likewise, in whatever way suffering arises, we must deal with it in an appropriate manner there and then. The mental defilements must be dealt with wherever they arise. If greed arises we shouldn't use the means for dealing with anger. Likewise, if anger arises we shouldn't try to deal with it by using means appropriate for greed. When we experience painful feelings we must contemplate them first. Whatever is hindering the mind at that time is what we deal with.

If you believe that the cultivation of *mettā* can lead you to become an *anāgāmi*, that will make your practice nice and easy, won't it? You will not have to contemplate the unattractiveness of the body, because that is difficult to do. Before we believe in something, we must view it with sound reasoning and put it into practice to test its validity. We can't believe everything in the scriptures, nor should we believe in something just because our teacher tells us. From my own personal experience I don't believe anybody who says that it is possible to attain to the Dhamma without having to contemplate the body. Nor do I believe the claims to attainment of anyone who has not practised body contemplation.

Mettā cannot take one to the level of an *anāgāmi*, but body contemplation certainly can.

Layperson: I sometimes hear mention of the need to beware of becoming stuck in concentration. Is this something to be afraid of?

Ajahn Dtun: No, not at all. It's quite a small concern really. Actually, becoming attached to the peacefulness of concentration, or 'stuck', as some people prefer to call it, is not as easy as people think. The level of concentration that can give rise to this condition of being stuck is that of *jhāna*. This is an advanced state of concentration whereby the mind completely absorbs into its meditation object. It's not easy to develop concentration to this degree.

Layperson: Is it easy to correct this condition?

Ajahn Dtun: Yes, it's not difficult unless one has taken a completely wrong path. It can be corrected by simply recognizing the impermanence and selflessness of the state of concentration. We therefore shouldn't attach to the pleasure we obtain from this peaceful state. Some people become stuck in or attached to the peacefulness for long periods of time because they are either lacking in wisdom or fail to reflect on the impermanence of concentration.

Layperson: I'm still a little confused as to whether the practice of *dojit* (watching the mind) is

the same as the practice of *cittanupassanā* as taught in the four *satipatthāna*.³⁰ If it is the same, shouldn't we all do it, because the practice of *satipatthāna* is the way to go beyond suffering?

Ajahn Dtun: Yes, watching the mind is what is called *cittanupassanā*. To practise *cittanupassanā* correctly one must see the characteristics of *aniccā*, *dukkha*, *anattā*; the impermanence, unsatisfactoriness and absence of self in all one's thoughts and emotions. In truth, *cittanupassanā* is the path of practice for an *anāgāmi* practising for the final breakthrough to arahantship. Anyone else can only contemplate the mind at a very gross or superficial level, because their faculties of mindfulness and wisdom are not yet subtle enough to penetrate deeply and uproot the mental defilements. Hence contemplating the last two *satipatthāna*, the mind and *dhammas*, in great detail or refinement requires one's mindfulness and wisdom to be extremely subtle, so as to be aware of the subtle delusion still remaining in the mind. As I just said, this is the practice of an *anāgāmi* developing *arahattamagga*, the path of practice that leads to full enlightenment.

³⁰ Satipatthāna: the foundations of mindfulness, the objects or spheres to which mindfulness is directed so as to develop concentration and wisdom: the contemplation of ; 1) the body (*kāya*), 2) feelings (*vedanā*), 3) states of mind (*citta*), and 4) phenomena or mental objects (*dhamma*).

The mindfulness and wisdom of ordinary unenlightened beings are too slow and too coarse to penetrate to any real depth within the mind. Actually, their mindfulness and wisdom can't even stay abreast of all the emotions and thoughts arising within the mind. If we think in terms of percentages, they would be aware of no more than 10% of the mind's thoughts and emotions. A *sotāpanna* (the first level of enlightenment) would be aware of perhaps 20%, a *sakadāgāmi* (the second level of enlightenment) would be aware of about 30%, while an *anāgāmi* would be aware of about 50%. To destroy the mental defilements completely, 100%, by way of practising *cittanupassanā* is solely the task of the *anāgāmi*. *Do jit* practitioners say that they are always trying to be aware of the arising and ceasing of the mind's objects of awareness, but really they can see them only a few times, and superficially at that, before the mind returns to indulging in its emotions again. It just isn't possible for an unenlightened person, a *sotāpanna*, or even a *sakadāgāmi*, to jump over to the practice of *arabattamagga*. They shouldn't even try, because their mind isn't subtle enough to practise at that level. It is odd, though, that all four *satipatthāna* are often taught as being there for all to practise, but in truth one must be an *anāgāmi* before the last two *satipatthāna* can be practised effectively;

otherwise the mind just isn't refined enough to contemplate at such a subtle level. It is necessary to free the mind of the coarse defilements of greed, anger and sensual desire before we can move on to freeing it from the subtle defilements, that is, the subtle delusion still remaining within the mind of an *anāgāmi*.

The problem is that people think too much about the theoretical or scriptural side of the practice. We don't have to view the practice in terms of having to do *cittanupassanā* or *dharmmanupassanā* (contemplation of mental phenomena). It really isn't necessary to think in such terms. We can sum up the practice as being simply about the body and the mind. We contemplate the body to see its impermanence and absence of self, and we contemplate the mind or, more correctly, its thoughts and emotions, to also see their impermanence and absence of self. This way of practice will naturally penetrate through to the mental defilements. If we view things conventionally in line with the four *satipatthāna*, by practising as I have been telling you, we are still contemplating the body and the feelings of the body; we are also contemplating the mind and *dharmmas* because we will be aware of the state of our mind, and also whatever mental object or quality the mind is experiencing.

Layperson: Sorry to break the flow, but I'm

rather new to all of this. Please describe in simple terms what these four are.

Ajahn Dtun: Yes. Firstly, we contemplate the body. On a conventional level we can all see the body, but in practice we have to view it on another level by reflecting on its impermanence and that it is of the nature to degenerate. We live with the body here in the present. We can easily think of our body as it was in the past, but we rarely think to reflect on how it will be in the future. The body must go through a process of change and finally break up. This is how we should look on the body. Since birth and childhood, and up until now, the body has developed from past causes. At this present moment it appears to be stable, but it will gradually degenerate as it moves into the future.

Secondly there is the contemplation of *vedanā* (feelings). We reflect to see the impermanence and absence of self in all our bodily and mental feelings. Whether we experience feelings of pain, sickness, pleasure or displeasure, all are impermanent and devoid of self.

Thirdly, there is the contemplation of the mind (*cittanupassanā*). Here we must see that what we normally believe to be the mind, our thoughts, moods and emotions, are in actual fact not the mind at all. We reflect to see that all states of mind are impermanent and absent of any entity that could

be called a 'self'.

Fourthly, there is the contemplation of all *dhammas* or the objects of the mind. Everything that we know and perceive is impermanent and not self. All *dhammas* are not self. We can reflect upon everything as being Dhamma; for instance, if we see a dead person we can remind ourselves that one day we will be just as they are. This is Dhamma, but we don't attach to it; we let go of everything by seeing the impermanence and selflessness of all things. Even those who have realized the Dhamma and attained to the different levels of enlightenment do not attach to the Dhamma they have realized. They must let go of everything.

These four topics are reflected upon so as to let them go. We let go of the body, feelings, mind, and *dhammas* by reflecting to see their impermanence and complete absence of any entity that we could call ourselves. However, before we are able to do this we must first cultivate the Noble Path to Liberation, *sīla*, *samādhi* and *paññā*. All three of these path factors have to be developed and maintained continuously, so that our faculties of mindfulness and wisdom can reflect upon the body, feelings, mind and *dhammas*. If we do not cultivate all three path factors, we will not be able to separate the mind from its thoughts and emotions, and so the mind will continue to flow together

with them as one. As a consequence the mind will be left incapable of contemplating its own states of mind, its moods and emotions, because it will hold to them as being the actual mind itself. It cannot see that all its thoughts, moods and emotions are merely conditions of the mind, but not the mind itself. We therefore have to view things insightfully, but this requires mindfulness and wisdom. The arising of these two faculties is conditional on the development of moral virtue, concentration and wisdom. It is the cultivation of all three of these path factors that creates the necessary causes and conditions for insight to arise.

The four *satipatthāna* have been classified in such a way as to be an aid to formal scriptural study. They can be summarized as being all about the body and the mind. It is even possible to narrow them down still further to being just about the mind. However, this summary causes some people to hold to the misguided view that if one is to extinguish the mental defilements, this must be done purely at the level of the mind by focusing on the mind only, watching it to see the thoughts and emotions as they arise and cease. Those who like to practise the method of *do jit* or watching the mind always say that the mental defilements exist within the mind, and so we must seek them out and deal with them at the level of the mind.

Their practice is all about watching thoughts and emotions, but no matter how much thoughts and emotions are watched, they will never cease. Every day new thoughts and emotions will arise. For example, as we experience sights, sounds, odours, flavours and bodily sensations today, feelings of liking or disliking will arise. Tomorrow we will again meet with forms, hear sounds, smell odours, taste flavours and experience bodily sensations, all of which will cause feelings of liking and disliking to arise. It's never-ending.

No matter how much they watch their mind, those who like to practise the method of *dojit* cannot remove the mental defilements. The only way to do so is to go to the very source of the defilements—the body. It is our deluded attachment to and identification with the body as being ourselves that give rise to greed and anger. The body and the mind are interrelated. However, even though attaining to the first three stages of enlightenment is dependent on body contemplation, we still have to stay aware of all our emotions and know them in line with the truth, so that we can let them go. Letting go is a conditional thing, it happens due to causes. For us to let go of our emotions from the mind, we must see their impermanence and absence of self.

Layperson: Now I understand. We give our attention to body contemplation, but if emotions

arise we reflect upon them so as to let them go. So there is no need for us to reflect on all four of the mental *khandhas*?³¹

Ajahn Dtun: Anyone who thinks they can contemplate the mind in a more detailed way than I have just explained, for instance through trying to contemplate the four mental *khandhas*, is just fooling themselves. Their mindfulness isn't subtle enough to perceive the four mental *khandhas* clearly, but the mental defilements fool them into believing they are capable of doing so. All they are doing is guessing or speculating about what is happening, in accordance with what they have heard, read and remembered. They are grasping at their theoretical knowledge, but how could they possibly see things as subtle as that? They think it is really clever and profound to separate the Buddha's teaching on the four foundations of mindfulness into stages. It sounds quite impressive and lofty to speak of the practice in these terms, so they hold to this standard approach to the four *satipatthāna*, believing that it has to be done this way to go beyond suffering.

³¹ Khandhas: the physical and mental components of personality: 1) the physical body, 2) feelings; 3) memory and perception; 4) thinking and imagination, 5) sense consciousness. They are often called the 'aggregates of attachment' because the mind attaches to them, identifying with them as being one's self. They are in fact simply natural phenomena which continually arise and cease, and are devoid of any abiding entity that could be called a self. The last four khandhas are generally referred to as the mental khandhas.

People who read texts and scriptures and memorize them don't truly know what is and what is not effective in the practice. I've never read about the four *satipatthāna*, but I've heard people talking about them. Through my own practice I know that in reality things don't run totally in line with the books. While practising, I put this knowledge down and contemplated the body and the mind's moods and emotions, doing so in ever greater detail and refinement until I knew that the usual approach to the *satipatthāna* was not correct. Ajahn Chah never taught us to separate the *satipatthāna* into stages of body, feelings, mind and *dhammas*. He taught us to contemplate the mind, that is, our thoughts, moods and emotions, and to also investigate the body using such practices as reflecting upon the 32 parts of the body, or contemplating the unattractiveness (*asubha*) of the body, in order to bring its repulsive nature to light. Forest meditation masters do not teach separating *satipatthāna* practice into stages. This is the way of scholars.

Actually, it is not necessary to pay attention to the standard framework of the four *satipatthāna*. Just view the practice in terms of the body and the mind as I've been telling you. Contemplate the body and its feelings. Whenever feelings arise in the mind that give rise to pleasure or displeasure, we contemplate them too. You could

use the conventional scriptural terms and call this contemplating the *citta* (mind) and the arising and ceasing of the *dhammas*, but in practice it is not necessary to separate things out like that. Just contemplate the more coarse defilements of greed, anger and sensual desire. To separate things out in terms of *cittanupassanā* or *dhammanupassanā* only complicates matters. In any case, our mindfulness will not be able to perceive things clearly enough to practise these two properly. Those who have not yet attained to the level of an *anāgāmi* practise *cittanupassanā* with the aim of temporarily freeing the mind from all thoughts, moods and emotions and thereby making it equanimous. Then the work of either developing concentration or contemplating the body can be done.

The idea that we should only watch the mind, because that is where the defilements arise, is true only at the ultimate level of path development, that of *arahattamagga*, the final stage of practice for the realization of full enlightenment. If we can't clearly see the coarse defilements of greed, anger, ill-will and sensual desire, there is no way we will be able to let them go by merely watching them in the mind. If someone is still lacking in moral virtue and still tends to speak in deceitful and evasive ways, how could he possibly watch the mind with the aim of freeing it from the defilements? Even some monks

don't speak directly in line with the truth. People of weak morals just can't see the defilements clearly enough to be able to let them go; they are very far from being able to do so. They can't penetrate through to the mind. It's like someone being kept outside a door, barred from entering because their moral virtue isn't sufficient.

I often use the analogy of someone keeping a precious object in a small box which has four increasingly larger boxes covering it. If we want to open the smallest box, we must first open the bigger boxes and work our way inwards. The outermost box is the body, followed by the progressively smaller boxes of feeling, memory and perception, thinking and consciousness. We cannot free the mind from its subtle delusions regarding the stream of mental events (feeling, memory and perception, thinking and consciousness) and thereby destroy *avijjā*³² if we haven't first let go of all our attachment to and identification with the five *khandhas* as being the self.

The task of destroying *avijjā* can be compared to an army which sets out to attack a great king's capital city with the ultimate aim of killing the

³² *Avijjā*: Fundamental ignorance or delusion as to the true nature of oneself. This ignorance is also the essential factor binding living beings to the cycle of rebirth. It is the seed of being and birth, the nucleus of all existence. It is also the root from which all the other mental defilements arise.

king. The king has positioned all his forces in front of his walled capital to counter the attack. His army is huge, numbering at least 100,000 soldiers. Now, if you were to take a small army of ten, one hundred or even one thousand soldiers, do you think you could get past his army and enter the city gate? The king is none other than avijjā or the avijjā-controlled mind. He has positioned himself right at the back of his army. In front of him are row after row of soldiers. If you think you are going to go straight to the mind, because that is where the mental defilements arise, you will be killed by the rows of soldiers in front of him before you get very far. The soldiers of the *kilesas* are all the forces of greed, anger and satisfaction and dissatisfaction regarding sensory pleasures. They will kill you at once because they are positioned right at the front of his army. Before you can get to the walls of the city you must pass through not only all the traps - pits, barricades and patches of burning oil - but also all the rows of archers, long spears and swordsmen.

People say we must watch the mind because the defilements arise in the mind, and so they think they can just march right in and deal with them at the mind, but it can't be done like that. The practice of watching the mind to see the arising and ceasing of mental objects merely creates a

degree of temporary equanimity in the mind. But it is not at all subtle or incisive, and it is only when we are not experiencing many sensory impressions which cause strong feelings of liking or disliking that we may have enough awareness to see our feelings or thoughts as they arise. If we have very limited sensory contact we may also be able to see their cessation, but as soon as strong feelings of attraction and aversion arise the feelings will no longer cease, because the mind will latch onto them. Our mindfulness will no longer be able to keep up with the emotions and let them go. At this present moment, as we sit here, we are not being bothered by frequent sensory contacts, and so we can easily watch the mind to see the arising and ceasing of our thoughts and emotions. However, our thoughts and emotions are merely the king's attendants, they are not the king himself. We can normally only watch our thoughts and emotions for a short time before we have to go off and do some kind of activity, which gives the mind an opportunity to drift off as it usually does

I tell you that anyone who thinks they will contemplate the mind so as to abandon the *kilesas* just won't be able to do it. It is too difficult. They are not yet ready to deal with subtle *kilesas*, because their mindfulness and wisdom can't yet penetrate that deeply into the mind. We first have to kill all

the lower ranking soldiers, and gradually move up through the ranks until we reach the generals and finally the king. There's no way we are going to move straight in and deal with the generals (the mind). Just encountering a few of their traps and pits may be all that is needed to beat us. For instance, if a monk thinks he is going to put up a fight against this great army, but then falls into one of its traps, he may disrobe and give up the holy life. At first he may be intent on attacking and killing the troops, but he gets lured into a trap by falling for a woman and that's it, he disrobes. Actually, the obstacles at this level are so superficial and coarse that we are not even close to accessing the mind. If our mind is still affected by sexual desire, material gain, status and praise,³³ we cannot penetrate through and kill the king.

Layperson: So in a way we should view the practice of watching the mind solely as a means to try and maintain some equanimity towards our emotional states.

Ajahn Dtun: Precisely! That's all it is. It just helps to stop the mind's restlessness and allow it to be temporarily free of thoughts and emotions, but it goes no deeper than that. There's no need to think a lot about seeing the arising and ceasing

³³ For the mind to be still affected by such things implies that its level of spiritual development is less than that of an anāgāmi.

of phenomena within the mind, because at the basic level where we still are, our mindfulness is not incisive enough to be effective. Unless one is an *anāgāmi*, watching the mind is not yet at the level of being able to deal with the generals and the king. It is the path we take to reach the king, but before we can reach him we start by killing off his sentries and lower ranks. I remember as a layman watching those old gangster movies. If anyone wanted to kill the Godfather, they first had to kill off all his 'boys'. As they moved in on his premises his boys would gradually come out to resist, but the Godfather would remain casual and unperturbed, sitting back in his big armchair.

Layperson: In the scriptures there are many cases of people attaining to the Dhamma without contemplating the body. Many people merely listened to the teachings and were able to realize the Dhamma.

Ajahn Dtun: All those people had built up the *pāramī* to a high degree in their former lives, and so in their last life they were spiritually ripe; that is, they only required a small amount of instruction to attain to the Dhamma. Also, remember that this happened 2,600 years ago and these incidents are described only briefly. It is written that these people only had to listen to the teachings in order to attain to the Dhamma, but this could well be an alteration

made by scholars and the writers of the texts in the period during which the teachings have been recorded or transmitted. The facts of every incident haven't been related in a detailed way. The *suttas* (*the discourses of the Buddha*) were written down long after the event and have been simplified and summarized. However, in truth, before these people listened to the teachings their hearts already had a solid foundation of moral virtue, concentration and wisdom. Their spiritual maturity was great, sufficient for their enlightenment. They could be compared to a lotus bud that has risen above the water's surface: the bud only needs to be kissed by the morning sun and it blossoms.

The texts don't always tell us that many of these people, before meeting the Buddha, were exposed to different religious sects such as Brahmanism, or were versed in the Vedas of the Brahmanic canon. Often we are not told of their background and how many *pāramī* they had built up over many, many lifetimes, but I assure you, they were a lot! This is why the Buddha taught us not to be led by tradition or the authority of texts simply because they have been passed down through time. He taught us to reflect on and contemplate such things. Not one person who was spiritually immature would be able to attain to a stage of enlightenment simply because they chanced to

listen to the Buddha expounding on the Dhamma. It's quite the opposite; they all possessed great spiritual maturity. Some may have made a resolution in a past life to realize the Dhamma while listening to a Buddha teach. Others may have determined to realize the Dhamma only at a time when there was a living Buddha. It is also possible that some attained to the level of *sotāpanna* or *sakadāgāmi* in a past life, and therefore, due to the strength of their *pāramī*, attained to the Dhamma with relative ease on meeting the Buddha. As I said, the background of every individual hasn't been made known to us. It has all been summarized, but they were certainly ripe for awakening. Their spiritual development was great.

Layperson: The scriptures often cite cases of individuals who attained to full enlightenment without having to gradually attain to the previous three stages of enlightenment. Do you think it is still possible in this present day?

Ajahn Dtun: My own personal view is that it is 99.99% impossible to do so in the present day. I'll give 0.01% to the possibility of doing so. People of this era do not possess sufficient spiritual development and maturity to attain to the Dhamma so quickly and deeply.

Layperson: Just before I heard you comment on the four *satipatthāna*. Do you actually doubt the

accuracy of parts of the Tipitaka (the Theravāda Buddhist scriptures)? It seems you don't give much importance to formal book study of the Dhamma?

Ajahn Dtun: In my own practice I have never seen any reason to study the scriptures or texts. We can read the texts, but in truth they are external to us. Texts are just pieces of paper that have sometimes been correctly recorded and passed down over the ages, at other times not. The Dhamma, however, is to be found in one's heart. If we study our hearts we will know for ourselves whether or not there are still greed, anger and sensual desire remaining in them, and whether these defilements are lessening or not. It's not necessary to open a book to know this. When we study we tend to remember what we have read, but as time goes by our memory will often be incorrect. If we study the body and the mind we will see that the Tipitaka actually exists here in our hearts. Scholars tend to read books and hold rigidly to them, taking the books to be their teacher. Many have the attitude that everything has to be in direct accordance with what is in the texts; if not, it's incorrect. There are many monks and laypeople like this. They mistakenly take their knowledge of the scriptures to be wisdom, but it's not, it's just memory. They only know what they have remembered. They may have memorized all

the stages and points of various teachings and then present themselves as being reliable teachers, often becoming very famous, but their hearts are still defiled. Their memorized knowledge hasn't enabled them to let go of the mental defilements.

It isn't that I don't believe the scriptures or have no confidence in their validity. I just have never had an interest in reading them. In my heart I already knew that *sīla*, *samādhi* and *paññā* were the path of practice to be developed, to have insight into the Four Noble Truths. This is what brings the mental defilements to their cessation. It's not really a matter of believing or disbelieving. If I were to say I believe, that wouldn't be correct. But to say I disbelieve isn't the case either, because I haven't read the scriptures. Actually, out of all the numerous volumes that make up the Buddhist Canon, I've read less than half the Dhammapada.³⁴ I just haven't bothered to read the texts; I couldn't see the point of it. If I'm quite honest, it's probably because I felt so much contentment within my heart. It had already seen and tasted the Dhamma, so why read about it? I felt like someone who had already eaten their fill. I was content, I didn't wish for anything more because I was no longer hungry. I had no doubts about the practice, there was nothing that I

³⁴ Literally 'The Way of Truth', or alternatively, 'The Words of Truth', an anthology of sayings of the Buddha.

felt I had to inquire about, because I already knew how to practise for the abandoning of greed and anger, as well as sensual desire, so why read about it? I don't know what is written in the books about how to abandon the mental defilements, but from studying my own heart I clearly know the path of practice that frees the mind from them.

I've never said I don't have confidence in the validity of the whole Tipitaka, but when one practises to a certain level, there are some points of Dhamma which have been written down that do not accord with one's experience. For example, the teaching of Dependent Origination, *paticca-samuppāda*³⁵: when people teach about it, or quote it, it sounds so good and well arranged: with the arising of this, that must arise in succession; this ceasing that ceases, and so on and so forth runs the whole chain or cycle. But, what is not made clear is where and how to cut the cycle. Where do we cut it to attain to the first stage of enlightenment? Where do we cut it to realize the second stage or the third stage of enlightenment? They say that if we cut out a condition or link in the chain, the

³⁵ *Paticca-samuppāda*: Dependent Origination, is the doctrine of the conditionality of all physical and mental phenomena. Through a series of twelve causes and effects, it illustrates how ignorance (*avijjā*) conditions the rise of the whole cycle of repeated birth and death (*samsāra*). It explains how the aggregates (*khandhas*) and sense bases (*ayatana*) interact with ignorance and craving (*tanha*) to bring about suffering (*dukkha*).

cycle breaks. It is so easy to say, but that doesn't let go of the defilements—it can't be done like that. When they teach it they describe all the steps of arising: dependent on this arises that, dependent on becoming arises birth.... I don't know why they run through it like this, memorizing and writing about it. Apparently, if we cut the chain at becoming then there will be no more birth, but how do we do this? In practice we have to develop moral virtue, concentration and wisdom, so as to let go of our identification with the body and mind as being our 'self'. This is what breaks the chain. We practise to weaken and let go of the defilements of greed, anger and sensual desire. These defilements arise dependent on our deluded attachment towards the body as being the self. So to let go of the defilements we must contemplate the body.

Another example that I sometimes meet with is when people, both monks and laypeople, say that to attain to stream entry all one has to do is let go of the first three fetters³⁶ of personality

³⁶ The ten fetters (*saṃyojana*) are the ten mental defilements that bind us to the cycle of death, rebirth and suffering, *saṃsāra*. They are as follows: 1) personality view (perceiving the five *khandhas* to be the self); 2) doubt about the practices that lead to enlightenment; 3) a wrong attitude to rules, precept and rituals (believing purity of mind is attained merely adhering to them); 4) sensual desire; 5) aversion, ill-will; 6) desire for fine material existence; 7) desire for immaterial existence; 8) conceit; 9) restlessness; and 10) ignorance. A stream-enterer has completely let go of the first three fetters. The once-returned has worked to weaken fetters 4 and 5. The non-

view, doubt, and any wrong attitudes towards rules, precepts and rituals. Then they compare themselves to the list of fetters as described in the texts. It's actually quite easy to be a *sotāpanna* by doing this. In truth this isn't the correct way to approach the practice. Anyone can say that all we have to do is let go of these three fetters and see that the body is not the mind and the mind is not the body, but if we don't have a strong foundation in moral virtue, concentration and wisdom it isn't possible.

Some people think that because they are currently free of doubts as to the Buddha's teaching and way of practice, that must mean they are stream-enterers. But who knows, before very long doubt may return. I personally didn't know of all these terms such as the ten fetters, but I was determined in my practice and put forth great effort. If someone learns all the terms and lists of Dhamma but doesn't do sufficient practice, how will they ever reach the goal? I had no doubts about the practice, but I didn't think I was a *sotāpanna*. It is only when the heart clearly sees that the body is not the mind and the mind is not the body that stream-entry takes place. It's easy to think that one is a stream-enterer by measuring oneself against the list of fetters, but that doesn't mean that one

returner has completely let go of fetters 4 and 5. Arahantship is attained on abandoning the last five fetters.

truly is. It's merely speculation, that's all it is.

I can remember when I was living at Wat Pah Pong. Sometimes Ajahn Chah would have the monks take turns at giving the evening Dhamma talk. One evening a relatively junior monk took the Dhamma-seat and talked of how he had given up the first three fetters, but when he studied his heart he saw that he still had some aversion, the fifth fetter, remaining. It was clear that all he was doing was talking from what he had memorized. At the time of reading the texts his heart may have had a degree of peacefulness and coolness, and so when comparing himself to the texts he spoke in terms of having a small amount of aversion remaining. Just wait until something strong contacted his heart; then he would know how much he really had left!

To be able to see truly that the body is not the mind and the mind is not the body, people must develop moral virtue, concentration and wisdom. They must use their wisdom to investigate the body and let go of a degree of attachment to it. This is the real thing, spoken by a heart that has let go, not by a heart that has memorized lists of *dhammas*. The path of practice that leads to this realization is to constantly maintain our moral precepts, whether it be five or eight precepts, the ten precepts for novice monks or the 227 precepts for fully ordained monks. The practice of concentration must be

cultivated to such a degree that the calm, focused awareness of concentration can be sustained even outside of formal meditation practice. This will provide the faculties of mindfulness and wisdom with sufficient strength to reflect upon the body and easily break it down mentally by contemplating the 32 parts, the unattractiveness of the body or the four elements. The body must be frequently broken down mentally, until the mind eventually releases the coarsest level of attachment to it. Only then can one see that the body is not the mind and the mind is not the body, and understand and see the disintegration of the body before it actually breaks up physically; that is to say, seeing the death of the body before death actually occurs. This is the real thing. If all one ever does is study, one's heart will never know or realize the true Dhamma.

Body contemplation is a practice that works to weaken and let go of our attachment to the body. It is a practice that is similar to making use of a cut-off switch. The defiling emotions of greed and anger or satisfaction and dissatisfaction are produced right here in the heart. They arise due to our identification with the body as being the self, so when we begin to weaken and uproot our attachment to the body, the defilements will also be progressively weakened. If we only watch the arising and ceasing of our emotions, without ever

taking measures to remove their source by throwing the cut-off switch, the current of defilements will just keep on flowing. At times emotions of greed and anger may be allowed to cease, but before long others will arise. There's no end to it. Hence the similarity to a cut-off switch, because body contemplation cuts the current or the fuel for these defiling emotions. Contemplation of the mind, on the other hand, is incapable of doing this. Merely watching the arising and ceasing of one's emotions and thoughts does not cut the current, it doesn't remove their fuel.

If you want to study, then read the biography of the Lord Buddha or the biographies of his arahant disciples and modern-era arahants. This is the true type of study (*pariyatti*), because their biographies inspire us to practise. We have to practise so that we can realize the Buddha's teaching here in our hearts. It's not to be found in books. It all comes down to practice; only then will we truly know for ourselves.

A SHORT BIOGRAPHY OF AJAHN DTUN

Ajahn Dtun (Thiracitto) was born in the province of Ayutthaya, Thailand, in 1955. When he was six his family moved to Bangkok and he continued to live there until June 1978. From a young age he was a boy whose heart naturally inclined toward having a foundation in moral discipline. By the time he was a teenager and during his university years, many small incidents that would fashion his life gradually steered him away from the ways of the world and towards wishing to live the Holy Life. After graduating in March 1978 with a BA in Economics, he was accepted to study for a Masters degree in Town Planning at the University of Colorado, USA. However, while he was preparing to travel abroad, many small insights came together in force, and changed his way of thinking from planning to take his studies as far as he could and then lead a family life, to deciding that after graduation he would remain single and work to assist his father financially until the time was right for him to be ordained as a monk.

One evening he picked up a Dhamma book belonging to his father: which opened by chance at the last words of the Buddha: “Now monks, I

declare to you: decline and disappearance are the nature of all conditions. Strive on with diligence!” As he read this over a second and then a third time, the words resonated deeply within his heart, causing him to feel that the time had now come to be ordained, knowing this was the only thing that would bring him any true benefit. He resolved that within two months he would be ordained as a monk, and that his ordination would be for life.

In June 1978 he travelled to the north-eastern province of Ubon Ratchathani to be ordained by the Ajahn Chah at Wat Nong Pah Pong. Resolute by nature and determined in his practice, he was to meet with steady progress regardless of whether he was living with Ajahn Chah or at any of Wat Nong Pah Pong’s branch monasteries. In 1981, he returned to central Thailand to spend the Rains Retreat at Wat Fah Krahm (near Bangkok), together with Ajahn Piak and Ajahn Anan. The three remained at Wat Fah Krahm until late 1984, when Ajahn Anan and Ajahn Dtun were invited to take up residence on a small piece of forest land in the province of Rayong in Eastern Thailand. Seeing that this land was unsuitable for long-term residence, Ajahn Dtun chose another piece of land which was made available to them, a forested mountain that would later become the present day Wat Marp Jan. He spent five years assisting Ajahn

Anan to establish Wat Marp Jan, and then decided it was time to seek solitude so as to intensify his practice, knowing this to be necessary if he was to finally bring the practice of Dhamma to its completion. He was invited to practise on 80-acres of dense forest in the province of Chonburi, where he remained in comparative isolation for two years. In 1992 he accepted an offer of land for the establishment of a monastery, which he named Wat Boonyawad. At present the monastery covers 160 acres, all kindly given by the faith and generosity of Mr and Mrs. Boon and Seem Jenjirawatana and their family.

Since 1993 Ajahn Dtun's reputation as a prominent teacher within the Thai Forest Tradition has grown, and has attracted between 50 to 60 monks to come and live and practise under his guidance at Wat Boonyawad.

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