







from heart and hand  
vol. IV

Ajahn Jayasāro

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wisdom for all.**









## Preface

This is the fourth collection of my twice-weekly handwritten 'Yellow Page' reflections. I started posting them on WeChat about ten years ago as a way to maintain a connection with students in China, who I rarely get to see face-to-face. Later, I posted them on a WhatsApp page, Yellow Page Teachings . Now they seem to go here, there and everywhere.

The single-page format I established for myself in writing these notes requires brevity, and does not allow a 'deep dive' into any Dhamma topic. Nevertheless, I believe the format does permit me to present ideas or perspectives on the Buddha's teachings, that are established and supported in enough depth to provide readers with material to contemplate in their own practice. This is my hope.

The discipline of writing these pages on the day they are posted (only a small handful of around five hundred so far were recycled or written in advance), has been an enjoyable challenge. I have written most of them at my kuti desk. But I've also composed them while visiting monasteries overseas, on trains and planes, and, recently, hunched over in a small tent. I've written them in sickness and in health, while on retreat and while attending to my responsibilities to the Sangha and the lay community. I intend to carry on with them as long as there are people who want to read them. In fact, even if nobody reads them, I doubt if I'd stop. They are one small way I've discovered of redressing the imbalance between all that I have received in my life, and all that I have been able to give.

I would like to express my appreciation for all those who have made this book available for free distribution. As the Buddha says, 'Of all gifts, the gift of Dhamma is supreme'.

Ajahn Jayasaro  
Janamara Hermitage  
February 2026





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I quite often speak with people afraid of ghosts. Usually, I ask them how many times they have been threatened or mistreated by ghosts. In almost every case, after some hesitation, these people (usually, but not always, children) reply 'Never'. I then ask, 'In your life so far, which has caused you more suffering: ghosts or fear of ghosts?' The reply is - as you may guess - fear of ghosts. 'So', I say, 'let's follow the Buddha's teachings and look at the two most important things: suffering and the end of suffering. Surely, your real problem is not malevolent spirits but the fear of them. Let's look at how to free ourselves of fear.'

Fear is triggered by sensory impingement. It is sustained by a torrent of thoughts, memories and perceptions. We cannot usually counter that torrent purely on the mental level. To abandon fear we must turn our attention to its physical manifestations. Scanning the body in order to observe in fine detail exactly how fear feels, removes attention from the mental states that feed it. By considering fear as an object rather than identifying with it, fear subsides.





Usually, when something goes wrong, the question soon arises, 'Who is to blame?' Some people who are involved in the matter try their utmost to find excuses for themselves and cast the blame on others. Other people seem equally determined to blame themselves and excuse others. But in Buddhaddhamma, the idea that any event is due to a single cause to which blame should be assigned is considered fallacious.

We look on events as complex. Rather than deciding who is to blame, we map all the factors that have contributed to the problem. These might include individual actions and motivations, the views and beliefs, desires and fears of the concerned parties but also environmental, social, cultural factors.

Mapping contributions is not meant to undermine individual responsibility but to make it more focused and precise. The assignation of blame rarely gets to the heart of the problem. The investigation of contributions leads to the possibility of resolution, and also to measures to prevent similar problems from arising in the future.







Our experience of the world may be divided into two categories: things such as height and weight that can be measured and things such as love and hate that cannot. One of the most popular beliefs of the modern age is that things that can be measured are somehow more real than those that can't be. People will often say of an immeasurable quality, "what's really happening here is...." and refer to a measurable quantity. It is due to this way of thinking that mental states are reduced to a matter of brain chemicals. In fact, although such materialist beliefs may be proclaimed to be scientific, they are more akin to religious dogma.

Tears are not the cause of sadness, and a mother's love is not caused by oxytocin. Neuroscience has increased our knowledge of correlation rather than causality. Consciousness remains the great mystery of the universe. To be fully comprehended, it is to the Eightfold Path of the Buddha that we must turn.





We usually feel that it is appropriate to be praised when we do good things and criticized when we do bad things. If we don't receive praise when we do something good we can easily feel unappreciated. If we are criticized when we didn't do anything bad, we can feel hurt. We have expectations about how things should be, and suffer accordingly. The Buddha taught us to let go of expectations. He himself, although utterly pure, was once accused by a woman of making her pregnant. Other enlightened disciples were accused of being greedy, violent or jealous. Over the centuries how many good actions have been ignored or denigrated? How many bad actions praised and rewarded? Far too many to count.

In this world full of defilements there is little short-term justice. Justice is to be found in the law of kamma. Every good and bad action has consequences. Even the smallest good action, recognised by others or not, praised or criticized, adds to the treasure of goodness in our hearts, which is our true refuge.







For meditators today, a common malaise is spiritual nostalgia. People with this illness suffer from their struggles to reproduce a powerful samādhi experience that occurred in the early days of their practice. They speak with awe of the unforgettable breakthrough they made in their meditation, and with sad eyes admit their frustration at being unable to experience it again. Perhaps one day, they conclude wistfully, it will happen. They live in hope. In fact it is this very hope, expectation and desire that prevents them from moving forward.

The goal of Buddhist meditation is not to gain a particular profound state of mind and make it permanent. Such a motivation would mean aiming at a heavenly rebirth. We practice for liberation. We develop samādhi in order to give the mind the necessary stability and clarity to see the nature of body and mind without distortion. Our aim is to learn from our experience whatever it may be, and not to dwell on our memories of the past. There is a lot to learn from deep states of samādhi, but there are also a lot of traps we may fall into because of them.







In the development of the path factors of Right View and Right Thought, *yoniso manasikāra* plays a crucial role.

'*Yoniso manasikāra*' is a difficult term to translate. Renderings include 'wise reflection', 'wise consideration' and 'considered attention'.

There are two kinds of *yoniso manasikāra*. The first kind is practised by cultivating perceptual frames and systematic reflections based upon the Buddhist understanding of the nature of phenomena.

These are then used to replace unwholesome thoughts and perceptions with the wholesome. An example would be reflecting in a way that results in feelings of loving kindness and replaces the distorted thinking that fuels anger and ill-will.

The second kind of *yoniso manasikāra* is practised by reflecting on experience in the light of the three characteristics of *anicca*, *dukkha* and *anattā*. These reflections remove deluded thoughts from the mind and create a pathway for the deeper insights of *vipassanā*. Examples include consideration of the impermanent, unpredictable nature of life, the inability of transient pleasures to provide true happiness, and the ownerless, uncontrollable nature of phenomena.





Kindness and love for people we like, or who are like us, is not so difficult. It is not a spiritual accomplishment. Mettā that draws the line at the cruel and corrupt and violent people in the world is no mettā at all. Mettā makes no exceptions. It recognizes no boundaries.

Mettā requires a foundation of Right View, in particular a trust in the law of kamma. It also requires the cultivation of mindfulness and wisdom. The more we observe within ourselves how defilement can hijack the mind at any moment, the more compassion we feel for ourselves and others. We realize just how difficult it must be for those who have never learnt how to take care of their minds, and have no inner defences. We see that there are no evil people out there, just puppets manipulated by defilement. We take no pleasure in contemplating the suffering that awaits them in the future as a result of the kamma they have created. Instead we wish all beings the joy of goodness and the safety from defilement that only the Dhamma can provide.







There are two kinds of harmony : one supportive and one destructive . In the destructive kind of harmony the members of a group avoid speaking about anything that might bring up bad feelings or create conflict, even when certain topics need to be discussed. The unspoken agreement in this kind of group is 'I won't say anything about your behaviour if you don't say anything about mine.' Lack of overt conflict is mistaken for social harmony.

In the supportive kind of harmony, the members of a group are devoted to the true welfare of both themselves and others. They humbly accept that they have blind spots and make mistakes. They open themselves up to words of advice and admonishment from those around them. They take on the responsibility of offering words of advice and admonishment at a suitable time and place, having first made sure of the facts and cleansed their mind of anger. Even though there may be some hurt feelings every now and then, the kind of harmony that develops from this way of living together is strong and nourishing.







The nature of water is such that it can be dyed or dirtied, be heated or cooled, and it can flow swiftly or stagnate. But whatever is added to water or whatever transformations it is subjected to, water always remains simply water. For this reason, water often appears in Buddhist texts as a metaphor for the mind. The essential nature of mind is constant whatever the contents of mind that pass through it. Defilements that appear in the mind may seem very real but they are no more an inherent part of mind than, say, a red dye or a bad smell is an essential aspect of water.

The non-meditator may say, 'I feel so angry', 'now I'm calm'. The meditator practising cittānupassanā is aware, 'mind with anger', 'mind with calm'.





If you do a good action and it is widely known, you may expect five kinds of reaction:

- 1) Genuine appreciation and praise
- 2) Insincere appreciation and praise
- 3) Indifference
- 4) Jealousy
- 5) Anger and aversion

Being prepared for a variety of possible reactions we vaccinate ourselves against disappointment and hurt feelings. Rather than feeling depressed at how little of the first kind of reaction we encounter, we teach ourselves: This is the human realm. It's like this. How fortunate it is that the world is not filled with good, kind, wise people. If it was, how would we ever find the motivation to be liberated from it?





In the time of the Buddha, monks were often asked about the goal of their monastic training. One of the most common answers they would give was that they practised the Dhamma in order to fully comprehend dukkha. On a number of occasions the Buddha confirmed that this was a correct answer.

It is a key point. The utter cessation of dukkha comes with the complete understanding of dukkha. The recognition that we are practising in order to realise a profound understanding of the way things are should inform every meditation session. If we are practising merely in order to escape certain mental states or to gain certain others then no matter how successful at that we might be, we are still on a worldly path. On the path of liberation we need to create and sustain a keen interest from the beginning of each meditation: right now, body and mind, what is going on?







Given that so many creatures are carnivores, there is a certain contradiction in wishing all beings to be happy. If, for example, all birds are going to be happy today then a huge many worms and fish are going to be very unhappy. In fact, they're going to be dead. But if all worms and fish are happy there are going to be a lot of unhappy birds. The skies will be full of them, getting thinner and thinner, until they drop from exhaustion.

The point here is not to be too rigorously logical. It is to remind ourselves that mettā can have no boundaries. There can be nobody, no creature, no monster even who lies outside the reach of our kindness. This is possible because mettā is not weak or blind to the faults of beings. It is cultivated together with the equanimity that arises from contemplation of the law of kamma. If, however, we feel loving kindness for all beings except for..... then we don't yet know what mettā truly means.





The seventeenth of June marked the 103rd anniversary of the birth of Ajahn Chah. That night, sitting in the moonlight surrounded by a group of monks, I asked each of them to share one teaching of Ajahn Chah that had particular meaning for them. Some monks mentioned his emphasis on 'mynae', the essentially unpredictable, unfixed, contingent nature of life. Others spoke of his advice on letting go, and the importance of practising Dhamma with patience and consistency. I especially appreciated a short quote that I had not thought about for some years. In it, Ajahn Chah asserted that purity is to be found within impurity, nowhere else.

Freedom from impurity does not mean turning our back on it and walking away, because without truly understanding impurity we will always carry the seeds of it within us, ready to sprout up elsewhere. Freedom from impurity is realized by facing up to it until we are aware of the causes and conditions sustaining it, and abandon them. Impurity is simply a name for an unwise relationship with body and mind; purity is the wise relationship that can replace it.







For most people, freedom means being able to make choices and to act without anybody else telling them what to believe or do. It is, essentially, a freedom from external constraints. From the Buddhist point of view, that may be a foundation for freedom, but it is not the thing itself. Our emphasis is on being able to make choices and to act with wisdom and compassion, unhampered by defilement. It is, essentially, a freedom from internal constraints.

Human beings want to be happy and don't want to suffer. However, through our thinking, our speech and our actions, we are often our own worst enemies. Again and again, we neglect to create the supporting conditions for happiness; again and again we create the supporting conditions for suffering. Without self-knowledge, without training the mind, any external freedoms we achieve become two-edged swords. If we don't face up to our subjugation by defilement and do something about it, we will never realise our profound potential for true freedom.







As meditators we must always be on our guard against pride. But sometimes we go too far. We come to believe that by downplaying the goodness within us we are practising humility. The Buddha did not teach that kind of humility. He taught us to observe and find joy in our good intentions and good actions. Learning how to appreciate the goodness arising in our mind is like sprinkling it with water; it grows and grows. Humility lies in remembering the debt of gratitude that we owe to the Buddha and his disciples. Without the example and instructions of our teachers these beautiful mental states would never have found a home in our hearts. We also should remind ourselves that this goodness doesn't belong to us. It is the result of cultivation. It will only continue to flourish if we look after it wisely.





The Buddhist path is one of learning. Progress towards liberation is not achieved through faith, prayer or ceremony. It is achieved through learning the true nature of body and mind. The difficulty with this kind of learning is that students do not start off with a blank slate. Initially, there is much unlearning of mistaken assumptions, views and beliefs to be attended to. The essential feature of this kind of learning is that ultimately it must consist of a direct non-verbal encounter with 'the way things are'. Such a profound learning is only possible when students are able to enter a stable state of sustained mindfulness called samādhi. Samādhi provides an unbiased, trustworthy awareness in which the student feels calm and strong and clear. In this state the impermanent ownerless nature of our existence manifests without distortion. We realise that we do not have to attain anything or become anything. All we have to do is to wake up to simple truths that have always, already been present.







Refraining from telling lies or misrepresenting the truth is a powerful Dhamma practice. It requires a sharp and constant mindfulness. It has a strong purifying effect on the mind. Its power lies in the way that it exposes the defilements that are triggered during conversations. In determining to care for the truth and uphold it — come what may — we are able to recognize and let go of the fears and desires, the insecurities and the pride, that lie behind our small untruths and half-truths.

But an uncompromising approach to even 'white' lies does not lead to a harsh, unfeeling style of speech; commitment to truth is not the only principle to be borne in mind while we are speaking. The Buddha also taught that our speech should be beneficial, appropriate to time and place, kind and polite.

Love of truth ennobles the mind. Expressing this love in our speech with skill and sensitivity is a wonderful gift we can offer all those around us on every day of the year.







Sometimes the momentum of thoughts is too powerful to resist. At such times, rather than giving into frustration, we can channel the thinking into wholesome pathways. If pursued without distraction, disciplined thought can bring the mind to a peace that the effort to let go of thought altogether cannot.

For example, lay Buddhists might imagine cooking a meal for the Buddha and a group of his enlightened disciples. Picturing in detail how one would prepare the ingredients, cook the food, and then travel to a forest, a cave or a mountainside to offer the food into the Buddha's hands, can give rise to such powerful feelings of joy that mental agitation disappears completely. This kind of meditation can allow for a creativity of mind that many meditators believe they must abandon if they are to follow the path of Dhamma. In fact, for skilful meditators, imagination can be a powerful tool for working with a stubborn mind.





A common cause of dullness and sleepiness in meditation is the mistaking of relaxation for peace. Many meditators successfully navigate their way through an initial storm of mental agitation, but are then seduced by the relaxation that takes its place. They settle back into it as if it was a comfy armchair. It certainly feels nice. But finding satisfaction in a nice feeling requires abandoning mindfulness and clear comprehension. And letting go of these two virtues means depriving oneself of meditation's guiding lights. Without them true peace remains far away.

The practice of meditation is the cultivation of wakefulness. By being awake to our breath, we learn how to be awake to our life. Whatever stage of meditation we have reached, it is the presence of a bright, stable wakefulness that guarantees that we are following the path of the Supremely Awakened One.







It is a great blessing in life to have role models who we look up to and seek to emulate. But bad examples can also, in their way, be good examples. The most natural reaction to being in the company of people displaying greed, dishonesty, arrogance, cruelty and bad temper, is depression and cynicism. But as Dhamma practitioners, we remind ourselves that such reactions are foolish. Instead, we look inside ourselves to see whether we also still harbor such unpleasant qualities in our own minds. Seeing how ugly these qualities are in other people, we determine to root them out in ourselves. We determine that although we may be unable to do anything about them in others, we will at least do our best to abandon these qualities within our minds. In this way, we can look at all kinds of people as our teachers. We may even feel grateful to people behaving badly for reminding us how important it is to avoid the traps into which they have fallen.







In the practice of mettā meditation, it is best to start with yourself, before radiating mettā to others. A lot of the difficulty people find in feeling mettā for themselves may be avoided by choosing words that have particular meaning to them. There is no need to keep to the traditional formula. Personally, for example, I find the phrase, 'May I be happy' unhelpfully vague, and never use it. The best phrases are those which express our highest aspirations. Here is an example of one set:

' May this body be healthy and well;  
May I know the happiness of, good health.  
May patience grow within me;  
May I know the happiness of a patient mind.  
May loving-kindness grow within me;  
May I know the happiness of a kind, loving mind.  
May mindfulness grow within me;  
May I know the happiness of a mindful mind.  
May peace grow within me;  
May I know the happiness of a peaceful mind.  
May wisdom grow within me;  
May I know the happiness of a wise mind.'





Mindfulness of speech is a challenging practice, because at the same time that we try to be aware of our own speech we also have to try to be aware of our reactions to the other person's speech.

Our responses to the person we are talking to may be improved by memorising the following checklist.

Speech may be

1. Timely or untimely
2. True or untrue
3. Gentle or harsh
4. Beneficial or unbeneficial
5. Kindly meant or unkindly meant.

There are many possible permutations, and it is good to reflect on them.

For example, a person might address us at an appropriate time and place, speak true, beneficial words in a harsh manner, and those words could be motivated by either kindness or some other emotion such as malice or contempt.

Whatever the other person's intentions might be, our task is to maintain the stance of a good friend. Then, politely, we speak only those words that we know to be true, timely and beneficial.







Kamma (karma) is intention. The moment that we act, speak or think with intention, we create kamma, good or bad. When intention is absent no kamma is created. If, for example, we were to accidentally step on an ant on a forest path there would be no kammic consequences (although we should probably resolve to be more mindful in the future).

The inner realm is more difficult to understand but follows the same principle. Every now and again we may lose our temper with those we love the most, or perhaps feel angry and resentful towards our parents or grandparents. That arising of negative emotion is due to many causes and conditions. If we recognise it as a poison and put it down immediately, no kamma is created. The bad kamma only arises if we welcome that emotion, indulge in it, become drunk with it, add to it with more negative thoughts and memories.

There is no need to feel guilty when negative emotions arise in the mind. Be patient. It takes a very long time to cleanse the mind completely. The important thing is to work steadily on the training of the mind. When negative emotion - the result of old kamma - arises, put your effort into refraining from creating new kamma on top of it.







In order to clarify the meaning of the word 'dukkha' the Buddha gave a number of easily observed expressions of it, one of which being that 'not obtaining one's wishes is dukkha'. It is an irrefutable point. Who has not experienced the disappointment and frustration that comes from unfulfilled desire for such things as sensual pleasure, wealth, love, respect, status or power?

But, interestingly, in expanding upon this point elsewhere, the Buddha introduced another dimension to the phrase. He explained it as referring to the suffering that comes from wishing for things which are impossible to obtain through wishing — not having to get old, not being subject to illness, not having to die, not having to feel physical and mental pain. These futile longings rarely emerge into consciousness, but underlie all conscious desires. The chronic background sense of unrest this produces is dukkha.

The good news is that there is end to old age, sickness and death. It cannot be known through wishing or prayer or ceremonies. But it can be realised through following the Eightfold Path to its conclusion.





We all need examples, both in worldly and spiritual matters. Someone who acts as a good example inspires us to believe that the work can be done, and gives us many pointers as to the best way to proceed. Without a good example we could easily become filled with doubts or waste time in incorrect practices. Through having a good example we become patient and intelligent in our actions.

But a bad example can also be of great benefit to us. When we see someone speaking or behaving badly, we must first try to let go of feelings of anger, hurt or despair as best we can. Then we should reflect that these kinds of speech and action are so ugly that we must never let them into our own life. Although we can't stop other people from behaving in this way, at least we can stop ourselves.

In fact, it may well be that in our efforts to cultivate virtue, the determination to not be like bad examples may be more powerful than the desire to be like good examples. For this reason, at least, even cruel and greedy people are worthy of our thanks.







Bangkok is sinking 1-2 cm a year due to the weight of all its buildings pressing down on a highly compactible clay base, from which the groundwater is being steadily drained. If we were to examine all the high-rise buildings that have been erected over the past years in terms of their design or engineering there would be little to criticise. The problem lies elsewhere - in the siting of these huge and heavy structures.

When I travel to Bangkok, and look at the new high-rises being built, I am often led to compare these buildings to opinions. Impressive arguments can be built up, step by step, each step of logic following on faultlessly from the last. But if there is a fault in them, it is often not be found in the design or the engineering of the argument itself, but in the base on which it stands.

At a time when there is so much attachment to views and opinions; we should regularly examine the underlying beliefs - unproven or unprovable - on which they are founded. Ask: 'What am I taking for granted?' 'What are they taking for granted?'







The heart of our practice lies in letting go. Through our training in sīla, we let go of unwise actions and speech. Through our training in samādhi, we let go of the hindrances. Through our training in paññā, we let go of the attachments that conceal the true nature of things, and that bind us to the wheel of birth-and-death.

One frustrated student complained to Ajahn Cha that it was so difficult to let go. He replied that the defilements are like red hot coals. If we were to hold a red hot lump of coal in our hands, we wouldn't have to struggle to let it go. We would do so instinctively, and without hesitation. The reason we can't let go of the defilements is because we cannot, as yet, see clearly enough how they burn us.

Ajahn Cha would tell his students to be patient, and to persevere in the three-fold training. Above all, he would say, keep observing and investigating the drawbacks of the defilements and the rewards of letting them go.





On the path of wisdom we do not consider the inner noise of memory and imagination as an enemy. Our practise is to know noise as noise and silence as silence. The commitment is to the knowing. Knowing provides a continuity that transcends the duality between silence and noise.

For the mind devoted to knowing, inner noise naturally falls away and inner silence manifests as a matter of course. If the mind does register noise it is experienced as irrelevant and far away; it does not detract from the silence. This knowing silence bears within itself the seed of insight into the three characteristics of existence and liberation from all attachment.





On a bitterly cold night in December 1980, seated on the wicker seat under his kuti, Ajahn Chah gave a Dhamma talk to his Western disciples. As I sat amongst his audience on the frigid floor that night in my thin cotton robe, struggling not to shiver, I was in heaven. It was exactly two years since I had arrived at Wat Pa Pong. All my hard work in learning the Thai language had borne fruit. Now I could understand every word of my teacher's discourse, and I felt filled with Dhamma joy.

The theme of the talk that night was that everything is correct; it is only our cravings that makes it seem otherwise. By saying this, Ajahn Chah was not denying the reality of good and bad, right and wrong. He was saying that everything that occurs does so as the expression of a web of causes and conditions. As such, all experiences are the inevitable consequences of all that has gone before – to use Ajahn Chah's idiom, everything is 'correct'. The wise person becomes free of suffering, not by fighting against it, but by dealing with the causes and conditions that underlie it.



Late that night a few of us accompanied Ajahn Chah upstairs. As he sat on his bed I put socks on his feet, unintentionally putting on one inside-out. Noticing, he said 'You've put that one on wrong'. I replied, 'Wang Bo, it's correct.' He smiled, 'You listened well'. I took the sock off, inverted it, put it back on his foot again. Then, after bowing three times, I took my leave.





In meditation practice, hindrances are not just things that happen to us. An element of volition is always involved. It might seem that one moment we are focused on the breath and the next we are reliving a memory or being swept along on a tide of imagination. In fact, if our mindfulness was sharper, we would observe that craving precedes distraction. Most commonly, it is the craving to enjoy the pleasures afforded by memory and imagination. But there is also an addictive pleasure in dwelling on things that have hurt or angered us, and sometimes we crave that pleasure too. The hindrance of dullness and sleepiness is usually preceded by the craving not to be present, to not experience something, the craving for annihilation. Sometimes, the craving to be or become manifests as the need to have something — anything at all — in the mind to sustain the sense of self that we are so attached to.

Meditation is the most profound way to investigate The Four Noble Truths. There can be no liberation from suffering without abandoning craving. We cannot abandon craving without first observing

what it is and how it works. We can learn what we need to know about craving by seeing what happens when we give ourselves a simple task like being aware of the breath.







It's hard to appreciate life without the recollection of death.

It's hard to use time wisely without the recollection of death.

It's hard to abandon indulgence in sensual pleasures without the recollection of death.

It's hard to prioritize wisely without the recollection of death.

It's hard to forgive others without the recollection of death.

It's hard to maintain a consistent Dhamma practice without the recollection of death.

So let us recollect:

"Every single person ever born has already either died or will die in the years ahead. I, too, am surely going to die."

"My life is slipping away, little by little, without the slightest pause, like sand in a timer."

"My death may come at any time. I could die today. I have absolutely no guarantees that I will see tomorrow. Or even my next inhalation."

"So many illnesses could cause my death. This body is so fragile. Death is never far away."

Wealth, power, fame, respect and love — no worldly achievement can prevent my coming death.

Only Dhamma practice can be a refuge to me in the face of my inevitable death.

Only by realizing liberation through practice of the Eightfold Path may I transcend death, and experience the Deathless.





The stern-faced teacher was testing his student's understanding of the impermanence and unpredictability of conditioned phenomena:

"Like?"

"Not sure."

"Dislike?"

"Not sure."

"Love?"

"Not sure."

"Hate?"

"Not sure."

"Agitation?"

"Not sure."

"Depression?"

"Not sure."

"Excitement?"

"Not sure."

"Boredom?"

"Not sure."



"Ajahn Jayasāro hand-written teaching?"

"Every Tuesday and Saturday"

"Ajahn Jayasāro hand-written teaching?"

"Not sure"

The teacher smiled -





There is no way out of suffering for those who identify with it, or those who deny it. There is no way out of suffering for those who consider it a random occurrence, or those who see it as a test or a punishment from a supreme being. There is a way out of suffering for those who gain faith in the Buddha's analysis of suffering as a conditioned state and who follow the Eightfold Path. In the Upanisa Sutta the Buddha revealed the causal process involved:

"With faith as proximate cause, well-being.

With well-being as proximate cause, zest.

With zest as proximate cause, tranquillity.

With tranquillity as proximate cause, happiness.

With happiness as proximate cause, samādhi.

With samādhi as proximate cause, the knowledge and vision of things as they really are.

With the knowledge and vision of things as they really are as proximate cause, disenchantment.

With disenchantment as proximate cause, dispassion.

With dispassion as proximate cause, liberation.

With liberation as proximate cause, the knowledge of ending."

"It's like when it rains heavily on a mountain top, and the water flows downhill to fill the hollows, crevices and creeks. As they become full, they fill up the pools. The pools fill up the lakes, the lakes fill up the streams, and the streams fill up the rivers. And as the rivers become full, they fill up the ocean.







The first meditation object given to new monastics - one embedded in the Pabbajja novice ordination ceremony - is contemplation of five parts of the human body: head hair, body hair, nails, teeth and skin. These constitute the first five items of the list of 32 body components found throughout the Suttas. They are distinguished by being the most visible items, and the most liable to provoke agitation. Throughout the history of humanity, it is sobering to consider how much vanity has been bound up with these five things, how much lust, jealousy, how much anxiety and how much depression.

Reflecting on these five body parts again and again allows us to recognize all that we project upon them and the ways in which we identify with them. We see that it is this projection and identification that causes us so much unnecessary suffering.

The reflections that are most helpful are those in which :

- ① we bring to mind the unattractive aspects of the body part which we usually try to avoid thinking about.
- ② its impermanent, constantly changing nature
- ③ the physical discomforts and suffering associated with it
- ④ its impersonal, conditioned nature.





## Expectation

An old story tells of the abbot of a monastery who learns one day that a teenage novice is sneaking out late at night to party in the local town. That night, the abbot hides behind a tree. He watches the novice, dressed as a layman, climb onto a rock and from there clamber up over the monastery wall. The abbot pushes the rock a short distance away and patiently awaits the novice's return. In the early hours of the morning he hears the novice approach. The abbot squats down in place of the rock. In the darkness the novice reaches the top of the wall, lets himself down onto the rock, and jumps to the ground. Something feels wrong. He peers towards the rock and, to his horror, sees his teacher. Oh no! He has put his dirty feet onto the head of his venerable teacher! Disaster. But the abbot simply says to him in a kindly voice, "It's getting very cold these days. If you're going out at night you should put on some warmer clothes." And without a further word, the abbot returns to his dwelling place. From that day onwards, we



are told, the novice turns a new leaf and willingly keeps to all the monastic regulations.

Overturning expectations is always powerful. In literature and drama it intensifies both tragedy and comedy. In relationships between teachers and their students, it can be employed as a skilful means. Demonstrating genuine kindness in a situation in which it is not expected can sometimes reach a student's heart in a way that stern words and punishment cannot.





Looking back on my teenage years, wandering alone through places like Afghanistan, I am struck by how reckless I could be at times. It is tempting to look on my attitude on such occasions as fearless. But, in fact, it was simply intoxication. Not intoxication by drugs (at least, not primarily) but by life itself. I assumed that I was the hero of my story, like Batman. I might get into some dangerous situations, but in the end I would always pull through. Why? Because that's what heroes do.

The Buddha identified three key kinds of intoxication: being drunk on youth, being drunk on good health, and being drunk on life. This foolishness leads us to create much avoidable bad kamma, and reap much unnecessary suffering. For this reason we need to return again and again to the daily reflection:

I am of the nature to age; I have not gone beyond ageing.  
I am of the nature to sicken; I have not gone beyond sickness.  
I am of the nature to die; I have not gone beyond dying.

I am the owner of my kamma, heir to my kamma, born of my kamma, related to my kamma, abide supported by my kamma.

Whatever kamma I shall do, for good or for ill, of that I will be the heir.







Today, I am going to retell an old story. Please sit comfortably and I will begin.

Once upon a time a little monkey left his home on Big Mountain and descended into the valley. He came to a cornfield. There were so many large ears of corn all around him that he became hungry. He picked an earful and walked away. Not long after he came to a peach tree, laden with big, red juicy peaches. He threw down the corn and picked two peaches. They were so big that he had to hold one in each hand.

As he walked along with the peaches, he caught sight of a watermelon field. Seeing how much bigger the watermelons were than the peaches, he threw down the peaches and ran into the field.

Suddenly, he saw a small rabbit hopping away. He turned from the watermelons and chased after the rabbit into the forest. After a long time of chasing

the rabbit, the monkey gave up. Now he was lost deep in the forest and had nothing.

The little monkey sat at the foot of a big tree feeling sad and frightened. Then, to his surprise, a monk sat down beside him. The monk was big and had funny pink-coloured skin, but did not seem dangerous. The monkey told his new friend that he was lost. The monk said, 'Don't worry. Let's meditate together. When your mind has calmed down you will think of a solution to your problem.' So the monk and the monkey meditated together. After some time the little monkey opened his eyes and smiled. He climbed the big tree and, looking down, he could see far below him the path that led all the way back to his home.







Two monks arriving at a river ford noticed a beautiful young woman sitting under a tree, crying. She told them that she was frightened and lost and didn't dare to cross the swift-flowing river by herself. The younger of the monks felt sorry for the woman. He decided that although it would be an offense against the monastic discipline, compassion should come first, and he would carry the woman across the river. But the other more senior monk forbade him from doing so. He insisted on them leading the woman to a bridge many kilometres downstream, where they left her with a trustworthy guide. The monks resumed their journey in silence, until some hours later the younger monk spoke up, 'We just added twenty kilometres to our journey, unnecessarily. If I'd carried the woman across the river back at the ford, we would have arrived at the monastery by now and be enjoying a refreshing cup of tea.' His companion replied, 'You are tired and frustrated because you have been daydreaming about that woman since we met her. You may feel you have wasted your time because of this detour, but I



feel as if I have spent my time very well. I have kept my mind on my meditation object on every step of the journey. I also feel joy at having been able to help that young woman in a way appropriate to a monk. Also, please understand that our rules do not limit our compassion, merely the ways in which we express it.





Vedanā, usually translated as 'feeling' refers to the tone of experience - pleasant, unpleasant or neutral. In the absence of mindfulness and wisdom, feeling provides the condition for the arising of craving (tanhā). This craving is the cause of mental suffering. Awareness of vedanā as merely vedanā, not me or mine, prevents the arising of craving and of dukkha.

Here are some expressions of craving that can arise when we experience unpleasant feeling:

Go away.

Leave me alone.

I don't want this.

I don't need this in my life right now.

Why me?

Why always me?

It's not fair.

It shouldn't be like this.

It's not what I want.

I can't bear it.

For non-meditators these reactions are assumed to be caused by the feeling, rather than unnecessarily added on to it. Through Dhamma practice we can prove to ourselves that vedanā can be experienced without craving. There can be pain and discomfort without suffering.







People often feel that they must make a choice between telling the truth and thereby hurting someone's feelings, or else telling a 'white' lie to spare their feelings. But it is a false dilemma. There are other choices available if we are willing to look. We can care for the truth in many different ways.

A certain man had a badly twisted right leg and was blind in one eye. Fortunately, he had inherited wealth and through hard work was able to increase it considerably. Having achieved great success in the world, he decided that he should have his portrait painted for posterity. One of the most popular artists of the day was approached for the job. However, when the completed portrait was presented to the man, he saw that the artist had painted him as a handsome figure with two good eyes and legs. Furious, he threw the artist out without payment. A second artist was hired. His painting was very lifelike, giving prominence

to the man's blind eye and twisted leg. The man lost his temper again and threw out the second artist. Finally, a third artist was found. When his portrait was revealed, the man was happy at last. The painting showed him with his right leg up on a rock bracing a rifle, his left eye closed shut as he took aim at his prey.





In some cases, the Buddha grouped defilements according to the occasions on which they manifest (e.g. *nivaraṇā*) and in others on the occasions on which they are abandoned (*samyojanā*). In some cases the group's members are chosen for their common effect on the mind.

Of this last type is the group called the Four Floods (*ogha*). The Buddha chose flooding as a metaphor for defilement because of the way that defilement can overwhelm everything in its path, cause great destruction and even loss of life. Just as everything caught up in a flood becomes part of the flood, so all that provides happiness and benefit in our life can become enlisted in service of the defilement.

The first '*ogha*' is the craving for sensual pleasures (*kāma*). Without the protection of precepts, forbearance and mindfulness, and without access to the superior pleasure of *samādhi*, the mind is easily flooded by sense desires.



The second ogha is becoming (bhava). Those caught in the strong currents of desire for status, fame, wealth and power, are soon lost to wisdom and peace.

The third ogha is 'views, beliefs, opinions' (ditthi). Carried away by the belief that 'I am right; I am on the side of truth' people lose their grounding in humility compassion.

The fourth ogha is ignorance (avijjā). As long as we have not penetrated the Four Noble Truths, we are swept helplessly along the endless pathways of saṃsāra.

The Buddha encouraged us to find a refuge from these floods on high ground, to make for ourselves an island.





Usually, finding joy in the happiness or achievements of others is not easy. It is particularly difficult when the happiness or achievement is one that you yourself desire but still lack. Most difficult of all is when the person who is now enjoying these things is someone you perceive as a rival.

But sometimes finding joy in the happiness or achievements of others is easy. Joy comes naturally, for example, when a representative of our country does well in a competition. Nobody (except perhaps some fellow athletes) feel jealous when an athlete from their country wins a medal at the Olympics. And joy comes most readily in seeing the happiness or achievements of one's own child.

Examining a quality we wish to develop in this way: looking at the cases in which it is easy to cultivate and those in which it is difficult, can give us a clue as to how to progress. Observe that when feeling appreciative joy is difficult, our focus is on 'me'. When it comes easy, the focus is on 'we'.

The way to be free of dissatisfaction and jealousy at the happiness and achievements of others is not by fighting with yourself. The skilful way is to reframe your perception of the situation in such a way that you can replace the 'I' focus with a 'we'. What kind of 'we' can you create in your mind that can include someone who you have taught yourself to see as a rival. This is the challenge I will leave you with today







Kindness without wisdom can sometimes do more harm than good. Kindness guided by wisdom is more effective because it takes into account the overall and long-term welfare of the person to whom we feel kind.

A small young novice was given the great honour of becoming one of Ajahn Chah's personal attendants. In the first days he felt overwhelmed by his new post but gradually the mettā Lwang Phor showed towards him made him feel more comfortable. One day, while cleaning out a cupboard, the young novice came across a ceramic tile bearing an image of his teacher. It seemed to have been there a long time. He thought how much his mother would appreciate it. Later that day, alone with Lwang Phor, he plucked up his courage and asked if he might have the tile. Suddenly - and to the novice's consternation - Lwang Phor's kind face transformed into a cold mask. He dismissed the request in a harsh tone that deeply mortified the young boy.

After the novice had completed his term as personal attendant he was sent to another monastery. One day, three months later,

he was sought out by a newly-arrived monk. The monk handed him the ceramic tile. Wang Phor, he said, had instructed him to give it to the novice.

At that moment the young novice realized that Wang Phor had intended for him to have the tile all along. But he did not want the young boy to get the idea that serving the teacher made him eligible for gifts or perks of any kind. Wang Phor's stern countenance had been as much an expression of his mettā as his warm, grandfatherly smiles.





Today: an old story. In America, two brothers become gangsters. Once they're rich and successful they start to make generous donations to a foundation for poor children run by their local church. The elder brother dies. On the eve of his funeral the grief-stricken younger brother visits the priest. He says that he promises to continue the funding on one condition. Tomorrow, during the funeral oration, the priest must tell the whole world that his dear brother was a saint. The next day a huge crowd is gathered at the church. The priest begins his oration. He starts to speak about the departed gangster: 'It must be acknowledged that, generous as he was, he did many unwise, bad things in his life. However, compared to his younger brother, he was a saint'

In conversation, we may often feel that we have just two choices: either speak the truth and hurt somebody's feelings, or lie and reassure them. But a white lie is still a lie and has consequences. The important factor here is the strength



of our commitment to truth. If we truly care for our precept we will seek to find a middle way: avoiding untruth without causing unnecessary distress. On special occasions this might be achieved due to fear of losing something important, as in the story. But generally, we need the sensitivity and sharpness of mind which only comes from the practice of mindfulness.





When we see or hear about people acting badly, whether it's people we know or people in the news, our most common reactions are depression and anger. Although depression and anger poison our minds, we let them do it again and again. Why do we do this to ourselves?

There is a wiser way. When we see or hear of people acting badly, we can consider the mental states that prompted their actions. We may reflect, for example, that 'This is the result of greed. Greed is a truly terrible thing. It causes so much suffering. How wonderful it would be if there was less greed in the world! I too have greed in my heart. Every time I feed this greed, I contribute to the suffering in the world. I will, I must, abandon this greed in my heart; for my own welfare, and to play my small part in reducing the suffering in the world'

(And for greed, we may substitute any other defilement.)

Reflecting in this way, each item of news strikes against our complacency and increases our sense of urgency. We recognize the greed and selfishness, the hatreds and jealousies, the attachment to views and beliefs, that cause so much turmoil in the world. Rather than feeling oppressed by them, however, we make them the fuel of our practice.







The lay Buddhist's training of conduct and speech is founded upon the five precepts. The first four kinds of behaviour they address: violence against other beings, stealing, sexual misconduct and lying, constitute the heaviest kamma that human beings can commit. Abstaining from them protects us from future pain and crippling remorse. It gives the gift of safety and trust to those around us. The kamma created by transgressing the fifth precept is more subtle. Consuming a substance that reduces our ability to take full responsibility for our actions and speech, we significantly increase the likelihood of transgressing the first four precepts. Again and again, throughout history, intoxication has been a contributing factor in foolish and criminal acts. For this reason the Buddha taught five rather than four fundamental precepts.

Meditators come to see how Dhamma practice relaxes tension and decreases social anxieties. They learn there is a wiser way to deal with mental pain than trying to numb

it with drugs. As a result, their need to self-medicate with alcohol naturally diminishes. As Dhamma practitioners realize the priceless value of a clear, sharp awareness for freeing the mind from the causes of its suffering, the more they turn away from alcohol and drugs that undermine that clarity, so hard to achieve even at the best of times.







Forest monks are encouraged by their teachers to remind themselves every day of all the ways that their life could suddenly change for the worse. They might be bitten by a poisonous snake or a scorpion or a centipede. They might fall down and break a limb. If they live alone it might be hours or even days before someone comes to look for them. Death could come at any moment and in any one of a number of different ways. The purpose of this reflection is not to make the monks anxious or fearful, but to encourage them in their Dhamma practice. The key point is for the monks to ask themselves how ready they are for whatever life might throw at them at any moment. How well are they spending their precious time? What unwholesome dhammas still remain in their heart, what wholesome dhammas remain undeveloped? Have they gained a true refuge yet, one that will sustain them come what may?

We can use our intelligence to create means to maximize our security and safety. But life will always be, to some degree, insecure and unsafe. Cities hold as many, if not more, dangers



as forests. To wish things were otherwise and to be angry that they are not, is a self-harming indulgence. What we can do is to learn how to make the best possible use of the uncertain time we have in this world. Using the Buddha's teachings we can create an inner refuge, an island that no flood can submerge.





A rough assessment of our progress in Dhamma practice may be gained by observing to what extent the number of things that make us suffer has decreased and the number of things that bring us joy and contentment has increased. But the sense of wellbeing we experience as the grosser defilements become much weaker has its own dangers. It is easy to become complacent. The good can often become an obstacle to reaching the best. For this reason the Buddha said that one of the most vital supporting factors on his path to enlightenment was a discontent with the wholesome qualities that he had already cultivated. He never stopped moving forward until he reached the ultimate good.

Until we reach Stream Entry, the first level of enlightenment, all of the positive changes we have made through our Dhamma practice are unstable and unreliable. They may seem to be rock solid, but they are not. It is only at Stream Entry that they become irreversible.

The statement that this human realm is dukkha does not necessarily mean that it is a source of constant pain. It is a reminder that as soon as unenlightened beings let down their guard, even for a moment, the world is likely to bite them hard. Mundane goodness is not enough.







In high school I remember being much impressed by a cartoon illustrating some words of Leo Tolstoy. In the cartoon, a fat well-dressed man crosses a stream sitting on the back of a poor emaciated man in rags, who is red in face from the strain. Tolstoy's words form the caption: "I sit on a man's back choking him and making him carry me, and yet assure myself and others that I am sorry for him and wish to lighten his load by all means possible... except by getting off his back."

Over the years, I have observed a similar attitude in many meditators. They are willing to do anything to free their mind from defilements except the one thing that is really necessary. An example: meditation on the unattractive and repulsive aspects of the human body is taught as the most effective antidote for a mind caught up in sensuality. And yet, many meditators faced by such a challenge will be willing to try everything except that meditation. Similarly, meditators whose minds are mired in negativity, are often willing to try everything

except mettā meditation. The more educated such meditators are, the more convincing the reasons they are able to employ to justify their position.

There are times to go with the flow and there are times to go against it. Dealing with chronic, deeply-rooted defilements is the time to go against the stream of what makes us feel comfortable.





Giving feedback is not a modern Western idea. It forms a central pillar of the Vinaya, the Buddhist Monastic Discipline. The Vinaya gives instructions how monks are to give feedback in a respectful and sensitive way. It also teaches them to welcome feedback from all their fellow monks, irrespective of their seniority. The skilful giving and receiving of feedback is meant to provide a vital counterbalance to the other key Vinaya principle of communal harmony.

The primary value of communal harmony lies in the supportive conditions it creates for growth in Dhamma. So when group harmony becomes the end rather than the means, and when devotion to sincere and well-meaning mutual admonition is neglected, corruption sets in. No longer do the members of a community try to help their companions to recognize their blind spots and overcome their weaknesses. Instead, the unspoken agreement becomes, "I won't say



anything about you, if you don't say anything about me."

This may give a superficial peace, but it results in a harmony of fools.

With an emphasis on precepts, mindfulness, kindness and wisdom we can avoid communal disharmony and the harmony of fools and reach the harmony of sages.





There is one often overlooked aspect of the cultivation of mindfulness of speech. It concerns the inner speech with which we frame and make sense of our experience. The words that we use and the concepts that they express can affect the mind more strongly than we think. Take the word 'too'. This word has the important function of expressing the idea that a cause or current state of affairs is not in alignment with a goal or standard. For example we can say that we are driving too slowly to arrive at our destination at the agreed time; or that a structure is too weak to support an estimated load. But this word used wrongly can have a significant detrimental effect on our mind. Consider some of the phrases used to justify not meditating: 'I'm too tired', 'I'm too restless', 'I'm too hungry', 'I'm too full', 'it's too hot', 'it's too cold', 'it's too early', 'it's too late'

Here this small word 'too' gives the argument not to meditate an undeserved power. All our patience is undermined by it. But with mindfulness established we can see that in this

context, 'too' doesn't mean unfitting or inappropriate; it means uncomfortable. We mean 'I feel uncomfortably tired', 'it's uncomfortably cold'. Recognizing the word 'too' is masking blind reactions to discomfort, the need for patience 'the supreme incinerator of defilement.' becomes clear.







When forest monks share stories over an evening mug of tea, anecdotes of stern masters are always appreciated. Humorous stories also go down well. Today, I would like to share with you a humorous story that features one such stern master and a struggling student. This student is full of faith but falls asleep every time he practises sitting meditation. The master gives the student various skillful means to deal with the problem, but none work. Within a few minutes of closing his eyes the student's upper body rocks forward until his forehead almost touches the floor. His body returns to the vertical for a few seconds and then rocks forward again. This happens over and over again. All he is getting from meditation are some yoga stretches.

Finally, the master presents the student with a drastic remedy. He tells the student to go to meditate at the edge of the nearby cliff, looking out over the void. If nothing else helps, then the instinctive fear of death is all that remains. It's clear that the student has two choices : get cured or rock yourself over the cliff edge

The following morning the student pays his respects to the master. The master says in a kindly voice: "So, you are cured at last". "No, master," says the student with embarrassment. He explains "After I had been sitting for a while I started to get drowsy, and then this happened." To demonstrate, the student sits crosslegged and mimes to the master how he started to rock not forwards, but backwards, again and again.





Right effort is, at any moment, that quality and intensity of effort which is most conducive to the realization of its goal.

In some areas of practice, effort may be more gentle and relaxed, and in other areas more forthright and rigorous.

The Buddha emphasized the need for the more decisive kind of effort most often when referring to Wrong Thought (Micchā Sankappa):

"Just as the royal bull elephant destroys elephants and their riders, horses with their riders, chariots and charioteers, and foot soldiers," so too "mendicants do not tolerate sensual, malicious or cruel thoughts... they give them up, get rid of them, eliminate and obliterate them."

It is clear from such passages that the Buddha considered sensual, malicious and cruel thinking to be so toxic to the mind that it should not be accepted in the mind even for a moment. And yet the Buddha was not advocating a violent campaign. If effort is motivated by vibhava tanhā, the craving to get rid



of, it will only make matters worse. The martial imagery is intended to convey the absolute sincerity that is needed. Effort here is not trying to blast something out of the mind, but the immediate no-nonsense withdrawal of consent, and uncompromising abandonment of indulgence in defilement.





Doubt is not always a bad thing. It can be an expression of intelligence: the recognition that one is lacking vital information needed to make a good decision. In such cases, the presence of doubt is an indication that you are being circumspect, not overly impulsive.

In meditation, however, doubt is almost always an obstacle. One of its most common forms is going over the same old ground again and again. It often arises from the unrealistic desire to be absolutely sure that one's meditation technique will be successful before committing to it. There can be no such guarantees and, sooner or later, you have to make a leap of faith. Only after a reasonable period of sincere effort can you review whether or not the technique works for you. Doubt can also take the form of speculation about phenomena arising during meditation. 'What is this? What does it mean? Why is it happening?' In such cases, a review may be

beneficial, but not during the meditation itself. During meditation all you need is to wield the Buddha's diamond sword: namely, the recollection, 'whatever is of the nature to arise, is of the nature to cease.'







Communities and societies tend to be predominantly based upon either ideas of duty and responsibility or else the concept of human rights. Of the two, the concept of human rights probably offers the better protection against abuse and corruption. But it has its own weaknesses. Definition of rights and prioritization of them can be controversial. Seeing the world too exclusively in terms of 'my rights' seems to have played a role in the growth of narcissism and sense of entitlement in the world today.

The Buddhist Monastic Order affords an example of a society based upon the principles of duty and responsibility. Checks and balances are provided by the Vinaya. Nevertheless, there is recognition of something akin to 'bhikkhu rights'.

In the ordination ceremony, the preceptor is required to inform the new monk of his four basic material rights: rag robes for clothing, almsfood for sustenance, the shade of a tree for shelter, and fermented cow's urine for medicine in times of illness.

I have always found this a most rewarding reflection. Contentment with robes, food, dwelling place and medical care has always come easy to me when I have recalled my basic bhikkhu rights, and remembered that everything else is a bonus, provided by kind people, to whom I owe a great debt of gratitude.





To most people the simple is boring and repetition is another word for monotony. But, to meditators simplicity and repetition are powerful aids in tracking the movements of the mind. Simplicity and repetition are two of the key pillars of monastic life.

When meditation periods are compulsory and take place at the same time every day, monastics are able to observe how their attitude to meditation may fluctuate between enthusiasm, indifference and even resistance. Being unable to follow their moods they are able to recognize them as conditioned phenomena. Noticing how the same event can lead to varying responses is food for wisdom.

It is not, of course, a principle reserved for monastics. Observe your feelings, for example, when your alarm goes off in the morning, and how they change from day to day, and why.

One newly ordained monk could not yet fully grasp this idea. He complained to me that hearing the morning bell at 3am



made him feel oppressed. It seemed to him to be a signal that he had lost all autonomy and was spending his life following the dictates of a bell. I advised him to set his alarm for 2.45 am so that he could feel the pride of getting up in the morning on his own terms. Similarly, in the afternoon he could come out to work a few minutes before the bell and leave a few minutes later than everyone else. Seeing his face showed dismay rather than gratitude, I added that he might find watching his mind to be a better option.





Many of the Buddha's teachings can be put to the test of experience quite easily. It does not take long to determine for ourselves whether keeping the five precepts does, in fact, increase the level of safety and trust in our family and community, and whether it fosters self-respect and freedom from guilt and remorse. We can observe without difficulty all the various ways that giving without desire for reward brings joy into our lives. We can see clearly how mindfulness practice enhances the quality of our mind and relationships.

But there are many teachings that we are, as yet, unable to prove or disprove. Teachings about rebirth and other realms of existence are obvious examples. In such cases, how should we hold the teachings? I would suggest that we do so with a deep trust in the great wisdom of the Buddha. The more we observe how his teachings that we are able to test for ourselves are always, without exception, correct, the more confidence we can place in the teachings that we cannot, as yet, verify.

We certainly do not claim something must be true simply because our teacher says it to be so. We do, however, assert confidence in his words based upon all our experience thus far of taking him as our refuge and guide on life's bumpy road.







Through the practice of meditation, the mind can reach a state of calm in which there is a clear bright awareness and a complete absence of thought. This may be accompanied by a profound state of contentment, fullness or bliss. The primary value of experiencing such a state is that it equips the mind that emerges from it with a much enhanced capacity to investigate the three characteristics of anicca, dukkha, anatta, and to do the work of wisdom.

But for one who reviews the experience of stillness, that is not the only benefit. Awareness accompanied by bliss proves that there is a happiness accessible within our minds, simply by removing the barriers to it that we have erected ourselves out of ignorance. Realizing this we feel empowered to develop a much healthier relationship to sense pleasures. We now have a perspective on them and an alternative to their charms.

Experience of awareness without thought proves to us that thinking is not an essential part of who we are. It is a tool to be used wisely. Fear to let go of thinking is a major obstacle for many meditators. Knowing for oneself the sublimity of the thought-free state we find the courage to let go of attachment to thinking.





We can become indifferent by hardening our heart to the things that upset us. But doing so reduces us as human beings. The cultivation of equanimity is a better path to follow. Equanimity (upekkhā) may often be confused with indifference, but it is a world apart. With indifference our heart becomes withered and dry. With equanimity it becomes boundless.

Equanimity is an unshakeable balance of mind. It is a stability that results from insight into the workings of kamma. The more that we see how our experiences are conditioned by volitional actions of body, speech and mind, the more natural this steadiness becomes.

We see how all beings are the owners of their kamma, and in this acceptance the mind rests in equanimity. We seek to help others be happy and to free themselves from suffering. But we



do this with the recognition that our efforts are only one condition amongst many. We do what we can and then let go of the results. We return to equanimity. Equanimity is our base, our default mode.

Equanimity is not a goal in itself. When we can open our eyes to situations without bias, and fully accepting them for what they are, we are ready to act wisely. Acts prompted by mettā and compassion are more powerful when they are grounded in equanimity.





One of the first Dhamma books I read as a teenager was Suzuki Roshi's, 'Zen Mind, Beginner's Mind'. It affected me deeply. Today I look back on the book with much affection. I loved the unique, poetic language in which the teachings were expressed. Now, I remember the joy and illumination reading the book gave me with great gratitude.

Suzuki Roshi says, in the sentence that gave the book its name, 'In the beginner's mind there are many possibilities, but in the expert's there are few'.

My understanding is that Suzuki Roshi does not mean to denigrate learning as such, but the attitude towards it. It is certainly important to gain a sound theoretical grounding in Dhamma through study. But it is as important to avoid attaching to that knowledge and creating an identity - 'I am an expert' - out of it. When we do that, we may gain a certain intellectual satisfaction from the Dhamma, but it is at the expense of a great and tragic loss. The mind loses the freshness

and openness needed to realise the profound meaning of the texts as a direct experience. And without that as a goal, the study of Buddhism, no matter how lofty, is doomed to remain an essentially worldly endeavour.







There is a significant difference between how objects appear through a dirty and clouded window and how they appear through a clean one. The objects we perceive through the clean window are clearer, the relationship between objects is more apparent. The lazy assumptions and unthinking assumptions that the untrained mind are prone to, are absent. Everything makes more sense. Having wiped the window clean, there is no doubt in the mind that by doing so we have gained a superior, and more accurate and trustworthy vision than that provided by peering through the dirty window.

Meditation is like wiping a window clean. As a result our perceptions of ourself and the world around us changes. It becomes immediately obvious to us that these new perceptions are superior, more accurate and more trustworthy. These new perceptions are not the product of viewing things through the lens of a particular philosophy - that could easily lead to a new kind of bias. Rather, they are the result of abandoning all the prejudices and attachments that cloud

our normal perceptions. Having done that, we can start to closely examine whatever appears.

Our effort is, in short, not to get anything, or to become anything, but to cleanse the doors of perception. Once those windows have been cleansed, we can really get down to the work of wisdom cultivation.





'Knowing the right time and place' occupies a prominent place in the lists of the qualities of wise people found in the Buddha's discourses. Being clearly aware of their intention in acting or speaking, the wise assess whether the time is ripe and the immediate environment is conducive to realising the goals of their proposed action or speech. When initiating a difficult conversation, for example, they take into account such details as the formality or informality of the room or meeting place, the privacy or likelihood of interruption. They decide whether or not the conversation should be one-on-one or whether anyone else should be present. They consider the time of day, their own mental state and their understanding of the other person's mental state. They are careful not to rush into an encounter prematurely through impatience. They do not seek reasons to put off the conversation merely out of anxiety or fear of the emotions that might be triggered by it.



Above all the wise are not self-absorbed. They have developed the ability to see the big picture. They are aware of their own desires and fears, but only as background noise. They are focused on the optimum expression of what is true, beneficial and kind.





Serious illness reveals many defilements: attachment to the body, attachment to sense pleasures, craving for life, fear of death, to name a few. Nagging worries over 'unfinished business', remorse over things said and done, regret over things unsaid and undone — all these combine to disturb the mind. But they don't have to. We can uncouple the mind from the vicissitudes of the body. Doing so is hard work though, work best begun before the onset of illness.

In 1982 Ajahn Chah was convalescing at one of his branch monasteries. Situated on the summit of a large hill, the monastery offered more seclusion than his home monastery, and a better climate. A lay supporter who visited him there was pleasantly surprised at how well he seemed to be doing. She said he looked as radiant as ever; was he really as sick as everyone said? Ajahn Chah replied that his body was ill, "like a block of ice melting in the sun", but his mind was not. He said that most people with a serious illness were obsessed with getting better. As a result, fears and anxieties

about not getting better flooded their minds. Trying to suppress thoughts of death filled them with stress. As for himself, he said he considered that he would either recover or he would not, and he was equally at peace with either outcome.







There is nowhere in the human realm where we can escape the eight worldly dhammas of gain and loss, pleasure and pain, praise and blame, increase and decline of status and reputation. Even monastery walls offer scant protection against these eight 'worldly winds'. Some people might think that living alone in a cave they would be free from them at last. But, in fact, before long they would find themselves reliving past experiences. Everyone has a big file of worldly dhamma material stored in their memory, enough for years of fruitless rumination in an unwise hermit's mind.

It is important to bear in mind that the eight worldly dhammas are included within the first noble truth, not the second. That is to say, they are not things that Buddhist practitioners need to abandon, but things that need to be fully comprehended. We cannot free ourselves of natural phenomena, but we can let go of the cravings based upon them. The untrained mind craves to enjoy gain, pleasure, praise and social status. At the same time it craves a life without loss,

pain, blame and decline in status. The more we crave the worldly dhammas we like, the more we fear and resent those we don't. It's not the dhammas themselves that are the problem, but our relationship to them.

Although we cannot escape the worldly dhammas, we don't have to suffer on their account. As our understanding of them grows, our attachment to them weakens. The weaker the attachment, the more free we become.







The Pali word 'rāga' is usually translated as 'lust'. It signifies an intense, burning desire. It is most commonly used in reference to sensual cravings, especially sexual. But the Buddha also uses the word in more unusual contexts. For example, 'sandilthi-rāga' has been translated as 'infatuation with the rightness of one's own view or dogma or ideology'. The term appears in the suttas together with the assertion, 'Only I am right. Everyone else is wrong.'

Lust and infatuation are strong words to use in speaking of the way people hold their views. But looking at the narrow-mindedness and fanaticism that are endemic in the world today, they seem apt. Another word that the Buddha used with regards to an unwise relationship with views and beliefs is 'paramāsa'. This is often translated as 'tenacious grasping'. But some Thai scholars have preferred words meaning 'fondling'.

These days faith is looked on as a good thing in itself. People with faith in religious dogmas are generally considered



These days faith is looked on as a good thing in itself. People with faith in religious dogmas are generally considered more virtuous than those who are without it. People who have faith in their own abilities and dreams are widely praised and admired. But the Buddha gave us an ever-timely warning: whatever the object of faith might be, if it is fondled with lust and infatuation with the feeling of being right, little of long-lasting benefit will come of it.





One afternoon, many years ago, I was sweeping leaves in the central area of our monastery when I heard piercing screams come from the Women's Section. I realized that it must be the laywoman with cancer who had recently arrived. Together with another monk I rushed to see what happened. I feared that she had been bitten by a poisonous snake. When we arrived in front of the woman's hut, she was standing with one arm raised in the air, sobbing with fear. I looked more closely at her hand and saw a single red ant clinging to one of her fingers.

My first reaction was of relief. And then I felt the urge to laugh. These red ants were everywhere in the forest and completely benign. But I managed to compose myself and avoid embarrassing the woman. Another laywoman arrived and gently pulled the ant off the woman's finger. I suggested she drink a calming cup of tea.

We cannot always understand a person's emotional reaction from its immediate trigger. This woman had spent a very

comfortable life in the city. It was probably the first time she had ever been bitten by an ant. When it happened all the fear of pain and fear of death churned up by her cancer diagnosis found a sudden release. For me, it was a memorable teaching. Distinguish triggers and causes. Consider the subjective pain of the person: not whether or not you think that they should have reacted in some other way.







Sometimes people who commit themselves to a strategy or course of action that proves to be unwise are reluctant to abandon it. They cannot accept that all their investments of time, effort, money, prestige etc have been wasted. They continue on the same fruitless path in the blind hope that in the future something will somehow improve. By doing so, they compound their losses. This is called 'the sunk-cost fallacy'. Leaders seeking to rally their country around a foolish war will employ this way of thinking. They say, "We will never give up. If we stop now, the deaths of all our brave soldiers will have been in vain". Their solution: the deaths of more brave soldiers.

The most foolish strategy we can commit to in life is the protection and promotion of self. What could be more exhausting and depressing than putting this cluster of desires and fears we call self, at the centre of our existence?

An alternative becomes clear when we start to look at our mind more closely during meditation. As mindfulness becomes stronger,

this 'self' which had always seemed to be so real and solid and demanding, is revealed as wispy and insubstantial. In samādhi, for a while, it disappears altogether. We learn how to find refuge in the sky of the mind rather than in the passing clouds of self-concern





Ignorance is listed as the first link in the teaching of Dependent Origination. This does not mean, however, that the Buddha considered it a first cause; indeed he rejected all theories of a first cause. The Buddha stated that Ignorance is also conditioned, specifically by the group of defilements called the Five Hindrances.

Ignorance is not a cause, and it is not a thing; it is an absence. We might, for example, observe that ignorance of the existence of water below the ground in a particular area is the significant prevailing condition for a lack of well-digging. That ignorance, no matter how ancient, is itself conditioned — perhaps by a superstitious belief in the absence of underground water, laziness to dig the earth with no sure result, or vested interests in using other sources of water. But if the correct steps are taken, that ignorance can be replaced by knowledge. And then wells will be dug.

Because ignorance of our human nature is conditioned it can cease when its conditioning factors are abandoned by



means of the Eightfold Path. As the work of abandoning these factors progresses, we gain more and more proof and more and more faith in our potential for authentic knowledge of the way things are and thus for liberation.





Sometimes people would ask Ajahn Chah questions about matters far beyond their capacity to understand any possible answer he might give. A lay supporter who only meditated for a few minutes every day might, for example, ask about the difference between the form and formless jhānas. If Ajahn Chah thought it would be good for the questioner, he might just give them a blank look (one which would never be forgotten) and then start talking to someone else. Occasionally, he would counter-question to help them recognize their intentions in asking the question. Often, he would simply suggest that the person ask about something more relevant to their own practice.

Determining which questions have answers, which questions have useful answers, and which questions have answers which we are ready to benefit from, is an important skill to learn. Of course, I would never try to compare myself with Ajahn Chah, but I also get

asked questions which I am disinclined to answer. On a couple of occasions school students have asked me, "Which came first: the chicken or the egg?" The first time I replied, "Which came first in your mind when you thought of the question?" The second time I replied, "Don't know. Don't care". As I get older, I find only questions concerned with the four noble truths can hold my interest.







Many years ago, I received a letter from an old Buddhist friend in the West. In it he inquired whether I would be interested in leaving the monkhood and accepting a position as a meditation teacher in his organization. I thanked him for his offer but politely declined. I said that it seemed to me that if I was foolish enough to disrobe, I could not be wise enough to be a teacher of Buddhist meditation.

I have always found joy in being able to live my life within a form defined by the Lord Buddha himself. For me, life as a monk is not incidental to the 'real practice' of meditation, but a central element in my cultivation of the Eightfold Path. Living as a monk is an expression of my devotion to the Buddha and his teachings and my gratitude to him.

Lay Buddhists have been given the same Eightfold Path as the monastics. There are no esoteric teachings reserved for a special inner circle of ordained disciples. It is

joyful to look on Dhamma practice, not as a personal project, but as a way of honoring the Buddha, expressing devotion to him, and gratitude. It is not just a matter of daily meditation sessions – it is one's whole life. It means cultivating a comprehensive rightness of view, thought, speech, action, livelihood, effort, mindfulness and samādhi.





The Buddha compared defilements to fires. Defilements take the raw materials of life and consume them, leaving ashes. Anger is the most obvious example. When they're angry, people look so hot and red. Anger burns up the peace and goodness of the mind when we dwell on the things we don't have, or think we should. Not getting what we want, not being treated as we think we deserve and a flame of anger can sweep through the mind. Greed also burns us up. It is the hot agitation that occurs when we crave something more: more pleasurable, more intense, more exciting; something new, something — anything — other than this. This fire burns up all contentment and appreciation for what is. Becoming obsessed with our appearance and image, our fears, anxieties, doubts and insecurities: these all create smoky flameless fires. But the smouldering fires of depression, anxiety and confusion can burst into flames at any moment.



Learning to observe the ways in which defilements cause suffering is a major motivator to practise Dhamma. The Dhamma is like water: it cools and ultimately extinguishes the fires of defilement. Observing how the Dhamma puts out the fires raging in our hearts gives us an unshakeable faith in the Triple Gem.





Over the years, many people have asked me how Ajahn Chah was able to communicate with his foreign disciples when he could not speak any of their languages, and they—at least to begin with—could not speak his. If asked this question himself, Ajahn Chah would usually reply humorously. "It's just like water buffaloes on a farm," he would say, eyes gleaming, "they don't know what you're saying but if you just keep tugging on their rope, this way and that, they soon get the hang of things." At times like this, it would seem that he considered himself more of a trainer than a teacher.

One of my own most memorable early exchanges with Ajahn Chah had zero Dhamma content. And yet I treasure the memory of it to this day. I was part of a group of monks following him on an inspection tour of the monastery's *kuti*s. Eager to show off how quickly I was learning Thai, I pointed out a window frame in need of repair. 'Nah-tahng', he replied slowly, correcting my pronunciation of the word for 'window'. It was like he had kicked me in the teeth. I'd got the

tones wrong! How humiliating! And yet, at the same time, I felt strangely joyful. The thought that my teacher cared enough about me to correct my Thai pronunciation electrified me. The determination that arose in my mind then to practice well and make him proud of me, had more of an uplifting effect on me than if he'd sat down right there and delivered a profound two-hour discourse on Dependent Origination in perfect English.

So, language is important, I tell people. But there's more to it than that.







The effort to manipulate how we are perceived by others is as old as humanity itself. The first and most powerful tool of choice has always been to lie. That is why keeping the fourth precept has such a transformative effect on the human mind. To begin with, this precept may simply be a matter of not saying something is what it is not, or is not what it is. But as we practise the precept, we become more and more sensitive to the defilements that lie behind our tendency to conceal, distort and dramatise, to minimize and exaggerate. We observe the habit to search for plausibly good reasons to justify or excuse our unwise actions; we catch ourselves trying them on for size in imaginary conversations. We see how fundamental lying is to maintaining the false sense of self that lies at the root of our suffering.

As time passes, we begin to love and value truth for its own sake. We let go of the draining short-term goal of maintaining the best possible image of ourselves in other peoples'

eyes. In its stead, we find that caring for the truth — giving no ground to the false — can provide a deeply fulfilling long-term foundation for our life with others.





Let's say you have a delicious cake in front of you. You become aware of a desire to take another slice even though you know that you've had enough. Why is it so difficult to resist that temptation? What would make it easier? An important element of the difficulty is the sense that not taking something you enjoy is a kind of loss. And we hate loss. Loss of whatever kind feels - irrationally - like a small death. Hence the conflict. So maybe you rationalize your greed - 'it'll be stale by tomorrow', or just forcefully shut down your thinking, and reach out.

One of the qualities of monks of the Noble Lineage is that they "find delight in abandoning the unwholesome and developing the wholesome." In the case of the slice of cake it means that on the Buddhist path we can learn to see that refraining from the extra slice does not necessarily incur a loss. We now see it as making a trade. We are able to exchange without regret a few seconds of sense pleasure for a delight in abandoning greed and developing sense restraint. The more we contemplate the dangers of defilement



and the beauty of wholesome dhammas, the more natural this becomes. We come to feel that, in fact, in exercising wise restraint we make a great gain.





Ajahn Chah taught the Four Noble Truths in a very simple and direct way. He told his students that if they suffered it was due to craving and attachment. If they wanted to be free from suffering then they needed to identify the craving and attachment that fuelled it, and then let it go.

To help them in this practice, Ajahn Chah led the monks in testing the limits of their physical endurance. He created conditions in the monastery that frustrated the worldly desires of his students. Likes and dislikes were to be seen as reflexes of the mind rather than commands to be obeyed. He said, 'If you're still following your likes and dislikes, you haven't even begun to practise.'

But we don't have to live in a monastery to investigate the Noble Truths. Whenever suffering arises in the mind, we don't turn our back on it or run away from it. We look at it closely: 'Where is the defilement here?' Whatever the situation, whatever the provocation, it is defilement that

determines whether or not we suffer. Letting go of craving and attachment allows our mindfulness and wisdom to attend to the problem that confronts us.







On one occasion the Buddha spoke about the way people reveal themselves through the way in which they talk about themselves and others: Good people do not disclose the faults of others, even when asked about them. If they have no alternative they speak 'with gaps and omissions, not fully or in detail.'

Good people disclose the virtues of others, even without being asked about them. When asked, they speak 'without gaps and omissions, fully and in detail.'

Good people disclose their own faults even without being asked about them. When asked, they speak 'without gaps and omissions, fully and in detail.'

Good people do not disclose their own virtues, even when asked about them. If they have no alternative, they speak 'with gaps and omissions not fully or in detail'.

Bad people, the Buddha said, speak in the opposite way: voluble about the faults of others and their own virtues, reticent about the virtues of others and their own faults.





The non-harming of self and others has always been one of the defining features of Buddhism. There is not a single sentence of the Buddha's teachings that can be interpreted in such a way as to support violence of any kind. The Buddha even denounced mental violence. On one occasion he cautioned the monks around him that anyone who indulged in angry thoughts towards those who slandered the Buddha would be no true disciple of his.

There is a common idea that certain kinds of harming others are sometimes necessary to achieve a greater good. When such actions are performed without any ideas of personal gain, it is believed, they are purified. This thinking, expressed by the English idiom, "the end justifies the means", lies behind so much of the violence that disfigures our world.

The Buddha never preached absolute pacifism. What he did do was to reveal the law of kamma. Harming others for whatever reason, he said, is always bad kamma. Those who choose to do so, whatever their justifications, should be aware of the consequences.







Feelings of like and dislike are of huge significance to small children. They assume that when they like something it means that thing is right and good for them, and disliking something means it's wrong and bad — reasonable conclusions for beings new to this world. Unfortunately, many people never grow out of this attitude. They may not cry or rage like children when they can't get their way, but they suffer nevertheless. Many people still see their life in terms of getting the things that they like, and avoiding the things that they dislike. Failure to achieve this goal often ends in depression. As the emphasis in today's world shifts more and more to the individual and away from the group, the tyranny of like and dislike grows ever stronger.

Likes and dislikes are human nature; the importance we give to them is not. Seeing likes and dislikes as temporary, conditioned phenomena is a crucial element of our cultivation. Ajahn Cha used to say to his monks, 'No matter how many years you've been ordained, if you're still following around after your likes and dislikes, you haven't even started to practise Dhamma.'





The Buddha's teachings are 'well-expounded'. They provide a clear, structured and complete map of the path to liberation.

The Buddha's teachings are 'timeless'. They deal with unchanging realities of the human condition. The ways in which suffering arises and way in which it ceases will always be true.

The Buddha's teachings are 'verifiable'. They are not unprovable dogmas to be accepted out of faith. The Buddha's teachings 'invite verification'. They challenge us to put them to the test of experience. The Buddha's teachings 'lead us onwards'. It is not possible to study and practise these teachings without being changed by them. The more profoundly we understand the teachings the more profoundly we change. The teachings of the Buddha must be verified by each person individually. No benefactor, no enlightened being can do the work for us. It is like taking medicine. But, the most wonderful medicine.







Usually, when we shine light on an object we see it more clearly. But sometimes the light shows us that our perceptions were mistaken. In fact, we were looking at something quite different from what we assumed to be the case. Every now and again we discover that the snake lying across the road is a length of rope, or the length of rope a snake. Through meditation we learn how to shine a light on our experience. As a result some things, like the ugliness of anger and the beauty of kindness, become much clearer to us. As a result our values and priorities change. Other things, clearly illuminated, now seem insubstantial. Most important of these is the perception of self. That which we formerly perceived to be solid and dependable, the locus and owner of experience, is seen to be none of those things. We find instead a conditioned flow of physical and mental phenomena.

Consider considering meditation in this way: not as the application of a technique in order to gain a particular result, but a means of shining a light on the body and mind, and of learning from what we see.







The path of Dhamma is rarely a smooth one, even for the great masters. Ajahn Chah once told his students that the difference between him and them was not in the number or severity of the obstacles he had to overcome, but in the strength of his determination to overcome them.

So how can we cultivate that kind of courage and determination? We do it by constantly bearing in mind certain basic convictions. The most important of these is that suffering arises due to causes and conditions, and that it can utterly cease through removal of those causes and conditions by practice of the Eightfold Path. This conviction grows steadily stronger by close observation of the relationship between suffering and defilement in our mind. When we are suffering we ask ourselves, 'What is the craving, what is the attachment here? What virtues are lacking?' When the mind feels bright, light and clear we ask ourselves, 'What is the craving, what is the attachment that is absent here? What are the virtues that are supporting this wholesome state of mind?'





One key characteristic of Dhamma is 'sanditthiko'. Translations of the term include, 'directly visible', 'knowable', 'verifiable' and 'apparent here and now'. The Buddha illustrated its meaning with a statement: under the influence of defilement we think, speak and act in ways that lead to our own affliction and the affliction of others. With the abandonment of defilement we do not think, speak and act in such ways.

In other words, the Buddha's teachings make verifiable statements about the human condition. These can and should be put to the test of experience. The Buddha did not simply present us with dogmas that give us only two choices: to accept them out of faith or reject them through lack of it. He challenged us.

In asserting that the Dhamma is verifiable, the Buddha was also asserting our capacity to verify it. His discovery of the untapped human potential for liberation from suffering was a turning point in the history of the human race.







Many years ago in my monastery in Ubon province, a young European monk with a gift for languages was making good progress in his study of Thai. One day, after giving my weekly Dhamma discourse to the local villagers, I asked him how much of the talk he had understood. He said almost all of it. I expressed my appreciation and asked him to summarise the main points. His confident summary bore almost no connection to the key themes of the talk. I realised that he had unintentionally stitched together a narrative from the words he knew and bypassed those he did not.

Whether in worldly or in spiritual matters we tend to overlook or downplay what we don't know. When we lack knowledge, our craving for things to make sense can make us careless. How can we be sure that the bits we don't know are not the most important bits? Taking into account the extent of our ignorance and not ignoring or downplaying it is essential on the path of wisdom. It is the humble heart that is open to the truth.







In most Dhamma practices a good basic principle is to start off with the coarse and easy and patiently move towards the subtle and difficult. This is certainly true with the letting go of self.

Two occasions when the sense of self tends to arise very strongly are when people make negative comments about our physical appearance, and when we are the victims of false accusation. By observing how the mind reacts in such challenging situations we can form an initial awareness of how self-grasping arises and how it feels. We can see it is not something inherent in the situation, but something we add to it. That awareness can then be cultivated to a more and more refined degree. Eventually we can be aware of the faintest reactive movement of the mind.

I have been using the phrase 'the sense of self' above to refer to the consciousness, perceptions and thoughts of 'me' and 'mine' that arise and pass away in the mind.

The arising of 'me' and 'mine' is no other than the arising of suffering. Abandoning the grasping onto body and mind as 'me' and 'mine' is its cessation.





Inner stillness reveals the way;  
make it your friend.

Inner movement may distract you;  
don't let it become your enemy.

The still depths of the ocean  
and the crashing waves on its surface  
are both comprised of water.

Inner stillness and inner movement  
are both manifestations of mind.

Focus on the mind itself  
and both your fascination  
and your aversion  
to thinking  
will disappear.





### About being mindful of the joy of confirmation

One day, shortly after I had delivered the Uposatha Day Dhamma Talk to the local villagers in our monastery, a middle-aged man approached me reverently, his face radiant. He bowed very slowly three times and then, raising his hands in anjali, thanked me for giving such a wonderful discourse. I asked him if there was anything in particular that I had said that had moved him so much. He said, 'No. All of it. What you said just now agreed exactly with my own understanding.' 'Maybe', I said to him, 'you should consider the possibility that we might both be wrong.'







Giving, sharing, performing acts of kindness with no thought of reward: this is the foundation of the Buddhist path.

Kind, generous acts and words gradually cleanse the mind of the poison of self-concern. They change the way we look at others, and they change the way we look at ourselves. Loneliness and alienation fade away. The perceptions, 'I am a giver, I have something to give,' 'I make a difference in my world through giving,' bring joy and stability to the mind.

The unwise seek happiness through accumulation, motivated by a deep irrational belief that it will protect them from death. The wise seek happiness through giving, based upon a rational conviction that cultivating a habit of non-attachment propels them onto the path to the deathless.





Practising giving, sharing, and performing kind unselfish acts should never be looked upon as merely preliminary practices. Their profound importance may be judged by a series of teachings given by the Buddha to the monks and recorded in the Anguttara Nikaya (V. 256-7). He says that it would be impossible for them to enter any of the jhānas, let alone realise enlightenment without abandoning five kinds of stinginess or miserliness:

Miserliness with regard to dwellings.

Miserliness with regard to lay supports.

Miserliness with regard to gains.

Miserliness with regard to praise.

Miserliness with regard to the Dhamma.

Possessiveness and the desire for no other person to share in the things one values and derives benefit from is a poison of the mind. Cultivating the love of giving removes that poison.





Sometimes lay Buddhists tell me that they do not feel ready to practise for Nibbāna. I reply by asking them what defilements they fear losing. If practitioners want to let go of some defilements and hold onto others, they often end up letting go of very little at all. Practising for Nibbāna simply means working towards the cessation of all defilements, without exception.

'Cessation' is the usual translation of the Pāli word, 'nirodha'. A useful alternative translation might be 'cessation of the arising of'. Cessation sounds misleadingly like a one-off event. But the great masters experience nirodha throughout their daily lives as the non-arising of defilement.







Religious faith gives people a sense of meaning and purpose, and provides emotional comfort through the ups and downs of life. A study of history suggests strongly that these psychological benefits are enjoyed independently of the objects of faith. Most religions see faith as the heart of religion and consider that the more faith one has the better.

Buddhism takes a different view. It considers faith as just one of a number of spiritual faculties that need to be cultivated in harmony. It emphasises the importance of balancing faith with wisdom, to protect against the danger of faith leading to bigotry, fanaticism and superstition. In Buddhism, faith is placed in the human potential for enlightenment, and it lies at the beginning of a path of practice. The proof of Buddhist faith is not to be found in the strength of belief. It is found in the sincerity with which one seeks to expose ones beliefs to the test of experience.





The world of the senses seems very real. It demands our attention. It is intoxicating and addictive. It leads us to believe that the only alternative to sensory stimulation is deprivation and death.

Meditation helps us allay our fears. Through it we can discover a stable clarity of awareness that produces deep feelings of well-being and contentment. Taking a step back from the sensual world we become aware of its coarseness, and its inability to meet the most profound needs of the human heart. No longer dragged here and there by our obsession with the content of experience, we are ready to learn the true nature of phenomena. This is the Buddha's path to liberation







To investigate an apple, we might look at it in terms of its taste, its colour and its smell. In the apple itself, however, these qualities are inseparable. Similarly, we can distinguish three characteristics of existence: *anicca*, *dukkha* and *anattā*. In reality, they too are inseparable. But whereas there seems to be no logic demanding that the apple's colour must necessarily be tied to the apple's odour, the three characteristics imply each other. The impermanence of phenomena (*anicca*) means that they are, by nature, unstable, imperfect, unreliable (*dukkha*). The impermanent and inherent instability of phenomena, changing according to causes and conditions, reveals the absence of an owner or controller (*anattā*).







One of the great underrated powers in the world is the power of familiarity. Human beings can feel indifferent in the presence of great beauty or great horror, merely because they have seen it many times before. People completely unmoved by cruel violence are not monsters. They are simply used to what they see and do.

By allowing ourselves to get used to things, life may become a little more peaceful. But it is a false peace, one gained by giving up part of what makes us truly human.

Fools seek to escape the tyranny of the familiar by constantly searching for new experiences, and are thus forever restless and dissatisfied. The wise keep re-establishing awareness in the present moment. By doing so they retain an ever-fresh appreciation of experience. The peace that they realise is not the result of a dulling of the faculties, but a deep understanding of the way things are.





It has been observed that over the past two hundred years, as the number of pirates in the world has steadily declined, average global temperatures have steadily increased. Could the answer to the growing climate crisis be as simple as sponsoring more pirates? Probably not.

Like most people, I am not very good at statistics. I have, however, taken to heart one of its basic principles: correlation is not causation. Pirates do not affect the weather. Distinguishing between correlation and causality is important in the investigation of Dhamma. Sometimes, in a given situation you lose your temper. On other occasions, you do not. What are the significant differences between the two occasions. In some areas of life you might be very patient; in other areas quite impatient. What accounts for the differences? Observation, review, analysis: all these activities have a place in Dhamma practice.





In 1978, I spent the Rains Retreat with Ajahn Sumedho's small monastic community in the English countryside, close to Oxford. Shortly before I left to seek ordination as a monk in Thailand, a man called B. arrived to take the place I was vacating. Until recently, B. had been a Zen trainee in Japan. On his return to England he had felt drawn towards Theravāda. He said that he was especially inspired by its emphasis on looking into suffering and investigating the ways in which it was created unnecessarily by craving. B. fitted into the community well enough but encountered one major unforeseen challenge. Whereas we all meditated sitting flat on the floor in the Thai style, B. had only ever meditated using a zafu. Adapting to a new sitting posture was very difficult for him, and he found it deeply frustrating. The Zen meditation posture had been his refuge and he had lost it. When he complained to me about how much he was suffering, I reminded him — perhaps a little unkindly — that surely he'd found what he was looking for. He replied, 'Well yes, I want to look into suffering, but not this kind of suffering.'



I have never forgotten those words. They seem to me to express a universal lament. As Buddhists, we accept the importance of facing up to suffering in the abstract, but find ourselves resisting the particular reality. We'd prefer some other kind of suffering. Ajahn Sumedho had a simple remedy for such deluded thinking. He taught us to reflect, 'It's like this!' In other words, he was saying that we don't get to choose. Right now this is what is before us. Don't feel sorry for yourself. Use the tools the Buddha has given us, and deal with it.





We have a dysfunctional relationship with our mental states. Through ignorance of the true nature of phenomena we identify with mental states, we grasp onto them. This is the cause of much unnecessary suffering. The problem cannot be remedied by thinking. It can be remedied by a meditation practice embedded in the Eightfold Path.

The effort to sustain awareness on a meditation object such as the breath gives us a new perspective. Formerly, we assumed that each mental state belongs to us, is who we are, or at least is an expression of who we are. Now, desire, aversion, discouragement, anxiety, agitation etc reveal themselves as temporary distractions from the work in hand. We see how unpredictable, unreliable and ownerless these mental states are. Our attachment to them wanes.

As meditation progresses, we are able to dwell in the spaces between thoughts, between emotions, for longer periods. We

see directly how mental states arise and pass away according to causes and conditions. Mental states lose their power over us. We gain a taste of liberation.







The Monastic Discipline states that a monk who speaks abusive words commits an offence entailing confession. When announcing the rule the Buddha told a charming story:

A long time ago, a certain poor brahmin owned a marvellous talking ox called Nandavisāla. One day the ox suggested that the brahmin bet a thousand coins with a local merchant that he could pull one hundred carts tied together. The brahmin took the advice and the great test of strength took place before a large crowd. The brahmin got very excited. He shouted out, 'Go, you rascal! Pull, you rascal!' To his horror, Nandavisāla stood completely still. Everyone laughed at the brahmin. Afterwards, the ox asked the brahmin why he looked so sad. The brahmin replied, 'What do you think? Now I owe the merchant a thousand coins. Why did you do that to me?' Nandavisāla said, 'Well why did you call me a rascal when it's not true? Anyway, it doesn't matter. Go back to the merchant and bet him two thousand coins that I can pull the one hundred carts. But please, don't call me any more

names.' The merchant accepted the bet and the crowd returned. After tying all the carts together and yoking Nandavisāla, the brahmin shouted, 'Go, good ox! Pull, good ox!' Then, to the loud cheers of the crowd, Nandavisāla pulled the carts away.

Even oxen respond well to polite, kindly speech was the lesson. How much more so, we human beings.





When someone says they don't believe in a religious teaching they usually sound (and see themselves) as reasonable and rational. The implication is that they don't believe in this thing because they have chosen to live their lives based on scientific principles. Only facts and objective proof are good enough for them. They are nobody's fools.

Commonly overlooked, however, is that in most cases not believing in one thing is dependent on an unacknowledged belief in something else. And that other thing may be as unsupported by evidence as the belief being denied.

Here is a quote from one of my favourite writers, B. Alan Wallace:

“... since scientists have not explained what catalyzed the Big Bang, how life began, the origins of consciousness in the universe, or the source of awareness in a fetus, it is wrong for them to assume that purely physical causes



underlie these phenomena. Nevertheless, many scientists routinely assume that there must be physical explanations for everything in nature; in doing so, they conflate metaphysical speculation with scientific knowledge.'





It was February 1976. I was a teenager travelling alone through southern India. I remember climbing down from a crowded bus after a long, dusty journey at the edge of a large town. It was already dark and I walked through the town looking for a cheap place to spend the night. As I rounded a corner, I heard a voice shouting out to me. I looked over to see a woman sitting at the side of the road by an old cooking pot, dishing out lentil soup to her many children. She insisted that I sat down with them and take a plate of soup and some bread. I was very hungry and the simple food tasted delicious. When I looked up, I saw the woman was watching my enjoyment with a look of genuine affection and satisfaction on her face. It was as if she had just fed her own grown-up son rather than a stranger.

Over forty years have passed by. There must have been times on my travels when I was treated unkindly, but I can't remember them now. The kindness of people like this poor woman, however, living in rags on the street with her children, has never left me.

Please do not underestimate small acts of kindness.  
They have a power and an influence and a beauty that lasts  
for a very long time.







There are two sides to a human life: the 'somebody' side and the 'nobody' side. The somebody side includes things like physical appearance, personality, image in the eyes of others, likes and dislikes, virtues and vices. Our somebody side has a lot of issues to deal with.

The nobody side of our being manifests naturally when the mind has been trained to let go of its addiction to thinking. When the nobody side comes to the fore everything settles down, and all the ways in which we are somebody in the world seem insubstantial or like a story told by a child.

Mental suffering arises when we are out of balance, when our mind is completely absorbed in our somebody issues, lacking access to the cooling perspective of our nobody dimension.

When we feel greedy, jealous, angry, misunderstood, anxious or confused, it's good to remind ourselves that it's just 'somebody stuff', manifestations of one dimension of our life, not the whole human deal.

By establishing a connection to our nobody nature we can find a balance between it and our somebody nature, and find peace in this unpeaceful world.





Monastic life is most supportive for those following the Buddha's path to enlightenment, because it was designed by the Buddha himself for that specific purpose. But it is not absolutely necessary to leave the world to realise the higher fruits of Buddhist practice. The first of the four stages of enlightenment is called Stream Entry. It is accomplished when the true nature of one's body and mind is seen so clearly that there is a profound letting go of all of the accumulated false ideas, beliefs, views and superstitions that we carry around with us, and which cause us suffering. Over the past 2,500 years many lay Buddhists, men and women, have realised Stream Entry.

There are two significant results of the realization of Stream Entry. Firstly, it ends, once and for all, the possibility of rebirth in a lower realm. Secondly – and hence the stream metaphor – it will inevitably lead to the highest stage of enlightenment, arahantship, within seven lifetimes at most.



The Buddha once said that if we were to compare the suffering we have experienced in our past lives to all the earth in the world, the suffering remaining for the Stream Enterer would be no more than the dirt that might get lodged under a fingernail. Stream Entry is, in short, a truly inspiring and a realistic goal for all Buddhists to aim for.





Some time ago I was discussing the design of a building with its architect. He explained the choices he had made in the design using such words as 'honest' and 'sincere'. For me, as a monk, it was interesting to hear ethical terms used to justify the number of windows in a wall, or the placing of pipes. I realised that it would be impossible to critique the design without appearing to take the side of the dishonest and insincere. Metaphor had taken on a life of their own.

In a similar vein, many corporations these days try to convince consumers that their products are simply expressions of such positive values as 'transcendence' or 'community'. This they hope will lead to long-term relationships with consumers and brand loyalty. In a world where the forces trying to manipulate our emotions are so overwhelming, where can we place our trust? Mindfulness is a good place to start.

Mindfulness creates for us a gap between stimulus and response. We are able to recognise 'in real time' whether we are being

persuaded to believe that buying a product or service will make us more attractive, of higher status or, in some way, a better person. With mindfulness, we can evaluate that claim within a single breath. The more mindful we are, the less gullible. Without mindfulness, even the smartest people are the prey of their desires and fears.







Everybody has ideas about who they are. Why, for example, would anybody become offended when they are treated with disrespect if they did not have an idea of themselves as somebody worthy of respect? Why would anyone meekly allow themselves to be disrespected if they did not think of themselves as somebody unworthy of respect? Why is being ignored so depressing, being rejected so painful? In the Buddha's teachings we learn that suffering arises from attachments rooted in mistaken assumptions about who we are.

Over 2500 years ago, the Buddha encouraged people to know themselves. However, the meaning that he gave to the term, 'knowing oneself' differs from the commonly understood meaning of today. These days knowing your self, or your 'true self', is often taken to mean things like being in touch with your guiding passion, or following your dream. For the Buddha, that is a narrow, reductionist idea. For him, knowing oneself means being aware of

the whole constellation of impermanent conditions that constitute our life. It means knowing how to abandon those conditions that cause suffering, and knowing how to cultivate the conditions that bring happiness and wisdom. Passions and dreams are best when embedded within the context of the Buddha's path to liberation.





In many areas of life, 90% is a very good outcome, 99% superb. In some areas, however, only 100% will do. Many complex systems break down if a single component malfunctions. In such cases, practically speaking, there is a huge chasm between 99% and 100%.

To be a force for liberation, mettā is one of those realities that has to be 100%. Even if someone has mettā for 99.9% of the human race, or mettā for all beings except for one particular 'him' or 'her', they are still far from mastery. And, of course, one exception easily becomes two, then two three, and so on. A helpful phrase to bear in mind as a mantra when dealing with difficult people is 'mettaṇca sabbalokasmiṃ', putting emphasis on 'sabba'. It reminds us that our mettā must include every inhabitant of every world, every realm. If there is a particular person who provokes a lot of negativity in your mind, then they are the test of your



mettā, not the people you already like and love. It's unlikely that you will be able to change that person themselves, but you can radically change the way that you think about them.





Upāli was one of the most intelligent and renowned followers of the Tains. He was so confident of his faith in the Jain teachings that he decided to debate the Buddha. He was determined to prove, once and for all, that the Buddha's teachings on kamma were incorrect. In fact, the Buddha was able to prove to Upāli that it was his own understanding that was full of inconsistencies.

Filled with joy and inspiration in the Buddha, Upāli requested the Three Refuges. The Buddha responded that Upāli was a very well-known figure in society and that he should take his time to think it over before taking such a big step. Upāli was even more inspired by these words and repeated his request a second time. Now, the Buddha reminded him that his family had been important supporters of the Jain monastics for a long time. If he became Buddhist he should not stop offering them alms. Once more, the Buddha's words brought joy to Upāli's heart. On his third request, the Buddha agreed.

The Buddha always encouraged the monks to observe him closely, to check whether he truly embodied the teachings. On this occasion he demonstrated a number of key traits: He was willing and able to defend his teachings from the most articulate and aggressive opponents. He did not seek to convert those affiliated with other religions, and indeed cautioned those who decided to become Buddhist in a flood of emotion, to stop and consider their decision in a calmer state of mind. He encouraged new Buddhists to continue to treat members of their former faiths with generosity and kindness.







To most householders, the accumulation of wealth seems the best way to provide a safety net for the uncertain future. This is reasonable; there is no question that material resources have an important role to play. But the wise give equal precedence to less tangible preparations. They also cultivate warm and supportive relationships with friends and family members. Most importantly, they develop the qualities of integrity, patience, mindfulness, kindness and wisdom that will equip them to make the best of whatever lies ahead, good or ill.

Monastics abandon, at least ideally, all financial security, and put all their emphasis on spiritual cultivation. It is said that after the death of the great Tibetan master, Milarepa, his disciples found amongst his meagre belongings a message written to them on a piece of rice paper. It said that Milarepa had buried all the treasure that he had accumulated during his lifetime under a nearby rock, and if they wished to recover it they should dig there. The monks rushed to the rock, started

digging, and soon uncovered a woollen bundle. Excitedly they opened it up, only to discover a dried-up lump of excrement. Accompanying it was a second note: "If you understand my teaching so little as to believe that I amassed gold, then this is all the inheritance you deserve."





The most effective means to ensure that our actions and speech remain in harmony with our values is practicing mindfulness of precepts. When we commit ourselves to the precepts and frequently reflect on them, we create the conditions for them to pop up in our mind whenever the intention to transgress arises. In even the most busy, complex situation we are thereby able to make wise choices.

The five precepts of the lay Buddhist prevent us creating the heaviest kinds of kamma. But we can increase the value of the practice by drawing up a list of our bad habits, big and small, and make determinations, 'I undertake to refrain from...'

The important point is to limit ourselves to actions and speech, and don't make unrealistic vows about mind states. We can't keep a vow never to get angry, but we can undertake not to talk over the other person, or to slam doors.

There was once a certain tortoise who could have benefited from this practice. The time had come for his best friends, a couple of storks, to say goodbye. He said



'Take me with you!'

'How?'

'You two get a long stick. Each of you hold one end of the stick and I will hold the middle of the stick in my mouth'

The storks agreed and they flew into the air. Later, they passed over a village. A boy looked up and exclaimed, 'What clever storks!' The tortoise shouted out, 'It was my idea - a - a - a - a - a - a'





The Buddha gave great emphasis to the practice of 'indriya samvara', which is usually translated into English as 'sense restraint'. Personally, I am not so fond of this rendering. To me, 'restraint' sounds too forceful; it sounds too much like the action of a charioteer straining at the reins of impetuous horses. I prefer to translate the Pāli word 'samvara' as 'governance', and in my work with children I use 'taking care'. 'Taking care' or 'looking after' your senses has a very different feel to it than restraining the senses and I think it is a much more helpful way of understanding the practice, especially for lay Buddhists.

The senses, or the sense doors as they are also called, are our portals to the world. Just as we are careful about the substances we introduce into our bodies through our mouths, so we should be careful about the things we allow to enter our minds through our eyes and ears. Take care what you look at and what you

listen to. Your mental health and progress in Dhamma may be significantly retarded by bad choices and greatly enhanced by good ones.







Buddhist meditation practices are not intended to be relaxation techniques. Relaxation is one of the first welcome results of meditation, but is by no means its final goal. This may seem an obvious point, but it's also one frequently forgotten. Inexperienced meditators find it hard to resist indulging in the pleasant feeling of relaxation as a reward for their efforts in overcoming distraction. By doing so their mindfulness weakens, their mind becomes dull, and their meditation session is derailed. Alertness and clarity of mind are crucial to progress in meditation. Any decline in them is an indication that the correct balance between effort and relaxation has been lost.

Learning how to sustain this balance is a key meditation skill. It begins with posture: the meditator must put effort into maintaining a straight (but not rigid) back and head, while allowing the rest of the body to relax. In the practice itself, we are taught to hold the meditation object in our mind as we would hold a small bird in our

hands. We must expend enough effort to prevent the bird from flying away, yet keep our hands relaxed enough to prevent us from causing it pain.





Imagine an artist at work. He makes a rough outline of the landscape of an imaginary world and then starts to fill it in. Some of the features in his emerging landscape are recognizable. Others are distortions of flora and fauna we are familiar with in our own world. Some are quite bizarre. The more colour and detail the artist adds the more realistic the landscape appears.

When we worry about things we are like this artist. But rather than a physical landscape we add colour and details to a rough outline of our future. The more colour and detail we add to our basic fears and concerns the more real seems the imaginary future we believe awaits us. But, in fact, only a few of its features bear any close relationship to the truth, many are distortions and some are totally bizarre.

Many highly unlikely things can seem highly likely to occur because of all the work our worrying mind has put into making it seem that way. Many people spend so much time



worrying over things that are highly unlikely to happen that they don't have the time or energy to prepare for challenges ahead that nobody can avoid : old age, sickness and death. Worry is not preparation; indeed it is the opposite of preparation.





I would like to take this opportunity to make a heartfelt and long-overdue public apology to ostriches. I confess that on many occasions in my life I have unfairly demeaned their intelligence. I have referred with some scorn to their habit of dealing with imminent danger by burying their heads in the sand. 'We are human beings, I have proclaimed in Dhamma talks, 'not ostriches. We must face up to our problems, not ignore them by burying our heads in the sand.' I freely admit that not once did I ask myself how ostriches would manage to breathe while their heads were so buried.

It was the internet that revealed to me the truth. I discovered that no ostrich has ever been observed burying their head in the sand in the face of danger. I will repeat that: Not once. Not ever.

The myth—for myth it is—is presumably based on the fact that ostriches lay their eggs in sand, and every now and then move them around with their beaks. Or perhaps

because when trapped by enemies with nowhere to go, they will crouch down with their heads laid on the ground.

I will not take the easy road here and blame my parents or teachers for misleading me on this matter. My only concern is how many other parts of my understanding of the world are based on unexamined assumptions, and how much of my understanding of other people.







It is usually much easier to notice a new presence than a new absence. Presence is immediate: 'What's that strange object in the corner?', 'What a surprise, they've come to visit at last!' Absence is more subtle and we often completely overlook it or perhaps just feel a vague sense of discomfort that something's not quite right. The exceptions come when the absent thing or person is important to us: 'Where are my glasses?' we say in our home; 'Why aren't they here to meet me?' we think at the airport.

For many Dhamma practitioners observing the occasional absence of defilement can be more difficult than observing its presence. Nevertheless, sometimes there is a small drama in our life and we find ourselves thinking that if this had occurred in the past we would have been so hurt, or jealous, or angry, or anxious. But right now we feel almost nothing. At this point we need to look a second time: 'Truly?' And a third time; 'Without doubt?' If we can confirm it, then

remember the feeling that arises at such a moment. The joy, the happiness, the calm equanimity that has appeared gives great encouragement on the path.





For hundreds of years, European doctors prescribed arsenic for digestive disorders. Needless to say, no cures were ever effected by the treatment. The reason why, undaunted, doctors continued to recommend it for so long, was reverence for authority. Unfortunately, the authority in this case – the medical textbook containing the remedy – had been poorly translated from Arabic. The word 'darsini' rendered in English as 'arsenic' actually meant 'cinnamon.'

Discovering the Buddha's injunction not to believe in anything simply out of respect for tradition, or out of faith or even logic, was a revelation for me and many young Westerners of my generation. However, the subtlety of the Buddha's words regarding our relationship to authority has often been missed. Many modern commentators take them to encourage a rejection of all external authority and putting one's own judgement first. But the Buddha did not, in fact, reject the value of such resources as external authority, logic, and certainly not his own words. He advised us to take



all these things into account, to give appropriate weight to each of them. What he was cautioning us against was placing absolute, unquestioning belief in anything liable to error or misrepresentation.





Monkeys often appear in Buddhist texts as symbols of mental unrest. When agitated, the mind is commonly referred to by meditation teachers as the 'monkey mind'. The reasoning is clear: the 'monkey mind' jumps from one thought and idea to another just as in a forest a monkey swings aimlessly amongst the trees from branch to branch.

In some cases, the 'monkey mind' is given a more general meaning. Here, the restless superficiality of the untrained mind is considered to be its defining trait, and the term 'monkey mind' is used to mean 'unenlightened mind'.

It is in this second sense that Ajahn Chah used the monkey metaphor to explain the nature of *nibbidā*, or disenchantment. *Nibbidā* is the term the Buddha gave to a profound new perspective on the body and mind that can arise through Dhamma practice. Meditators may sometimes wrongly assume impermanent feelings of distaste for the sensual world to be an experience of *nibbidā*. Ajahn Chah would say that

they were simply experiencing the temporary disenchantment of the bored monkey. True nibbidā meant being disenchanted with the monkey itself.







Football supporters are notorious for the intensity of their aversion to rival supporters. Some years ago, a group of scientists investigating empathy decided they would make good subjects for an experiment. A number of Manchester United fans were asked to write about their love of their club. Afterwards, some walked past an actor writhing in pain dressed as a fellow Manchester United fan, some walked passed a similarly afflicted 'Liverpool fan' (their worst enemies). Nine out of ten people stopped to help the fake Manchester United fan, only three out of ten for the Liverpool fan. So far, so sadly predictable. However, in a follow-up, when fans were asked to write about their love of football rather than their love for their club, the difference almost disappeared.

It may be true that dividing the world into 'us' and 'them' is hard-wired into our genes. But what is not so determined, something that each of us can take responsibility for, is how we define the terms 'us'

and 'them'. In the Buddhist teachings we are encouraged to constantly remind ourselves that all living beings are companions in birth, old age, sickness and death. We are taught to expand the feelings of loving-kindness, compassion, sympathetic joy and equanimity until they become boundless and immeasurable. And when we do that, how could there be a 'them'?





Today is Asalha Puja day, the day when we commemorate the teaching of the Dhammacakkha Sutta, the Buddha's first discourse

It might be said that the July (Asalha) full moon day, exactly two months after the Buddha's enlightenment, signified the birth of Buddhism

On that day, through his great wisdom and compassion, the Buddha was able to translate his profound understanding of reality – an understanding that transcended all concepts and language – into words for the first time. Through this first act of teaching his Buddhahood became complete.

On that day, the Dhamma became manifest in the world. Teachings that described the human condition and those that prescribed the best response to that condition were delivered in a masterful way that thrilled, inspired and illuminated the minds of the Buddha's audience. Through this manifestation, the Dhamma became complete.



On that day, five rather resentful ascetics became the first bhikkhu disciples of the Buddha. Of these, the one named Kondañña became the first person to realize Stream Entry, the initial level of enlightenment. Through the appearance of both the conventional and noble Sangha, the Sangha became complete.

Bearing in mind the auspiciousness of the day, may we all spend it in a way that best expresses our gratitude and appreciation.





There is something about anger that makes it seem the most appropriate reaction to behaviour or events that are cruel, cruelly stupid, or stupidly cruel. Anger seems to be an emotion that offers us a fuel to maintain the motivation to oppose injustice and oppression. It appears to be the only alternative to sinking into submission and despair. Feeling angry is seen as the proof that we care.

But whatever its cause, anger is always a mistake. It is rooted in a mistaken view of why and how things happen. It provokes actions which sometimes produce short-term gains, but always lead to serious long-term losses. Anger eats away at much which is good within us.

Anger thrusts us into the trap of black-and-white thinking, into feeding the very ideas of 'us' and 'them' which are major causes of any conflict. Lasting solutions to complex problems are found by minds free from bias, and with the clarity and patience to fully

comprehend the web of causes and conditions that prevail. An angry mind is too coarse to contemplate anything but how to inflict maximum pain on the current enemy.







Untrustworthy people retreat from their lies step-by-step:

"It is absolutely untrue. I feel insulted that you could think this of me."

"It is not true. How many more times do I need to repeat this?"

"Yes, well, true, but only to a very limited degree."

"I am sorry to say that it is true, but it in no way reflects who I really am."

The sneaky mind can come up with a hundred ways to put a more positive spin on its behaviour:

"It was just once. One single time"

"I've hardly ever done it. Very rarely"

"I'm only human"

"Anybody in my position would have been tempted"

"In fact, I've done it a lot less than many other people"

"I've done so many good things. Why is nobody talking about them?"

"Actually, compared to all the good things I've done, this is nothing"

"It's time to move on."

People with integrity take responsibility for their actions. They apologise for the hurt they have caused without reservation. They say, "Please tell me what you want me to do to make amends."





The Buddha often emphasized that his teachings about the various realms of existence were not based on common beliefs or philosophical tenets, but on direct experience. He would say, for example, that he was able to reveal how different volitional actions of body, speech and mind lead to rebirth in various heaven or hell realms from 'having known it myself, seen it myself, observed it myself.' He considered it vital that his disciples place confidence in the existence of other realms.

The Buddha did not, however, demand blind faith in this matter. Indeed, his criticisms of the faults inherent in blind faith are found throughout the discourses. The Buddha did, though, encourage the cultivation of a confidence to be based, initially, upon trust in his wisdom and compassion. The importance he gave to the acceptance of the existence of other realms may be seen from its inclusion in Right View, the first component of the Eightfold Path. The conclusion to be drawn here is that without the acceptance of other realms, at least as a working hypothesis, a practitioner's understanding



of the law of kamma will never be profound enough to support a practice that culminates in liberation.





'Kamma' means intentional action. Deliberately treading on an ant is bad kamma. Unintentionally doing so is not. Deliberately telling a lie is bad kamma. Saying something untrue, believing it to be true is not.

Deliberately dwelling upon plans to inflict suffering on somebody is bad kamma. Experiencing a cruel thought arise and pass away in the mind is not.

Heedlessness is a grey area. Consider someone who drives their car after drinking alcohol and hits a dog. It is true that they do not create the bad kamma of deliberately killing another living being. They do however, make the bad kamma of deciding to drive while not in full command of their faculties, and thus recklessly endangering self and others.

The Buddha taught that the essence of kamma is intention. The more we cultivate a moment-by-moment awareness of intention the more we are able to avoid bad kamma and make

good kamma. The more good kamma we make the lighter and brighter our mind becomes.

When the mind has been sufficiently nourished by good kamma, it will have the maturity needed to fully comprehend the nature of the person we assume is creating that kamma. It is here that the path to liberation reveals itself.







Every act of kamma (volitional action), no matter how insignificant, has consequences for our physical, moral and spiritual well-being. Unwholesome kamma, motivated by defilement, leads to an increase in suffering. Wholesome kamma, motivated by virtue, leads to a decrease of suffering, and ultimately to liberation. We create who we are in the present moment and the future with the kamma that we create.

The results of the kamma that we have created in the past, both in this life and in previous lives, is called 'vipāka'. It is often referred to informally as 'old kamma'. The Buddha strongly refuted the idea that our lives are determined by old kamma. Vipāka is not fate or destiny. If it were there could be no eight-fold path, no liberation, no Buddhism. Old kamma does not determine our lives but, until we realize the fruits of Dhamma practice, it conditions it to one degree or another.

Old kamma may be seen clearly in our default reactions. People who have fed their anger, for example, will experience anger as their automatic reaction to certain triggers. Replacing an automatic angry reaction with a mindful anger-free response is not easy. It takes time and patience and consistent effort. But it can be done. Eventually, all kammic obstacles can be transcended through Buddhist training. This conviction is central to our faith in the Triple Gem.





The Buddha encouraged his disciples 'Whatever is not yours, abandon it; abandoning it will lead to your long-lasting welfare and happiness.'

This is an intriguing statement that raises a number of questions. For example, how can you give up what is not yours in the first place? And what does it mean exactly to say that something is 'yours' or 'not yours'?

The answer to the first question is that we can give things up that don't belong to us in the case that we have stolen them from others. Or else - and this is the relevant case here - when we mistakenly believe them to be ours. The Buddha is teaching the abandonment of a false sense of ownership.

Ownership is not a natural truth; it is a concept. It is defined by power over the 'owned'. The Buddha is pointing out that we assume ownership over our bodies, feelings,



memories and perceptions, thoughts and emotions, and our sense consciousness. But, in fact, on close observation, we can see that we do not possess the kind of power over them worthy of the term 'ownership.' Believing that we own the five aggregates that constitute the body and mind is the basic delusion that fuels our suffering. Letting go of attachment to that concept brings true happiness.





In the modern world with its stress on personal autonomy, people's likes and dislikes have gained an unprecedented importance. These days, many people define who they are in terms of their likes and dislikes. In fact, this has always been the case to some degree. In his first discourse, the Buddha referred to the suffering that comes with separation from the liked and association with the disliked. Seeing the world too much through the lens of what we like, what we dislike and what we don't care about, we narrow and impoverish our minds. Greed feeds on liking, aversion thrives on dislike, while dullness and callousness grow with indifference.

But the things we like, dislike and are indifferent to, change. And if they change, how could they be who we really are? Even in the case of abiding likes, dislikes and indifference, close observation yields interesting results. Watch moment-by-moment the feelings that arise while, for example, enjoying something we like - let's say eating a favourite food. If we look, without preconceptions, we may notice far

more neutral feelings than we expect, and perhaps even some moments of unpleasant feeling. The correlation between liking and pleasant feeling is not so straightforward. Ideas of like and dislike and indifference can mask and distort our experience of life. Cultivating the interest, the curiosity, the passion to look deeply within us in the present moment, is the path of the Buddha.







How much is the right amount: not too much, not too little?

Knowing the right amount is one of the most important of all life skills, and yet it is rarely acknowledged as such.

There is, of course, no fixed answer to the question of the right amount. It will depend on the person and the context. Even for one person, the right amount in various areas of their life will not remain constant. How much food do we need, how much rest, how much entertainment? How much money? How much stuff? There are few clear boundaries, and in a consumer society most of the signals we receive tell us 'more is better'. This resonates with our instinctive assumption that what makes us feel good must be good for us. To find the right or optimum amounts in life it is necessary to train ourselves to be mindful of the true needs of body and mind.

The vital point is to make it a habit to be constantly asking the question: how much is the right amount here?

By doing so we cultivate a sensitivity that protects us from subjection to greed.

As a simple guideline, enjoying anything that you like, it is usually best to stop - at least a short time - before you want to.





There is an art to starting well. A good way to begin a meditation session is with ritual. Bowing with reverence and gratitude to the Buddha, Dhamma and Sangha, followed by chanting a few verses of dedication and recollection, helps us to feel that we have entered a special space, one in which we've temporarily distanced ourselves from worldly concerns.

At the beginning of the session it is good to remind ourselves of our purpose in practising meditation — namely, to learn how to abandon the unwholesome, cultivate the wholesome and to liberate the mind from suffering and its causes. This reflection uplifts and energises the mind.

But sometimes this is not enough. To make a good beginning we should assess our state of mind. Is there still some coarseness agitation, depression? If the mind lacks interest and zeal for meditation, that defect must be addressed before turning to a subtle object like the breath. If so,



we might spend a few minutes preparing the mind with one of the following practices.

Scanning the sensations in the body systematically from head to toes.

Practising loving-kindness meditation to remove anger and resentment

Practising meditation on the 32 parts of the body to remove sensual obsessions.

Practising meditation on death to remove laziness and complacency.





False accusation usually leads to hurt and outrage. But on one occasion the Buddha pointed out to his disciples that if they became angry or upset with people who unfairly criticized the Buddha, Phamma or Sangha they would be creating unnecessary difficulties for themselves. He asked them if feeling angry they would be able to point out clearly and objectively on what points the attacks were unjustified. The monks admitted that they would not. The Buddha said that with calm minds they should 'unravel what is false and point it out as false, saying: 'For such and such a reason this is false, this is untrue, there is no such thing in us, this is not found among us.'

A popular Western cultural idea holds that anger can, in certain circumstances — facing up to injustice, for example — be virtuous. It has become commonplace to believe that in such cases the only alternatives to anger are indifference or despair.

But, to a Buddhist view, allowing anger into the mind is like allowing a fire to be lit on a dry forest floor. It engulfs the

mind, and distorts its judgement. Anger makes the mind short-sighted and coarse, unable to perceive the subtleties and complexities of situations. It creates demons out of opponents, while justifying one's own faults. Anger may well provide motivation but it is the motivation of the foolish and, ultimately, solves nothing.







Cultivating samādhi has three important benefits:

Firstly, it increases mental power. To understand this, we might compare meditation to using a magnifying glass to focus the rays of the sun. Or, in the Buddha's own analogy, it is like damming all the tributaries of a mountain stream, thereby stabilizing the current and allowing it to flow swiftly, sweeping any debris along within it.

Secondly, samādhi brings happiness and ease. Relaxation, a deep sense of well-being, joy, tranquillity - all are the natural results of letting go of negative thoughts and emotions. It is not so much that happiness has been gained, as that the self-made obstacles to it have been removed.

Thirdly, samādhi brings clarity and sharpness to the mind. The Buddha compared it to the purification of the water in a muddy pond. Once the suspended foreign matter has been removed, it is possible to look through the water

and see pebbles, rocks, weeds and fish. Similarly, once freed of mental hindrances, the true nature of things within the mind are revealed, and all the attachments that thrive in mud-like ignorance may be recognized. Thus samādhi provides the condition for liberating insight.





Recently, a monk came to ask my advice. He had completed his initial five-year training at a good forest monastery, and was now enjoying the challenge of practising in a more independent style for a while. He told me that his sister had recently offered him a smart phone, and he was unsure whether or not to use it. I have often expressed the opinion that smart phones in the hands of junior monks do more to undermine the standards of monasteries today than almost any other factor. However, this monk had a few years of experience under his belt and was now testing himself in an environment free of both the restrictions and the protections of his home monastery. I did not want to take the choice out of his hands.

I advised the monk to make an inventory of all the advantages and dangers he saw to his Dhamma practice from using a smart phone. If he felt the advantages outweighed the dangers then he should give himself a trial period of three to six months. He should draft



a code of conduct for himself ("I will..." "I will not...") and come to recite it to me. He should keep a daily record of any transgressions and reveal them to a fellow monk before the twice-monthly recitation of the Pātimokkha at my hermitage. At the end of the trial period he should review again the advantages and the dangers, before deciding whether or not to keep the phone any longer or return it politely to the donor.





One Autumn day, while walking through a forest with a group of his disciples, the Buddha reached down and picked up a number of leaves. He turned to the monks with him and said that the number of things that a Buddha knows is vast, like the number of leaves on the forest floor. However, he continued, the number of things he teaches is far less, comparable to the number of leaves in his hand. Elsewhere, he said that the sole criterion for the selection he made was that the teaching must either elucidate the nature of human suffering or the path to its cessation.

The discourses of the Buddha represent leaves in the Buddha's hand. We can conclude that any topic found within these suttas has been chosen by him for its practical value. This includes the teachings on rebirth and the other realms within samsāra. Although we must admit that we cannot prove the existence of heaven and hell realms, we should bear in mind that the Buddha, with his great wisdom and compassion, considered it important that we should take the

information he gave us about them on trust, or as working hypotheses. Rebirth is not a dogma to be blindly accepted. It is a theoretical framework for understanding our lives, which provides necessary supportive conditions for consistent progress on the path.







Yesterday, I was sitting with a fellow monk in the grass-roofed pavilion at my hermitage. A gentle rain was falling and the temperature was pleasantly cool. Looking southwards past the large stone Buddha ringed by its pool of lotuses, and serene under its sheltering tree, the peaks of Khao Yai formed a silhouette against the cloud-filled sky.

Suddenly, an unusual movement in front of the Buddha caught my eye. Standing up, I walked towards it. As I got closer to the lotus pool I realized that the object of my gaze was a king cobra with a large frog clamped between its jaws. The frog was in shock. It struggled a little, but with what seemed a rather resigned, half-hearted effort. It knew that it was too late; its time was up. Soon, the snake, prize in mouth, returned to its home at the base of the tree. We two monks resumed our conversation.

There is a kind of peace to be found in closing our eyes to the vulnerability and insecurity of our lives. But there is

a superior peace found in opening our eyes to the nature of things. We don't fight against the truth; we acknowledge that we are frogs and there are cobras, and it's alright. Each moment has meaning because it may be our last.





On one occasion the Buddha said that just as a golden light in the east signifies the imminent rising of the sun, so certain virtuous qualities signify the imminent arising of the Noble Eightfold Path. These qualities are as follows:

1. Associating with good and wise people: having teachers and friends who instruct, uplift and act as role models.
2. Being accomplished in sīla: training one's conduct and speech to be measured and kind; not acting or speaking in ways that harm oneself or others.
3. Being accomplished in self-motivation: channeling one's desires into the aspiration for goodness, excellence and truth
4. Being accomplished in conventional identity (atta): devoting oneself to an education of one's



relationship to the material and social world, and to the training of the heart and wisdom.

5. Being accomplished in view: being fluent in the basic principles of Dhamma that form the foundation for the path of liberation

6. Being accomplished in heedfulness: being free of complacency; wasting no time on trivial concerns; able to sustain awareness throughout activities.

7. Being accomplished in wise reflection: knowing how to frame issues and how to reflect on them so as to best facilitate the abandonment of defilement, cultivation of virtue and insight into the true nature of things.





These days there seems to be so much contention throughout the world on so many important issues. Often we don't have the time or resources to be able to make reliable judgements as to where the truth is really to be found.

There are, however, certain simple criteria we can apply to determine how trustworthy the people are who are trying to persuade us about an issue. Here are three:

1. To what extent do they display an absolute confidence that they are right? As my teacher used to say, the wise never forget the truth of uncertainty. People who are passionately convinced of things of which they have no direct experience, and are deaf to any counter-arguments, should be treated with caution. Humbly acknowledging the limits and possible errors in one's own position is a sign of intelligence and integrity.

2. How do they refer to people with whom they disagree? Do they disparage or demonize them? Those who assume

that all who oppose them are weak, stupid, brainwashed or else motivated by defilement, are not to be trusted. Dismissing opponents due to an inability to empathise with those of different beliefs and opinions is a serious weakness.

3. Do they try to manipulate your emotions? Do they use words that seek to trigger your desires, fears, anxieties or insecurities for example, or your pride, your prejudices, your pity, your loyalty, in order to bolster their arguments. If so, they are not to be trusted.

Untrustworthy people are not always wrong about important matters, but most times they are







Ajahn Chah did not speak English but he was very skilled in teaching his Western disciples who knew little Thai. One day, in the weeks following my arrival at Wat Pah Pong, I was sweeping leaves when he walked by on an inspection tour. As soon as I saw him, my heart started pounding against my ribcage as if it was going to jump out into the forest. I squatted down by the side of the path, eyes downcast, my hands in anjali.

He said, "Chavn ("Spoon" his nickname for me as he couldn't pronounce my English name, Shavn)

Are you well?"

Yes, Wang Por, I'm well.

Are you very well?

I'm very well.

Very well is not good.

And with a stern look on his face, Ajahn Cha walked away. I was stunned. What had I done wrong? I had recently learned the phrase 'Sabai dee' and nobody had ever told me that it was not good. How could it be bad?

He'd clearly given me some sort of teaching. I spent many hours that day trying to work out what Ajahn Chah was telling me.

This is the conclusion that I reached: Being well was good. It meant that I felt content with my decision to take on the training and was settling in okay. But 'very well' was not good, because I was at the beginning of practice, and my heart was still full of defilements. Feeling very well was only possible if I was overlooking all the inner challenges I faced. I had received a warning against complacency. My understanding was that Ajahn Cha had seen how much I loved monastic life, observed my easy-going personality, and given me the best possible teaching he could in a few simple words.





In meditation we learn to do something that sounds very simple, so simple in fact that most people assume that they do it already. But, in fact almost nobody does it, and the failure to do it, or even see the reason why anybody should want to do it, lies at the root of human suffering.

The skill I am talking about is that of experiencing physical sensations as physical sensations, feelings as feelings and mental states as mental states.

The chief characteristic of the unenlightened mind is that it does not see its experiences in this way. It sees through the filter of 'me' and 'mine'. Progress on the path to liberation may thus be measured by the extent to which we are weakening the sense of 'me' and 'mine'.

In meditation, once the mind has been stabilized and is free from hindrances, physical sensations, feelings and mental states reveal themselves stripped of all identification and attachment. We see them as they are in themselves.



Please observe this and remember.

It is a glimpse, a rehearsal of enlightenment.





When Kisa Gotami's child died she went mad with grief. Grasping the child's body firmly to her breast, she refused to believe the truth. Kisa Gotami searched ceaselessly for someone to cure her child of its illness. No advice - kind or firm - could persuade her that the child was beyond help. Finally, she approached the Buddha for assistance. Noting her mental state, he offered her neither teaching or comfort. He said, 'If you can bring me a sesame seed from a house in which nobody has ever died, I will help you.' Suddenly full of hope - perhaps it was some kind of magic! - she rushed off, knocking at doors. But from everyone she spoke to she received the same reply, 'Yes, we have sesame seeds but there have also been deaths in the house.' Slowly, disappointment by disappointment, the inevitability of death seeped into her mind. By the time she returned to the Buddha, Kisa Gotami was ready to hear the Dhamma. Before long she had become an arahant.

Meditation is for us like Kisa Gotami knocking on the doors. It allows the truth to seep into our minds, little by little.

Nothing in the conditioned world is really ours. Everything is impermanent and will soon disappear. Its too much for the untrained mind to accept. Only by exposing ourselves to the truth again and again are we gradually convinced and are able to abandon our illusions.







'Sappurisa' is one of the terms used by the Buddha to refer to wise, cultivated people. The seven qualities of sappurisas provide a useful checklist for assessing one's own level of education.

1. They know 'dhamma': Whether in study or action, they are aware of the relevant principles and natural laws. They are knowledgeable and well-informed. They know the causes needed to produce effects, the methods or techniques needed to achieve success.

2. They know 'attha': They understand meanings, implications, consequences, results. In any activity, they are aware of their goal and do not lose sight of it.

3. They know themselves: They have an accurate understanding of their strong and weak points, their knowledge and abilities, their virtues and vices. They know where and how to improve.

4. They know moderation: They are sensitive to 'just the right amount, not too much, not too little' in all things, beginning with food, sleep, exercise, wealth, possessions.

5. They know time and place: They know when and under what circumstances it is appropriate to act or speak and when not to. They are neither hasty or tardy.
6. They know groups: They are observant and tactful in the midst of different groups and communities. They know how to relate appropriately and how to adapt when necessary.
7. They know individuals: They have an accurate understanding of the personalities, abilities, virtues and vices of those around them. They know how to conduct themselves appropriately with different people; whether or not to associate with them, how to best communicate with them, how to learn from them or to teach them.





One mark of great teachers is their ability to explain the most profound matters in language that is simple and yet in no way betrays their deep meaning. Ajahn Chah would often use the ordinary objects around him to teach the Dhamma. By doing so he de-mystified it. He showed how the most transformative ideas are rarely intellectually complex. If they seem difficult it is because they oppose our habits and attachments.

Explaining how desire distorts perception he would pick up a nearby object and say, 'If you want it to be long, it looks too short; if you want it to be short, it looks too long'

In talking about the attitude to take towards the conditioned transient nature of all that we love, he would point to the glass of water beside him: "You must see that this glass is already broken"



Chuckling at how we blame our suffering on other people or situations he would point to his monk's bag. It's as if, he would say, you had a bag full of excrement and then walked around, bag on shoulder, complaining of the bad smell everywhere you went.





It is in living our lives with wisdom and compassion that we become vessels for life's true blessings.

Avoiding people who drag you down,  
or encourage the worst in you,  
Associating with people who lift you up,  
and encourage the best in you  
Honouring only that which is  
truly worthy of honour:  
These are root blessings.

Being able to feel and express respect  
Being humbly aware of one's limitations  
Being able to keep one's mind free  
from jealousy and discontent  
Being able to appreciate all the benevolent  
acts that have benefited you, no matter  
how small,  
These are some of life's higher blessings

Having a mind unshaken  
by all life's ups and downs,  
A mind without sorrows,  
A mind without stains,  
Dwelling in the sublime state  
free from all suffering  
This is life's highest blessing







In a discourse in the Itivuttaka the Buddha teaches that by far the most powerful and beautiful means of making merit is by liberating the mind through mettā (loving-kindness) meditation. He says that released by mettā the heart 'shines forth, bright and radiant'.

The Buddha illustrates his point with three similes: releasing the heart with mettā exceeds other merit making practices as the light of the full moon outshines the combined light of all the stars in the sky.

The heart released by mettā dispels inner darkness as does the sun rising in the clear cloudless skies that follow the end of the rainy season, dispel the darkness of space.

The heart released by mettā is as beautiful and luminous as the Morning Star at the moment of dawn.

In our efforts to apply the teachings of the Buddha in the midst of the pressures and responsibilities of modern life, a heart filled with mettā which refuses to accept boundaries or exceptions, can be the light which illumines our path.





Some of the Buddha's teachings we can verify without much difficulty. We can apply his analysis of the causes of human happiness and pain to our own lives, and see whether it holds up to scrutiny. For example, the Buddha says that unselfish acts of kindness and generosity bring joy to the mind. When we discover such observations to be true, our faith in his wisdom steadily grows.

There are also many of the Buddha's teachings that are only verifiable to a well-trained mind. Indeed, some may only be verified by the mind of an arahant. In such cases, we do not adopt those teachings out of blind faith. We do so with the confidence that time and time again the Buddha has proved worthy of our trust. In those areas in which we have been able to put his teachings to the test, they have never let us down.

This willingness to trust the Buddha comes to the fore in the teachings on kamma and rebirth. Without it, our inability



to create mental images of such profound matters may seem an important obstacle to acceptance of their truth.

On one occasion the Buddha revealed why taking his teachings on trust may have major implications for how we live our lives:

"Bhikkhus, if beings knew as I know, the result of giving and sharing, they would not eat without having given, nor would they allow the stain of meanness to obsess them and take root in their minds. Even if it were their last morsel, their last mouthful, they would not eat without having shared it, if there were someone to share it with. But, bhikkhus, as beings do not know, as I know, the result of giving and sharing, they eat without having given, and the stain of meanness obsesses them and takes root in their minds."





May 1977. I'd just crossed over the Khyber Pass between Pakistan and Afghanistan, and was standing at the side of the road trying to hitch a ride to Kabul when a taxi stopped. In its back seat were sat a couple of well-dressed Westerners. I guessed from their pony tails that they must be Hare Krishna devotees. Get in, they said with warm smiles, and I did.

They said they were businessmen from San Francisco. They'd been buying up handicrafts in Peshawar and were returning to their base at the Kabul Hilton. I think I was as exotic a figure to them as they were to me, but nevertheless we chatted almost non-stop on the long journey. By the time we reached the outskirts of Kabul we were good friends. To them my life seemed unimaginably austere and as we parted one of them insisted I accept a small gift. It was a 50 dollar bill — a treasure to me at that time.

As the taxi pulled away I made a vow. If that day I met another traveller who needed this money more than me; I would give it to them. I sat down in a teashop and within



minutes a young Englishman entered. He looked worried and drawn. When I asked him if he was okay he told me that he had just been robbed of his money and all his possessions. I gave him the bill without regret.

We've all done things we're proud of. The memory of them and the emotions they evoke can become a powerful meditation technique. The Buddha said that bringing to mind ones acts of generosity brings gladness to the mind. Gladness leads to rapture, rapture to a deep physical ease and mental bliss. Bliss leads to the samādhi that forms the foundation for seeing things in their true life. It is wonderful to see how every act of goodness can contribute to the Buddha's path of practice







In death meditation we do not reject the thinking mind but use it in a disciplined way. We allow the mind to reflect upon a list of themes, one-by-one. Here, the coherent train of directed thought is the meditation object. We begin the meditation with more general reflections and then move the focus to ourselves. It is in applying the truth of death to ourselves that the practice becomes profound. Through it we gain a new cooling perspective on our personal dramas and can let go of distractions and procrastination. We realize: 'Death is coming to me, to this very life, and there is no escape!'

Here are some general themes to begin the meditation:

Everyone has to die. Every being that has ever been born and ever will be born has died or will die.

The human body is so fragile; there are so many causes of death.

Death can come at any age, at any time, at any moment.

As we focus upon ourselves:

My lifespan decreases with every breath.

Death is coming to me. Without doubt.

When death comes none of my possessions or achievements will be able to help me.

When death comes, my loved ones will be unable to help me.

When death comes, only Dhamma can help me.





Saṅghānussati, recollecting the virtues of the enlightened ones, can suppress the hindrances and bring joy to the mind. One great monk well worthy of such reflection is Ven. Sāriputta.

It is well-known that Ven. Sāriputta was the Buddha's disciple foremost in wisdom and as such may seem a rather austere figure. But in the commentaries other aspects of his personality are revealed. It is recorded, for example, that he would often spend the early morning while the other monks were on almsround sweeping, picking up rubbish and tidying up. Then he would go to visit the sick monks in the infirmary to encourage them and also check whether they needed more medicine. If they did he would procure the necessary items from supporters who had offered a formal invitation for medicine.

On long walking tours Ven. Sāriputta would rarely take his place at the head of the group. He would prefer to stay at the back with the elderly and infirm. He was often known to be the one who would apply oils to the weeping sores of sick monks.



Ven. Sariputta was known for his kindness in visiting the sick and for the uplifting Dhamma talks he would give on such occasions. On one occasion he gave an instruction on the contemplation of feeling to Ven. Samitigutta, a monk suffering from leprosy, that was so profound that the patient realized arahantship. On another occasion the excruciating pains being experienced by Anathapindika ceased completely after hearing Ven. Sariputta teach him the Dhamma. Finally, when Anathapindika lay on his death bed Ven. Sariputta gave him a stirring discourse on non-attachment. After death, Anathapindika was reborn as a deva in Tusita realm and returned to the Jeta Grove to pay homage and express gratitude. In the presence of the Buddha he recited the following verse:

Sariputta is truly endowed with wisdom  
With virtue and with inner peace  
Even a monk who has gone beyond  
At best can only equal him.





Yesterday, I arrived in England and went to visit my only surviving uncle. He is 93 years old and his mind is still very bright. Although he lives alone, his daughter's house is visible from his kitchen, and he has many friends. Every wall in his house and every shelf is covered with family photos. He says that counting grandchildren and great grandchildren and their children there are 51 altogether. When he goes for a walk and his leg hurts, he goes through their names one by one. It takes his mind off the pain and keeps his memory sharp.

My uncle's daughter belongs to a Christian group. He has not joined it but once a week for the past ten years he has attended one of their meetings. He says that what he appreciates about this group is how they are trying hard to lead lives according to their beliefs, and that they care for each other. He said that after his wife died he thought that they were the kind of people he wanted to be around. 'In the end', he said simply, 'it's all about love.'



Two days ago my uncle had a small operation to remove a growth on his neck. He is waiting for the results of a biopsy. He seems completely unperturbed. As we parted he said with a smile, 'I've got nothing to complain about. I've had a good life.'

For the rest of the day, the purity of heart that had recreated itself so beautifully during our conversation was my meditation object







When I first entered the monastery, I was inspired by a certain young monk. He seemed to me to embody the monastic virtues of patience, diligence, restraint, kindness, gentleness and calm that I much admired.

One day I was shocked to discover that the monk had disrobed. I later learned that what I had assumed to be his modesty and calm were, in fact, shyness and insecurity. His mind had been filled with doubt and confusion. For him, every day in the monastery had been a struggle. I realised how much I had projected onto him. My desire for a good role model had blinded me to the monk's pain.

Experiences like this, when we are shown how wrong we have been about somebody, are important learning opportunities. Reflecting on them we gain insight into the ways in which our desires and fears, hopes and expectations, influence our perceptions of those around us.

Recognizing the arising and passing away of mental states in meditation lies at the heart of our Dhamma practice. But it is also important to investigate how, in the absence of awareness, these mental states condition our conduct and relationships in the world.





Last night I had a dream. In the dream I was thinking: "Tomorrow we'll be leaving early and walking in the mountains most of the day. By the time I'll be free to write Tuesday's teaching it will be late at night in China. Let me compose something now." At that moment a Dhamma reflection appeared in my mind that was very pleasing to me. I smiled with satisfaction.

Then I woke up. I looked through the window at a clear mountain sky full of stars. The memory of the dream arose in my mind with great clarity. I remembered my concern about posting the teaching, and then I realized: I couldn't remember the teaching itself. I giggled.

Then I thought: "Well, starting the day with a giggle is not so bad. The first time, I think, in 64 years. Why don't I write about what just happened?" And so I did.

Then I thought: "But that's not really a teaching, is it?" And then I remembered speaking to a group of young monks:



"In the monastery your desires, your views and opinions, your conceit, rubs up against those of your fellow monks again and again. It may not be so peaceful but it is not a bad thing. It's like the stones by the side of a swift mountain stream. Over the course of time they become rubbed into beautiful smooth pebbles. Now you are like jagged rocks. Aspire to be pebbles."

Then I thought, "That should do."





Defilement is the name given to mental states that cloud and sully the mind, and which prevent good qualities from being established in it. The lists of defilements found in the Discourses provide checklists for meditators to assess their growth in Dhamma. If, overall, these qualities seem to be waning in our lives, then we can conclude that we are on the right path. If, on the other hand they are increasing it is time to consider specific remedies. As long as defilements remain it is as difficult for the mind to absorb the Dhamma as it is for dirty, stained cloth to absorb fresh dye. One of the more extended lists is that of the 16 Vpakkilesa (M.N. 7)

Abhijjhāvisamālobha: Covetousness, immoral greed

Byāpāda: Ill will, malevolence

Kodha: Anger

Upanāha: Holding grudges, spite

Makkha: Denigrating others; belittling them;  
putting them down

Palāsa: Raising, promoting oneself as an  
equal to one's superiors

Issā : Jealousy

Macchariya : stinginess, possessiveness

Māyā : Deceit, deviousness

Sātheyya : Boastfulness as a means of  
creating a good image.

Thamā : Obstinacy, rigidity

Sārambha : Contentiousness, competitiveness

Māna : Conceit

Atimāna : Arrogance

Mada : Vanity, indulgence

Pamāda : Negligence; heedlessness

If you've been reading this list saying to yourself, 'Yes, yes, yes, yes...' and feeling discouraged, then stop. Take a deep breath. None of these defilements is permanent. None of them are you. Follow the Buddha's teachings sincerely and every one will fade away.







It is common to talk about complex phenomena as being 'greater than the sum of their parts'. When contributory factors combine in a particular way, new unexpected things can happen. The unique qualities of water - say, for example, its ability to put out a fire - cannot be predicted from any of its constituent elements of hydrogen and oxygen. In Buddhist terminology, so-called 'emergent properties' are referred to as 'conditioned phenomena'. These properties can only be present as long as their supporting causes and conditions prevail. In the case of water and all its properties, they will disappear if electrolysis is used to separate the hydrogen and oxygen atoms.

One way of looking at this very real sense we have of ourselves as the owner of experience, the one who acts and is acted upon, is as an emergent property of the Five Khandas. In Buddhism, when we say that there is 'no self' we mean that we cannot

find this entity we believe to exist separate from the moment-to-moment interactions of the five khandas. 'No self' means that we accept that there is a phenomena that we have agreed to call 'self'. It's just not what we think it is.





Someone recently told me that she is trying to encourage her son to meditate. He complains that it is boring. She tells him that it is only boring because he loses his mindfulness; if he perseveres the boredom will go away. The son is unconvinced. He resents being pushed into doing something he doesn't want to do.

In the course of advising this parent, I said that whatever kind of career her son pursues, there will always be times when he will have to do things he finds uninteresting. If his habitual reaction is to become bored and lose all motivation, he will never gain the consistency of effort necessary to achieve success. Boredom is an unpleasant mental state that will undermine him his whole life. I suggested she ask her son whether he was reconciled to having boredom as part of his life until the day he dies. I asked her to tell him how Buddhist meditation provides us with the means to observe how boredom arises in real time, how it is part of our mind's response to situations rather than part of



the situations themselves, and how we can free our mind of boredom completely.

In short: if you feel bored, don't stop. Look at the boredom.





I was never an enthusiastic student of the hard sciences. One topic in physics did, however, capture my attention. I discovered that light could be understood as being composed of either particles or waves. I was fascinated that a single entity could be seen in two apparently mutually exclusive ways. The best explanation I found was this: if you ask light particle questions it will give particle answers. If you ask it wave questions it will give wave answers.

Later, I considered that the mind is somewhat similar to light in this regard. If you ask the mind content questions it gives content answers; if you ask it process questions it gives process answers.

Content questions are important. We need to ask ourselves questions like 'On what grounds do I take this to be true?', 'In this situation what is the right thing to do?' Is this wholesome? Is thinking in this way on this topic taking me closer to liberation from suffering, or tying me more firmly to it?

But content questions can only take us a certain distance along the Buddhist path. We also need to know how to shift our focus away from content to process. We ask 'What conditions the arising of this mental state? What conditions its disappearance?' Can I observe this arising and passing away - the universal nature of all phenomena - in real time as a direct experience? It is in shifting emphasis from content to process that our Dhamma practice becomes profound.







If there is no self, then how can there be remembrance of past lives? The Buddha answered this question by referring to the five khandas. He said that when one remembers past lives, one is simply remembering past forms, feelings, perceptions, volitional formations and sense consciousnesses.

This point may be easier to understand by comparing life to a river. We can, for example, talk about the Yellow River in terms of the provinces it flows through. We can legitimately refer to the Yellow River in Xinghai, the Yellow River in Shaanxi and the Yellow River in Shangdong. But actually there is no discernible entity, 'Yellow River', that flows from the Bayan Har Mountains to the sea (and indeed, no real entity 'province'). The Yellow River that can be known directly is water, silt, pebbles, sand etc. We can talk on a conventional level about a being passing through the various realms of samsāra, but, in fact, we are talking about the arising and passing away of the five khandas.





In the 1970's a Korean Zen master resident in America was asked, 'Can a woman become a Buddha?' Without hesitation he replied with a very firm 'No'. There was an intake of breath amongst the many women in the audience. After allowing the various reactions to his reply take their course, the master added, 'And neither can a man. As long as you are identifying with being a man or a woman, Buddhahood is impossible.'

In the Samyutta Nikaya, the bhikkhuni Soma makes a similar point. When Māra taunted her that being a woman she did not have the capacity to achieve liberation, Soma calmly replied that he was wasting his time:

'Where does womanhood come into it, when the mind is well concentrated, when knowledge flows onwards through seeing clearly, rightly into Dhamma? It is one to whom it might occur, 'I am a woman' or 'I am a man' or 'I am anything at all' that Māra should address.'







There is a small lump of sandstone on my shrine. For fourteen centuries it was part of one of the two huge Bamiyan Buddhas in Central Afghanistan. I received the rock from a Thai lay Buddhist nearly twenty years ago. He had obtained it while visiting Bamiyan as a member of an international organization. By the time of his arrival the Buddhas had already been obliterated by the Taliban, and my piece of rock was simply rubble. 'Created things may be resistant to change but they are not immune to it. Religious structures built to last for a thousand years may indeed survive the predations of nature for that long, but who can predict how they will be perceived and what they will be used for in the future? The British army used Shwedagong Pagoda in Rangoon as a fort in the mid-nineteenth century. Of the Buddhist monuments in India not destroyed by members of other religions, many were re-named and appropriated by them.

Whether or not Buddhism is to survive into coming centuries will not depend on materials like sandstone, or even granite. It will depend on nurturing the flame of Dhamma within the hearts and minds of living beings. We don't have to fight against impermanence, only understand it.







In meditation practice sati (mindfulness) is cultivated in conjunction with sampajañña (clear comprehension) and ātāpi (keenness). Samādhi results when these three are developed in harmony.

Mindfulness here means both 'bringing to mind' and 'bearing in mind'. While meditating we bring to mind the relevant instructions (e.g. stay in the present moment; take no pleasure in thoughts and memories) as we bear in mind the meditation object. Mindfulness fixes attention on the object, not allowing it to become unclear or to slip away.

Clear comprehension is a wisdom factor, an expression of Right View. It is wakeful, alert to context, a moment-by-moment awareness of the presence or absence of wholesome and unwholesome mental states.

Keenness is a synonym for Right Effort. It is the unwavering commitment, moment-by-moment, to guarding against and abandoning unwholesome mental states and to creating and maintaining wholesome mental states.





In saṃsāra there's always a price to pay.

The more we crave excitement,  
the more we struggle with boredom.

The more we love status and recognition,  
the more we feel hurt and offended when  
we are discounted or remain unseen.

The more we love to be praised,  
the more unbearable it feels to be criticized.

The more we are obsessed with our physical  
appearance, the more dissatisfied we feel  
with the slightest flaw, and the more shallow  
our heart becomes.

The more we seek to control people and  
situations, the more insecure we feel.

The more we want more, the less joy we  
feel in what we have already.

The more we put ourself at the centre of  
the universe, the more lonely a place it becomes.

Saṃsāra is something we do to ourselves.

We don't have to.







Recently, I much enjoyed reading the words of an American sportsman. He said that he had never had a great deal of natural talent, but had achieved success through 'being good at getting better.' What a wonderful phrase! Love of learning, perseverance, continuity of application, care for the small details and making regular marginal gains are the hallmarks of champions in training. An Olympic gold medallist swimmer has commented, 'People don't know how ordinary success is.' As Buddhists we might add that when we take full responsibility for the ordinary the door to the extraordinary is opened.

Meditation can be frustrating when we desire more than marginal gains while putting forth less than optimal effort. Many people want peace of mind without abandoning the causes of its lack. A good corrective to this tendency is to establish goals within the practice itself. Taking each element of Dhamma practice we can resolve to being good at getting better at it. Marginal gains accumulate.







An old joke. Two friends, Jay and Joe are sitting in a four-engine plane when it is shaken by an explosion on one of the wings. Almost immediately, they hear the pilot's reassuring voice on the intercom. He says that one of the engines is now out of order. There's nothing to worry about but unfortunately it will mean that their arrival will be delayed by an hour or so. A few minutes later, there is a second explosion and a second calming announcement with a new amended arrival time. Before long there is a third explosion and a third announcement. A worried Jay turns to Joe, "I hope there aren't any more explosions or it's going to be really late before we land."

In itself, the explosion of the fourth engine would be no different than that of the previous three. But the result would be vastly different.

Through meditation, we wake up to the way things are. We see that this life, this world we are living in, is running on the single fourth engine.

We can take nothing for granted.





Sitting under a Bodhi tree in northeast India, more than 2,500 years ago, the Buddha realised the true nature of all existence, and the means necessary to accomplish that realization. In summarising his enlightenment he spoke of identifying Four Noble (or Ennobling) Truths and the duties that must be carried out with regard to each one. He said that it was in the awareness that he had carried out these duties perfectly that he knew himself to be Buddha.

There is dukkha. It is to be fully comprehended  
There is a cause of dukkha. It is to be abandoned.  
There is cessation of dukkha. It is to be realized.  
There is a path leading to the cessation of dukkha.  
It is to be followed

The Buddha did not give us a list of dogmas to believe in. It is in our efforts to practice the Eightfold Path in its entirety in order to fully comprehend dukkha, abandon its cause and realize its cessation that we become truly Buddhist







As I grew up I absorbed the ideas of thinking for myself and questioning authority. I assumed that the authorities that needed to be constantly questioned were political, economic, religious, cultural. It was when I discovered Buddhism that I realized that there is another powerful authority, in many respects the most powerful of all. I learnt how our lives are most oppressed and impoverished by the defilements within our own minds.

There are many inner dictators who in every country of the world are slavishly followed, without question. They include Greed, Aversion and Belief. The devotion to these dictators crosses all political boundaries and social classes.

I gained a conviction as a teenage Buddhist that has stayed with me to this day. It is only by incorporating the Buddha's path to wisdom, compassion and inner freedom, that any efforts to improve the quality of life of beings in the world will achieve long-lasting, sustainable results.







In most academic tests, students can safely trust that all the questions on the exam sheet have answers, and that they possess (providing they have revised well) all the knowledge necessary to answer them.

Outside of the classroom we cannot be sure that the questions facing us are legitimate. They may be wrongly formulated. They may be trivial questions concealing more important issues. They may have no answer at all. We may not have the knowledge we need to answer the questions. Our knowledge may be faulty or incomplete.

We needn't feel oppressed by doubt and uncertainty. They are not enemies to be crushed. They are mental states to be recognized and incorporated in our considerations. The craving to be sure is more of a hindrance than being unsure. A mature relationship with doubt is a fundamental aspect of true humility.





It is because we have all created a great deal of good kamma in our past lives that we have been born into the human realm and come into contact with Buddhism. But whether or not we make the best of this precious human birth lies, above all else, in our making a steady long-term and unwavering effort to realise the truth of the Buddha's teachings as a direct experience. A key principle of this effort is that when we feel enthusiastic and full of faith we practice. When we feel low or lazy or discouraged, we practice.

On one occasion Ajahn Chā was asked to what causes and conditions he attributed his great achievements. He said, 'Actually, when I was a young monk I had many defilements. If there was anything that distinguished me from other monks it was that I was patient, I endured through all my difficulties, I never gave up.'







The meaning of dukkha as one of the three characteristics of existence is different from that of dukkha as a Noble Truth.

In the Three Characteristics, dukkha refers to the inherent instability of all impermanent conditioned phenomena.

In the Four Noble Truths, dukkha refers to the experience of the unenlightened mind. This mind habitually reacts to an inner and outer world characterized by impermanence and instability with craving and attachment. Here, dukkha is the sense of lack, incompleteness, hollowness, unsatisfactoriness inseparable from a life founded upon such reactions.

Dukkha in the 'tilakkhana' is unaffected by the appearance of a Buddha. It is woven into the very fabric of existence. Dukkha as a Noble Truth, on the other hand, can be completely eliminated through practice of the Buddha's teachings.







When we think of our mistakes in the past unwisely, we make ourselves the villain. We think "I was so bad. I am so bad" The result is guilt. Guilt is a cause of suffering. It takes us round in circles. It has no resolution. When we think of our mistakes in the past wisely, we think, "That was so bad. That was a wrong and foolish thing to do." The result is shame. Shame is a mental factor leading to freedom from suffering. It motivates us to abandon the causes of our mistakes. It has a resolution.

When we think of our successes in the past unwisely, we think, "I was so good. I am so good". The result is pride, conceit and ingratitude. The more successful we are the stronger the sense of self, the more sensitive to praise and blame

When we think of our successes in the past wisely, we think "That was so good. Goodness has been created." The result is joy in the Dhamma and gratitude to our teachers. The more successful we are the less the sense of self and the more easy it becomes to navigate the world of praise and blame.





A few days ago I was sitting in the abbot's kuti in a forest monastery in southern Norway. It was a bright and windless day. Through the plate glass window of the kuti the forest appeared utterly still and I sat quietly watching the stillness. After some time, I became conscious of a most subtle movement. I realized it was a leaf in a tree high to my right. Moments later, to my left, another small leaf quivered. With a relaxed alertness I became aware as time passed of more very slight, almost invisible tremors. Some time later a gentle breeze swept through the forest and a myriad of leaves responded.

Days later, in England, a meditator said to me that her mind attained stillness easily, but what, she wondered, should she do next. I said that the mind is like a Norwegian forest. Keep watching.





Sometimes Dhamma practice feels like it is making life darker and heavier rather than brighter and lighter. If so, it can be a warning that you've lost your way. Your practise has become hijacked by the craving to get, to be, to become. It's time for a change of attitude. Time to let the aspiration to let go of all that imprisons you wash away the self-centred striving.

But there is another darkness. It is the growing darkness surrounding those who are digging through a mountain of defilement. As they dig ever deeper into their mountain, the light they formerly lived by shrinks and fades. Doubts may arise. They don't know how wide the mountain is, and how much of it remains.

The great teachers say, 'Be patient. Keep digging. If you persevere, you will break through. The hole will become a tunnel. Everything will become illuminated. Be patient.'









# Ajahn Jayasāro

|                       |                                                                                                                  |
|-----------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <i>Birth name</i>     | Shaun Chiverton                                                                                                  |
| <i>1958</i>           | Born in England                                                                                                  |
| <i>1978</i>           | Became an anagarika with Ajahn Sumedho's community in England, then travelled to Thailand for further ordination |
| <i>1979</i>           | Became a novice monk at Nong Pah Pong Monastery, Ubon Ratchathani Province, Thailand                             |
| <i>1980</i>           | Took full Bhikkhu ordination at Nong Pah Pong Monastery, with the Venerable Ajahn Chah as his preceptor          |
| <i>1997 – 2001</i>    | Abbot, Wat Pah Nanachat (International Forest Monastery), Ubon Ratchathani Province, Thailand                    |
| <i>2002 - present</i> | Resident at a hermitage in Pak Chong District, Nakhon Ratchasima Province, Thailand                              |
| <i>2019</i>           | Received monastic title of Phra Rajabajaramanit                                                                  |
| <i>2020</i>           | Received monastic title of Phra Thepphacharayanamuni                                                             |
| <i>2021</i>           | Received monastic title of Phra Dhammaphacharayanamuni                                                           |
| <i>2024</i>           | Received monastic title of Phra Phromphacharayanmuni                                                             |





## Panyaprateep Foundation

Panyaprateep Foundation is a non-profit organization set up in 2008 by the founders, administrators, teachers and friends of Thawsi Buddhist Wisdom School community in Bangkok. On the 1st April 2008 it was officially registered by the Ministry of Interior with Registration Number of Kor Thor 1405. Since 2009 Panyaprateep Foundation has been instrumental in the establishment and support of Panyaprateep Buddhist Wisdom Boarding School, which is situated in the district of Pak Chong, Nakhon Ratchasima.

### Objectives of Panyaprateep Foundation

- 1) To support the development of Buddhist education based on the Buddhist principle of the integrated Three-Fold Training of conduct, emotional well-being and wisdom (*sīla samādhī and paññā*).
- 2) To propagate Buddhist wisdom and developmental principles through organization of retreat programs, training workshops and through the dissemination of Dhamma media such as books, and through other social media.
- 3) To create understanding of humanity's relationship to the natural world, to promote eco-friendly learning activities, and renewable energy for sustainable development, and a way of life based on His Majesty King Bhumibol Ajdulyadej's Philosophy of Sufficiency Economy.

### Organizational Structure of Panyaprateep Foundation

#### *Members of the Executive Committee*

Phra Ajahn Jayasaro

Chairman of the Advisory Board

Assoc. Prof. Prida Tasanapradit, M.D.

Chairman of Committee

|                                        |                      |
|----------------------------------------|----------------------|
| Professor Somsak Kuptniratsaikul, M.D. | Vice Chairman        |
| Dr. Witit Rachatatanun                 | Vice Chairman        |
| Mrs. Srivara Issara                    | Member               |
| Miss Petchana Mahapan                  | Member               |
| Mrs. Apapatra Chaiprasit               | Member               |
| Mrs. Jurarat Intharamaha               | Member               |
| Mr. Wichet Phothiwisutwati             | Member               |
| Ms. Siriporn Leabchant                 | Member               |
| Mr. Nutthapong Larbboonsarp            | Member               |
| Ms. Chutima Mokkahasmit                | Member               |
| Mr. Nummon Rachatatanun                | Member               |
| Miss Sirada Sirijindaphan              | Member               |
| Mrs. Pakkawadee Svasti Xuto            | Member and Treasurer |
| Mrs. Bupaswat Rachatatanun             | Member and Secretary |

The Chief Spiritual Advisor of the Foundation is Venerable Ajahn Jayasaro, a monk disciple of Ajahn Chah of the Thai Forest Tradition, and leading figure in the Buddhist education movement. The Foundation is also honoured to have Assoc. Prof. Prida Tasanapradit, M.D. as Chairman of the Executive Committee. Furthermore, the Foundation has sought and received the kind blessing and pledges of support from a number of distinguished experts in diverse fields to help as advisors.

To date the Foundation has supported the consistent growth of Panyaprateep School to serve as a prototype of Buddhist wisdom education and to share the learning experiences with society at large. Furthermore, dhamma books in Thai and English are published for free distribution with support of the Foundation.

