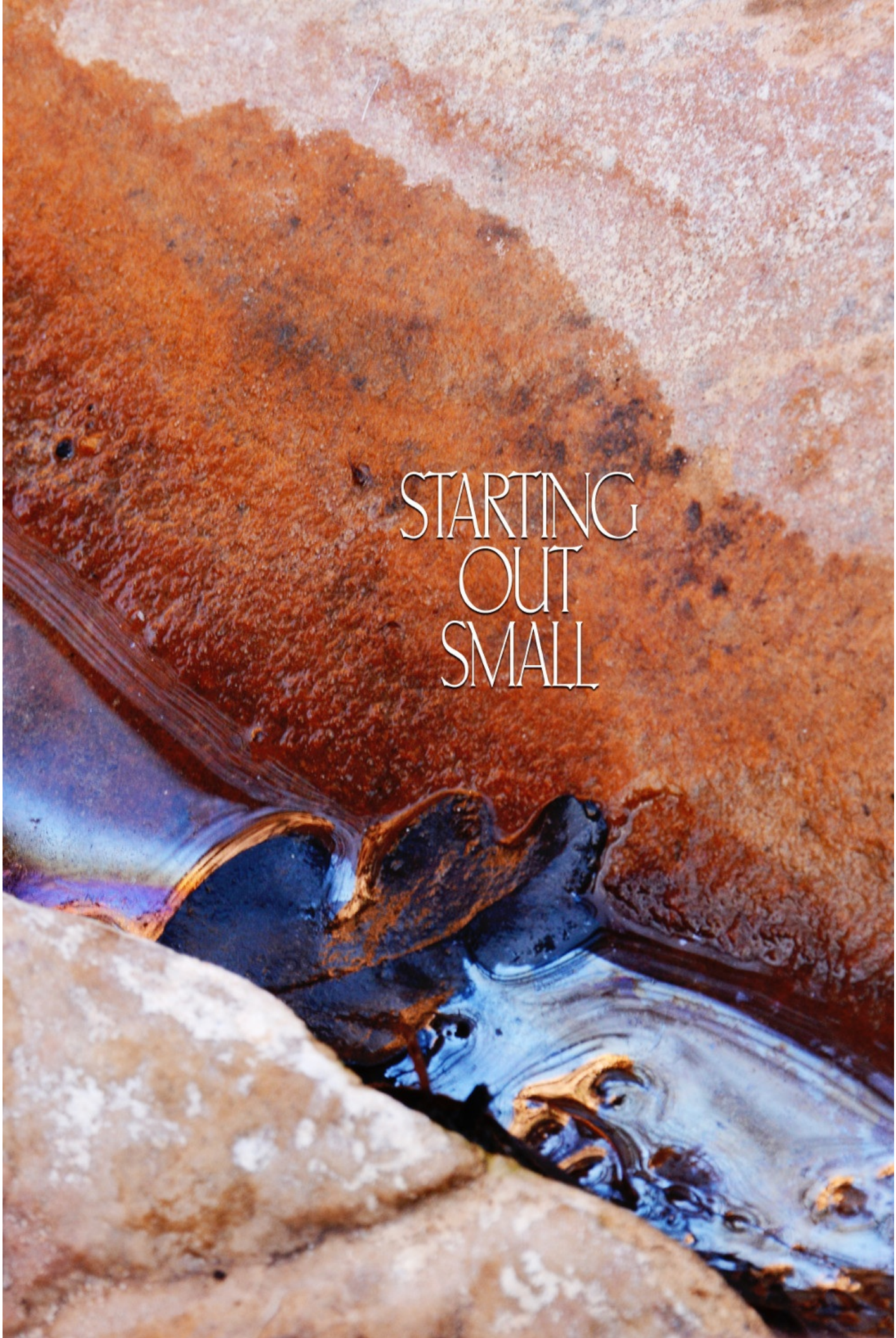
STARTING
OUT
SMALL

Starting Out Small

A Collection of Talks for Beginning Meditators

by

Phra Ajaan Lee Dhammadharo
(Phra Suddhidhammaraṅsī Gambhīramedhācariya)

Translated from the Thai

by Ṭhānissaro Bhikkhu
(Geoffrey DeGraff)

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questions about this book may be addressed to

Metta Forest Monastery
Valley Center, CA 92082-1409
U.S.A.

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Introduction

This is a work in progress. Eventually, I hope to make available in English a much larger collection of Ajaan Lee's talks to add to the collections already available: *Lessons in Samādhi, Food for Thought, Inner Strength,* and *The Skill of Release.* But for the moment, in keeping with the title of the collection, I'd like to start out small.

The passages translated here had their beginnings in talks that Ajaan Lee gave to groups of people while they were meditating. In some cases, the people were his followers; in others, total strangers. In every case, Ajaan Lee found it necessary to cover the sorts of questions that occur to people new to meditation—Why meditate? How should I meditate? And why in that particular way?—and in his own style he provided not only straightforward answers to these questions but also vivid analogies, to help his listeners relate their meditation to familiar activities so that they would feel less intimidated by the uncharted areas of the minds they were trying to tame.

One aspect of Ajaan Lee's teachings that might strike you as foreign is his analysis of the body into four properties: earth, fire, water, and wind. This mode of analysis dates back to the time of the Buddha, although Ajaan Lee develops it in a distinctive way. Think of this analysis, not as an attempt at biology or chemistry—the sciences we use to analyze the body from the outside—but as a way of analyzing how the body feels from the inside. This is an aspect of awareness that we often overlook and that, in English at least, we have a poor vocabulary for describing. As you gain through meditation a greater familiarity with this aspect of your awareness, you'll come to see how useful Ajaan Lee's method of analysis is.

The passages included here have taken a fairly circuitous route from Ajaan Lee's mouth to your eyes. One of his followers—a nun, Mae Chii Arun Abhivaṇṇā—took notes during the talks, from which she later worked up reconstructed versions of what Ajaan Lee had said. Ajaan Lee had a chance to review and revise the reconstructions of the talks dated prior to 1957. As for the talks made after that year, Mae Chii Arun didn't get around to making reconstructions until after Ajaan Lee's death in 1961, and so these were printed without his input.

Although the talks make for great reading, they make for even better listening. If you meditate with a group of friends, try arranging for one member of the group to read a passage while the others are meditating. In that way, you can best recreate the context for which the talks were originally intended.

Ṭhānissaro Bhikkhu

OCTOBER, 1999

This expanded edition (see Part II) contains translations of two new talks that have never been published before—"Merit" and "On Target"—along with complete translations of the talks "The Art of Letting Go" and "At the Tip of Your Nose," both of which were excerpted in *Lessons in Samādhi.* I hope to continue adding new talk-translations to this collection as time permits.

Ṭhānissaro Bhikkhu

JANUARY, 2016

This book has now been expanded with a second section (see Part III) of newly translated Dhamma talks, featuring one of Ajaan Lee's longest recorded sermons, "Recollection of Virtue."

Ṭhānissaro Bhikkhu

SEPTEMBER, 2016

PART I

Brightness Within

May 18, 1958

For people to be happy or sad, good or bad, all depends on the heart. The heart is what's in charge, the most important thing to be found in our body. That's because it's lasting and responsible for all the good and evil we do. As for the body, it knows nothing of pleasure or pain, happiness or sadness, and it's not at all responsible for anyone's good or evil actions. Why is that? Because the body isn't lasting. It's empty.

To say that it's empty means that as soon as it's deprived of breath, its four properties of earth, water, wind, and fire separate from one another and return to their original nature. The parts coming from the earth property return to be earth as they originally were. The parts coming from the water property return to be water as they originally were. The parts coming from the wind and fire properties return to be wind and fire as they originally were. There's nothing about them that's "woman" or "man," "good" or "bad." This is why we're taught, *Rūpaṁ aniccaṁ,* physical form is inconstant. *Rūpaṁ dukkhaṁ,* it's hard to bear. *Rūpaṁ anattā,* it's not-self, empty, and doesn't stay under anyone's control. Even if we try to forbid it from growing old, growing sick, and dying, it won't behave in line with our wishes. It has to fall in line with the processes of arising and wasting away in accordance with the nature of natural fabrications. This applies to everyone.

But you can't say that the body is entirely *anattā,* for some parts of it are *attā.* In other words, they lie somewhat under our control. For instance, if you want the body to walk, it'll walk. If you want it to lie down, it'll lie down. If you want it to eat, it'll eat. If you want it to take a bath, it'll take a bath. This shows that it lies somewhat under your control. So the body is both *anattā* and *attā.* But even so, both aspects are equal in the sense that they're empty and not responsible for the good or evil things we do. No matter how much good or evil you do, the body doesn't have any part in the rewards. When it dies, it gets cremated and turns into ashes either way. It's not responsible for anyone's happiness or sadness at all. When people do good or evil, the results of their good and evil all fall to their own minds. The mind is what's responsible for all our actions, and it's the one that experiences the results of its actions as well. This is why the Buddha taught us to cleanse our hearts and minds, to make them pure as a way of leading us to future happiness.

What do we use to cleanse the heart and mind? We cleanse the heart and mind with skillfulness—in other words by developing skillful qualities within it through practicing concentration. We cut away all the thoughts of greed, anger, and delusion within the mind, such as the Hindrances of sensual desire, ill will, torpor & lethargy, restlessness &

anxiety, and doubt. All of these qualities are things that soil the mind. When the mind is soiled in this way, it's bound to suffer. It's headed for darkness because of its own actions.

Our unskillful actions can be divided into the different ways they're dark. Some are dark like the darkness of night, i.e., totally devoid of any brightness. Some are dark like clouds, i.e., they alternate between being dark and bright, just as when the moon is bright at some times and covered by clouds at others. Some of our unskillfulness is dark like haze, obscuring all our vision whether by day or by night. This third kind of unskillfulness is ignorance, or *avijjā.* It obscures the mind at all times so that we can't recognize which of the mind's objects are past, which are future, and which are present. This is why the mind concerns itself with past, present, and future so that it can't stay firmly in any one place. It has no certainty about anything. This is ignorance. From ignorance comes craving, the cause of all stress and suffering.

To get rid of this haze we have to meditate, getting rid of thoughts and concepts of past and future by seeing them as inconstant, stressful, and not-self; seeing all the aggregates of form, feeling, perception, thought-fabrication, and consciousness as inconstant, stressful, and not-self, to the point where there is no past, no future, no present. That's when the mind is released from the clouds and haze of its Hindrances and enters into brightness.

There are two kinds of people in the world. Some are like those with good eyes. They're the ones who develop skillful qualities within themselves, and so they see the brightness of the world both by day and by night. Then there are those who don't develop skillful mental qualities. They're like people born blind: even though the light of the sun and moon may be shining, these people are in the darkness—in this case, the darkness of their own minds. This is why the Buddha taught us to remove the darkness from our minds, to remove our minds from darkness, as in the Pali verse,

Kaṇhaṁ dhammaṁ vippahāya sukkaṁ bhāvetha paṇḍito,

which means, "Having abandoned dark qualities, the wise person develops the bright." When people develop brightness within themselves, they can use that brightness to illuminate all their activities. This will bring them success in all they do. But if they're in the dark, it's as if they were blind, so that the things they do won't succeed in full measure. For example, they may listen to the Dhamma, but if their minds are still wandering out all over the place, it's as if they were obscured by the clouds and haze of their Hindrances.

This is why we're taught to practice tranquility meditation, fixing the mind on a single preoccupation. Tell yourself that the qualities of the Buddha aren't separate from the qualities of the Dhamma, which aren't separate from the qualities of the Saṅgha. They're actually one and the same, as the Pali verse tells us:

Buddho dhammo saṅgho cāti nānāhontampi vatthuto
Aññamaññāviyogā va ekībhūtampanatthato

"Although the Buddha, Dhamma, and Saṅgha may be different as objects, seemingly separate from one another, they are actually one in meaning."

Thus when we make the mind firm in its awakened awareness, it contains the qualities of the Buddha, Dhamma, and Saṅgha all in one. That's when our concentration will develop in the proper way.

So I ask that you abandon unskillful mental qualities and cleanse the mind so that it's clean and pure. Brightness will then arise within your heart. This way you'll experience ease and happiness without a doubt, as the Pali passage guarantees: *Citte saṅkiliṭṭhe duggati pāṭikaṅkhā. Citte asaṅkiliṭṭhe sugati pāṭikaṅkhā.* "When the mind is defiled, a bad destination can be expected. When the mind is undefiled, a happy destination can be expected."

The Light of Discernment

August 23, 1958

Our discernment is like light, and there are three levels to it: low-level discernment, which is like the light of a torch; intermediate discernment, which is like the light of a candle or a kerosene lantern; and high-level discernment, which is like electric light.

To get light from a torch, you need to use a lot of fuel. And even though it's bright, it creates smoke. This is like the discernment that comes from being generous: it requires a lot of financial resources, and you sometimes have to contend with resistance from people outside.

The light of a candle or gas lantern is like the discernment that comes from observing the precepts. You have to exercise a lot of care and use your powers of endurance to keep them pure. Lantern-light requires fuel and a wick. As for candlelight, it requires a wick and some wax. If you have wax but no wick, you can't get any light. And both lantern-light and candlelight create smoke and soot, so neither of them counts as being entirely good.

As for electric discernment, there's no need for fuel, and it doesn't create smoke or soot. It's easy to use: whenever you want it, by day or by night, just flip on the switch. This refers to the discernment that comes from developing concentration. The power of the mind, when it's pure and firmly established, gives rise to the light of knowledge—liberating insight—enabling us to see events clearly, both in the area of the world and of the Dhamma. When we can make the mind clean and pure, it gives rise to concentration and to the light of discernment—*paññā-pajjoto*—which is like electric light, or the light of the sun, which shines all twelve hours of the day. This kind of discernment is the discernment of the noble ones.

All three forms of merit—generosity, virtue, and meditation—depend on discernment. When we develop discernment, we'll know how to look for merit on our own. And what kind of light will we want—torch light, candlelight, lantern-light, or electric light? Death is like darkness. When the time comes to die, outside light won't be of any use to us. Our speech, hands, feet, arms, and legs won't be of any use to us. They won't be able to help us at all. Our eyes won't be able to see any light. No one will hear what we have to say. Our hands and feet won't be able to move. Our possessions won't be able to help us. The only resource that will be able to help us is our discernment, making sure that greed, aversion, and delusion don't get provoked, maintaining the mind in a state free from greed, free from aversion, free from delusion. We'll be able to separate these three things—body, mind, and defilement—out from one another, in the same way

that we separate the wick of a candle from its wax. The fire of defilement will then have to go out, because the wick and the wax lie in separate places and don't make contact. In the same way, if we can separate the body from the mind, our normal awareness will have to go out. But when it goes out, that doesn't mean that awareness is annihilated. It's still there, but as a special form of awareness that doesn't depend on the body or mind and yet can still be aware. It's just like fire going out from a candle: it's not annihilated. There's still plenty of fire potential left in the world. It's there by its nature, simply that it isn't involved with any fuel. This kind of fire is better than the kind that requires fuel, because it doesn't wear anything out. It's simply there by its nature. This kind of merit is more wonderful than anything else.

If we can separate the body, the mind, and defilement from one another, there'll be no more heat. The mind won't be hot, and instead will be cool at all times. The light of fire arises from the spinning of waves. If there are no waves, there'll be no spinning. The waves are like defilement. If we can cut through the waves, the spinning will stop. There will be no more birth. Greed, aversion, and delusion are like waves—or like the wick of a candle. If we cut out the wick, leaving only the wax, fire will have no place to catch hold and so will have to go out. When the candle goes out, it's like the death of human beings: the fire leaves the candle, but the fire potential isn't annihilated. In the same way, the mind that goes out from the body isn't annihilated. If it can remain on its own, without having to depend on a body, it doesn't appear in any way, shape, or form anywhere at all. That's the awareness of nibbāna.

This is the kind of awareness that's really like electric light. Whenever we want it, it's there for us to know. Sometimes even if we don't want to know, we still end up knowing. As for ordinary people, even if they want to know things, they often don't know; they often don't see even when they want to see. That's like torch light or candlelight: if there's no fuel, there's no way it can be bright.

This is why we're taught to train our minds to be firmly established in concentration —for the mind well-trained is what gives rise to the light of discernment that doesn't get deluded: the discernment that knows for sure.

Clinging

September 9, 1957

Clinging is the cause of all suffering and stress. It's what gives rise to states of becoming and birth. It's not at all safe. *Whatever appears and takes shape is bound to create suffering.* Just as when a person's money appears in a way that other people can see: there are bound to be thieves who will steal it away. When you have money, you're afraid if people see it. You're afraid even if they don't. In the same way, when people cling to the five aggregates as their self in this world, they suffer. When they die and go to the next world, they suffer still.

The clinging we feel has three kinds, or three time frames: past, present, and future. In each time frame there are five aggregates, which means that each of us has 15 aggregates. And when we have so many aggregates to carry around, it's no wonder we suffer. When we look ahead, we start wondering: "If I live until 60, 70, or 80, what's it going to be like? If I fall into poverty, what will I do?" When we think like this, we start worrying in all kinds of ways. If we think about good things, we get enthralled. If we think about bad things, we get disheartened. Some people think about bad things so much that they get really discouraged and despondent. That's because they cling to their thoughts and preoccupations. This is called having five heavy stones placed in front of us.

Then we turn around and look behind us: "When we die, what will happen to our children and grandchildren?" We might think of giving them part of the family fortune so that they'll be able to set themselves up in life. But then we think of how foolish they can be. "If they take our family fortune and gamble it all away, what will we do?" When we think like this, it makes us discouraged. Other times we think of our own good qualities, our children's good qualities, in the present, and it makes us happy. That's another five heavy stones. So altogether we have five stones in front of us, five stones behind us, and five stones in the present. Our right hand clings to physical phenomena, our left hand to mental phenomena. We hold on to form, feeling, perception, thought-constructs, and consciousness as our self. So we carry a burden in our right hand, a burden in our left hand, and more burdens placed on a pole over our shoulder. If we keep carrying these things around without ever putting them down, we'll meet with nothing but suffering. Then we grab onto the suffering so that we suffer even more, to the point where our faces are all contorted and our shoulders twisted out of shape.

This is why the Buddha had such compassion for us and taught us to *cāgo paṭinissago,* to relinquish and let go. Whoever doesn't put down the pole on his or her shoulder will never get away. If we can first let go of our thoughts of past and future, things will be

somewhat lighter. If we're only carrying things in our hands there's some hope that we'll be able to keep going. In other words, if we don't practice concentration, keeping our minds still and away from the Hindrances, we're still carrying a pole over our shoulders with burdens in front of us and behind us, all because we can't let go of our thoughts of past and future. *Thoughts of past and future are things we don't need to think about.* Whether they're our own affairs, the affairs of our children or grandchildren, or our business or financial affairs: when we've come to meditate like this, there's no need to think about anything at all. Be intent on sitting still. Keep your body straight, focus on watching only the present—the breath—and light will appear. Even though your right and left hands are still holding onto physical and mental phenomena, at least you've put down both burdens that were on your shoulders.

As for the physical phenomena that are still heavy, that's because the King of Death keeps sprinkling poison on them. For example, our eyes: At first they are clear. Everything we see is sharp and bright. But then the King of Death sprinkles his poison in them, making them murky and dark, or giving us cataracts. So we have to go running to have our eyes examined, to get glasses for them, to put medicine in them, to go in for surgery. They make us suffer in every way, so that our tiny little eyes start weighing as much as a fist in the face.

As for our ears, at first they can hear all kinds of sounds. Then the King of Death comes and sprinkles his poison in them so that they start ringing or going deaf. We can hardly hear what other people are saying, we can't understand what they're getting at, and this makes us irritable. They say bad things, and to us they sound good. Or they say good things, and to us they sound bad. We get things right and wrong, and this gives rise to quarrels and disagreements.

The same with our nose. At first it's in good shape, but then the King of Death sprinkles poison in it, so that tumors and growths develop. We have to go looking for medicinal snuff and inhalers, or for doctors to zap the growths with electricity. Our nose starts smelling bad and disfigures our face.

As for the tongue, body, and mind, they pile us high with pain in just the same way. This is why we're taught, *rūpaṁ aniccaṁ:* all physical forms are unstable and inconstant. If we get stuck on thinking about these things, it sets us on fire. Our skin and flesh grow flabby and wrinkled, our backs get bent, and as we grow older like this it's a burden both to our own hearts and to the hearts of our children and grandchildren. In addition, it's a burden in terms of the money we need to spend to look after ourselves.

Whoever holds onto unstable things as being his or her self will have to walk in an unstable way. Most of us tend to cling to the body and other physical things as being ours. Sometimes we cling to mental phenomena— feelings, perceptions, thought-constructs, and consciousness—as being ours. This is called carrying things in both hands. Still, it's better than carrying loads on a pole over our shoulder, for as long as our burdens are only in our hands we're able to sit or lie down. But if we have burdens on a pole over our

shoulder, we can't sit down. We have to keep standing.

For this reason we should train our hearts to be peaceful and still—in other words, to develop concentration. When the heart's tranquil and still, discernment will arise. When discernment arises, we'll understand our own birth: When we were born, we didn't bring along even a single tooth or piece of cloth. However we came is how we'll have to return. We won't be able to take a single thing along with us, aside from the good and evil that will take us to be reborn in good or bad destinations or that will send us to nibbāna. People who can meditate in this way will become light and unburdened, for they'll be able to let go of what they're carrying in their hands. In that way they'll be happy, for they've received three jewels to adorn themselves. When they get to the other side, they'll be able to sell them for a good price. As long as they stay here, they'll have good things to dress up with. Whoever has the intelligence to practice letting go in this way will receive wealth that's of value everywhere—like gold: No matter what country you go to, gold is recognized as having value. It's not like paper money, which is recognized only in your own country.

For this reason, when we can train the mind to let go—so that it's released from holding on to the future, the past, and the present— it's as if we've received an entire ingot of pure gold. We'll be happy at all times. But if we're stupid enough to hold onto things as our own, we'll set the mind on fire so that it won't know any peace.

This is why the Buddha has warned us: Whoever clings to physical or mental phenomena, or to mental labels and thoughts, will have to be so burdened that they won't be able to get anywhere. Ultimately, they'll have to die stuck in the world, like the monkey who stole melons from the old couple's field and ended up getting stuck in a tar trap and dying on the spot. It's a story they tell as an analogy of how painful and difficult clinging can be.

The story goes like this: Once an old couple lived at the edge of the forest near the foot of a mountain. It so happened that their rice fields were flooded and they couldn't grow any rice, so they cleared fields on the mountainside and planted them with corn, beans, watermelons, and cantaloupes to have enough food to make it through the year. At night, though, porcupines and other animals kept coming to eat their crops; while during the day, birds and monkeys would come and harass them. So eventually the old couple decided that they'd have to sleep out in the fields to keep watch over them and set out traps to protect them. The old man would keep watch at night, while the old woman would keep watch by day.

One day a troop of monkeys came and invaded the field. No matter how much the old woman tried to chase them away, they wouldn't leave her alone. They'd jump from that tree to this, teasing and pestering her to the point where she had no time for her midday rest. So she came up with an idea. She went into the forest and found some tree sap that she boiled until it was a nice sticky tar. Then she took the tar and spread it all over any trees or stumps that the monkeys liked to use as their perches.

The next day a huge troop of monkeys came, stealing watermelons and cantaloupes and eating their fill. Now one of the monkeys, a female, had two babies. One of her babies was sick, so she left it home with her husband for him to look after, while she came along with the troop with the other baby hanging down in front of her chest. While eating the melons she thought of her sick baby, so she decided to take some back for the baby and her husband. When she had eaten her fill, she stuffed two tiny melons into her cheeks for her baby and grabbed a largish melon that she hugged to her chest for her husband. As for the baby hanging in front of her, she had it hang onto her back.

Just as she was all set to go, the old woman—carrying a shovel—happened to come across the monkeys and gave chase. Startled, the monkeys all ran off—except for the mother monkey, who could do nothing but jump back and forth because she was so weighed down: weighed down in front, weighed down in back, weighed down in her mouth. She tried calling for help, but no sound came out. She happened to jump up onto a stump that the old woman had smeared with a thick, soft glob of tar. The old woman came straight at her with the shovel, so the monkey decided to jump away but she couldn't budge. Her tail was curled up and stuck in the tar. She tried to pry her tail loose with one of her paws, but the paw got stuck. She used her other paw to pry off the tar, but that one got stuck, too. Seeing that the tar on her paw was black and sticky, she sniffed it, only to get her paw stuck to her nose. With one of her back feet she tried to push herself off the stump, but the foot got stuck. Then she used the other foot to wipe the first one off, but her two feet got stuck together as if they were tied up with a rope. She couldn't move. All she could do was look around grimacing, just like a monkey. After a moment's thought she bent down and bit the tar in furious anger. She wanted to bite the old woman but all she could do was bend down and bite tar.

As for the old woman, when she saw the monkey all stuck in the tar like this, she called the old man to come and see. Then the two of them found a red ants' nest and broke it over the monkey. Then they set fire to her hair, tormenting her there on the stump. Finally one of them took a hoe handle while the other took a shovel handle, and the two of them beat the monkeys—mother and baby—to a miserable death.

This is the result of clinging and attachment: clinging to the future, clinging to the past, clinging to the present: the baby on her back and the melon she was holding to her chest. That's why she had to suffer so much.

For this reason, when we can train the mind to let go—so that it's released from holding on to the future, the past, and the present— it's as if we've received an entire ingot of pure gold. We'll be happy at all times. But if we're stupid enough to hold onto things as our own, we'll set the mind on fire so that it won't know any peace.

This is why the Buddha has warned us: whoever clings to physical or mental phenomena, or to mental labels and thoughts, will have to be so burdened that they won't be able to get anywhere. Ultimately, they'll have to die stuck in the world, like the monkey stuck in a tar trap.

Whoever clings is said to be heavily burdened. As long as we're alive, we have trouble finding true goodness. When we die, we have heavy burdens lying in our way. This is why the Buddha teaches us to let go. Don't grasp onto thoughts of past, future, or present. Make the mind like water on a lotus leaf, which doesn't seep in. It reaches a quality that doesn't die, doesn't come back to be born in this world or any other. Free from suffering and stress, it reaches the highest, most excellent ease.

So we should all try our best to lighten our burdens.

Letting Go

Notes from a Talk
April 21, 1953

Letting go.

One of the important reasons why the Buddha taught the Dhamma was to teach us to let go, not to hold on to things. The more we really know the Dhamma, the more we can let go. Those who know a little can let go of a little; those who know a lot can let go of a lot.

As a first step we're taught *dāna*—to be generous, to give donations—as a strategy for getting us to learn how to let go. The next step is *cāga*—renouncing rights of possession—which is letting go at a higher level than dāna. And finally, on a more refined level, we're taught to relinquish all our *upadhi,* or the acquisition-defilements in the mind. This is the level on which we examine and explore until we can gain total release.

Dana means giving away material things. If we don't give them away, they're hard to let go. For the most part, if we don't give things away, we hold rights over them and regard them as belonging to us. But if we give them away, we no longer have any rights over them. Things we hold onto are dangerous. (1) They can cause us harm. (2) They cause harm to people who steal them from us. And (3) once those people have stolen them, then *they* claim rights over them. The Buddha saw these dangers, which is why he taught us to be generous, to learn how to give things away.

People who develop the habit of being generous reap many rewards. Their act of generosity comes back to them both in the present and on into the future. They have lots of friends. Other people trust them. Their hearts are light—they aren't weighed down with worries about looking after the things they've given away. And these same results will keep coming in the future, just as when we have a bucket of rice grains: if we plant them in a field, we'll reap ten buckets of rice in return. The same holds true with the goodness we develop in this lifetime. It gives enormous returns. That's how people of discernment understand it.

Cāga is the next step. Dana is something that even crazy people can do, but cāga is a type of giving that only wise people can do, because their sense of personal possession has to end immediately in the act of giving. They see that all material things are common property: things don't really belong to us, they don't really belong to other people. If you see things as belonging to you, that's addiction to sensuality *(kāmasukhallikānuyoga).* If you see things as belonging to others, that's addiction to self-affliction

(attakilamathānuyoga). When we're born, we didn't bring anything along with us when we came. When we die, we won't take anything along when we go. So what really belongs to us? Our sense of possession has to fall away from the heart if our giving is to count as cāga.

The third level of letting go is relinquishing what's in the heart. Whether or not we give things away, we let go of them in the heart every day. We let go of the things we have. We let go of the things we don't have. Just as a person has to wash his mouth and hands every day after he eats if he wants to stay clean at all times. What this means is that we're not willing to let anything act as an enemy to the heart by making us stingy or grasping. If we don't do this, we're the type of person who doesn't wash up after a meal. We're not clean. We stay asleep without ever waking up. But when we let go in this way, it's called *virāga-dhamma,* or dispassion. The lower levels of letting go are things we can do only from time to time. Dispassion is something we can develop always.

Ordinarily our defilements tie us down hand and foot, and then nail us to the floor. It's hard to get free, which is why we need a high level of skill, called *bhāvanāmaya-paññā* —the discernment that comes from developing the mind in meditation—to gain release.

Dispassion is a mental quality that's really delicious and nourishing. Whoever hasn't reached this level of the Dhamma has eaten only the rind of the fruit, without knowing the taste and nourishment of the flesh. The good part of the flesh lies deep.

The *upadhi-kilesas,* or acquisition-defilements in the mind, are ignorance, craving, and clinging. If we reach the level where we see the Dhamma for ourselves within us, then we take responsibility for ourselves. We can take care of these things on our own, just as when we come of age in terms of the law.

If we can get our minds into the first *jhāna,* we can let go of the five hindrances.

Most of us are like inexperienced children: when we eat fish or chicken, we eat the bones along with the flesh because we haven't developed any intuitive insight. When this insight arises, it's more dazzling than the light of a fire, sharper than a spear. It can consume anything: meat, bones, rice, husks—anything—because it's smart enough to pound everything into a powder. It can consume sights, sounds, smells, flavors, tactile sensations, and ideas. Good or bad, it isn't picky. It can eat them all. If people praise us, we can use it to nourish the heart. If they criticize us, we can use it to nourish the heart. Even if the body is in terrible pain, the heart can be at its ease, for it has all the utensils it needs to fix its food properly: grinders, mixers, steamers, pots, and pans. The fog of ignorance will scatter. Everything that ties us down—the nails of the five aggregates of clinging, the three ropes (love for spouse, love for children, love for material possessions), and the eight chains of the affairs of the world *(loka-dhamma)*—gain, loss, status, loss of status, praise, criticism, pleasure, and pain—will all fall away.

Stupid people think that staying in jail is comfortable, which is why they keep on doing more and more evil. They see the world as pleasant and so they're like prisoners

who don't want to get out of jail. As for people with discernment, they're like the caged quail who keeps looking for a way to get out of the cage. As a result the chains that hold them down will fall away one link at a time. The eight affairs of the world are like the chains put on criminals to keep them bound. Stupid people think these chains are necklaces of gold to wear as ornaments. Actually, they're things that defile the mind. People who get tied down by them will never get away, because they're afraid they'll lose their wealth and status, afraid of criticism and pain. Anyone who is stuck on pleasure, who is afraid of criticism, will never manage to come to the monastery to practice.

The Buddha saw that we're like monkeys tied to a chain. If we don't develop liberating insight, we'll never get free from our chains. We'll never make it to dispassion.

In the first stage we let go of evil and start doing good. In the second stage we let go of evil and some forms of good. In the third stage we let go of everything, good and evil, because everything is fabricated by nature and thus undependable. We do good but we're not attached to it. When you let go, you have do it intelligently, and not in a ruinous way —i.e., by not doing good. You can't hold on even to your opinions, much less to material things. When you do good, you do it for the sake of the living beings of the world, for your children and grandchildren. You do everything in the best way possible, but you're not attached to it, because you know that all things fabricated are inconstant. This way your heart can be clear and bright like a jewel.

If you get caught up on criticism or praise, you're foolish. It's like drinking other people's saliva. When you act rightly, there are people who will say that you're right and those who will say that you're wrong. When you act wrong, there are people who will say you're wrong and those who will say you're right. There's nothing constant about good or bad, for they're all nothing but fabrications.

Three Principles

July 6, 1956

In brief, there are three principles that are really basic to meditation:

1) The right intention: You have to make up your mind that you're going to let go of all thoughts and preoccupations dealing with the world. You aren't going to keep them to think about. Every thought and concept dealing with the past or future is an affair of the world, and not of the Dhamma. Make up your mind that you're going to do one thing right now: the work of the religion, and nothing else. In other words, you're going to work on the immediate present. This is called the right intention.

2) The right object: This means the right theme or focal point for the mind. The theme here is *dhātuvavatthana,* or resolution into the properties, one of the themes in taking the body as a frame of reference *(kāyānupassanā-saṭipaṭṭhāna).* In short, we're going to look at the four properties that make up the body: the properties of earth, water, wind, and fire. The earth property covers the hard parts of the body, such as the bones. The water property covers the liquid parts, such as urine, saliva, blood, and pus. The fire property covers the heat and warmth in the body. The wind property covers the feelings of energy that flow in the body, such as the breath. Of all these properties, the most important one is the wind property, or the breath. If other parts of the body get damaged—say, if our eyes go blind, our ears go deaf, our arms and legs get broken—it can still survive. But if it doesn't have any breath, it can't last. It'll have to die. So the breath is an important object because it forms a basis for our awareness.

3) The right quality: This means the feelings of comfort or discomfort that arise in the body. When you take care of the in-and-out breath so that it flows freely through the various parts of the body, it'll give rise to results. Take good note of whether the results that the body and mind reap from the breath are good or bad. Does the body feel open and at ease, or does it feel tight and constricted? Does the mind feel calm, quiet, and pleasant, or is it irritable, distracted, and chaotic? If the body and mind feel at ease, that counts as good results. If the opposite is true, then that counts as bad results. So you have to gain a sense of how to adjust the breath so that it becomes comfortable.

As for the right qualities of the mind, those are mindfulness and alertness. Try to keep following these three basic principles every time you practice

concentration. Only then will you get results that are full and correct.

As for the rewards of concentration, there are lots of them. They arise in line with the power of the mind of the person meditating, as I'll explain at a later date.

Three Strands of a Rope

August 19, 1959

If you've never meditated, these two easy principles are all you have to understand: (1) Think of the qualities of the Buddha; and (2) think of bringing them into your mind. What this means is, be mindful to make the mind firmly established solely in the breath, without forgetting it or letting yourself get distracted.

Not forgetting the breath means being mindful of the in-and-out breath at all times. Not getting distracted means that you don't grab hold of anything else to think about. If the mind is focused but you're thinking about something else, it's not called Right Concentration. Your mindfulness has to keep within the bounds of the work you're doing, in other words, staying with the breath.

Don't put pressure on the breath, tense it up, or hold it. Let it flow easily and comfortably, as when you put a fresh egg in cotton batting. If you don't throw it or push it down, the egg won't get dented or cracked. This way your meditation will progress smoothly.

The breath is one thing, mindfulness is another, and your awareness, still another. You have to twist these three strands together so that they don't break away from one another. In other words, your awareness has to stay with the act of mindfulness, thinking about the breath. And both your awareness and mindfulness have to stay with the breath. Only then can you say that these things are factors of meditation.

When you can twist these three strands into a single rope, focus your awareness on observing the in-and-out breath to see whether it's comfortable or not, expansive or confined, broad or narrow. Whichever way of breathing feels comfortable, keep breathing in that way. If the breath isn't comfortable, keep changing it until it is.

If you force the mind too much, it's bound to pop away. If you loosen your grip too much, it's going to get lost. So try to tend to it in a way that's just right. The important point is that your mindfulness and alertness be circumspect, making adjustments throughout the breath. Don't let the mind go flowing out after other preoccupations.

Mindfulness is like a person who's awake and alive. If the mind lacks mindfulness, it's like we're sleeping with dead bodies in a cemetery. There's nothing but foul smells and fear. This is why we're taught to be mindful of ourselves in the present moment at all times. Cut away all thoughts of past and future without grabbing onto them to think about, for these things are deceitful and illusory, like spirits and demons. They waste your time and pull you down. So be aware simply of the breath, for the breath is what gives life

and leads you to higher happiness.

Mindfulness is like a magic soap that scrubs the breath. Alertness is another bar of magic soap for scrubbing the mind. If you constantly have mindfulness and alertness in conjunction with the breath and the mind, your body and mind will be valuable and pure, so that as long as you live in the world you'll be at your ease; when you die, you won't be put to difficulties.

If the mind is focused but forgets the breath and goes thinking about other things, that's called Wrong Concentration. If the mind drops some of its Hindrances, such as sensual desire, by falling asleep, that's called Wrong Release. Only if the mind is firmly focused on mindfulness and the breath is it in Right Concentration. Only if it drops its Hindrances by being wise to their tricks is it called Right Release.

If mindfulness and alertness are constantly established in the mind, our views will become straight, our concentration will become right, just as when two beams of light meet: they give rise to the bright light of discernment. There are times when discernment arises for only a tiny moment in the mind, and yet it can kill off enormous defilements. For example, it can let go of all the aggregates of clinging. It can abandon self-identity views by letting go of the body; it can abandon attachment to practices and precepts by letting go of feeling; and it can abandon uncertainty by letting go of perception, mental fabrications, and consciousness.

We're taught to develop this sort of discernment by practicing Right Concentration. Even if it arises only for the flash of an eye, it can bring us many, many benefits. Just like an atomic bomb: even though it's only a tiny thing, it can bring destruction to the world in an awesome way.

The discernment arising from within the mind is something that can't be described. It's a tiny, little thing, not like the knowledge that comes from studying and memorizing in school. That's why we can't talk about it. The Buddha even laid down training rules for the monks, forbidding them from talking about their spiritual attainments. This is why we can't know if other people are noble disciples. It's something that each noble disciple can know only for him or herself alone.

At the Gate of a Cattle-pen

August 23, 1959

I'd like to recommend the basic principles of sitting in meditation for newcomers who've never done it before.

1. Make up your mind that you're not going gather up anything else to think about, that you're going to think about only one thing: the qualities of the Buddha, or the word *buddho.*

2. Be firmly mindful of the breath, thinking *bud-* with the in-breath, and *dho* with the out. Or if you want, you can simply think *buddho, buddho* in the mind.

3. Make the mind still and then drop the word *buddho* so that you can simply observe nothing but the in-and-out breath. It's like standing at the gate of a cattle-pen and keeping watch over the cattle to see their characteristics as they come in and out of the pen. What color are they—black? red? white? spotted? Are they old or young? Are they calves or fully grown? Make sure you don't go walking in with the cattle yet, for they might kick you and break your shins, or gore you to death with their horns. Stay right at the gate. What this means is that you keep your mind still in one point. You don't have to make it go in and out with the breath. Observing the characteristics of the cattle means learning how to observe the breath: Does breathing in short and out short feel good, or does in long and out long feel good? How about in long and out short, or in short and out long? Learn to recognize which type of breathing is most comfortable, and then stick with it.

So there are three steps you have to follow: the first step is to stay mindful of the word *buddho.* The second is to be mindful of the breath, thinking *bud-* with the in breath and *dho* with the out. Don't forget. Don't get distracted. The third step, when the mind is still, is to drop the word *buddho* and to be observant of nothing but the in-and-out breath.

When you can do this, the mind will grow still. The breath will be still, too, like a dipper floating in a barrel of water: the water is still, the dipper is still, because no one is pressing on it, tipping it, or hitting against it. The dipper will keep floating in perfect stillness on the surface of the water. Or you can say that it's like climbing up to the top of a very tall mountain, or like floating up above the clouds. The mind will feel nothing but a cool sense of pleasure and ease. This is the root, the heartwood, the apex of all that is skillful.

It's called the root because it's a good quality that runs deep and tenacious right down

the middle of the heart. It's called the heartwood because it's solid and resilient, like the heartwood of a tree that insects can't burrow into and destroy. Even though insects may be able to nibble away at the tree, they can go only as far as the bark or the sapwood. In other words, even though distractions may come and bother us, they can reach only as far as the sense doors: our eyes, ears, nose, tongue, and body. For example, when sights strike against the eye, they go only as far as the eye. They don't get into the heart. When sounds strike the ear, they go only as far as the ear, and not into the heart. When smells strike the nose, they go only as far as the nose. They don't enter the heart. This is why we say that the goodness of meditation is the heartwood of what's skillful, because the various forms of evil can't easily destroy the goodness of the heart when it's solid and stable, in the same way that insects can't bore into heartwood.

The skillfulness of a mind in concentration is called the apex of all that's skillful because it's high in quality. It can pull all other forms of goodness into the mind as well. When the mind is still, its goodness spreads out to cover the entire body, so that we stop doing unskillful things with the body. It will cover our speech, so that we stop saying unskillful things with our mouth. The unskillful things we've done with our eyes, ears, hands, will all get washed away. In this way, the goodness that comes from meditating will wash out our eyes and ears, will wash our hands and all the various parts of our body so that they all become clean.

When we have cleanliness in charge of our body, it's a goodness that's high in quality —just as rain falling from high up in the sky spreads to cover everything. The higher it comes from, the more territory it covers. When the mind is high in quality, its goodness spreads to cover our eyes, ears, nose, tongue, and body. It spreads to cover sights, sounds, smells, tastes, and tactile sensations. It spreads to cover our thoughts of past and future. In this way, this goodness spreads out until eventually it covers the entire cosmos. These, in short, are a few of the rewards that come from meditation.

The high-quality goodness coming from meditation is like rain falling from high in the sky. Not only does it wash away the dirty things on the ground, but it also nourishes the plants so that human beings can depend on them. In addition, it refreshes people with its coolness. The Buddha showered his goodness on the world beginning from the very day of his Awakening, and his goodness is still raining on us 2,500 years later. The Buddha was a Great Being because of the high-quality goodness he developed through his meditation—the same meditation we're doing right now.

To put it simply: every aspect of meditation is good. No matter how much you do, even if you don't seem to be getting any results, it's all good regardless. Even when you simply repeat the word *buddho,* it's good for the mind. When you're mindful of the breath, it's good for the mind. When you can make the mind still with the breath, it's good for the mind. For this reason, meditation is something you should do at all times. Don't let the time and opportunity to meditate pass you by.

Starting Out Small

May 17, 1959

The power of the Buddha is more tremendous than that of all other beings, human and divine. His body is enormous, in that we've been making representations of it from ancient times up to the present and yet still haven't finished the job. His mouth is enormously wide. Many are the things that he said only once but that other people have repeated without ceasing: here I'm talking about his teachings, which members of the Saṅgha have copied down into texts and delivered as sermons for us to hear up to the present. The Buddha's physical mouth was small, but his words are amazingly great, which is why we say that his mouth is wide. His eyes are wide as well: they've seen the true nature of the entire cosmos. This is the way it is with people who are really good: they tend to have this kind of enormous greatness.

Big things like this have to come from small things. Before the Buddha could become enormous in this way, he first had to make himself small. In other words, he cut himself off from his royal family and went alone into the forest to sit under the branches of the Bodhi tree on the banks of the Nerañjarā River. He let his in-and-out breathing grow smaller and smaller until it was extremely subtle, and there the fire of his defilements and mental fermentations went totally out without trace. He awakened to the foremost right self-awakening, becoming a Buddha. His heart, which he had let grow so extremely subtle and small, exploded outward in goodness in a way that is still blatant to us even today.

So I ask that we all set our minds on really practicing concentration. Don't worry about the past or the future or anything else. When the mind is firmly set in concentration, knowledge and discernment will arise without our having to worry about them. Don't let yourself think that you want to know this or see that. These things will come on their own. As the proverb says, "Those with a lot of greed get only a little to feed on; those content with only a pinkie's worth will get a whole thumb." Keep bearing this point in mind.

For the mind to range far and wide, wandering after outside concepts and preoccupations, saps the strength it needs to deal with its various affairs. Whatever it then thinks of doing will succeed only with difficulty. It's like a gun with a broad-gauged barrel. If you put tiny bullets into it, they rattle around inside and don't come out with much force. The narrower the gauge of the barrel, the more force the bullets will have when you shoot them out. It's the same with the breath: The more you narrow its focus, the more refined the breath will become, until eventually you can breathe through your pores. The mind at this stage has more strength than an atomic bomb.

Intelligent orchard owners get their bananas to help them plant their orchard, get their mangoes to help them plant their orchard. They don't have to invest a lot of capital. In other words, they clear the land bit by bit, plant it bit by bit, harvest bit by bit, sell bit by bit, until the orchard grows larger and larger all the time. This way they don't need to invest much in terms of labor or capital, but the results they get are large and lasting. As for stupid people, when they start an orchard, no matter how large, they pour all their money into it, hiring people to clear the land, plow it, and plant it all at once. If they run into a drought for three days or seven days running, their plants all wither and die. Grass and weeds spring up and overrun the place. At that point, there's nothing the owners can do, because the orchard is way too big for them. They don't have the money to hire the workers again, because they used up all their funds right at the beginning. All they can do is sit with their arms around their knees, blinking back the tears. They've lost all their capital and have no profits to show. That's the way it is with people who are greedy. As for those who keep at their work steadily, bit by bit, the results keep growing bigger and bigger all the time.

Housework & Fieldwork

August 4, 1956

When we sit and meditate, there are three things we have to work with:

1)The breath: make it the object of the mind.

2)Mindfulness: think of the meditation word *bud-* with the in-breath and *dho* with the out.

3)The mind: keep the mind both with the breath and with the meditation word. Let the breath flow comfortably. Let the mind be at ease. Don't force the breath or try to put the mind into a trance. Keep the mind firm and upright, and don't let it slip off here or there.

These are the things we have to study—not just so that we'll know them. We study them so that we can put them into practice, i.e., we practice them so that we'll come to the knowledge we really want.

In keeping the mind pure, we have to cut away perceptions so that they don't stick in the heart. It's like looking after a white sheet spread on our bed. We have to watch out for any dust that will blow in on the wind and land on the sheet, and for any insects—such as ants or bed bugs—that will come to live there. If we see any dust, we have to take the sheet and shake it out. Wherever there are any stains, we have to launder it immediately. Don't let them stay long on the sheet or else they'll be hard to wash out. If there are any insects, we have to remove them, for they may bite us and give us a rash or keep us from sleeping soundly. When we keep looking after our sheet in this way, it will have to stay clean and white and be a comfortable place for us to sleep.

The dust and insects here are the Hindrances that are the enemies of the heart. We have to look after our heart in just the same way we look after our bedding. We can't let any outside perceptions come in and stick to the heart or nibble at it. We have to brush them all away. That way the mind will become calm, free from distractions.

When we meditate, we're giving rise to skill in three ways: we aren't harming anyone with our body; we aren't bad-mouthing anyone with our speech; and we're getting the mind to stay with good intentions. In other words, we're staying with *buddho* with every in-and-out breath, so we're not thinking of doing anything evil, and we don't think thoughts of anger or hatred about anyone. This way our body, speech, and mind are pure. This is what gives rise to merit and skill, for we're not doing any evil at all.

When we think of the breath in this way, it's as if we're painting a picture on a piece of

white cloth. Our mind in its ordinary state is like a plain piece of cloth, with no patterns or designs. When we raise the mind to a higher level and think of the factors of meditation, it's like drawing a mental picture on it. For example, the word *buddho* is a mental picture, inasmuch as we can't see it with our eyes, but we can see it through our thinking. If we think of it constantly, it's as if our ink or paint seeps deep into the cloth. If we don't think *buddho,* or think of it in only a superficial way, it's like drawing with a pencil. The picture won't stick and seep into the heart. It might get smeared or entirely erased.

Then we add details to our picture: this is what's meant by evaluation *(vicāra).* If we keep at it, our picture will become more and more elaborate. As the picture becomes more and more elaborate, we'll notice whether the in-and-out breath has become comfortable or not. If it's easy and comfortable, keep it that way. Sometimes you'll notice that the mind is comfortable but the body isn't; sometimes the body is comfortable but the mind is irritable and distracted; sometimes the body is reasonably comfortable and at ease, and the mind has settled down and isn't jumping about. So when you see any aspect that isn't comfortable, you should fix it, in the same way that a rice farmer has to keep careful watch over the sluice gates in his field, clearing out any branches or stumps that will cut off the flow of the water. When you see anything that isn't good, you should get rid of it. You have to stay observant of the breath, to see if it's too slow or too fast, or if it's making you tired. If it is, change it.

This is like plowing or harrowing your field. When the big clods of earth get broken up and spread around, the field will be level. When the body gets level and smooth, keep it going that way. The mind will then become level and smooth as well—for it lives with the body, and now it gets to stay in a place of comfort. Whether it's good in every part, or only in some parts, you'll know.

When we give rise to skill in the mind like this, it's as if we've gained wealth. And when we gain wealth, things are bound to come and disturb us, just as a tree with beautiful, fragrant flowers tends to have caterpillars or insects disturbing its flowers. When the virtues of the Buddha, Dhamma, and Saṅgha arise in the heart, there are bound to be things that will disturb or destroy them, such as visions or Hindrances, just as when a flower is pestered by insects, it may fall away from the tree. When it falls off the tree, it won't be able to bear fruit. The same with your mind: Don't let your goodness fall away under the influence of the Hindrances. You have to keep after it, to make sure that it stays still and established in the body until there's no sense of anything disturbing it or trying to destroy it. The mind will then be like a spray of mango flowers nourished with drops of mist. In no long time it will bear fruit, and you'll be able to harvest the fruit and eat it in comfort.

In the Dhammapada, the Buddha says that a person who is forgetful or heedless is like a dead person. In other words, if mindfulness lapses for a moment, you've passed out for a moment. If it lapses for a long time, you've passed out for a long time. So if you realize that it's lapsed, you have to correct things immediately. In other words, you re-establish

mindfulness right away. If you've realized it's lapsed, there's at least some hope for you. Some people don't even know that it's lapsed: those are the ones who are hopeless. As the Buddha said, *Pamādo maccuno padaṁ:* heedlessness is the path of death. This is because heedlessness is delusion, the root of unskillfulness. When delusion arises, it opens the way for all kinds of evil and unskillful things. So we should try to uproot it immediately before it starts growing and spreading its branches far and wide. When mindfulness lapses, it opens the way for us to think of all kinds of things, making it hard for us to finish our work. To say nothing of keeping track of the breath, if mindfulness keeps lapsing we couldn't even finish writing a single letter.

So we have to be especially careful to maintain mindfulness. Don't let yourself forget or lose track of what you're doing.

Strength for the Journey

May 7, 1958

When you sit in concentration, you have to keep being observant to see whether the mind is established in all the component factors of meditation. Your practice of concentration has to be composed of three component factors for it to count as correct in line with the principles of meditation that will give rise to the full results that we all want. The component factors of meditation are:

1.The right object. This refers to the object on which the mind settles—or in other words, the breath. We have to focus our awareness on the breath and not let it stray out in other directions. This is the "*ṭhāna*" or foundation of our *kammaṭṭhāna.*

2.The right intention. Once we've focused our awareness on the in-and-out breath, we have to keep our mindfulness fixed solely on the breath by thinking *bud-* in with the in-breath, and *dho* out with the out. We have to keep doing this until the mind is still and in place. Then we can drop the meditation word. Once the mind is still and doesn't go wandering off in other places, mindfulness will stay snug with the breath without slipping away or growing absent minded. This is the intention, the *kamma* of our *kammaṭṭhāna.*

3.The right quality. This refers to the skill with which we can improve, adjust, and spread the breath so that it becomes comfortable. For example, if short breathing is uncomfortable, change it so that it's a little longer. If long breathing is uncomfortable, change it so that it's a bit shorter. Observe long breathing, short breathing, fast or slow breathing, and then keep on breathing in whichever way is most comfortable. If any problem or discomfort arises, make further changes. But don't tense up the breath or try to hold it. Let the body breathe in and out with a sense of ease. The breath will then feel wide open, agile, and spacious. It won't get bottled up in any one spot, won't feel heavy or confined. When this is the case, a sense of fullness and refreshment, a cool sense of ease will arise in the mind. As for the body, it'll feel at ease as well. This is the essence of what is good, the skillfulness that we all desire.

When we can train the mind to stay firmly in these three factors of meditation, it'll become tame and obedient, and no longer stubborn—because once our mind becomes skillful and intelligent, it'll gain a sense of what's good for us, what's not, what are the affairs of other people, what are our own affairs. When this happens, there won't be a lot

of confusion. It's the same as when we've trained an ox. We can put it to good work and won't have to waste a lot of rope to keep it tied down. That's when we can be at our ease. Even if we let it wander off on its own, it won't get lost. When it goes away, it'll come back to its pen on its own, for it knows which pen belongs to its owner, which pens belong to other people, which person is its owner and which people are not, which plants are the grasses it can eat, which plants are the rice plants it shouldn't. This way it won't invade the fields of other people, trampling their crops and eating their rice, which would give rise to all sorts of controversies and bad feelings. That way, we can live in peace.

It's the same with the mind. Once it's trained, it'll become tame. It won't go traipsing off after external thoughts and preoccupations. Normally, the mind doesn't like to stay with the body in the present. Sometimes it goes flowing out the eyes, sometimes out the ears, sometimes out the nose, the tongue, and the body, so that it splits into five different currents, just like a river that splits into five channels instead of staying in one: the force of the current gets weakened. And in addition to leaking out the five sense doors after sights, sounds, smells, tastes, and tactile sensations, the mind also goes flowing out after thoughts of the past and thoughts of the future without ever staying firmly in the present. This is why it knows no peace, because it doesn't get any time to rest. As a result, its strength begins to fail, and when the strength of the mind grows weaker, so does the strength of the body. When this is the case, we can't bring any of our projects to completion, either in the area of the world or of the Dhamma.

When this happens, we're like a sick person who's a burden on his doctors and nurses. The doctors have to keep making visits to check up on his symptoms. The nurses have to feed him, give him medicine, and take him to the bathroom. When he tries to sit up, he needs someone to support him. The people looking after him have to go without sleep both by day and by night, and can never leave him alone. As for the people financially responsible, they have to run around trying to find money to pay the medical bills. The whole family is worried and concerned, and the sick person himself can find no comfort. He can't go anywhere, can't do anything, can't eat solid food, can't get any sleep: everything becomes a problem.

In the same way, when our minds aren't quiet and still, and instead keep flowing out after concepts and preoccupations, we're like sick people. We don't have the strength to bring our work to completion. This is because the untrained mind goes wandering off as it likes and is very stubborn. You can't tell it to do anything at all. If you tell it to lie down, it'll sit down. If you tell it to sit down, it'll get up and walk. If you tell it to walk, it'll start running. If you tell it to run, it'll stop. You can't really control it at all. When this is the case, all sorts of unskillful qualities—ignorance and defilements like greed, anger, and delusion, or the five Hindrances—will come flowing into the mind, overcoming it and possessing it in the same way that people get possessed by spirits. When this is the case, we're in all sorts of trouble and turmoil—all because the mind doesn't have the strength it needs to withstand ignorance or to drive it out of the heart.

The Buddha saw that this is the way things are for people by and large, causing them to suffer, which is why he taught us to gather up the strength of body and strength of mind we need to fight off these various forms of suffering. In other words, he taught us to practice concentration so as to make the strength of our mind firm and solid. Practicing concentration means training the mind to be quiet and still. As the mind stays quiet and still for longer and longer periods of time, it'll become clear. When it's clear, the light of discernment will arise within it. This discernment is the strength that will enable the mind to contend with all sorts of events, both good and bad, for it'll have the intelligence enabling it to wise up to all the preoccupations coming in by way of the eyes, ears, nose, tongue, body, and intellect. It will be able to identify perceptions of past, present, and future. It will be acquainted with the properties, aggregates, and sense media, knowing what's good, what isn't, what's worth thinking about, what's not, what's untrue, what's true. When it knows this, it'll become dispassionate, disenchanted, and will let go of all thoughts and concepts, let go of its attachments to the body, let go of its attachments to things outside, all of which arise from the process of fabrication and have no real enduring essence.

When the mind can let go of all thoughts and preoccupations, it'll become light and agile, like a person who has put down all the burdens she's been carrying on her shoulders and in her hands. She can walk, run, and jump with agility. She can sit down or lie down with ease. Wherever she goes, she's comfortable. When the mind has experienced a sense of comfort, it'll become happy and full. It won't feel hungry. When it's full and happy, it can rest. Once it's rested, it'll have strength. Whatever tasks it undertakes, in terms of the world or the Dhamma, will succeed. If the mind lacks a sense of fullness, though, it'll be hungry. When it's hungry, it's in a lousy mood: irritable and upset. When this is the case, it's like a sick person who doesn't have the strength to complete any task with ease.

As for people who have practiced concentration to the point where their minds are quiet and still, they're no longer hungry, for they have a sense of fullness within them. This gives them five kinds of strength—conviction, persistence, mindfulness, concentration, and discernment—which will enable them to advance to even higher levels of goodness. When the mind is still, it develops mental serenity. When the body is still, it develops physical serenity as well: the various properties within it are peaceful and harmonious, and don't quarrel with one another. The whole body is then bathed in the purity that comes flowing out the currents of the mind through the properties of earth, water, fire, and wind, caring for them and protecting them. When things are protected and cared for, they don't run down. In this way the properties of the body reach a state of harmony, giving them the strength they need to withstand feelings of pain and weariness. As for the mind, it'll develop greater and greater strength, enabling it to withstand all sorts of mental torments. It'll keep getting more and more powerful, like the gunpowder used to make rockets and fireworks. When it's lit, it explodes and shoots all the way up to the sky.

When we practice concentration, it's as if we were gathering provisions for a trip. The provisions here are the skillful qualities we develop in the mind. The more provisions we have, the more comfortably we can travel and the further we can go. We can go to the human world, the deva worlds, the brahmā worlds, or all the way to nibbāna. When we have a lot of provisions, our traveling is easy, for we can afford to go by car or by boat. We can stay in comfortable places and have plenty of food to eat. The trip won't tire us, and we can go far and fast. As for people with meager provisions, they can't afford the carfare, so they have to go barefoot, walking on gravel and stepping on thorns, exposed to the sun and rain. They can't stay in comfortable places; they're lacking in food; their progress is tiring and slow. By the time they reach their destination they're ready to give up, for they're all out of strength. But whether we travel quickly or slowly, we're all headed to the same destination. For example, suppose we're all going to Bangkok. Those who go by foot will get there in three months; those who go by car, in three days; while those who get on a plane will arrive in three minutes.

For this reason, you shouldn't get discouraged in your efforts to do what's good. Develop as much strength as you can, so that you'll have the provisions and vehicles you'll need to help speed you along to your goal. Once you've arrived, you'll experience nothing but happiness and ease. When you practice the Dhamma, even if you don't reach the paths, their fruitions, or nibbāna in this lifetime, at the very least you're developing the conditions that will help you along the way in the future.

When we meditate, it's as if we were driving a car on a trip. If you have a sense of how to adjust and improve your breath, it's like driving along a smooth, paved road. The car won't run into any obstacles, and even a long trip will seem short. As for people who aren't centered in concentration, whose minds are slipping and slithering around with no sense of how to improve their breathing, they're driving their car along a bumpy, unpaved road full of potholes. In some spots the bridges have collapsed. In others the road is washed out. What this means is that their mindfulness lapses and they let their minds fall into thoughts of the past and future. They don't stay put in the present. If they don't know how to repair their road, they'll keep running into dangers and obstacles. Their car will keep getting bogged down. Sometimes they spend weeks and months stuck in one place, and their short trip turns into a long one. Sometimes they go back to the beginning point and start all over again. Running back and forth like this, around and around in circles, they'll never be able to get to the goal.

So I ask that you all remember this discussion of the Dhamma and take it to heart. Try using it to make adjustments in your mind and see what happens. If you train the mind correctly in line with the three factors of meditation that I've mentioned here, you may well meet with the peace and happiness for which you aim.

Into Position

Undated, 1958

When meditators "get into position," exactly what are they doing? "Getting into position" means making the mind stay in place, making it stay with the body, not letting it go stay with other people or think about anything else at all. If the mind stays outside of the body, it's like a battery without any current. You can't get any use out of it. You can't use it to produce heat or give off light. So this is why we're taught to keep the mind inside.

When trees are withered and dry, it's because they don't have any water to nourish them. The same holds true with us. If the mind doesn't stay inside the body, the body won't flourish. It'll have to wither and wear out, grow ill in one way or another, and eventually die because of this disease or that. So the mind is like water that permeates the body to give it nourishment. If the mind focuses its attention outside of the body, then the body won't be able to gain any sense of freshness, fullness, or ease. This is because the mind is the most important factor influencing the body. It's our most valuable resource.

Now, when the mind is a valuable resource in this way, we should learn how to look after it. We have to hand it over to someone we can trust. In other words, we entrust it to somebody venerable. But the word venerable here doesn't mean the external venerables, like monks, because not all monks are trustworthy. Some of them are good monks, some of them aren't. If we let them cheat us out of our valuables, we end up even worse off than before. No, venerable here means internal venerables: the venerable qualities of the Buddha, Dhamma, and Saṅgha within the mind.

When we meditate, we're handing our minds over to these venerable qualities. They're qualities that are kind and considerate. They won't abuse us or cause anyone any harm. This is why we can wholeheartedly entrust our valuables—our mind—to them. For example, when we meditate *buddho, buddho,* we have to be sincere to these qualities. We really have to think about them. We don't just think about them in jest. "Thinking in jest" means that we think without really being intent. We have to be really intent on keeping *buddho* with the mind, and the mind with *buddho* each and every time we breathe in and out. This is what it means to be sincere in our thinking. It's the kind of thinking that serves a purpose.

The purpose here is to develop something of real and abundant essence within ourselves—to create results that will be lasting. Things that don't serve any real purpose are those giving results that don't last. When we talk about lasting results: for example, when you sit here and meditate, you'll find that the results will continue appearing even after you die. But if you aren't really meditating, if you let your mind think about other

things, you'll find that the results will vanish at death, because the things you think about aren't certain or sure. They're not lasting. They'll have to change, deteriorate, and end up disappearing and dying in the same way that you will.

When we make ourselves quiet and still—when we put the mind into concentration—it's as if we're charging our battery. Once our battery is charged, we can put it to use whenever we want. When our battery is fully charged—full of discernment—we can use it for any sort of purpose at all. We can hook it up to a wire and use it to cook our food or light our home. If we simply charge it, without connecting it up to anything, the current will stay there, cool in the battery, without causing danger of any sort, like the current in a flashlight cell. If a battery is just sitting there, we can touch it with our hands and see that it feels cool, not the least bit hot—and yet there's still the fire of electricity in there. If we need light or want to cook our food, all we have to do is hook up a wire and turn on the switch, and the electricity will come out of the battery to achieve whatever aims we have in mind.

Our "battery" is the mind in concentration. If we hook up the wire of ardency to roast our defilements, the power of our current, or discernment, will burn them to ashes. As when we cook food to get rid of its rawness: the food will be saved from going spoiled and will benefit the body. In the same way, people who have discernment within themselves can eliminate all the defilements that present a danger and cause suffering to the body and mind. This is why we're taught to develop concentration: so as to accumulate the discernment that will benefit us both in this present lifetime and on into the next.

Two Guardian Meditations

August 11, 1956

When you sit and meditate, keep observing two important factors:

1) the body, which is where the mind dwells; and
2) the mind, which is the factor responsible for good and evil.

The mind is a factor that's extremely fickle and fast. It likes to slip off looking for all sorts of nonsense, for things that bring us nothing but trouble. It doesn't like to stay in place. Now it goes running here, now it goes running there, bringing back different kinds of suffering. That's why we say that it's fickle and fast: easily diverted, hard to look after. Now, since our mind is so fickle and fast, the Buddha had to search for a method by which we can take this weak point and turn it around into something good. He teaches us to develop concentration by focusing on the body. In other words, he has us fix our attention on one of the really important factors of the body, the breath. The breath is what helps us find comfort and ease in all the parts of the body. It's what keeps the body alive. All of our sense doors—the eyes, the ears, the nose, the tongue, the body, and the mind—depend on the breath to create the sensations by which they receive impressions of outside things and bring them in to have an effect on the body. For instance, the function of the eyes is to receive impressions of forms for us to see. The function of the ears is to receive impressions of sounds for us to hear. The function of the nose is to receive impressions of aromas for us to smell. The function of the tongue is to receive impressions of flavors for us to taste. The function of the body is to receive impressions of tactile sensations for us to touch. The function of the mind is to receive impressions of the various things that come in via these other five senses.

So when we meditate, we have to close all of these sense doors off tight. We close our eyes: we don't have to look at pretty sights or ugly ones. We close our ears, so that we don't listen to anything that isn't necessary—i.e., anything that isn't beneficial to listen to. Only the words that advise us to do good should we listen to. As for the nose, it's necessary for life. If we don't have the nose as our breathing passage, we start having problems in the other parts of the body, so we keep it open. As for the mouth, we keep it closed. And as for the body, we keep it in one position, as when we sit with our legs crossed, like we're doing right now.

We have to try to keep these sense doors closed off, so that we don't use our eyes, ears, nose, tongue, body, or mind in any other activity aside from practicing concentration. We herd the mind into one preoccupation, so that it stays in its home, the body, with the

windows and doors all shut.

The mind is the heart-property or heart-element. The nature of the mind is that it's faster than the wind in the air, which flows to and fro, up and down, and never stays in place. So we have to bring our mindfulness into the mind so that we can take this weak point and turn it around into something good. This is called *bhāvanā,* or mental development through meditation. We focus on the breath and recollect the qualities of the Buddha. When we start off recollecting the Buddha in this way, we simply think of the word, *buddho.* We don't yet have to analyze what it means. *Buddho* is a name for mindfulness. It means being aware, being awake. But if we simply think of the word *buddho,* it doesn't fulfill all the factors for mental development through meditation. When we think the word, we have to steady and adjust it so that it stays in rhythm with the breath. When we breathe, we have to breathe just right, not too slow, not too fast, whatever feels natural. Then we think *buddho* back and forth with the breath, adjusting our thinking so that it merges with the breathing. That's when we can say that we're fulfilling the factors of meditation.

This is called recollection of the Buddha, in which we think of the qualities of the Buddha in an abbreviated way, depending on the breath as our focal point and keeping our mindfulness in charge of the thinking.

When mindfulness becomes one with the breath and with our awareness in this way, our various senses will grow even and calm. The mind will gradually grow more and more quiet, bit by bit. This is called getting established in the first "guardian meditation"—recollection of the Buddha—in which we use our thinking as a path of practice.

This kind of thinking gives results for Buddhists of all sorts. At the same time, it brings us into the factors that are helpful for the mind—mindfulness and alertness—the factors that support the mind in getting established in goodness.

The second guardian meditation is good will. The word good will—*mettā*—comes from *mitta,* or friend. As a quality, it means love, benevolence, familiarity, intimacy. When we imbue our mind with good will, we escape from animosity and hostility. In other words, we should remind ourselves that we're going to stay with our friend at all times. We won't go wandering off. We won't leave our friend in a lurch. Our friend, here, is the body, because the body and mind have to depend on each other at all times. The body has to depend on the mind. The mind has to depend on the body. When people are friends they have to love each other, wish each other well, stick with each other, be intent on helping each other at all times. They don't abandon each other.

So tell yourself that when the body breathes in, you're going to stick with the breath. In Pali, the breath is called *kāya-saṅkhāra,* or bodily fabrication, because it's what fixes the body to keep it alive. It's like the cook who fixes food in a home so that the people in the family can eat their fill and be happy. If there's something wrong with the cook, then there's going to be turmoil and chaos in the house. If the cook of the body—the breath—

gets weird, everyone else in the body—the properties of earth, water, wind, and fire—will all have to suffer and get thrown into a turmoil as well. So we can say that the breath is the property that looks after all the properties in the body. For example, we inhale the breath into the lungs. There it cleanses the blood in the lungs, which gets sent to the heart. The function of the heart is to send the blood out to nourish all the parts of the body, so that the blood and the breath energy flow normally. If the breath isn't as good as it should be, the lungs won't be as good as they should be. The heart won't be good, the blood it pumps out won't be good, so all the various parts of the body will have to suffer as a result. This is when the properties of the body are said to be defiled.

If the mind really has good will for the body, then it has to look after the breath in the body to keep it functioning properly. So we have to keep after our "cook" to make sure that she isn't filthy, lazy, or apathetic. Otherwise, she'll put poison in our food to kill us, or filth in our food to make us sick. So we have to make sure that our cook is clean and pure in her habits, as when we breathe the qualities of the Buddha in with the breath.

The breath accompanied by *buddho* is called the *sukka* breath, or the clean, clear breath. When the master of the house is clean and circumspect like this, the cook will have to be clean and circumspect, too. All the employees in the house will have to be clean. In other words, when we're mindful, the breath that goes into the body will be a pure breath. When it reaches the heart, it will cleanse the blood in the heart so that it's pure as well. When the heart pumps this pure blood, sending it to nourish the body, the body will be purified, too. And then the mind will have to feel well. In other words, the heart is good, the nourishment in the blood is good. When the mind is in good shape like this, the blood won't become abnormal. And when this good blood is sent to nourish the nerves throughout the body, the body will have to function well. It won't feel tired or aching.

This is because we've adjusted our breath well, so that we can treat all kinds of diseases and pains. When the purity of the breath spreads throughout every blood vessel, the bad things already there in the body will have to scatter. Those that haven't yet appeared won't be able to appear. This will help the body to be balanced and normal.

When the breath is in good shape and the heart is in good shape, then the fire property in the body won't be too strong. If the breath isn't right, or if it's too hot, then the fire property gets thrown out of balance. When it grows too hot, the blood thickens and gets stuck in the capillaries, making us sleepy or giving us a headache. If it grows too cold, it gives us the shivers or makes us feverish.

So the breath is more important than any of the other the properties in the body. It assists the fire property, which in turn distills the liquid property. The liquid property in the body falls into two sorts: the part that hardens and turns into earth, and the part that stays liquid by its nature. When the breath functions properly, all the other properties function properly, and the body will feel rested and at ease.

This is called showing good will for yourself. The mind sticks with the breath, the breath sticks with the body, the body sticks with the mind. They don't abandon one another. They're affectionate, intimate, harmonious—they're good friends.

When people stay together they become intimate and familiar with one another. If they don't stay with one another, they can't become familiar with one another. And when they're not on familiar terms, they don't really know one another.

When people are friends and on familiar terms, they trust one another. They tell one another their secrets. They don't hide what's going on. In the same way, when we become close friends with the body and on familiar terms, we're going to learn all the body's secrets. For instance, we may learn what kamma in the past led to the birth of the body the way it is—what our previous lifetimes were like, what good and bad things we did, that led to the body's being like this or that. We'll learn how the four properties of the body function. We'll learn how things arise and pass away at the properties of the eye, ear, nose, tongue, body, and intellect. We'll get to know the secrets of the various affairs connected with the body, because it will have to reveal its true nature to us in every way—just as when we open the cover on a serving dish, enabling us to see what's there in the dish.

When we come to know how things function in the body this way, that's called *vijjā,* or clear knowing. This sort of clear knowing arises from the stillness of the mind. When the body and mind are both quiet together, they give knowledge to each other. Just as with people: if we're friendly with them, they're bound to be friendly with us. If we're antagonistic with them, they're bound to be antagonistic with us. In the same way, when the body is friendly with the mind, the mind is bound to be friendly with the body. In other words, it can help the various parts of the body. It can help make the body act in line with its thoughts. If, for instance, there's a feeling of pain or weariness, we can gather the power of the mind at full strength to think of the feeling going away, and that feeling of pain or weariness may completely vanish, simply through the power of a single mental moment. People who have helped each other in the past have to help each other all the time. If we can help them, they're bound to be able to help us.

The ability to do this comes from the power of the mind that's capable of giving orders in line with its aspirations. When we can make our friend good through the power of our thought, then all our friends can become good. For example, when we think of purifying the breath, the breath will help improve the fire property. The fire property will help improve the liquid property. The liquid property will help improve the earth property. When all the properties help one another in this way, they become balanced and a help to the body, so that the body can be healthy.

As for the mind, it grows cool and calm. Anyone who comes near will pick up some of that calmness as well. Just like a mountain cool in its depths: whoever walks past will be cooled as well, even though the mountain didn't make a point of splashing water on them to cool them off.

Here we've been speaking about the body. As for the mind, when it's pure it gives even greater results. When we think using the power of the pure mind, the currents go faster than lightning through the sky, and they can go all around the world. If anyone wants to come and harm us, they can't get near, because the current of a pure, strong mind has the power to ward off all kinds of danger. Take the Buddha as an example: No one could kill him. People who thought of killing him, as soon as they got near him, saw him as their loving father. Those who were subject to the current of the Buddha's purity let go of their evil habits and turned into good people; they let go of their violence and viciousness, becoming gentle and mild. Aṅgulimāla, for instance: If he hadn't been willing to listen to the Buddha, he would have been swallowed up by the earth. But he was able to think, "The Buddha won't kill me. I won't kill anyone." He immediately put down his weapons, gave up killing once and for all, ordained, and became one of the Buddha's noble disciples.

So in the same way, we should think of the qualities of the Buddha, Dhamma, and Saṅgha with every in-and-out breath. When we stay within the territory of the Dhamma in this way, it's as if we were having an audience with the Buddha himself. Even though—when we keep thinking of the qualities of the Buddha, Dhamma, and Saṅgha—we keep going over the same old territory over and over again, what's wrong with that? Actually, when we use our powers of directed thought *(vitakka)* and evaluation *(vicāra)* back and forth this way, the results we end up with are positive: a sense of fullness that spreads throughout every part of the body. The mind will feel full and bright. The heart will feel blossoming, established in the sense of fullness, or rapture *(pīti),* that comes with thoughts of good will. When the heart is full in this way, it's at ease, just as when we've eaten our fill of food. And when the heart is full, its friend the body is sure to feel full and rested as well. We'll be at our ease both in body and in mind, just as when we see our children and grandchildren well-fed and sleeping soundly. This is called pleasure *(sukha).* And when we see that something gives pleasure to our children and grandchildren, we have to focus our efforts on it continually. This is how the mind reaches singleness of preoccupation *(ekaggatārammaṇa),* entering into a state of peace, free from every sort of disturbance and danger.

Playing Host

September 27, 1956

When you sit and meditate, tell yourself that your body is like your home. When you repeat the word *buddho* in with the breath, it's like inviting a monk into your home. When people invite a monk into their home, what do they do in order to qualify as having good manners? 1) They have to prepare a place for him to sit down. 2) They provide him with good food or drinking water. 3) They have to converse with him.

When we meditate, "preparing a place to sit down" means thinking *bud-* in with the in-breath, and *dho* out with the out. If we're mindful to think in this way, the word *buddho* will always stay snug with the breath. Whenever our thinking slips away from the breath, it's as if we put a rip in the seat we're preparing for our guest. And don't forget that before you prepare a seat, you first have to sweep the place clean. In other words, when you first start out, you should breathe in long and deep and then let the breath come all the way out, two or three times. Then you gradually allow the breath to grow lighter, bit by bit, until it's just enough for you to follow comfortably. Don't let it grow any weaker or stay any stronger than just right. Then you start combining *buddho* with the in-and-out breath. When you do this, your visiting monk will come into your home. Now make sure that you stay with him. Don't go running off anywhere else. If your mind runs off to hang around with external concepts of past or future, it's as if you've run away from the monk you've invited into your home—which is really bad manners.

Once the monk has sat down in the seat you've prepared for him, you have to give him some good food or water, and then find good things to converse with him. The good food here is the food of intentions, the food of sensory contact, and the food of consciousness. The food of intentions stands for the way you adjust the breath so as to make it comfortable both for the body and for the mind. For instance, you're observant to see which kind of breathing is good for the body, and which kind is bad. What kind of in-breathing feels easy? What kind of out-breathing feels easy? Does it feel good to breathe in fast and out fast? How about in slow and out slow? You have to experiment and then taste the food you've prepared. This is one kind of food for the mind. This is why being intent to stay with the breath is called the food of intention. When you adjust the breath to the point where it feels comfortable and in good order, it'll give rise to a sense of fullness and ease. That's when you can say that you've provided your visiting monk with good, nourishing food. When he's finished his meal, he's going to chant blessings for the sake of your well-being and happiness, so that you'll be free from pain and suffering. Or, as the saying goes, the power of the Buddha gets rid of suffering. In other words, when you've

adjusted the breath properly, the pains in the body will disappear. Even though there may be some that don't disappear, they don't impinge on the mind. As for pain and suffering in the heart, that will all disappear. The mind will cool down. When it cools down, it'll be at its ease—quiet, blooming, and bright.

And as for the saying, the power of the Dhamma gets rid of dangers: the various forms of Mara coming to disturb the body, such as the pains of the aggregates, will all vanish. The mind will be free from dangers and animosities.

And as for the saying, the power of the Saṅgha gets rid of disease: all the various diseases in the mind—sorrow, lamentation, pain, distress, and despair—will disappear. This way, once you've invited this monk into your home and provided him with good food, he's going to give you three kinds of blessing: you escape for pain, from danger, and from disease. This is part of the blessing that your visiting monk will give you. But if, when you've invited a monk into your home, you go running off outside—in other words, if you forget the breath or go hanging around with external thoughts—it's really impolite, and the monk is going to be put to difficulties. It's as if you had invited him into your home but had forgotten to prepare his meal. So if you aren't really intent on the breath and don't really welcome your monk into your home, you won't get this kind of blessing.

The last part of inviting your monk into your home is to converse with him. Once he's eaten his fill, you talk with him. This stands for the qualities of directed thought, evaluation, rapture, pleasure, and singleness of preoccupation. You connect all six types of breath energy in the body so that they all flow into one another—as when you put up a telephone line. If the line stays in good shape, you can hear what they say all over the world. But if the line is cut, you can't get word of what they're saying even in Bangkok just down the road. So when you keep your line in good shape, you can hear anything being said anywhere at all. When the mind stays in the first jhāna this way, it's as if your visiting monk is talking with you, and you're talking with him. And the things you're talking about are all Dhamma. This puts you in a good mood. As time passes, you feel so good that you don't even want to eat. This is rapture: the body feels full. At the same time, the mind is free from disturbances and so feels pleasure. Wherever you get a sense of pleasure, you keep staying interested in that point: this is singleness of preoccupation.

When you welcome your visiting monk in this way, he's going to keep coming to visit you. No matter where you go, he'll be able to reach you. Even if you're staying in the mountains or forest wilderness, he'll be able to give you whatever help you need.

An Image of the Buddha

August 31, 1958

Our goodness: what can we do to make it really good? For today's goodness I want each of us to set our minds on casting a Buddha within the mind to protect ourselves, because Buddhas are things that are more sacred and numinous that any other object in the world. They can protect us and help us survive all sorts of danger and suffering. As we're told in the Pali chant, "*Sabba-dukkhā sabba-bhayā sabba-rogā vinassantu,*" which means, "All sufferings, all dangers, all diseases can be destroyed through the power of the Buddha, Dhamma, and Saṅgha."

Whoever has an inner Buddha is protected from all three major fears. The first kind is the fear of suffering, i.e., birth, aging, illness, and death. The Buddha isn't afraid of these things at all, for he has warded them off in all their forms ... (2) The various kinds of danger, such as danger from criminals: Whoever might try to come and steal his valuables, the Buddha isn't the least bit afraid, for his valuables aren't the kind that anyone can steal. The danger of fire: Don't mention house fires or being bombed by nuclear weapons. Even if the fires of the end of the eon were to burn up the entire world, he wouldn't be startled or fearful. The danger of floods: even if water were to flood from the earth up to the sky, he wouldn't be concerned. The danger of famine, drought, and pestilence wouldn't make him suffer or put him to any hardship. (3) The various diseases that arise in the body don't cause him any fear. Just look at the Buddha image in front of you: What dangers is he afraid of? From where? No matter what anyone does to him, he just sits there perfectly still, not afraid of anything at all. This is why we should cast a Buddha within ourselves so that we can wear it around our neck and protect ourselves from fear wherever we go.

Now, when they cast a Buddha image, what do they do? The first thing is to make a mold that's beautiful and well-proportioned. Then they heat it until it's hot through and through. Then they pour molten metal into the mold. Then they let it cool. When it's thoroughly cooled, they pull off the pieces of the mold, leaving only the Buddha image, but even then the image is still rough and unattractive. They have to polish it until it gives off clear reflections, or else paint it with lacquer and cover it with gold leaf. Only then will they have a finished Buddha image in line with their aims.

So now that we're casting a Buddha within ourselves, we have to heat our mold before we can pour the metal into it. Pretend that the body here is your mold; your mind is the expert craftsman. I want us all to set our minds on casting a Buddha within ourselves. Who's going to have the most beautiful Buddha will depend on how skillful and capable

each craftsman is at smelting.

How do we heat our mold? We heat the mold by sitting in concentration: your right leg on top of the left, your hands placed palm-up in your lap, your right hand on top of your left. Sit up straight. Don't lean forward or back, or tilt to either side. If the mold is off-center, your Buddha will have to be off-center, too. The next step is to fix your mindfulness on the breath, thinking *bud-* with the in-breath and *dho* with the out. Stay focused exclusively on the breath. You don't have to think of anything else—just as if you were pumping air into your furnace to heat up the mold. If your mindfulness doesn't stay with the breath—if you forget or absent-mindedly think of other things—it's as if your air pump breaks down. The fire won't grow strong, and the mold won't get heated through. If the mold isn't heated through, then when you pour your molten metal into it, the mold will crack and the metal will leak out all over the place. So you have to be careful that your mold doesn't crack, and make sure that your air pump doesn't wear out, either. In other words, keep watch over your mindfulness so that it isn't absent-minded or forgetful.

Now let's talk about how you melt your metal—the bronze, gold, silver, or whatever kind of metal you're going to use to cast your Buddha image. When they cast an image, they have to melt the metal and remove all the specks and impurities, leaving nothing but the metal in its pure form. Only then do they use it to cast the image. In the same way, we have to cut away from the heart all the concepts and preoccupations that act as Hindrances. The five Hindrances are like impurities mixed in with gold. If we don't melt them away or remove them from the heart, our Buddha image won't turn out as perfect and powerful as we'd like it. It'll be blemished and full of holes. If you were to put it on an altar, it wouldn't look inspiring. If you were to give it away, no one would want to receive it. Therefore it's necessary—crucial—that your expert craftsman be meticulous, circumspect, and not careless; that he make a concerted effort to purify the metal he's using. In other words, you have to brush away all concepts of past and future, leaving only the present: the breath. Be aware only of the breath. When your mold is thoroughly heated (i.e., you're alert to the whole body), your air pump is working well (i.e., mindfulness is steady and strong), and your metal is pure and free from specks (i.e., there are no Hindrances in the heart), then the Buddha image you're casting will be beautiful to your satisfaction.

Casting a Buddha image within you means sitting in concentration, giving rise to peace and calm in the mind. When the mind is at peace, the body is at peace. Rapture—a sense of fullness in body and mind—will arise within you (i.e., when mindfulness fills the body, your awareness fills the body, too). When rapture arises in full force, it gives way to pleasure. When there's a lot of pleasure, the mind grows clear and bright. The brightness of the mind is the knowledge of liberating insight. You come to see the truth of the body, that it's simply the four properties of earth, water, fire, and wind—not yours or anyone else's. It's inconstant. Stressful. This gives rise to a sense of weariness and

disenchantment, so that you let go of the process of mental and physical fabrication, seeing that there's no real substance to it. You can separate the body from the mind.

The mind will then be free of its burden in having to haul the physical body around. It turns into a mind that's free, light, and at ease. Whichever way you look is wide open—as if you were to remove the floors, walls, and roof of your home: if you look down, you see the ground. If you look up, you'll see the stars. Look around in all four directions and you'll see that there's nothing to obstruct your line of sight. You can see everything clearly. If you look to the west you'll see the noble truth of stress. Look south and you'll see the cause of stress. Look east and you'll see the cessation of stress. Look north and you'll see the path. If you can see in this way you're said to be a full dollar, i.e., worth four full quarters. And if you get four full quarters many times over, you'll grow more and more valuable all the time. You'll turn into a rich person with lots of wealth—i.e., noble treasures. You'll be released from poverty.

Whoever has noble treasures is said to be a noble person. Noble people are those who have seen the four noble truths. Whoever sees the four noble truths is said to see the Buddha within. The Buddha likes to stay with people of that sort—and when the Buddha is staying with us, we'll be blessed and won't fall into hardship. We'll simply keep heading higher and higher. This is why we should all cast a Buddha within ourselves by practicing concentration whenever we have the opportunity.

Another way of casting a Buddha within ourselves is to meditate constantly on the foulness of the body, as when we chant: *Ayaṁ kho me kāyo:* This body of mine. *Uddhaṁ padātalā:* From the tip of our big toe up to the head—what is it like? *Addho kesamatthakā:* From the crown of the head down to the big toe, what is it like? *Tacapariyanto:* Inside this burlap bag, what valuables do we have? The skin covering the body is like a burlap bag full of all kinds of things, so let's see what fantastic valuables we have here in this bag. Starting with the ribs, heart, liver, lungs, intestines, food in the stomach and intestines, blood, gall, lymph, urine. What kind of lovely valuables are these things?

If you look carefully at your body, you'll see that what you have here is the four states of deprivation, nothing wonderful at all.

The first state of deprivation is the animal kingdom: all the worms and germs that live in our stomach and intestines, in our blood vessels, and in our pores. As long as there's food for these things to eat in there, they're always going to be with us, multiplying like crazy, making us ill. On the outside of the body there are fleas and lice. They like staying with those who don't keep themselves clean, making their skin red and sore. As for the animals living in the blood vessels and pores, they give us rashes and infections.

The second state of deprivation is the kingdom of hungry ghosts, i.e., the properties of earth, water, fire, and wind in the body. First they feel too cold, then too warm, then they feel ill, then they want to eat this or that. We have to keep pandering to them, running around to find things for them to eat with never any chance to stop and rest. And they

never have enough—like the hungry ghosts who starve after they die, with no one to feed them. These properties keep pestering us, and no matter what you do, you can never please them. First the food is too hot, so you have to put ice in it. Then it's too cold, so you have to put it back on the stove. All of this comes down to an imbalance in the properties, sometimes good, sometimes bad, never coming to a stable state of normalcy at all, making us suffer in various ways.

The third state of deprivation is the land of angry demons. Sometimes, when we get ill or lose our senses, we run around naked without a stitch of clothing, as if we were possessed by angry demons. Some people have to undergo operations, getting this removed or cutting out that or sucking out this, waving their arms and moaning in a way that's really pitiful. Some people get so poor that they have nothing to eat; they get so thin that they have nothing left but ribs and eyeballs, suffering like the angry demons who can't see the brightness of the world.

The fourth state of deprivation is purgatory. Purgatory is the home of all the spirits with a lot of bad karma who have to suffer being roasted, speared with red-hot iron spikes, and pierced with thorns. All the animals whose flesh we've eaten, after they've been killed and cooked, gather together in our stomach and then disappear into our body in huge numbers. If you were to count them, you'd have whole coops of chickens, herds of cattle, and half a sea's worth of fish. Our stomach is such a tiny thing, and yet no matter how much you eat you can never keep it full. And you have to feed it hot things, too, like the denizens of purgatory who have to live with fire and flame. If there's no fire, they can't live. So there's a big copper frying pan for them. All the various spirits we've eaten gather in the big copper frying pan of our stomach, where they're consumed by the fires of digestion, and then they haunt us: Their powers penetrate throughout our flesh and blood, giving rise to passion, aversion, and delusion, making us squirm as if we were burned by the fires of purgatory, too.

So look at the body. Is it really yours? Where did it come from? Whose is it? No matter how much you care for it, it's not going to stay with you. It'll have to go back to where it came from: the properties of earth, water, fire, and wind. The fact that it's able to stay for a while depends entirely on the breath. When there's no more breath to it, it starts to decay, and no one wants it then. You won't be able to take it with you when you go. There's no one who can take his arms, legs, feet, or hands along with him. This is why we say that the body is not-self. It belongs to the world. As for the mind, it's the one that does good and evil, and will be reborn in line with its karma. The mind is what doesn't die. It's the one that experiences all pleasure and pain.

So when you realize this, you should do as much good as you can for your own sake. The Buddha felt compassion for us and taught us in this way, but we don't feel much compassion for ourselves. We prefer to fill ourselves with suffering. When other people teach us, it's no match for our teaching ourselves, for other people will teach us only once in a while. The possibility of being a common animal, a human being, a heavenly being,

or of entering nibbāna all lie within us, so we have to choose which one we want.

The good you do is what will go with you in the future. This is why the Buddha taught us to meditate, to contemplate the body to give rise to dispassion. It's inconstant, stressful, and nothing of ours. You borrow it for a while and then have to return it. The body doesn't belong to the mind, and the mind doesn't belong to the body. They're separate things that depend on each other. When you can see this, you have no more worries or attachments. You can let go of the body, and three hunks of rust—self-identity views, attachments to precepts and practices, and uncertainty in the Path—will fall away from your heart. You'll see that all good and evil come from the heart. If the heart is pure, that's the highest good in the world.

Binoculars

August 20, 1956

When you meditate, you have to be mindful of three things at once. In other words, as you breathe in and out, three things—(1) the breath, (2) the meditation word, and (3) the mind—have to stay together with every moment. At the same time, alertness always has to be in charge. Only then can you say that you're established in the factors of meditation lying at the essence of what's meritorious and skillful.

"Mindfulness"—heedfulness—counts as what's meritorious here. Forgetfulness—heedlessness—counts as evil.

Alertness is what surveys the results of our activities—seeing what we do that gives good results, what we do that gives bad—and then makes adjustments. For example, if the breath isn't yet comfortable, we move the mind to a new spot or change the way we're breathing. It's like changing the place where we sit. If where we're sitting isn't comfortable, we have to get up and find a new place to sit down. Once we've found a comfortable place to sit, we have to keep it going as long as we can. We don't have to change seats any more.

When mindfulness stays with the breath, it's called *ānāpānasati.* When it's immersed in the body, it's called *kāyagatāsati.* When mindfulness stays with the body and mind at all times, it's called developing our meditation theme *(kammaṭṭhāna)*—as when we sit here meditating: we're doing our work, i.e., our work on our meditation theme.

Mindfulness is the cause. If we focus our attention on working with the mind, we'll get lots of results on the level of the mind. If we focus on working with the body, we'll get lots of results on the level of the body.

The results that come from developing our meditation theme are (1) we calm down the evil qualities of the mind; and (2) we calm down the physical properties of the body. The mind will be wide open and free, like the ocean when it's free of waves: the wind is still, the water smooth, and the air is clear. When this is the case, we can see all kinds of far distant things. This way we get to know the affairs of the body. On the lowest level, we come to know the body in the present: we understand what's going on with the properties of earth, water, fire, and wind, both in their important parts and in their unimportant parts. The important parts are the ones that stay in the body; the unimportant parts are the ones that come and go, forming a bridge between the properties inside the body and those outside. In terms of the wind property, we'll see how many types of breath energy stay in the body, and how many types of breath come in and out. We'll see which parts of

the earth, water, fire, and space properties stay in the body, and which parts come and go. The same holds true with the property of consciousness. For instance, when our eyes don't see clearly, what's wrong with the property of eye-consciousness? We'll be able to see all the ways in which it changes, as well as all the changes in the properties of ear-, nose-, tongue-, body-, and intellect-consciousness. We'll have mindfulness and alertness constantly in charge.

Mindfulness and alertness are like binoculars for seeing great distances. The mind is like the binoculars' owner. If the properties in the body aren't at normalcy, if they aren't smooth and calm, then no matter how fantastic our binoculars, we won't be able to see anything. For example, when the Buddha surveyed the beings of the world, he'd wait until the world was quiet and still—the last watch of the night before dawn, when the minds of human beings were quiet, still, and asleep. That's when he'd use his special binoculars to survey all that was going on in the world.

When the mind is calm it's like an ocean that's calm: the wind is still, the boat isn't rocking, the water is clear, and the air wide open.

As we keep training the mind, it keeps getting more and more mature, more tempered and sharp, able to cut right through anything at all. Like a knife that we always keep sharpening: there's no way it *can't* become sharp. So we should keep at the practice in the same way we sharpen a knife. If any part of the body or mind isn't in good shape, we keep adjusting it until we get good results. When good results arise, we'll be in a state of Right Concentration. The mind will be firmly established in the present, in a state of singleness of preoccupation. We'll gain power both in body and in mind. Power in body means that wherever there are pains, we can adjust the properties of earth, water, fire, and wind to give rise to a sense of comfort, in the same way we trim a tree. If any branches are broken or rotten, we cut them away and graft on new branches. If the new ones break, we graft on more new ones. We keep doing this until the tree is healthy and strong.

When we work at the mind in this way, the four bases for success arise in full strength. And as the Buddha said, whoever develops the bases for success will live long. In other words,

> *chanda:* we're content with our work;
>
> *viriya:* we stick with our work and don't get discouraged or give up;
>
> *citta:* we focus our full attention on nothing but our work;
>
> *vimaṅsā:* we're circumspect in the mind, circumspect in the causes and results of what we're doing.

All four of these qualities are bases or steps to the Path. They're the cause for developing power in body and power in mind, all the way to the knowledge of the ending of mental fermentations and on into nibbāna.

What I've said so far is meant to give us all a sense of how to develop mindfulness and

alertness as our own special binoculars for surveying events in terms of the world and of the Dhamma. So you should train your mind to stay firm and upright in the factors of our meditation, riding herd on it so that it will stay with the body in the present. Regardless of how much you can remember of what I've said, you should set your mind on practicing at all times. Don't abandon the practice, or do it in fits and starts, for that will prevent you from reaching any kind of success. Think of yourself as a supervisor, constantly keeping an eye on the body and mind. When you do this, your workers—the properties of earth, water, fire, and wind—won't dare shirk their jobs or be slack in their work. Each will have to fulfill its responsibilities to the full. In this way, you'll come to succeed in your work in every way. At the same time, once you've developed your special binoculars, your eyesight will go further than that of ordinary people. In this way, you'll be able to keep yourself protected on all sides. You'll escape from dangers and meet with happiness and fulfillment in every way.

The Electric Heart

October 22, 1958

The currents of the heart are fast, erratic, and don't take on any shape that can appear to the eye. The currents of sound and smell can be measured in terms of numbers—1, 2, 3, 4, etc.—but the currents of the mind can't be measured at all. And it's the nature of fast things that they be subtle as well. That's why the currents of the mind are impossible for anyone who's not really interested in researching them to see. Some people even maintain that there is no mind in any individual, that all we have is a body, like trees. When we die, there's nothing left, nothing to take rebirth. There's only the properties of earth, water, wind, and fire.

It's the nature of really fast-moving things that we can't see them—what they are, what their shape or characteristics are. For example, when we ride in a car or a boat passing another one coming in the opposite direction at top speed, we can't see the faces of the people riding in the other car or boat well enough to recognize who they are. Or suppose that two people run past each other at high speed. They won't be able to see each other's faces. Some birds fly through the air so quickly that we can't even see them. All we can hear is the *whoosh* going past in the air. The currents of the mind that flash out of the body are the same sort of thing.

The Buddha discovered that the human mind is something powerful—stronger and more numinous than anything else there is. But because the mind spins so fast, we can't see it. If we want to see it, we have to get it to spin more slowly. As it spins more and more slowly, we can get it to stop. When it stops, we'll realize that the mind is something true, something that doesn't die. At the same time, it's cool. When it hasn't yet stopped, it's hot. The heat comes from the spinning. When it spins really fast, it can generate the electricity of passion, aversion, and delusion.

As we generate these three kinds of electricity within ourselves, the mind will go running out the six wires—the nerves of the eyes, ears, nose, tongue, body, and mind. If any of these wires get shorted, they can set our home, our town, on fire. When these currents flare up in the mind, they can wear out the nerves of our eyes, ears, nose, tongue, and body, so that they start sending us the wrong information and make us misunderstand things. If we go around with exposed wires and meet up with someone else whose wires are exposed, we're going to get shorted, and both of us will be devastated. It's bad enough that both of us are generating electricity; to make things worse, we go ahead and put our hands right on each other's exposed wires. When this happens, we'll get electrocuted. The danger of exposed wires is that their current sucks us in. When we

connect, the heat builds up and explodes into fire.

The spinning of the mind builds up heat in the properties of the body, and when the properties get unbalanced like this, they can give rise to pain and illness. When the mind spins in this way, it darkens everything. Our eyes, ears, etc., get darkened so that they can't see the truth of sights, sounds, smells, tastes, tactile sensations, and ideas. This is why the Buddha teaches us to give rise to stillness by developing the ballast of skillful and meritorious actions. And what acts as ballast for the mind? We're taught to create ballast for the mind by looking for three big hunks of rock: *generosity,* making donations of material things; *virtue,* keeping our words and deeds at normalcy; and *meditation,* training the mind. If the mind isn't slowed down by the weights of what's skillful and meritorious, there's no way it can get relief from the heat of its fires. Sometimes evil pulls it in one direction, while goodness pulls it in another. Goodness is like the positive current; evil, like the negative current. The mind alternates between good and evil, looking for good only from time to time, but it doesn't find any real peace and quiet. Still, it's beginning to see things a little more clearly, as when a car begins to slow down but hasn't yet stopped.

So we have to find four other ways to slow the mind down. In other words, we have to make sure that our thoughts, words, and deeds don't fall under the four kinds of bias: bias based on desire, based on aversion, based on delusion, and based on fear. We have to be fair and gentle with other people, harming neither ourselves nor others. This helps our mind spin even more slowly. If it spins forward, it has four blockades in the way. If it spins back, it has three rocks weighing it down. We need principles in how we sit, stand, walk, lie down, speak, act. These are the mainstays of the mind in developing tranquility and insight. This is what's meant by meditation.

The mind is like a machine. When the machine stops, we can safely touch all its belts and gears. The belts here are its various concepts and perceptions. In other words, perceptions of past and future spin back and forth, which is why the mind can't find any coolness. As it keeps spinning, it develops heat. If it spins really fast, it'll set on fire, burning itself and spreading out to burn other people as well. This is why we're taught to stop the spinning by cutting the belts. In other words, we practice tranquility meditation, not allowing the mind to spin along after the currents of the world. Whatever activity you're involved in, keep the mind fully involved in what you're doing. This is like water in the ocean when it's full of waves: if we take a bowlful of water and set it apart until the waves grow still, or if we clarify the water with an alum crystal, we can look into the water and see our reflection clearly.

Our face is something that normally we never see. Even though we use our mouth to speak day in and day out, we've never seen what shape it is. Even though we breathe through our nose with every moment, we've never seen it. Our ears hear sounds all day long, but we've never seen what they look like. Our eyes can see all kinds of things, but they can't see themselves. This is why we have to depend on mirrors to see our reflections. Only then can we see our face. When people have discernment, it's as if they have a large

mirror for looking at themselves, because discernment is the clear knowing that comes from a mind bright, clean, and pure, free from spinning, free from waves.

When the mind stops spinning, it comes to stillness. This stillness is what gives rise to the discernment that develops into cognitive skills within us—the three skills and the eight, such as recollection of former lives, which enables us to see ourselves; knowledge of the passing away and arising of living beings—once we've seen enough of ourselves, we can see other people; and knowledge of the ending of mental fermentations: we can see what's good, what's evil, what should be abandoned, what should be developed, what takes birth and dies, what doesn't take birth and doesn't die. When these skills arise within us, we will thoroughly comprehend our own bodies and minds, as well as fabricated things in general. The three fires of passion, aversion, and delusion will stay separated far from the heart. The heart stops spinning, and when there's no more spinning, the fire and electricity stop, leaving nothing but coolness and ease.

This is why we're taught to find ballast and blockades for the mind so that it will spin more and more slowly, more and more slowly until it stops, for the sake of the coolness, ease, and peace I've mentioned here.

Restraint of the Senses

August 5, 1958

Restraint of the senses means making sure they're in harmony with their objects. In other words:

Cakkhu-saṁvaro: Exercise restraint over the eyes. Don't let your eyes be bigger than their visual objects, and don't let the visual objects be bigger than your eyes. An example of small eyes and big objects is when you see something and the heart latches onto it for days on end. This is called not being straightforward in your practice, because you've let the visual object get bigger than your eyes. As for big eyes and small objects, that's when you can't see enough of an object. When it disappears, you want to see it again and again. You can't let go of it. This is called eyes bigger than their objects. This is what gives rise to greed. When objects are bigger than your eyes, that also gives rise to greed and delusion. Anyone who doesn't know how to exercise restraint over the eyes gives rise to the three fires of passion, aversion, and delusion, which burn the eyes and give rise to suffering.

Sota-saṁvaro: Exercise restraint over your ears and their sounds so that they're the right size for each other. Sometimes your ears are bigger than the sounds they hear, sometimes the sounds are bigger than the ears. For example, someone says something and you take it to think about for many days. That's a case of the sound being bigger than the ears. This gives rise to liking or disliking. The fires of passion, aversion, and delusion burn the ears of people like this, for they haven't watched out for evil, and so evil can come flowing into their hearts.

Ghāna-saṁvaro: Exercise restraint over the nose and smells. If a smell smells good, don't fall for it. If it smells bad and you can't stand it, get away from it. Don't hate it. If you contemplate the nose and its smells, you'll see that sometimes a smell is bigger than the nose, i.e., one whiff and it gets stuck in the heart for many days, months, and years. The smell may have been over and gone for many days, months, and years, but the nose hasn't gotten over it. Passion and aversion get provoked, and then delusion goes running after the smell. This is called not exercising restraint over the nose.

Jivhā-saṁvaro means restraint over the tongue and flavors. If the food you get is edible, don't go struggling to look for things to make it more special than it already is. If you like it, eat your fill. If you don't like it, eat just a little. Choose foods that benefit the body. Otherwise, you'll suffer. Don't follow your taste buds. Sometimes the flavors are bigger than the tongue. You sit thinking about eating chicken or duck, pork or fish, and so you go looking for them. When you get them, your tongue shrivels up and you can hardly eat them at all. This is called not having a sense of enough, not exercising restraint. In

addition to eating, the tongue plays a role in speaking. Sometimes the tongue grows large: what you say goes way beyond the truth. You speak without stopping and it's all nonsense. Other times, the topic is big but the tongue grows small: there's a lot to be explained, but you hem and haw so that no one can understand the truth. This is called not exercising restraint so that the tongue is the same size as its topics, and it's one way of bringing on suffering.

Kāya-saṁvaro means restraint over the body and tactile sensations. Sometimes they feel comfortable together, sometimes they don't. In other words, the place where you're staying may be big, but the body is small. Sometimes the place is small, but the body feels big. They don't go together. The tactile sensations that touch the body don't fit. Sometimes the body is small but the sensations are big. For example, you come across a sensation you like. Then, even when it's vanished for many days, you still miss it. Sometimes the body is big but the sensations are small. For example, you don't feel comfortable wherever you sit or lie down, for the whole world seems narrow and confining. That's called not exercising restraint to keep the body and its tactile sensations in line with each other. And that gives rise to suffering.

Mano-saṁvaro: Exercise restraint over the heart to keep it on the right path in line with things as they arise. Sometimes your thoughts are bigger than the mind: you worry and stew about something, going way beyond the truth of the situation. This leads to misunderstandings, making the mind restless and anxious. Sometimes the mind is bigger than your thoughts: you take a minor problem and turn it into four or five big ones. In other words, you don't exercise restraint over the heart to keep it in line with your situation—what they call "harvesting grass to roof the field." This leads to useless distraction, which opens the way for greed, anger, and delusion. This is why we're taught to exercise careful restraint over the heart to bring it to peace and calm. That's what's meant by restraint of the senses.

Snakes, Fires, & Thieves

April 12, 1959

The dangers faced by the mind are like poisonous snakes, fires, and great thieves—things that are always lying in wait to lay us to waste: robbing us, killing us, and stripping us of our valuables, our human goodness, every day and night.

"Poisonous snakes" here stand for passion, aversion, and delusion, which have a painful poison that seeps into the minds of run-of-the-mill people. When it reaches the heart, this poison can kill you.

As for "fires," there are two kinds: forest fires and house fires. A forest fire doesn't have any one owner. It arises of its own accord, by its nature, and spreads its destruction far and wide, without bounds, until it dies out on its own. This stands for the fires of birth, aging, illness, and death, forms of suffering that arise in the bodies of all living beings. This fire can burn up both our worldly treasures and our noble treasures (i.e., the goodness of the mind that we otherwise would be able to develop). As for house fires, those are the fires that arise from within the heart—defilements, ignorance, craving, and clinging—the hindrances that get in the way of the goodness that comes from training the heart and mind.

The "great thieves" or "500 most wanted criminals" stand for our five aggregates: form, feeling, perception, thought-constructs, and consciousness, which are constantly robbing us, killing us, and oppressing us, destroying both our worldly treasures and our noble ones. In addition, there are the underground criminals that keep sneaking up on us without our realizing it: material gain, status, praise, and pleasure from external things. Whoever gets duped by these criminals finds it hard to work free. This is why they can destroy the goodness that we'd otherwise be able to attain in the area of the heart and mind.

All of these poisonous snakes, fires, and criminals pose a tremendous danger to the heart. They keep destroying our goodness every moment. If we're not wise to them, we'll have trouble gaining release from them. The only way to prevent these dangers is through the power of the Dhamma: in other words, the practice of meditation, using our powers of directed thought and evaluation within ourselves to the point where we give rise to the discernment that clearly knows and sees the truth of all fabricated things. When we can see the dangers on all sides, we'll learn to be careful and on our guard, to look for ways of destroying them or of escaping from them. When we can do this, our lives will be happy.

When we practice the Dhamma it's as if we were going through a lonely, desolate

forest on the way to a goal that's the highest form of happiness and safety. To get through the forest, we have to depend on the practice of concentration, with our mindfulness circumspect on all sides. We can't be heedless or complacent. We must make the effort to cut away all the concepts and preoccupations that come in to destroy the goodness of the mind. When we know that there are poisonous snakes, fires, and the 500 most wanted criminals lying in wait for us along our way, we have to be mindful, alert, and wakeful at all times, and to get good weapons ready so that we can fight them off.

At the same time, we need provisions to help us on our way—in other words the factors of *jhāna.* Directed thought is what focuses the mind on what it wants to know. Evaluation is what kills off the Hindrances. These two qualities are like fixing dinner. But if we have only these two qualities, it's as if we've prepared our dinner but don't yet know the flavor of the different kinds of food we have. If we can still the mind until it's one with its object, that's like eating and swallowing our food. That's when we'll know its flavor and be able to gain a sense of fullness and nourishment from it: in other words, a sense of rapture, pleasure, and singleness of preoccupation. The heart will then be able to gain full strength, just like the body when it's had a nourishing meal.

Outer food is what nourishes the body and gives it strength. When the body has strength, we can walk or run anywhere we want. Whatever we want to do, we'll have the strength to succeed. As for inner food—the Dhamma—that's what nourishes the heart and mind. When the heart and mind are well nourished, the power of the heart is made resilient and strong. Whatever we set our mind on will succeed in line with our thoughts. If the mind is deprived of the food of the Dhamma, it gets feeble and weak. Its

thoughts meet with no success, or at best with success in some things and not in others, not fully in line with our hopes. That's why we have to shore up the strength of our own minds as much as we can, for the strength of the mind is the most important thing within us that will take us to our goal of the highest happiness.

As long as you're still alive and breathing, don't let yourself be heedless or complacent. Don't let time pass you by to no purpose. Hurry up and accelerate your efforts at developing goodness—for when there's no more breath for you to breathe, you'll have no more opportunity to do good …

You should focus exclusively on whatever thoughts help make the mind firm so that it can give rise to goodness. Don't dally with any other kinds of thinking, regardless of whether they seem more sophisticated or less. Shake them all off. Don't bring them into the mind to think about. Keep the mind firmly set in a single preoccupation: that's your true heart, the true heart of the Buddha's teachings.

Enduring Principles

May 26, 1958

Those of us who are training our hearts and minds in hopes of the paths and fruitions leading to nibbāna, if we don't study to understand the fundamental principles of the world, are likely to wander off the path. Or else we'll keeping circling around without ever reaching our goal. So if we really want to put an end to suffering, we should ask ourselves: what do we have within us that can act as a true refuge for ourselves? This is the sort of question we should keep reflecting on all the time. As we chant every day: "*Svākkhāto bhagavatā dhammo, sandiṭṭhiko akāliko*—The Dhamma well-expounded by the Blessed One, to be seen here & now, is timeless." In other words, if we want to reach it, we'll be able to reach it. If we don't want to reach it, we won't. But whether or not we'll reach it depends on underlying causes, which come in two sorts: an enduring principle and supporting principles. The enduring principle, called *dhamma-ṭhiti,* is what stays unmoving by its nature. The supporting principles are our training and education, which can be either good or bad. This is why our practice sways back and forth, like a tree in the middle of an open field, swaying back and forth in the wind. If we don't discover the enduring principle within us, we won't be able to find anything to act as a true refuge—for our training and education are simply supporting factors.

This is why we should keep asking ourselves: "Have we found any principle within ourselves that can act as our refuge?" As long as we're still depending on other people, other things, we don't have a true refuge. Our training and education are nothing more than supporting factors—like the fertilizer we give to plants. When the fertilizer runs out, the plant will have to fall to the ground and decompose. The same holds true for the Buddha: when his body ran out of strength, it turned into the four elements. The Dhamma, when it no longer has any power, turns into nothing but letters on paper or palm leaves, which then disintegrate. As for the Saṅgha, when they run out of strength, they die. So the refuge we take in these things is nothing more than a snack or finger food, but people for the most part misunderstand them to be our true refuge. They think that the Buddha, Dhamma, and Saṅgha will carry or drag them to heaven or nibbāna. From one angle this is right, but from another it's wrong. It's right in the sense that the Buddha, Dhamma, and Saṅgha keep alive the tradition of goodness that we can hold onto and follow. It's wrong, though, in the sense that they aren't the things that will make us reach the paths and fruitions leading to nibbāna. Reaching nibbāna depends on our own actions: our practice.

So we have to ask ourselves: "What do we want in life?" If we really want something,

we're sure to succeed at it in every way. But the fact that we don't succeed comes from ourselves. If we want to be millionaires, we'll have to become millionaires. If we want to be beggars, we'll have to become beggars. Success and lack of success come from within ourselves—in other words, from the causal factors lying within the limits of our own goodness. If we practice correctly, we're sure to succeed. It all depends on the enduring principles in the world, together with the supporting factors that point us in the right direction. The supporting factors are the teachings formulated by wise people and sages. The enduring principles—*dhamma-ṭhiti*—come from the principles of nature. To reach the paths and fruitions leading to nibbāna requires dhamma-ṭhiti.

Take our Buddha or the Private Buddhas as an example: when they were born, there was no Buddha to teach them. But they had met up with sages and Buddhas in previous lives, so they were born with character traits that spurred them on to be high-minded, to see the drawbacks of the world so crowded with defilement and craving, with birth, aging, illness, and death. Disenchanted, they aspired to gain release from all this suffering—for as long as we human beings are subject to birth and death, then even if we had wings to fly, we still wouldn't escape from our suffering. But if we're free from birth and death, then even if we have to crawl on all fours in the dirt, we won't feel any suffering. This is why the Buddha left the householder life and went off into the wilderness to be alone, developing virtue, concentration, and discernment until he attained full Buddhahood. Once he had attained his goal, he had another character trait—his great compassion—that inspired him to teach the Dhamma to his relatives and to living beings in general so that they could gain release from suffering as well.

Practicing virtue is called compassion in terms of one's actions. This is followed by compassion in terms of one's speech and thoughts. When the Buddha expressed this sort of compassion, people responded to him in kind: they loved him, respected him, and were willing to grant him power. The Buddha's compassion expressed itself in two ways: for the well being of the world *(lokattha-cariyā)* and the well being of his relatives *(ñātattha-cariyā).*

In terms of the world, the Buddha spread his good will and compassion to beings all over the world, without showing any partiality for any group or individual at all. As for the well being of his relatives, like everyone else he had parents, grandparents, and siblings, and these people in turn had children, grandchildren, and in-laws. The Buddha's compassion spread out along all of these connections, expressed in terms of compassionate actions, compassionate words, and compassionate thoughts. This compassion spread out from a heart that had found its own dependable refuge within. This was why he was able to spread his compassion so that others could depend on him as well. It's the nature of the heart that when it can depend on itself, its goodness gradually spreads out of its own accord. If there's any kind of connection—whether people are relatives or not—it spreads out along those connections. It spreads out in terms of words, when you can teach and instruct others. In terms of thoughts, there's no anger, hatred, or jealousy. There's simply the willingness to sacrifice for others. When there were ways the

Buddha could help others with his thoughts, he spread those thoughts at all times.

He had seen that the lay life wasn't convenient for spreading goodness so far and wide, which was why he became a monk. He had seen that being a member of the noble warrior class involved both good and evil, for it's the nature of the world that people are proud of their birth, their race, their class, which divides us into factions and creates inequalities. When divisions like this arise in the world, it's difficult to spread goodness. That was why he left his relatives, cutting himself off from his class and race.

And this is why, when a new monk is being ordained, the announcing teacher asks him, "Have your mother and father given their permission?" and the candidate answers, "Yes." He has left the limitations of the worldly life and now doesn't belong to any family at all. Then, once he's ordained, he's taught not to go hanging around with his old family. So when the Buddha left home, he went off on his own to find the truth of the Dhamma. Regardless of whether he was to get teachings from others, he explored within himself without depending on his old wealth or family connections. He gave himself totally to the practice. At first he had studied with the Six Teachers, but they were unable to convince him of their teachings.

The first teacher was Teacher Eye. This teacher fools us in all sorts of ways. It tells us that this sight is beautiful, that sight is ugly, this sight is good, that sight is bad. It whispers to the heart, causing us to trip and fall, because we don't see things in terms of their basic principles—that all sights are the same. Whether they're birds, rats, people, animals, trees, vines, whatever, they differ only in terms of their features. Their basic condition is the same: they arise, decay, and then disappear in line with the principles of nature.

The second teacher was Teacher Ear. At first there are two of these teachers, but then they turn into four, which gets things even more confusing. In other words, the left ear hears good sounds and bad sounds, the right ear hears good sounds and bad sounds, all of which gives rise to distorted perceptions. We imagine good things to be bad, and bad things to be good; true things to be false, and false things to be true. So Teacher Ear is another teacher who fools us. The Buddha thus left both Teacher Eye and Teacher Ear to study with:

Teacher Nose. At first this teacher has two nostrils, but then they split into four. Sometimes it likes good smells; sometimes it doesn't like good smells and likes bad smells instead. Then it goes whispering to the heart to make it misunderstand things. If we could take a photo of the mind, we'd see that the eyes are big and bulging, the ears are set out like huge sails, while the nose is wide, wide open. When the Buddha saw that he had no use for these three teachers, he went on to study with:

Teacher Tongue. This teacher—the mouth—is even more of a turmoil. If it were part of the army, it'd be called a multi-task force. On the one hand, it eats food; on the other, it says all kinds of things. Sometimes it likes to say good things, sometimes bad things.

Sometimes it doesn't like to say good things, and prefers to say bad things instead. One little tongue, but it too splits into four. When it's not speaking, it eats. Sometimes that person gets to eat, this person doesn't get to eat. This person has only a little to eat, that person starves, while that person over there has more than enough to eat. The dangers that come from these affairs block the paths and fruitions leading to nibbāna. So the Buddha moved on to study with the fifth teacher:

Teacher Body. This teacher is made up of the six elements, but as soon as the elements get unbalanced it gets feverish or chilled, weak or stiff. As it meets up with friction, it wears out. As for the sixth teacher, that's:

Teacher Mind. This teacher thinks and worries, deluding itself in all sorts of ways. Suppose, for instance, that we're leaving the house to come to the monastery. As soon as we've left the door it starts deceiving us: "What a pain. It's so far to walk. A waste of time. The sun is hot." When we get to the monastery and start sitting in meditation, it starts deceiving us again: "We've been sitting too long. I'm tired. My legs hurt. They're numb. My back is stiff." Then it squeezes our legs, squeezes our arms, beats our back, pokes our stomach, giving us heartburn or a stomachache. When we're whipped and beaten like this, we eventually give in. Sometimes it comes whispering, "Why don't you stop? Time's almost up. Open your eyes." So we leave meditation, raise our hands in respect, and bow down to the Buddha. And that's it. If we're weak by nature, we fall for it.

This is why the Buddha left all of these six teachers, closed his eyes, closed his ears, nose, tongue, body, and mind, not letting his heart go running after sights, sounds, smells, tastes, tactile sensations, or ideas. He closed off his senses to escape from these things, leaving only the door of the mind, which he focused on goodness. When this was the case, he didn't concern himself with any of the senses. He went to sit cross-legged under the Bodhi tree on the full moon day in May and gave rise to discernment within himself. Gathering all his thoughts so that they were right, he didn't let them associate with anything outside of the Dhamma. He began meditating, cutting off all connection to the past and future, cutting all connection to the nerves of the eyes, ears, nose, tongue, body, and mind. He focused on the breath, making it more and more refined, to the point where the condition of the body disappeared, leaving just the qualities of the six elements: seeing, for example, how the breath actually moves, how it stops. This is called *buddha-vijjā,* the skill of the awakened ones. This skill sees things in terms, not of their characteristics, but in terms of their basic qualities. Inconstancy is a characteristic. Stress and not-self—burdensomeness, what can't be controlled—are all characteristics.

Basic qualities, though, are neutral and constant. Inconstancy is on the level of characteristics. To make an analogy: the mouth can't turn into the nose. That's an affair of basic qualities. If things could change like that, we wouldn't be able to live. For example, if tonight our ears changed into eyes, or our leg became an arm, or our nose became a mouth: if this happened, everything would break out into chaos. If we see things only in terms of their characteristics, that's the knowledge of the six teachers. Change-of-

lineage knowledge, though, sees from both sides, both as characteristics and as basic qualities. To make another analogy: our leg, ever since we were two, has been a leg. It'll still be a leg when we're 80, in line with its basic quality. This is constancy. Whatever it's been, that's what it'll continue to be until we die. Whoever doesn't see through to basic qualities like this will get dragged off by the six teachers. This is why the Buddha left the six teachers to study the skill of the awakened ones, to see both what it is that changes and what it is that doesn't. Whoever sees both sides—the side of inconstancy and the side of constancy—without getting stuck on either side, that's change-of-lineage knowledge: knowing the principles of the world and the basic quality of the Dhamma.

This is why the Buddha taught, "*Sabbe saṅkhārā aniccā, sabbe dhammā anattā:* All conditioned things are inconstant; all phenomena are not-self." Regardless of whether people might say, "constant" or "inconstant," "stress" or "bliss," "There is a self" or "There is no self," the Buddha could remain unswayed. This is called, "*Attāhi attano nātho*"*:* those who can give rise to this knowledge and skill within themselves can truly depend on themselves. They're not attached to knowledge of the past, knowledge of the future, knowledge of the present. They're not stuck on any dimension of time at all. They can let go of conventions, formulated teachings, formulated ultimate truths. They can let go within themselves alone, know within themselves alone. This is called truly depending on yourself. When you reach this point, your training for the sake of the paths and fruitions leading to nibbāna will have to succeed in line with your aims. There won't be any wandering astray.

And that's enough for now.

PART II

Merit

July 5, 1959

The world is a place where happiness is hard to find. Whichever direction you look, there's nothing but pain, trouble, and turmoil. If we could escape and go live someplace else, hardly anybody would be left staying here. The world would fall vacant, without anyone living here at all. But because we're stymied and can't find a way out, we have to put up with living here in agony and anguish. If it weren't so beyond our capacity to escape, it's unlikely that anyone would want to stay.

The Buddha's purpose in formulating the custom of gathering to meet on Dhamma-listening days was to invite people to train themselves in doing what's good. Any gathering without a purpose doesn't give rise to anything. So as we gather together today, we have to be sincere in our intent to search for goodness within ourselves—not that we come to the monastery simply because we see other people come, or we gather together because we see other people gather together. If we come without any purpose in mind like that, no real benefits arise.

We've been interested in the affairs of the world ever since we were young, but some of us have become interested in the affairs of the Dhamma only now that we're old. Some people die before they make it to the monastery even once. You have to see that the time when you have the opportunity to do good has value. So when you listen to this Dhamma talk, don't just go through the motions of listening without any real purpose. You have to be genuinely intent on listening. Only then will your listening to the Dhamma give results. This is why the Buddha said, "*Kālena dhamma-savanaṁ etam-maṅgalam-uttamaṁ:* Periodically listening to the Dhamma is the highest blessing." What this means is that we'll get something of excellence embedded in our heart.

The word "world" refers to the affairs of material things. The word "Dhamma" refers to the affairs of things that aren't material. The Dhamma is an affair of the heart and mind. The world is an affair of the body. But the world and the Dhamma have to depend on each other, in the same way that people have to depend on the world in order to live, and the world depends on people to dress it up and make it livable and lovely, arranging homes, buildings, and roads in a way that's beautiful.

Lots of people are interested in dressing up themselves and their homes to make them beautiful, but there are hardly any people interested in dressing up their minds, because the mind is something you can't see. But the fact is that the mind is the most important thing for any human being. The body and the mind have to depend on each other if they're going to grow. Still, they're two separate things, not one and the same, in the same

way that people have to depend on the earth, but the earth isn't people, and people aren't the earth.

What does our suffering come from? The Buddha discovered that if things are good, the mind is at ease; if they're not good, the mind isn't at ease. Whether the lives of people in the world are to be pleasant or painful depends on these two factors. So the question is, "How can we make ourselves good so that we can be at our ease and not suffer in various ways?"

So what do we want? If you were to ask people this question, they'd be sure to answer, "We want the best things, the cleanest things, and things that satisfy our desires!" When the heart is satisfied, it will be happy and at ease. But happiness is of two sorts. The first sort is like rice that's cooked. The second sort is like the brightness of stars in the sky. So there's rice-happy and star-happy. The happiness of the world is rice-happy. The happiness of the Dhamma is star-happy.

The heart is like an innocent child that puts things that aren't really food into its mouth, and so it suffers. We all want happiness, but we keep putting suffering into ourselves without realizing what we're doing. That's because there are those two kinds of happiness. Star-happy is bright and flavorful, with a high level of nourishment that's cooling to the heart. Rice-happy has flavor for the body, but it doesn't have any brightness —i.e., no real happiness for the heart.

The happiness of the heart has a flavor that's cool and soothing because it can depend on the Dhamma to solve its problems and keep it in good repair. If the mind isn't pervaded by the Dhamma, it has no real happiness. So we have to make the heart gleaming like the stars and bright like the moon. If this is something you want, you should do what you can to really experience it.

This body of ours—composed of various elements gathered together in a single lump: If we don't know how to separate the elements out to see what's there, we don't really know ourselves. It's as if someone were to hand us a piece of scrap metal. If we don't take it and separate out the various metals to see what's mixed in it—tin or copper or whatever —it won't have any value for us and we'll have to sell it cheap. We all have good things within ourselves, but if we don't know how to separate them out, the body will be nothing but a lump. We'll look after it until it dies in the same way that we'd lie around hugging a piece of metal or a piece of rock without knowing what to do with it. We won't get any benefit out of it at all.

The Buddha saw that the body and the mind are two separate things of differing value. The body is slow and heavy. The mind is light and very fast. For example, if you think of going to Bangkok, the mind immediately zooms to Bangkok. It could go there who knows how many times in a day. But with the body, if you simply want it to go, it'll never get there. And it's even worse when you're old: Each step can wear you out. So the speed of the body and mind are different in this way. That's why the Buddha said that the mind is

the fastest thing in the world, and it's the most important thing in the body. We have to study it so that we're fully acquainted with it. Otherwise, we won't be able to meet with happiness.

Buddhism isn't an affair of praying or asking, and it's not something that we can give to one another. We each have to do the work for ourselves if we want to get results. This is why the Buddha taught us to make merit, for merit is what gives rise to the happiness we aspire to. If you look around you, you'll see that some people succeed at everything they put their hand to. Other people don't succeed at anything: They try this and it doesn't succeed; they try that and it doesn't succeed. That's because they don't have any merit to help them. The Buddha thus praised those who make a lot of merit often, for whatever they think of doing will succeed in line with their aims. Those are the people who are happy.

"So what's good about merit? The more you make merit, the less wealth you have. What's so good about it?" If people look at it only on the surface, they're sure to see things in that way. If you speak only briefly about merit without explaining it, people are sure to misunderstand. This is why the Buddha explained the rewards of the three ways of making merit: generosity, virtue, and meditation.

Generosity is a way of helping other people be happy. When we help one another and give useful things to one another, it has to mean *some*thing. So stop and think. All the suffering and turmoil in the world—thievery, arson, and world wars: What do they come from? They come from people not eating their fill. Not eating your fill happens in two ways: (1) not having anything to eat; and (2) having things to eat but you're not full—i.e., your greed has no sense of enough. These two forms of not eating your fill give birth to world wars. Some people want to be the only ones who are rich. But think about it: If there were only ten really rich people and twenty million people with nothing to eat, the twenty million are sure to gang up on the ten. Once the twenty million gain power, they're going to force the ten of you to eat nothing but watery rice porridge and to sleep on the ground.

This is why the Buddha taught us to be generous, to share food with one another. Don't be stingy and selfish. If we were to share things with one another all over the world, there probably wouldn't be any turmoil. When people have enough to eat, they quiet down. And not just people: The same is true of animals, like dogs. Once they have enough to eat, they lie down still. You can step over their heads and they won't bite you. And they won't harass people as well.

It's the same with people. When they can eat their fill and sleep at night, they smile until their cheeks bulge out. Other people can curse them and they won't get angry. But if, when they're hungry, someone says anything even just the least bit displeasing, they can almost rip off that person's flesh to eat it. This is the way it is with people and animals.

"Not having anything to eat": What does that come from? It comes from being poor. Poverty can come from lots of things, but by and large it comes from either laziness or

stupidity. That's why many people don't have anything to eat. They're too lazy to work, and so they're poor. When they're poor they don't have anything to eat.

"Having things to eat but you're not full": This happens when greed and stinginess take over the heart. You have enough but you don't dare eat it for fear that you'll run out, or that other people will see you, or that they'll ask you for some of what you've got. If you don't dare eat because you're afraid of running out or that other people will steal what you have, you have to eat in secret. When other people who don't have anything to eat see you, they'll think, "Why do these people have so much? Why do they eat in secret without sharing?" This gives rise to thievery and robbery. This is the fuse that ignites world wars: We don't share food with one another. If we were to share with one another, the world would be peaceful and happy. If we don't share, there will have to be turmoil. When little wars start, they give rise to big wars, which then turn into world wars.

The Buddha foresaw these problems and so he taught, *"Dānañca dhamma-cariyā ca etam-maṅgalam-uttamaṁ:* Giving and practicing the Dhamma are the highest blessing."

There are four kinds of giving:

1) Giving support to your children, sharing your wealth with them as is appropriate to help them gain an education and get started in their livelihood.

2) Giving charity to poor people when disasters hit, and to sick people and to old people who are weak.

3) Giving aid to the country at large, giving money to build roads and hospitals, and being willing to pay your taxes in full.

4) Giving offerings in honor of the Buddha, Dhamma, and Saṅgha, those who are worthy of offerings.

When you do this, it's a blessing for yourself. You've put your wealth in safekeeping in these four banks. When you need that wealth, all you have to do is to remember the good you've done, and the mind will be comforted. This type of wealth is noble wealth: It follows you to your dying day, and even when you go to the next world, you'll have plenty to use without any worry.

For this reason, the Buddha looked after the world to keep it happy and at peace by teaching people to give these four kinds of gifts. And he taught the Dhamma so that we would observe the precepts and practice meditation. He taught us, "Don't stay stuck in the pleasures of the world—being able to lie down and sleep, and eating your fill—because being full in this way doesn't stay full for long, and isn't really full. If you're full today, you'll be hungry again tomorrow. If you're full tomorrow, you'll be hungry again the next day. You have to suffer in running around always looking for things to eat. As for the pleasure in lying down, there's nothing reliable about it. Try lying down for three days and see what it's like. Your back will get so stiff that you won't be able to get up. You'll have to find someone to massage you and rub you down with oil. What you thought

would be pleasant ends up giving you pain.

That's why the Buddha taught us not to be infatuated with the pleasure of eating and lying down, and instead to pulverize that pleasure into a fine powder so that it'll turn into something of value. It's like a tapioca root that costs 20 cents. If you slice it, dry it in the sun, and then grind it down to a fine flour, then when you take it to sell in the market you'll find that its price has increased to four or five dollars a kilogram. Or like ordinary rice, which costs a dollar and a half per liter: If you sun it and grind it down into flour for making sweets, you'll be able to sell it for twice its original price.

In the same way, the Buddha taught us to take our wealth and pulverize it so that it'll grow in value. In other words, he has us use our discernment to see that wealth is simply common property of the world, and that we can gain value from it by giving material support and offerings to others, so that we'll then be generous to others. Don't eat it all yourself. "*N'ekāsī labhate sukhaṁ:* Those who eat alone can find no happiness." When you lie down, don't lie down for long. Sacrifice some of your time in bed by sitting up in meditation, developing thoughts of goodwill as a means of strengthening your heart and mind. In that way you won't oppress other people, and you won't oppress yourself.

The Buddha taught that if the mind falls into good thoughts, it'll find ease and happiness. If it falls into evil thoughts, it'll find suffering and pain. You can prove this to yourself: When you go back home, trying thinking of something long and difficult, and see how you feel. Your head will immediately start itching and aching. Or else think about someone you really hate—someone who's been your enemy or has abused and oppressed you in various ways: Your heart won't feel happy at all. This is thinking about things that aren't good.

As for things that are good, you can try that as well. For example, think about what would happen if someone told you a number that'll win the first prize in the lottery for sure, and that you'd be able to make merit in a huge way. If the lottery then comes out with exactly that number, not a single digit off, and you have 500,000 dollars in your hand, what would you want? When you think like this, you could sit there just smiling to yourself. You could close your door and lie there smiling to yourself.

This is why the Buddha taught us to think only of things that are good—like thinking, *buddho, buddho.* The mind will be at its ease, blooming and bright, without any sorrow.

When the mind thinks about things that are meritorious, it's like eating food that has flavor and nourishment. If you sit here thinking about all the money you've lent to other people, it's not anything good, because some people, when the time comes, won't pay their interest. You have to confront them before they'll be willing to pay. Some people won't even pay then. They'll cheat you out of both the interest and the capital. When you think about this, it pains your heart. So think about something better than that. Tell yourself, "I'm going to work solely on the mind. I won't get involved in affairs of the eyes, ears, etc., at all." When the mind has nothing disturbing it, it'll give rise to purity. It'll

brighten up and be star-happy. Don't let it be rice-porridge happy: i.e., you put it in a plate, leave it there for six hours, and come back to find that it's spoiled.

No matter how amazing the good things of the world, that goodness doesn't last. It'll have to part ways with us. It's not like happiness in the Dhamma, i.e., when the heart is happy. That kind of happiness stays with us at all times. No matter where we go, it'll follow us there. For this reason, you should try to bring your mind to right concentration with insight in your heart. You'll be at your ease. Whether you're rich or poor, you won't care. You won't be interested in the affairs of the world at all.

When you practice the Dhamma, you have to practice in line with the actual Dhamma. It's the same as when you want to ride on an ox or in a car. Don't ride the shadow of the ox or the shadow of the car. Only if you ride the actual ox or car will you gain any comfort and actually get to your goal. The externals of merit are like the shadow of the ox or the shadow of the car. If you don't train your mind, you'll never get to reach actual merit. You'll land either on its head or on its tail, and the ox may kick you or stab you with its horns—as happened in a story I'll tell you.

One day at the beginning of the Rains retreat, a husband and wife decided to give a gift to the Saṅgha for they saw that it would gain them a lot of merit. That night they prepared all the food and other things they would give to the Saṅgha, and both of them felt joyful and happy. The next morning the two monks who were to receive their gift arrived at the house. The husband's name was Maew, and the wife's name was Ma. Both of them brought trays of food and placed them in front of the monks.

The monks had ordained when they were old, and neither of them knew how to chant the precepts. So when Maew and Ma asked for the precepts, the elder monk fidgeted around a bit and then gave the fifth precept—against drinking—first. He had heard that drinking was a really big sin, and just as a tree is big at its base, he decided that the big precept should come first. So that's how he chanted it. When he had finished, the second monk said, "That's not the right way to give the precepts." The first one said, "Yes, it *is* right." The second one said, "No, it's wrong." So they started getting irritated and argued back and forth until the first monk challenged the second monk, "Which part of a boat comes first? Which part of a carrying pole comes first? Which part of a person comes first? Try thinking about it. Any side at all can come first. When a person walks, the toes come first. When he crawls, the thumbs and knees come first. It's the same with boats and carrying poles: Whichever direction you're headed, front or back, that's the part that comes first. So there's nothing wrong with giving the fifth precept first."

So they agreed that he was right, even though the whole thing was totally wrong. Usually the precept against killing has to come first every time. It's just that neither of them had had any training.

Then the elder monk taught Maew the chant for offering the gift to the Saṅgha: "These offerings we give to the Saṅgha," etc. Maew and Ma chanted "*Namo tassa*...:

Homage to the Blessed One," three times, and then Maew said to Ma, "Repeat after me." So he started with the first word in the chant, *"Imāni,"* [which means, "These," in Pali, but "This bitch Ma, here," in Thai]. Ma just sat there in silence and didn't repeat after him. So Maew started again, *"Imāni."* But Ma sat there fuming: "Here we, on a day making merit, and he uses this kind of language with me." So Maew started again, *"Imāni."* Ma couldn't stand it any longer and so she shot back at her husband, *"Ai Maew ni:* This bastard Maew here!"

Maew got angry and gave her a nasty look. Finally they started yelling at each other and, taking the serving spoons from the tray, began beating each other over the head. "Where did you study this kind of language?" Ma yelled at her husband. "I've never heard you say anything like this before." Maew said he learned it from the monks. So Ma turned on the elder monk and accused him of turning her husband against her and teaching him foul language. "All these monks know how to do is eat. You can't even give the precepts right. Well, I've had enough. Get out of my house right now!"

The two old monks were in a fix. Whatever they said would make her flare up even more, and they themselves were famished, so they took their bowls and hurried out of the house. When they got back to the temple, they had to boil a pot of rice for their meal.

This is what happens when people try to do good but miss what's actually good inside, leading to all sorts of trouble.

So when you try to make merit and do what's skillful, you have to train your heart so that your merit really will lead to happiness. Make your mind clear and clean, in line with the Buddha's saying, *"Kusalassūpasampadā:* Be complete in what's skillful." That merit will then cleanse your mind, in line with the saying, *"Sacitta-pariyodapānaṁ:* Cleanse your mind on all sides" so that it's free of faults. *"Etaṁ buddhāna-sāsanaṁ:* That way you're right in line with the teachings of all 108 Buddhas."

On Target

August 28, 1956

To sit in meditation in a way that's right on target, the mind has to be on the path. This means that it stays in the present, without tripping over preoccupations that it likes or dislikes. It's established solely in the middle way. If it misses this target, it's not on the path. It's not in line with true meditation. No matter how much it meditates, it won't get any results.

Like shooting a bird: If you don't aim right on target, then even if you have 100 bullets you'll never be able to hit the bird. But if you aim accurately right at the bird, a single bullet is all you need to bring it down right away. In the same way, when sitting in concentration or sitting in meditation, if the mind stands firm and tall in the path, you'll meet with the truth of meditation—stillness—without having to waste a lot of time.

* * *

The mind in concentration is like genuine silver—malleable and pure white—because nothing else is adulterating it. We can make it into whatever we want right away, without having to waste time placing it in a crucible and heating it to get rid of the impurities. The mind not in concentration is like imitation or adulterated silver: hard, brittle, and black, because it's mixed with copper or lead. The more the impurities, the lower its value.

A pure mind is thus like genuine silver. The various perceptions that darken the mind are like the impurities that make the silver black, brittle, and dull. So if we let perceptions come in and get mixed up in the mind, the mind will have to take on the characteristics of imitation or adulterated silver. We won't be able to find any purity in it at all. When this is the case, the mind will have no stillness.

But if we brush away the various perceptions and preoccupations adulterating the mind, it'll become firmly established in concentration, in line with the factors of the path.

Once the mind turns into the path, we have to watch over it carefully, in the same way that we try to keep a road from washing out. We have to survey it continually to see where it's wearing out. Wherever it's wearing out, we fix it right away. If we don't fix it immediately, and let it get riddled with potholes or wash away, it'll be really hard to repair. When the mind is following the path, any hindrances that interfere are a break in the road. If we let it go like that and don't hurry up to repair it, the break will get wider and deeper until the road turns into an ordinary piece of ground.

So while you're trying to develop the path, if you let yourself be forgetful—if you let your mindfulness lapse, letting distractions into the mind—the state of mind that forms

the path will immediately be destroyed. Your meditation will be spoiled, your concentration will be spoiled, the mind will return to its ordinary state and won't be able to find the path to genuine goodness.

Being forgetful while you meditate can happen in three ways. The first is by bringing inside things out to think about. In other words, you grab hold of any lights or visions that may appear, and in this way your path washes out. The second way is by bringing outside things in to think about, i.e., abandoning your meditation object. The third way is by losing consciousness. You sit there, but it's as if you were asleep. All of these things are called a washed-out path, like a road that washes out and is full of deep potholes.

To keep preoccupations out of the mind is to cut a path in the mind. To let outside preoccupations in is to let the path wash out. When the path washes out, there's no way that insight or discernment will arise—just as when a road washes out, no cars or trucks can run along it. When concentration gets extinguished in this way, you can't practice insight meditation. There's nothing left but thoughts about insight, thoughts about concentration, thinking, guessing, groping in line with your old preconceptions. The virtues of your heart disappear without your realizing it. If you want to go back and start all over, it's hard—like going back over a washed-out road.

* * *

When mindfulness stays with the body, it's called *kāyagatāsati:* mindfulness immersed in the body. In general, this refers to being mindful of the four properties: earth, water, fire, and wind. To pick out just one part, it refers to being mindful of the breath. This is also called *kāyānupassanā satipaṭṭhāna:* establishing mindfulness through contemplating the body. Mindfulness is the cause; alertness, the result. Or you could say that the breath is the cause, and a sense of comfort is the result.

When we have mindfulness and alertness in charge of us at all times, the body will always be awake. It won't get sleepy or drowsy. The hindrances won't be able to come in, latch on, and eat away at the mind. It's like a home where there's always somebody awake by day and by night, without falling sleep. Thieves won't be able to break in and disturb them.

When the mind and body are asleep, they open the way for various forms of Māra to come in and destroy our goodness in every way. For instance, the various demons of the aggregates will get into the body, making form abnormal, feelings abnormal, perceptions abnormal, fabrications abnormal, and consciousness abnormal. The various demons of defilement will sneak in and place poison in our body. In other words, as soon as mindfulness lapses, these demons will come in and force the mind to sleep. Then they'll put more poison in our hearts: the five hindrances.

The reason the hindrances are called poison is because they make the mind dizzy and deluded. For example, sensual desire makes us deluded, infatuated with different objects. Ill will makes us angry and vengeful, hot and fiery so that our mind has no peace. It's as if

we fall into a living hell. Sloth and torpor make us discouraged. We don't see the rewards of what's meritorious and skillful, or of generosity, virtue, or meditation. This makes us sleepy, drowsy, and listless. Restlessness and anxiety make us distracted, irritated, and scattered. When this happens, uncertainty is bound to arise, so we grope around without any sense of what we can take as our standard.

All of these things are nothing but detriment. They're all poisons and intoxicants. This is why they're called the demons of defilement. When these things work their way into us, they're bound to exert a lot of power and influence. They can pull our body out of the Buddha's teachings; they can pull our heart out of the Buddha's teachings, making us lazy, careless, and unreliable. We start living like duckweed, which simply rises and falls with the water, and is nothing more than food for turtles—ignorance—and fish—evil. When our mind hasn't fathomed the qualities of the Buddha, Dhamma, and Saṅgha, it's bound to be this way. It still lives with flocks of demons. Even though we practice, it's just a show. We're still far from the Buddha, Dhamma, and Saṅgha. We don't count as close to them at all.

To be far means to be far away in terms of our behavior. For instance, if we don't waken the body, don't waken the mind, we don't count as practicing the Buddha's Dhamma. But if you're mindful and alert, you'll always be awake in body and mind. In other words, when your eyes are open, your mind is firmly established. When your eyes are closed, your mind is firmly established. Whatever job you're doing—whether sitting, standing, walking, or lying down—the number "1" has to be in charge of your mind at all times. Don't let it turn into the numbers 2, 3, or 4 at all. This is what's called being genuinely established in the Buddha's Dhamma, in line with the verse from the Canon:

Suppabuddhaṁ pabujjhanti sadā gotama-sāvakā
Yesaṁ divā ca ratto ca niccaṁ kāyagatāsati

which means:

Whoever is mindful, contemplating the body, always awake in the Buddha's Dhamma by day and by night, is a genuine disciple of the Buddha.

* * *

When you sit in concentration or in meditation, the mind has to penetrate straight into the truth if you're going to get results. Don't hit only the convention. We want genuine silver, but if there are imitation things adulterating it—if the copper has adulterated it up to 80 or 90 percent—that silver isn't the silver we want.

There are two kinds of conventions: conventions in line with the truth and conventions not in line with the truth. An example of a convention is the way we're sitting with our eyes closed here. If someone asks us what we're doing as we're sitting here, we say that we're sitting in meditation. But this phrase, "sitting in meditation": Is our mind still

or not still? If it's still, that's a convention in line with the truth. We're sitting in meditation. But if the mind isn't still, if it flickers out after perceptions and preoccupations, that's a convention not in line with the truth. You can't really say that you're sitting in meditation. What you're doing is simply sitting with your eyes closed, that's all. Simply sitting with your eyes closed isn't sitting in meditation. The truth of the convention called "sitting in meditation" is sitting with a still heart, keeping the mind firmly established in a single preoccupation, without being distracted by other preoccupations. That's the convention in line with the truth.

So now that we've come here intent on sitting in meditation, we should try to be on target with the truth of the convention. If we're not on target with the truth of the convention, we're just sitting with our eyes closed. No matter how many decades we keep this up, it's not likely to serve any purpose.

When we meditate in line with the truth of the convention, we'll meet with the truth as our reward. The results of our work will be right concentration. The silver put into our mold will be pure silver. We won't have to trouble ourselves with having to get rid of the impurities. It's 100 percent pure silver, so the impurities will fall away on their own. It's the same when the mind is pure: The hindrances won't be able to penetrate. Whatever work we do, no matter what, will be right action: clean and pure. Our words will be right speech, pure speech. Whatever we say, people will trust us. We'll bring progress both to ourselves and to others. Our words will be good, with no drawbacks. When this is the case, our livelihood will advance in the right direction: right livelihood.

If the mind lacks a foundation in concentration, it's like adulterated silver. If the adulterations are many, the silver will be black and brittle. Whatever shape you try to hammer it into, it'll all break. It's useless. It isn't malleable. But if your mind is firmly established in concentration, it's like genuine silver without any adulterations: bright, beautiful, white, and clean, something that other people love. You yourself will be happy, too, for the mind will be full and refreshed, in and of itself. When you live with other people, they'll be refreshed as well. But if you're the type of person who's always suffering, then when you live with other people, you make them suffer, too.

Suffering arises from the adulterations of our not being true. If we meet up with the truth of the Dhamma, it's like finding a huge hunk of merit. And when we have an enormous hunk of merit in this way, we'll have more than enough to eat for life. The goodness buried in our heart and mind is like a hunk of mineral buried in rock. If the mineral is more than the rock, with the passage of time it might be able to turn the whole rock into diamond. But if the mineral is only a small part of the rock, it may be no match for the rock and the dirt. It may get turned into whichever part is more.

If we have only a little bit of skillfulness and merit, it's bound to be no match for our evil and unskillfulness. With the passage of time, the mind will all flow back down to its evil ways—in the same way that some people, even though they're already 80 or 90 years old, have never been able to make anything of themselves in life. That's because whatever

they gain, they use it all up without setting anything aside to invest in the future. If you make merit but then throw it away, throw it away, *when* will you have enough to look after yourself? You'll have to be poor for life. If you have children and grandchildren, they'll have to be poor, too, because they're born into a poor family. If we're rich in noble wealth, our children and grandchildren won't be poor. We'll have no difficulty if we keep on living, and no fear if we die. But if the good we do isn't enough for our own mouths and stomachs, if we don't have enough goodness to keep ourselves going, if we have nothing but evil to pass on to our children, we're compounding our evil on two levels: the evil of being evil ourselves, and the evil passing evil on to them.

The Art of Letting Go

August 17, 1956

When you sit and meditate, even if you don't gain any intuitive insights, make sure at least that you know this much: When the breath comes in, you know. When it goes out, you know. When it's long, you know. When it's short, you know. Whether it's pleasant or unpleasant, you know. If you can know this much, you're doing fine. As for the various perceptions and concepts *(saññā)* that come into the mind, brush them away—whether they're good or bad, whether they deal with the past or the future. Don't let them interfere with what you're doing—and don't go chasing after them to straighten them out. When a thought of this sort comes passing in, simply let it go passing on. Keep your awareness, unperturbed, in the present.

When we say that the mind goes here or there, it's not really the mind that goes. Only concepts go. Concepts are like shadows of the mind. If the body is still, how will its shadow move? The movement of the body is what causes the shadow to move, and when the shadow moves, how will you catch hold of it? Shadows are hard to catch, hard to shake off, hard to set still. The awareness that forms the present: That's the true mind. The awareness that goes chasing after concepts is just a shadow. Real awareness—'knowing'—stays in place. It doesn't stand, walk, come, or go. As for the mind—the awareness that doesn't act in any way coming or going, forward or back—it's quiet and unperturbed. And when the mind is thus its normal, even, undistracted self—i.e., when it doesn't have any shadows—we can rest peacefully. But if the mind is unstable and uncertain, it wavers: Concepts arise and go flashing out—and we go chasing after them, hoping to drag them back in. The chasing after them is where we go wrong. This is what we have to correct. Tell yourself: Nothing is wrong with your mind. Just watch out for the shadows. You can't improve your shadow. Say your shadow is black. You can scrub it with soap till your dying day, and it'll still be black—because there's no substance to it. So it is with your concepts. You can't straighten them out, because they're just images, deceiving you.

The Buddha thus taught that whoever isn't acquainted with the self, the body, the mind, and its shadows, is suffering from *avijjā*—darkness, deluded knowledge. Whoever thinks the mind is the self, the self is the mind, the mind is its concepts—whoever has things all mixed up like this—is lost like a person lost in the jungle. To be lost in the jungle brings countless hardships. There are wild beasts to worry about, problems in finding food to eat and a place to sleep. No matter which way you look, there's no way out. But if we're lost in the world, it's many times worse than being lost in the jungle, because we can't tell night from day. We have no chance to find any brightness because

our minds are dark with avijjā.

The purpose of training the mind to be still is to simplify things. When things are simplified, we can see. The mind can settle down and rest. And when the mind has rested, it'll gradually become bright, in and of itself, and give rise to knowledge. But if we let things get complicated—if we let the mind get mixed up with sights, sounds, smells, tastes, tactile sensations, and ideas—that's darkness. Knowledge won't have a chance to arise.

Mind-states mixed up with sights, sounds, smells, tastes, tactile sensations, and ideas are like a boat buffeted by storm winds from the back, the front, the left, and the right—all eight directions—that keep it from staying upright and simply cause it to sink. The lanterns used on the boat will have to go out because of the strength of the winds.

Thoughts and concepts are like waves running back and forth in the ocean. The heart is like a fish that swims up and down in the water. Just as it's the nature of the fish to see the waves of the ocean as enjoyable, it's the nature of people filled with thick ignorance to see tumultuous issues as enjoyable as well. But when we can calm down all the issues of the mind, we can bring it to its meditation object, firmly implanting the recollections—beginning with recollection of the Buddha and ending with recollection of the Saṅgha—in the heart.

When this is the case, we can throw out all the bad things in the heart, just as we throw out all the useless things in our boat and load the boat with useful things instead. Even though these things may add weight to the boat, our heart is light—because all the affairs of merit and skillfulness are light. When the heart is light in this way, our burdens lessen. The mind is free of its various thoughts and concepts, the hindrances don't appear, and we can immediately enter into our meditation.

We have to use mindfulness and alertness to survey the effect that the in-and-out breath has on the body and on the mind. If the breath is weak, start with a long in-breath again. Don't let your mindfulness lapse. Keep adjusting the breath until you feel that the body and mind are gaining a sense of comfort and ease. (To take a deep breath is to highlight your sense of feeling.) When you gain a sense of comfort and ease in this way, the mind grows still. When the mind is still, it gives rise to many kinds of good results: (1) results in the area of the body and (2) results in the area of the mind. Results in the area of the body are a sense of openness, lightness, and suppleness without any sense of constriction or trouble. You can without feeling tightness, pains, or disease.

As for the mind, it feels undisturbed: wide open and empty, free from external thoughts and concepts. Be careful to look after these results well, maintain them for a long time. Other results will then appear in their wake: i.e., knowledge. On the physical level, this refers to the visions that may arise *(uggaha nimitta).* Whatever vision appears as an image in the heart is a secondary level of result. When the foundation provided by the body is comfortable, the foundation provided by the mind is bound to be comfortable,

and results—called cognitive skills—will appear in the mind. For example, things we've never read about or studied can appear to use. Another sort of result is when the mind is nice and quiet, if we want to know about a particular matter, we simply move the mind just a little bit and we can immediately know what we wanted to know—like a needle on a record: As soon as it hits the record, sounds will arise to tell us clearly what's on the record.

This kind of knowledge can develop into liberating insight *(vipassanā-ñāṇa).* But if the knowledge concerns lowly matters—dealing with perceptions of the past and future—and we follow it for a long distance, it turns into worldly knowledge. That is to say, we dabble so much in matters of the body that we lower the level of the mind, which doesn't have a chance to mature in the level of mental phenomena.

Say, for example, that a vision arises and you get hooked: You gain knowledge of your past lives and get all excited. Things you never knew before, now you can know. Things you never saw before, now you see—and they can make you overly pleased or upset. Why? Because you take them all too seriously. You may see a vision of yourself prospering as a lord or master, a great emperor or king, wealthy and influential. If you let yourself feel pleased, that's indulgence in pleasure. You've strayed from the Middle Path. Or you may see yourself as something you wouldn't care to be: a pig or a dog, a bird or a rat, crippled or deformed. If you let yourself get upset, that's indulgence in self-affliction—and again, you've strayed from the path. Some people really let themselves get carried away: As soon as they start seeing things, they begin to think that they're special, somehow better than other people. They let themselves become proud and conceited—and the true path has disappeared without their even knowing it. If you're not careful, this is where mundane knowledge can lead you.

But if you keep one principle firmly in mind, you can stay on the right path: Whatever appears, good or bad, true or false, don't let yourself feel pleased, don't let yourself get upset. Keep the mind balanced and neutral, and discernment will arise. You'll see that the vision or sign displays the truth of stress: it arises (is born), fades (ages), and disappears (dies).

When you know in this way, you can stay neutral and equanimous. The mind will let go of the vision and discard it from the heart. The vision will disappear—but it isn't annihilated. The vision still has its truth. It's like fire in the world: The red light of the flame exists, but we don't touch it or try to grab it. All visions disband, but they aren't annihilated. Wherever we go, they're still there, but we simply don't latch onto them. If they arise, that's their business. If they disband, that's their business, but our awareness stays at normalcy.

This is the path. When the path is established in this way, the cause of suffering disbands, but our ability to know and see the Dhamma is still there. For example, if we want to know what heaven and hell are like, or if they exist, a vision will immediately appear. Sometimes we know the affairs of other people: This person is like this, that

person is like that, what they're like after they die and what the place they're reborn is like. Sometimes when we know these things we get carried away, entranced in other peoples' business, entranced by our own knowledge. Sometimes we see the face of an enemy who oppressed us in the past, and this gets us upset. When this happens, the mind falls into self-torment.

The right way is that we don't have to show any happiness or sadness in the things that we like or don't like. We have to remind ourselves that it's normal that all of us have both good things and bad things in our past. The affairs of birth keeping circling around like this. Nothing's for sure. Nothing's true. The good things aren't truly good. The bad things aren't truly bad—and they keep on being unreliable. This is the way it is with us; this is the way it is with other people.

When you see the truth in this way, the mind gives rise to disenchantment because it sees clearly that every thing of every sort simply arises and changes, and when it changes it disbands. The mind can let go and stay neutral, and the path arises. The mind stays steady and still, with no worries, no attachments. It will then be released from the visions about you and about others, released from its knowledge. It won't latch onto knowledge about you—such as knowledge of previous lives—or onto knowledge about others, such as knowledge of the death and rebirth of other beings.

When we're no longer involved in our own affairs—true or false, good or bad, and about whether we know or not—the mind will gain release from the mundane level and develop the knowledge of the ending of mental fermentations.

Some people reach the stage of gaining knowledge and latch onto it, which can lead to delusion. As for those perfections are strong, they'll know how to hold back from their knowledge, and the mind will enter the lowest of the noble attainments, or stream-entry.

Some people gain cognition on the mental level. Knowledge arises concerning the affairs of the mind. This kind of sign is a form of knowledge that arises from stillness without our having thought of the matter. It can simply arise on its own. As soon as we think of something, it will immediately arise, just as we hear sounds when we turn on a radio. Sometimes we know this, sometimes that, sometimes we don't know, sometimes it arises on its own.

This can turn into the corruptions of insight, which is why we shouldn't latch onto the true things we know, we shouldn't latch onto the false things we know. If you latch onto your views, they can hurt you. Latching onto false things can hurt you; latching onto true things can hurt. In fact, the true things are what **really** hurt you. If what you know is true and you go telling other people, you're bragging. If it turns out to be false, it can backfire on you. This is why those who truly know say that knowledge is the essence of stress: It can hurt you. Knowledge is part of the flood of views and opinions *(diṭṭhi-ogha)* over which we have to cross. If you hang onto knowledge, you've gone wrong. If you know, simply know and let it go at that. You don't have to be excited or pleased. You don't have to go

telling other people.

People who've studied abroad, when they come back to the rice fields, don't tell what they've learned to the folks at home. They talk about ordinary things in an ordinary way. They don't talk about the things they've studied because (1) no one would understand them; (2) it wouldn't serve any purpose. Even with people who *would* understand them, they don't display their learning. So it should be when you practice meditation. No matter how much you know, you have to act as if you know nothing—because this is the way people with good manners normally act. If you go bragging to other people, it's bad enough. If they don't believe you, it can get even worse.

So whatever you know, simply be aware of it and let it go. Don't let there be the assumption that 'I know.' When you can do this, your mind can attain the transcendent, free from attachment.

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Everything in the world has its truth. Even things that aren't true are true—i.e., their truth is that they're false. This is why we have to let go of both what's true and what's false. Once we know the truth and can let it go, we can be at our ease. We won't be poor, because the truth—the Dhamma—will still be there with us. We won't be left empty-handed. It's like having a lot of money: Instead of lugging it around with us, we keep it piled up at home. We may not have anything in our pockets, but we're still not poor.

The same is true with people who really know. Even when they let go of their knowledge, it's still there. This is why the minds of the Noble Ones aren't left adrift. They let things go, but not in a wasteful or irresponsible way. They let go like rich people: Even though they let go, they've still got piles of wealth.

As for people who let things go like paupers, they don't know what's worthwhile and what's not, and so they let it all go, throw it all away. And when they do this, they're simply heading for disaster. For instance, they may see that there's no truth to anything—no truth to the khandhas, no truth to the body, no truth to stress, its cause, its disbanding, or the path to its disbanding, no truth to unbinding *(nibbāna).* They don't use their brains at all. They're too lazy to do anything, so they let go of everything, throw it all away. This is called letting go like a pauper. Like a lot of modern-day sages: When they come back after they die, they're going to be poor all over again.

As for the Buddha, he let go only of the true and false things that appeared in his body and mind—but he didn't abandon his body and mind, which is why he ended up rich, with plenty of wealth to hand down to his descendants. This is why his descendants never have to worry about being poor.

So we should look to the Buddha as our model. If we see that the khandhas are worthless—inconstant, stressful, not-self, and all that—and simply let go of them by neglecting them, we're sure to end up poor. Like a stupid person who feels so repulsed by a festering sore on his body that he won't touch it and so lets it go without taking care of

it: There's no way the sore is going to heal. As for intelligent people, they know how to wash their sores, put medicine and bandages on them, so that eventually they're sure to recover.

In the same way, when people see only the drawbacks to the khandhas, without seeing their good side, and so let them go without putting them to any worthwhile or skillful use, nothing good will come of it. But if we're intelligent enough to see that the khandhas have their good side as well as their bad, and then put them to good use by meditating to gain discernment into physical and mental phenomena, we're going to be rich. Once we have the truth—the Dhamma—as our wealth, we won't suffer if we have money, and won't suffer if we don't, because our minds will be transcendent.

As for the various forms of rust that have befouled and obscured our senses—the rust of greed, the rust of anger, and the rust of delusion—these all fall away. Our eyes, ears, nose, tongue, body, and mind will all be clean and bright. This is why the Buddha said, "*Dhammo padīpo:* The Dhamma is a bright light." This is the light of discernment. Our heart will be far beyond all forms of harm and suffering, and will flow in the current leading to nibbāna at all times.

At the Tip of Your Nose

August 26, 1957

If feelings of pain or discomfort arise while you're sitting in meditation, examine them to see what they come from. Don't let yourself be pained or upset by them. If there are parts of the body that won't go as you'd like them to, don't worry about them. Let them be—because your body is the same as every other body, human or animal, throughout the world: It's inconstant, stressful, and can't be forced. So stay with whatever part *does* go as you'd like it to, and keep it comfortable.

The body is like a tree: No tree is entirely perfect. At any one time it'll have new leaves and old leaves, green leaves and yellow, fresh leaves and dry. The dry leaves will fall away first, while those that are fresh will slowly dry out and fall away later. Some of the branches are long, some thick, and some small. The fruits aren't evenly distributed. The human body isn't really much different from this. Pleasure and pain aren't evenly distributed. The parts that ache and those that are comfortable are randomly mixed. You can't rely on it. So do your best to keep the comfortable parts comfortable. Don't worry about the parts that you can't make comfortable.

It's like going into a house where the floorboards are beginning to rot: If you want to sit down, don't choose a rotten spot. Choose a spot where the boards are still sound. In other words, *the heart needn't concern itself with things that can't be controlled.*

You can compare the body to a mango: If a mango has a rotten or a wormy spot, take a knife and cut it out. Eat just the good part remaining. If you're foolish enough to eat the wormy part, you're in for trouble. Your body is the same, and not just the body—the mind, too, doesn't always go as you'd like it to. Sometimes it's in a good mood, sometimes it's not. This is where you have to use as much thought and evaluation as possible.

Directed thought and evaluation are like doing a job. The job here is concentration: centering the mind. Focus the mind on a single object and then, giving it your full attention, examine and reflect on it. If you use a meager amount of thought and evaluation, your concentration will give meager results. If you do a crude job, you'll get crude results. If you do a fine job, you'll get fine results. Crude results aren't worth much. Fine results are of high quality and are useful in all sorts of ways—like atomic radiation, which is so fine that it can penetrate even mountains. Crude things are of low quality and hard to use. Sometimes you can soak them in water all day long and they still don't soften up. But as for fine things, all they need is a little dampness in the air and they dissolve.

So it is with the quality of your concentration. If your thinking and evaluation are

subtle, thorough, and circumspect, your 'concentration work' will result in more and more stillness of mind. If your thinking and evaluation are slipshod, you won't get much stillness. Your body will ache, and you'll feel restless and irritable. Once the mind can become very still, though, the body will be comfortable and at ease. Your heart will feel open and clear. Pains will disappear. The elements of the body will feel normal: The warmth in your body will be just right, neither too hot nor too cold. As soon as your work is finished, it'll result in the highest form of happiness and ease: nibbāna—unbinding. But as long as you still have work to do, your heart won't get its full measure of peace. Wherever you go, there will always be something nagging at the back of your mind. You won't be able to get away, for you'll have to come back and work at your job again until it's finished.

This is why the Buddha taught,

anākulā ca kammantā etam-maṅgalam-uttamaṁ

which means, "A job not left unfinished: That's the highest blessing."

Once your work is done, you can go wherever you want with ease, without any worries or cares before you or behind you.

If you haven't finished your job, it's because (1) you haven't set your mind on it; and (2) you haven't actually done the work. You've shirked your duties and played truant. But if you really set your mind on doing the job, there's no doubt but that you'll finish it.

Once you've realized that the body is inconstant, stressful, and can't be forced, you shouldn't let your mind get upset or excited by it. Keep your mind normal, on an even keel. 'Inconstant' means that it changes. 'Stressful' doesn't refer solely to aches and pains. It refers to pleasure as well—because pleasure is inconstant and undependable. A little pleasure can turn into a lot of pleasure, or into pain. Pain can turn back into pleasure, and so on. (If we had nothing but pain we would die.) So we shouldn't be all that concerned about pleasure and pain. Think of the body as having two parts, like the mango. If you focus your attention on the comfortable part, your mind can be at peace. Let the pains be in the other part. Once you have an object of meditation, you have a comfortable place for your mind to stay. You don't have to dwell on your pains. You have a comfortable house to live in: Why go sleep in the dirt?

It's not the case that we have nothing but pain in the same place all the time. Sometimes our back aches, sometimes our leg hurts, sometimes the pain moves from the leg to ache in the small of the back. Sometimes it hurts today but disappears tomorrow. Or sometimes it disappears but then it comes back to hurt us again. That's because there's nothing certain or stable about it. So class the bad parts as bad kamma, and the good parts as merit, and then ask yourself, "Do you want bad kamma or merit?" If you don't like bad kamma, let it go to one side. If you like merit, stay with the parts that feel comfortable.

When you can do this, suffering will disappear. Your merit will keep on developing

until all five aggregates will feel pleasant. The form of your body will feel comfortable, feeling with feel comfortable, perception will feel comfortable, fabrications will feel comfortable, consciousness will feel comfortable. When these five kinds of comfort arise, the heart will lie back eating nothing but the goodness and merit of what's called rapture and calm. This is what comes from *dhamma-vicaya,* or exploring the Dhamma of the present.

When we become acquainted with what's going on in ourselves in this way, we can keep on making an effort within our goodness or old merit, and our heart will experience nothing but the ease and refreshment of rapture. As rapture grows greater and greater, we'll feel totally full. When we're full, we'll stop feeling hungry, stop feeling tired, stop feeling hot or cold. We can live anywhere at all and be at our ease. The energy of our body and the energy of our mind will grow strong and gain power. We'll be able to sit for five hours without any aches or pains.

When the heart is full like this, it can rest—but this doesn't mean that it dozes off. "Resting" here means that it grows quiet as it enters into concentration with a sense of ease and comfort, with nothing to disturb it. This kind of resting is called *vihāra-dhamma,* a home for the mind, as the mind enters into jhāna. It's like sitting up in a bright, wide-open place where you can see everything clearly, both near and far. If you sit down in a dark place, you can't see anything at all. In other words, the heart is obscured with the power of the hindrances. If you sit in a bright, wide-open place, the hindrances can't sneak up and oppress the mind. Resting like this is resting with your eyes open—i.e., you're aware with every in-and-out breath. Your awareness of things both within and without stays constant, seeing things from every side and into every corner—and yet the mind remains steady and still. The body is quiet. The mind is quiet. This is called *kāya-passaddhi,* physical calm, and *citta-passaddhi,* mental calm.

Tranquility meditation *(samatha)* is a mind snug in a single preoccupation. It doesn't establish contact with anything else; it keeps itself cleansed of outside preoccupations. Insight meditation *(vipassanā)* is when the mind lets go of all preoccupations in a state of all-around mindfulness and alertness. When tranquility imbued with insight arises in the mind, five faculties arise and become dominant all at once: *(1) Saddhindrīya:* Your conviction becomes solid and strong. Whatever anyone else may say, good or bad, your mind isn't affected. *(2) Viriyindrīya:* Your persistence becomes resilient. Whether anyone teaches you the path or not, you keep at it constantly without flagging or getting discouraged. *(3) Satindrīya:* Mindfulness becomes dominant, enlarged in the great frame of reference. You don't have to force it. It spreads all over the body, in the same way that the branches of a large tree protect the entire trunk from bottom to top, without anyone having to pull them down or shake them up. Our awareness becomes entirely radiant in every posture: sitting, standing, walking, and lying down. It knows on its own without our having to think. This all-around awareness is what is meant by the great establishing of mindfulness. *(4) Samādhindrīya:* Our concentration becomes dominant, too. Whatever

we're doing, the mind doesn't waver or stray. Even if we're talking to the point where our mouth opens two meters wide, the mind is still at normalcy. If the body wants to eat, lie down, sit, stand, walk, run, think, whatever, that's its business. Or if any part of it gets weary or pained, again, that's its business, but the mind remains still in a single preoccupation, without straying off into anything else. *(5) Paññindrīya:* Discernment becomes dominant within us as well, to the point where we can make the mind attain stream-entry, once-returning, non-returning, or even arahantship.

We all want nothing but goodness, but if you can't tell what's good from what's defiled, you can sit and meditate till your dying day and never find nibbāna at all. But if you can set your mind and keep your mind on what you're doing, it's not all that hard. Nibbāna is really a simple matter, because it's always there. It never changes. The affairs of the world are what's hard, because they're always changing and uncertain. Today they're one way, tomorrow another. Once you've done something, you have to keep looking after it. But you don't have to look after nibbāna at all. Once you've realized it, you can let it go. Keep on realizing, keep on letting go—like a person eating rice who, after he's put the rice in his mouth, keeps spitting it out.

What this means is that you keep on doing good but don't claim it as your own. Do good, and then spit it out. This is *virāga-dhamma:* dispassion. For most people in the world, once they've done something, it's theirs—and so they have to keep looking after it. If they're not careful, it'll either get stolen or else wear out on its own. They're headed for disappointment. Like a person who swallows his rice: After he's eaten, he'll have to defecate. After he's defecated he'll be hungry again, so he'll have to eat again and defecate again. The day will never come when he's had enough.

But with nibbāna, you don't have to swallow. You can eat your rice and then spit it out. You can do good and let it go. It's like plowing a field: The dirt falls off the plow on its own. You don't need to scoop it up and put it in a bag tied to your water buffalo's leg. Whoever is stupid enough to scoop up the dirt as it falls off the plow and stick it in a bag will never get anywhere. Either his buffalo will get bogged down or else he'll trip over the bag and fall flat on his face right there in the middle of the field. The field will never get plowed, the rice will never get sown, the crop will never get gathered. He'll have to go hungry.

This is the way our practice of the Dhamma tends to be. Whatever we do, we're not really intent on what we're doing. We walk along, looking to the left, glancing to the right, forgetting where we've been and where we're going—like the old husband and wife who, one day, took their machetes into the forest to clear a field. After cutting down all the big trees, the old man came across some tall grass, so he took off the cloth he had wrapped around his head, tied it as a sash around his waist, and tucked the machete into the sash behind his back. Then he squatted down to pull out the grass. As he was pulling out the grass, he came across a stump, so he turned around to pick up his machete to cut back the stump, but he couldn't find it anywhere on the ground. He couldn't remember where he

had placed it, so he started walking around, looking for it in the forest. After walking around everywhere two or three times, he still couldn't find it. The old woman called out after him, "What are you looking for?" The old man replied, "I'm looking for my machete. I want to cut back a stump." The old woman saw the machete tucked under her husband's sash, and it struck her as so funny that all she could do was snicker to herself to the point where she couldn't say anything at all.

Finally, her husband was at his wits' end as to how to find his machete. So—because he was so tired and the sun was so hot—he plunked himself down on the ground. That's when the handle of the machete tucked behind his back hit the ground with full force. Startled, the old man turned around to look—and that's when he realized that the machete had been tucked behind his back all along.

The way we practice concentration isn't all that different from the old man. This is why we're taught to be persistent in directing our thoughts to our meditation object and evaluating it, with mindfulness and alertness in charge, with each and every in-and-out breath.

Buddho, our meditation word, is the name of the Buddha after his Awakening. It means someone who has blossomed, who is awake, who has suddenly come to his senses. For six long years before his Awakening, the Buddha traveled about, searching for the truth from various teachers, all without success. So he went off on his own and on a full-moon evening in May sat down under the Bodhi tree, vowing that he wouldn't get up until he had attained the truth. Finally, toward dawn, as he was meditating on his breath, he gained Awakening. He found what he was looking for—right at the tip of his nose.

Nibbāna doesn't lie far away. It's right at our lips, right at the tip of our nose, but we keep groping around and never find it. If you're really serious about finding purity, set your mind on meditation and nothing else. As for whatever else may come your way, you can say, 'No thanks.' Pleasure? 'No thanks.' Pain? 'No thanks.' Goodness? 'No thanks.' Evil? 'No thanks.' Attainment? 'No thanks.' Nibbāna? 'No thanks.' If it's 'no thanks' to everything, what will you have left? *You won't need to have anything left.* **That's** nibbāna. Like a person without any money: How will thieves be able to rob him? If you get money and try to hold onto it, you're going to get killed. If this thief doesn't get you, that one will. Carry 'what's yours' around till you're completely weighed down. You'll never get away.

In this world we have to live with both good and evil. People who have developed dispassion are filled with goodness and know evil fully, but don't hold onto either, don't claim either as their own. They put them aside and let them go, and so can travel light and easy. Nibbāna isn't all that difficult a matter. In the Buddha's time, some people became arahants while going on their almsround, some while urinating, some while watching farmers plowing a field. What's difficult about the highest good lies in the beginning, in laying the groundwork—being constantly mindful, examining and evaluating your breath at all times. But if you can keep at it, you're bound to succeed in the end.

PART III

Fragments

§ The world is like a prison or a dungeon. People who are still tied up in their attachments to material things or to their good and bad moods are like prisoners tied down with fetters and bonds, and who can't escape.

If they're stuck on the eight ways of the world, both the good side—material gain, status, praise, and pleasure—and the bad—material loss, loss of status, criticism, and pain—they're like prisoners shackled to a stake with a chain whose links are eight centimeters thick. This counts as a heavy sentence, and it's going to be hard for them to get out of prison. Monks who come to comfort them can't reach them, because they're deep in the dungeon. They themselves can't get out because of the fetters tying them down.

Some people are serving a lighter sentence, so their chains are only six centimeters or four. The lightest sentence is two centimeters. This refers to people who are attached to their bodies and minds, thinking that the body's elements of earth, water, wind, and fire are the self, holding to the idea that the body is *their* body, that the mind is *their* mind. These people are serving a lighter sentence, the kind that can be remitted on good behavior. They have a chance of making good and being released into freedom.

§ Don't look down on people who aren't smart or who were born into a family of low status, because things of this sort depend on the actions that we have done in the past and that yield fruit in making us come here with different characteristics. For some people, even though they were born into a poor family, *it's simply a matter of kamma tossing them there.* They can still have goodness as part of their mental current as well. They might reach the paths and fruitions someday in the future. The fact that their kamma tossed them into poverty may have simply been for the purpose of subjecting them to hardship so as to see the drawbacks of life, and to finish paying off their old kammic debts.

On this matter of kamma, the Buddha taught us not to be heedless—and don't be heedless of what you can't see. Don't despise the gifts given by others, or their virtue or their meditation. They might have something good hidden inside, simply that it's covered up by other kamma so that you can't see it. If you treat them with disrespect, that kamma might come back at you so that you suffer from its results on into the future.

§ When directed thought is in the breath energy, evaluation is in the breath energy, and pleasure and rapture are in the breath energy, that's when things gather into *ekaggatā,* or singleness of preoccupation.

§ Make your mind like a train running along the track. The breath is the track, the mind is the train, and mindfulness is the conductor driving the train. You have to make sure that the conductor isn't drunk on alcohol, and that he's intent on driving the train well so that it goes straight down the track. When the train goes smoothly up and down the track without any hitches, the results are that you'll earn money from carrying passengers and freight. The money stands for inner worth and skillfulness. The passengers are the four jhānas, which will benefit the mind. The freight stands for the fullness of the physical properties, which will benefit the body.

§ Expanding the breath is beneficial both for yourself and for others. It benefits others in that it helps keep your body healthy and at ease. It benefits you in that it helps to expand the mind.

§ We have to build goodness within ourselves, with the help of the current from others. It's like electricity. What we get is just the current that flows, not the actual power in the generator or battery.

§ The Buddha, Dhamma, and Saṅgha have to die, but the virtues of the Buddha, Dhamma, and Saṅgha are unable to die.

§ Thoughts are like knives. If you know how to use them, they benefit you. If you don't know how to use them, they can harm you. Sometimes they can even kill you.

§ What is insight? Insight is entering in to know the condition of the Dhamma. The various ways that that condition manifests come from the suppositions and conventions that people use to grab hold of it. If these things disband, there's nothing but the condition. For example, if a water glass simply sits there, it doesn't break. Only when someone grabs hold of it will it break.

§ This body, if the mind doesn't enter into it and latch onto it, is nothing more than a black piece of charcoal, that's all. If the mind latches onto it with craving and clinging, it turns into a red-hot piece of charcoal. So when we separate the mind from the body, and there's just the knowing of awareness, the body disbands, like a piece of charcoal from which the fire has disbanded.

§ When the body "disbands," that doesn't mean that there's no body. It's there, but you don't fabricate it.

§ When pain arises and you focus your awareness on someone or something else in order to forget the pain, that's okay, but it's only mindfulness, not alertness. You have to know inside yourself for there to be both mindfulness and alertness.

§ *Saṁvara* means care and restraint. It's like holding a water glass in your hand. You have to be careful to hold it well. If you let it go, the glass will drop and break. When the mind has entered in to be quiet in its theme of concentration, you have to be careful not to damage it. Your eyes can see forms, but don't suppose them to be good or bad. Your ears can hear sounds, but don't suppose them to be good or bad—and so forth.

§ To take pleasure in sights, sounds, smells, tastes, and tactile sensations is sensual craving. When the mind goes out looking for preoccupations but hasn't yet found one that it likes, that's craving for becoming. When the mind leans or wavers in a present preoccupation, that's craving for non-becoming. If you don't know these characteristics of the mind, that's ignorance.

§ Before they can shape iron, they have to hold it over the fire until it's soft and glowing red. In the same way, we hold the mind over the fire—i.e., we polish it with virtue and concentration—and only then can we use discernment to shape it.

§ In practicing concentration, the Buddha has us follow a single path: the one-way path (*ek'āyana-magga).* Normally, we follow up to six paths: the path of the eye, the path of the ear, the path of the nose, the path of the tongue, the path of the body, and the path of the mind. When the mind receives sensations from outside, it sometimes gets stuck on sights, sometimes on sounds, sometimes on smells, sometimes on flavors, sometimes on tactile sensations. As long as the mind isn't established in a single preoccupation, no stillness will arise from it—because normally, when you follow lots of paths, you can't follow them all at the same time. You have to take turns, following now this path and now that. As a result, none of these paths will be worn smooth, because you don't walk constantly on any one of them. So these paths will have to be overgrown and filled with dangers. You might step on thorns or sharp rocks. Twigs and branches on the side of these paths will catch you in your eyes, ears, arms, or legs. And normally, an overgrown place tends to have biting ants, snakes, centipedes, and scorpions hiding out. When you don't see them, you'll step on them. They'll bite you or sting you, infecting you with their poison or even killing you.

At the same time, if you're in a hurry and need to take a shortcut, an overgrown path isn't convenient, because you get stuck on this or that obstacle lying athwart the path, which means that you'll reach your goal slowly or arrive too late. If you're walking during the day, you can at least see the path. But if you're walking at night, it's really difficult.

The Buddha saw that following lots of paths is dangerous for people, so he made it a basic principle that we follow a single path—a path that's pure, complete, and free of every kind of danger. In other words, he has us make our minds still in a single preoccupation. This is what's called the development of concentration. This single path is the path that will take us to four treasures: stress, its origination, its cessation, and the path to its cessation. These noble truths are noble treasures that are genuine and never

change.

§ Where does the genuine Dhamma lie? Spoken words, books, and texts are just the shadows of the Dhamma. The genuine Dhamma lies in the heart.

§ For the flavor of these things to go deep into your heart, you have to try them out so as to know their truth for yourself. You can't simply hold by the words of others or by your own thoughts. You have to make actions your standard if you want to be in line with the principle of Buddhism that says, "We are the owners of our actions."

§ You have to set your heart on abandoning evil until your dying day, and on doing good until your dying day: That's when your intention is up to standard.

§ I've set my heart on giving every drop of blood in my body, from the head down to the feet, to the purposes of the religion. Whether it's up in the sky or down under the ground, I ask to keep doing this to the end of my life.

§ Our defilements: If we rub them at the right spot, all we have to do is run our hand over them a single time and they'll all wear away. If we rub at the wrong spot, we can keep rubbing for ten years and nothing will wear away at all.

Understanding the World & the Dhamma

August 7, 1954

Now I want you to listen intently. The Dhamma I'm going to discuss today is on the topic of views and understanding. These are important things for people practicing the Dhamma to study. First you study things in general; then you come to an understanding within yourself.

Right view means seeing things correctly. For example, you see that acting in this way is good, and acting in that way is not good; acting in this way is right, acting in that way is wrong. You know what's good and what's evil. For example, you know that virtue is good, concentration is good, discernment is good—*but you don't know what results that goodness yields.* This is called having right view, but not having understanding.

Understanding is an affair of right resolve. If you lack the important element of understanding, it's going to be hard to practice. As a result, you get discouraged and don't have the strength to practice those forms of goodness. But if you have right view along with understanding, then it's going to be easy to develop goodness in yourself.

This is why people should study the Dhamma to know it clearly and to understand it as well. When you have both sides, this is called *sikkhā-gāravatā,* respect for study.

There are two kinds of study. The first is to study like a child in school. You have to memorize the texts and listen to the teachings from the mouths of your teachers or other monks, memorizing their words and practicing in line with them.

The other kind of study is to study like an adult. You listen and then you make yourself understand—taking what you've heard, contemplating on your own, and then trying it out to the point where you gain results.

In training the heart to reach the paths and their fruitions, some people can do it easily and get results quickly; others can do it only with difficulty and get results slowly. This is because people come in many varieties. That's why the Buddha taught in three ways. On the first level, all he had to do was explain things so that his listeners agreed, and they were able to understand on their own. On the second level, he had to explain things so that they agreed, and he also had to show them how to come to an understanding. On the third level, he had to explain things so that they agreed, and then he also had to quiz them back and forth many times before they understood.

As for the fourth level—the people who couldn't see what he was getting at and didn't understand—no matter how much he might try to explain things, he wouldn't get any results. These are the people he abandoned because they were *padaparama*—they could go

no further than the words—and were a waste of time.

The issues that we have to study are these: What is the world? What is the Dhamma?

Our body—starting with the stem of the heart and going out to the bones, muscles, skin, hair, etc.—is an affair of the world. There's no truth to it, for it does nothing but waste away. We first have to study our body so that we thoroughly know how it comes into being and goes out of being. Some parts of the world are good but not true; some are true but not good. Thoughts, words, and deeds are things that aren't true. They're an affair of the world. As for the Dhamma, it's an affair of what's true and what's good. When you truly do it, it's truly good and you get true results. It's an affair of the heart, something very profound.

When we say that the world is good but not true, it can be compared to paper money. Paper money is good for buying and selling things, but it's just paper. It doesn't have any true value to it. As for what's true but not good, it's like old-fashioned silver money. In the past you could use it to buy things worth 100 cents, but now you can't use it to buy things worth even one red cent. This is what the affairs of the world are like.

This shows that external material things, the things of the world, are things that aren't true. *They're good but not true, or true but not good.* People who latch onto the things of the world as real and true will never meet with what's really good and really true. They'll have to keep meeting only with things that aren't good and aren't true. They won't have any way of meeting with true or genuine happiness. They'll have to keep meeting up with things spinning around for their entire lives.

This spinning around is like the spinning around of a windmill. It just spins around and around in place, without ever going anywhere. This is the opposite of the Dhamma. When people practice the Dhamma, then even though there's still change and spinning around, they spin like the propellers of an airplane. In other words, they spin to keep going higher and higher, in the same way that airplane propellers carry an airplane up into the air.

Or you could say that they spin like the wheels of a train that carry the train and its passengers to the station or their ultimate destination. The propellers and wheels here stand for the wheel of the Dhamma, which spins with virtue, concentration, and discernment. When virtue spins forward for the sake of purity, it cuts through sensual craving, and counts as the resolve for renunciation. When concentration spins forward for the sake of purity, it cuts through craving for becoming, and counts as the resolve for non-ill will. When discernment spins forward for the sake of purity, all craving ends. This is resolve for harmlessness. Virtue, concentration, and discernment are thus interconnected. They're *aññamañña-paccayo, anantara-paccayo, sahajāta-paccayo,* and *nissaya-paccayo:* immediate conditions, reciprocal conditions, simultaneous conditions, and conditions that depend on one another.

We have to bury our lives into the Dhamma wheel until we reach the hub, so that we can

receive the results of not having to spin around to be born again.

What's the cause of spinning back to birth? Clinging to "us," to "them," and to "self." Clinging to good and not good; to past, future, and present. These are the causes that force us to spin around in birth and death in the cycle of *saṁsāra.*

So when we know that the affairs of the world aren't true in their goodness or good in their truth, we shouldn't cling to them. We have to brush them aside. If people say we're good or bad, there's no truth to their words—because "good" is true only in the mouth of the person speaking, and "bad" is true only in the mouth of the person who yells it. So don't latch onto anything they say. Focus instead on the good and bad that are actually within you.

As for the good and bad things *we* do, no one knows better than us. Even devatās can't know better than we do, because these are things that are known exclusively inside. As long as we deludedly take "good" and "bad" from other people, we'll have to keep on meeting with suffering and stress, over and over again. That's because the affairs of the world are affairs of having "us" and "them" and "self." "Them" *[khao]* is the horns *[khao]* of a forest animal, or of a cow or water buffalo. "Us" is like the tusks of an elephant. Even though an elephant's tusks are high things, attached to its head, they have to come striking down on the ground. If we put horns and tusks on our heads, we turn into forest animals, too. If we're like cows and water buffaloes, we won't escape from being caught and slaughtered, or stabbed by the horns of other water buffaloes. If we put tusks on our heads, it's like riding on an elephant's neck. We might get stabbed by the elephant's tusks.

The elephant here stands for ignorance. When there are elephants, there have to be other animals, too. If we have an elephant in us, we're still in the dark. We can't see any light; we can't see the truth. There are times when *we* are the ones standing in the way of our seeing the truth, because we latch onto sights, sounds, smells, tastes, tactile sensations; or feelings, perceptions, thought-fabrications, and consciousness, which are all fabrications. They're nothing true or genuine. They keep changing. They're not for sure. If we enter into them and get stuck, clinging to them as genuine and real, that's the cause that brings suffering on ourselves.

The same with good and bad: When people say you're good or bad, don't get pleased or upset. Go by the reality of what you've actually done. When people practice correctly, bringing their minds to a high level, developing until they reach the Dhamma in full, their goodness opens out on its own, like the petals of a lotus fully blooming in a pool. The blossom is large, the petals spread out, and they send a sweet fragrance—coolness—in all directions.

The coolness here is happiness and ease. When the eye sees good sights, it's at ease. When it sees bad sights, it's at ease. When the ear hears good sounds, it's at ease. When it hears bad sounds, it's at ease. When the tongue tastes good flavors, it's at ease. When it tastes bad flavors, it's at ease. Whatever sensation comes to make contact, whether good

or bad, the mind has to be neutral and unfazed in *chaḷaṅg'upekkhā,* six-factored equanimity, which is both a factor of the path and one of the factors for awakening.

The Buddha wasn't stuck on good or bad, wasn't snagged by sensations or preoccupations, past, future, or present. This is why he's termed *lokavidū:* an expert with regard to the world. When the mind isn't stuck or snagged on external preoccupations—good, bad, past, future, or present—it will gain release from mental fermentations. It's a mind that has reached the stream of the Dhamma. It has a cool sense of ease as it's mental home. It's gained the skill of release. Whenever you can practice in this way, you're sure to get results then and there, without any limitations of time or season, so it's *akāliko:* timeless.

For this reason, I ask that we all study to clearly know the affairs of the world and of the Dhamma until we understand them. Whichever aspect is an affair of the world, let it go. Whichever is an affair of the Dhamma, bring it into your hearts and practice it. That's when you're sure to get the results: peace, a cool sense of happiness and ease. Wherever you stay, you'll be at your ease. Wherever you go, you'll be at your ease, free from anything that would trouble you.

Inner Eyes

October 12, 1958

Goodness in the area of the Dhamma isn't an affair of the body. The body is an affair of the world. Goodness in the area of the Dhamma arises from the mind.

The duties of those who practice the Dhamma are (1) listening, (2) Dhamma discussion, and (3) practice. The third duty, though, is the most important in reaching success.

When you practice but haven't yet reached the truth of the Dhamma, it's like studying in school to the point where you know how to read and write, but you haven't yet used that knowledge to further your livelihood or to benefit yourself in other ways. It's only when you use these three principles in your practice that you can be said to be interested in the Dhamma. Otherwise, you're just playing around.

The body, or this *rūpa-dhamma,* is something coarse because it has a shape and features that are easy to see. As for the mind—*nāma-dhamma*—it's something more refined. There's just awareness, without any shape or features that you can see with the eyes of the flesh. Only when you give rise to inner eyes within yourself can you see the features of the mind. The eyes of the flesh are the eyes of the world, and every person has two of them. These eyes of the flesh can see only crude and coarse things that have a shape—and they're eyes that you can't really trust. Sometimes they see good as bad; sometimes bad as good. They look at things both in right and in wrong ways. You can't find anything true or for sure in them at all. As for inner eyes, when they see that something isn't good, you can let it go. When they see that something is good, you can hold onto it. This is why we're taught to give rise to inner eyes so that we can use them to contemplate the truth of the world and of the Dhamma.

There are three inner eyes: (1) *ñāṇa-cakkhu,* the eye of knowledge; (2) *paññā-cakkhu,* the eye of discernment; and (3) *dhamma-cakkhu,* the Dhamma eye—all of which are forms of cognitive skill. To give rise to these three eyes depends on the stillness of the mind. When there's stillness, the clarity and brightness of these three eyes will appear.

What does lack of stillness come from? Lack of stillness comes from waves—the waves of ignorance. When there's ignorance in the mind, it gives rise to fabrications. When there are fabrications, they give rise to waves. There are three types of fabrication: (1) meritorious fabrications, the mind thinking in ways that are good and skillful; (2) demeritorious fabrications, the mind thinking in ways that are evil and unskillful; and (3) impassive fabrications, when the mind stops still in concentration or the attainments of

jhāna that are neither meritorious nor demeritorious. As long as ignorance permeates the mind, the mind can't escape from these three forms of fabrication. This is why we're taught, *Avijjā-paccayā saṅkhārā:* From ignorance as a condition come fabrications. And depending on which direction the current of ignorance pulls the mind, that's where the mind tends to go.

The mind that seeps into fabrications is like the fire element that permeates trees and other objects. For example, the fire element that permeates the floorboards on which you're sitting right now: You can't see that there's any fire, and you don't feel any heat. That's because we can't see the fire element. We sit right on top of it without fearing any danger. If it were a blatant fire outside on its own, we could immediately see it—and we'd know that it's hot. We wouldn't dare go near it or use our hands to touch it. This is why blatant fire doesn't pose us any danger. But as for the subtle fire that we can't see with the eye of the flesh, it burns away at us all the time every day, but we're not aware of it. We're immersed in a bonfire but we don't know enough to try to get out.

In the same way, a person who latches onto fabrications doesn't feel the heat of fabrications. It's like the fire element that permeates material objects. Only when the object is struck or rubbed violently will the fire appear—and that's when we'll feel its heat. It's because we can easily see blatant fire that we can get away in time. This is why we only rarely die from it. But as for the subtle fire that we can't see: That's what burns us to death without our realizing it.

This subtle fire of ignorance burns us with birth, the gradual weakening called aging, the waning away called illness, and the final disbanding called death. The nature of fire is that if we feed or nourish it, it'll grow. If we don't feed or nourish it, it'll disappear. For example, if you have a small fire but don't feed it, it'll disappear. If you feed it, it'll immediately flare up—and it can spread out indiscriminately. But the nature of fire is that when it's developed in full measure, it has to start dying out—the only difference being whether it disbands quickly or slowly. If we see that fire is hot and damaging, we should search for water to put it out. In that way, it can disband quickly. Or else we simply let it disband when it runs out of fuel. This is why they say that the mind arises and disbands—but the disbanding is stressful, the arising is stressful.

If we train the mind so that its ignorance grows smaller, fabrications will get shorter. It's like the wick of a candle. If there are only a few strands in the wick, it'll burn slowly. If there are lots of strands, it'll burn quickly—and its flame will be strong. The three types of fabrication are like three strands in the wick of a candle. In other words, meritorious fabrications are one strand, demeritorious fabrications are another strand, and impassive fabrications another strand. If you twist all three strands together, the wick will be large, and the heat of the mind will get stronger. But if the mind has only a single preoccupation, it'll cool down and grow still. This is why we're taught,

Sukho viveko tuṭṭhassa:

Happy is the seclusion of one who is contented.

If the mind is in seclusion, its burdens will be light. And like all light things, it will float up into the air where it can see the world far and wide.

As the mind grows higher, it will give rise to cognitive skill. Ignorance will grow shorter, and the waves will die down. If the mind isn't stilled in concentration, it's difficult to get ignorance to disband. But when ignorance disbands, you see the aspect of the mind that doesn't arise and doesn't die. This is why we're taught to develop virtue and concentration, making the mind still and free from hindrances. The hindrances are like dust, soot, and mud. Wherever these things are found, they make the place dirty. This is why a mind clinging to the hindrances can't find any purity.

When the mind is immersed in hindrances, that's ignorance. People with ignorance are ignorant of themselves. Knowledge of yourself has to come from stopping in stillness. For instance, if you want to know the power of the light of the sun, go out and sit still in its rays. After just three minutes it'll be almost too hot to bear. In the same way, if the mind doesn't stop in stillness, you won't be able to see your own stress and suffering. If you want to know how hot the sun really is, you have to stand really still in the sunlight. After just a moment you'll know just how hot it is. If you walk around for half a day, you won't feel so hot. As long as our mind wanders around in its concepts and preoccupations, it won't know its own stress and suffering. But if you make the mind quiet and still, that's when you know that the world is hot.

To see the stress and drawbacks of things, you have to give rise to stillness in the mind. In other words, you focus on a meditation topic and stay within the boundaries of where you're focused. Use directed thought and evaluation of the Dhamma as your preoccupation. When the mind does this, it's in the factors of jhāna. Don't let it fall into other preoccupations, which follow the current of ignorance. When the mind doesn't fall into preoccupations of past and future, it'll shrink into the present. Lift the meditation object into the mind; lift the mind into the meditation object. Normally, the mind has six kinds of preoccupations, but when we sit in concentration we need to let it have only one: *ek'āyana-magga,* the one-way path; *ekaggat'arammaṇa,* singleness of preoccupation. Only then can you say that you're established in tranquility meditation.

When concentration arises in the mind, it's a skillful mental state. The mind's burdens will be light. Its flavor will be cool, empty, and at ease. It's like sitting in the breeze in a quiet, wide-open spot, with no noises to disturb us. If we sit next to a wall, we won't be able to see far. But if we sit in a spot with nothing to block our eyesight, we'll be able to see far distances: This refers to knowledge of the past and future. That's the discernment that will be able to kill off and destroy the three kinds of fabrication. The eye of knowledge will kill off the fermentation of sensuality; the eye of discernment will kill off the fermentation of becoming; and the eye of Dhamma will kill off the fermentation of ignorance. The mind will give rise to the cognitive skill that will kill off meritorious

fabrications and demeritorious fabrications, and will see through impassive fabrications. It won't be stuck in any of these forms of fabrication.

If the mind isn't able to strip away ignorance, we won't be able to see suffering. This is why the Buddha said, *"Cakkhuṁ udapādi, ñāṇaṁ udapādi, paññā udapādi, vijjā udapādi, āloko udapādi":* The eye arose, knowledge arose, discernment arose, cognitive skill arose, light arose. The mind rises to a high level called *gotarabhū-ñāṇa,* change-of-lineage knowledge, and it will see what takes birth and what doesn't. It will blossom as *buddho*—the awareness that knows no cessation—bright in its seclusion from thoughts and burdens, from preoccupations and mental fermentations.

When we keep practicing in this way, we'll come to *amatadhamma*—birthlessness and deathlessness—the highest happiness. That's because when we have inner worth and skillfulness, it's like having a vehicle that will take us easily to our destination.

Noble & True

August 23, 1958

To give rise to goodness in yourself—being generous, observing the five or eight precepts, listening to the Dhamma, and practicing meditation—is to find the treasures of noble wealth for yourself. People without discernment don't know how to find wealth, don't know how to keep it, don't know how to put it to use. They look for it in the wrong way, keep it well within the reach of danger, and use it in ways that cause harm. When this is the case, their wealth brings them nothing but suffering and trouble. This is why we're taught to develop discernment in looking for wealth, keeping it safe, and using it in a way that's beneficial for ourselves and for others.

Worldly wealth—gain, status, praise, and pleasure—isn't lasting. When you acquire it, it can waste away. This is why we're taught to make merit and develop our skillfulness: being generous, observing the precepts, and meditating. Generosity and the virtues of the precepts are external wealth. They're like royal robes and jewels that dress your body and make it beautiful. As for the internal merit of meditation, that dresses your heart to make it beautiful. These three kinds of clothing and jewelry are treasures that the Buddha left behind as an inheritance for his immediate followers, who can be compared to his children, and this inheritance has been passed down to us so that we can wear them, too.

Generosity—giving donations and making sacrifices for others—is an ornament. Virtue—taking care in your activities in word and deed—is an ornament. Meditation—making the mind firmly established and pure—is an ornament. These ways of making our thoughts, words, and deeds beautiful are the robes and jewelry of royalty and nobility. The noble disciples of the Buddha who gained awakening dressed themselves in these jewels.

The Buddha was the son of royalty. When we aim at being his children, we have to dress ourselves in a dignified way that's fitting for our status as children of royalty, too.

For example, we observe the five, eight, ten, or 227 precepts.

The jewels of monks and novices are the 227 and ten precepts. At the same time, we depend on the four requisites to maintain ourselves. The four requisites are things we wear simply to keep us from being naked and to help us survive. They're not jewels to dress up the mind. As for laymen and laywomen, they dress their bodies with the five and the eight precepts. If you don't dress beautifully in these ways, you're said to destroy the reputation of your father, the Buddha. And you destroy yourself as well.

As for the jewels of the four requisites—almsfood, robes, lodgings, and medicine:

Once you've declared that you're willing to be a child of the Buddha, people will bring these things to donate to you. If you didn't have these jewels to depend on, your body wouldn't survive. But don't get carried away by them. You need to have a sense of moderation in storing them and using them. As for the jewels of the mind, those are the steps of the practice, and in particular, meditation—making the mind act in purity, without any defilement.

There have been many hundreds of millions of people in the world, but no one has been able to discover the truth of the world except for our Buddha, who was a genuine hero. He was brave and courageous, and put forth true effort. This is why he was able to find the truth that has no birth, no aging, no illness, and no death: the highest happiness in the world. All of us want the same thing, but we don't act truly, which is why we don't meet with the truth. Instead, we meet with things that are false and deceptive, that entertain us for a while but then bring pain and suffering afterwards.

The Buddha set his mind sincerely and truly on this thought: "I want the genuine highest happiness. I don't want anything else, no matter how amazing it may be. I want only a happiness that's for sure, that won't turn back into anything else." That was how he put forth persistent, unrelenting effort in his search for the truth. Even if his life were to end, he was willing. Then, ultimately, he found the truth: the reality of nibbāna.

If we search for the truth like our father—if we're true in our intent and true in what we do—there's no way the truth can escape us. We're sure to find the truth in line with our aspirations.

Every person alive wants happiness—even common animals struggle to find happiness—but our actions for the most part aren't in line with our intentions. We don't get to realize the happiness that's in line with our aspirations simply because there's no truth to us. For example, when people come to the monastery: If they come to make offerings, observe the precepts, and sit in meditation for the sake of praise or a good reputation, there's no real merit to what they're doing. They don't gain any real happiness from it, so they end up disappointed and dissatisfied. Then they start saying that offerings, precepts, and meditation don't give any good results. Instead of reflecting on the fact that they weren't right and honest in doing these things, they say that there's no real good to the Buddha, Dhamma, and Saṅgha, that the Buddha's teachings are a lot of nonsense and lies. But actually the Buddha's teachings are an affair of the truth. *If a person isn't true to the Buddha's teachings, the Buddha's teachings won't be true to that person*—and that person won't be able to know what the Buddha's true teachings are.

Practicing the Dhamma in a way that's not true is like performing a play for other people to watch. You get dressed up and walk to the front of the stage, announcing that you're this character or that, but you're not really the character you say you are. For instance, you dress up like a policeman, but you're not a policeman. You dress up as a

deva, but you're not a deva.

People put on plays to be popular, to gain fame and praise, and to receive enough income to keep themselves fed from one day to the next. Those who perform well become famous and receive a good income. When they succeed, then the defilements take over: They start getting arrogant and squander their wealth, all of which exposes them to danger. For example, if they get really wealthy, they buy diamonds and jewels to dress themselves up, or else they brag about their wealth, so that thieves come to rob them and kill them. Or if they're really popular, other people get jealous and try to destroy their reputation, or to steal their fame and their business, all of which brings them trouble. Or it may be that when they perform they're very popular for a while, but then they lose their popularity and their income drops. As they get older and weaker, they can't perform as well as they used to, which leads them to disappointment and suffering.

In the same way, when Buddhists practice goodness for the sake of praise and reputation, or for the sake of offerings and homage like the income that comes from performing a play, the same sorts of things happen. In other words, we can't escape from suffering.

For this reason, the Buddha teaches us to be true in whatever we do—true in being generous, true in being virtuous, true in developing concentration and discernment. Don't play around at these things. If you're true, then these activities are sure to bear you the fruits of your own truthfulness without a doubt.

We've come to the monastery today to dress ourselves in the jewelry of royalty and the robes of the noble ones: i.e., virtue, concentration, and discernment, which are ornaments that are truly beautiful. But if we aren't true in our practice, if we deceive ourselves and deceive others, it's like taking robes and jewels and giving them to a monkey. The monkey is bound to get them dirty and tear them to shreds because it has no sense of beauty at all. Whoever sees this kind of thing happening is sure to see right through it, that it's a monkey show. Even though the costumes are genuine, the monkey inside isn't genuine like the costumes. For instance, if you take a soldier's cap and uniform to dress it up as a soldier, it's a soldier only as far as the cap and uniform, but the monkey inside is still a monkey and not a soldier at all.

If you were to make a comparison, our minds are not that different from monkeys. Even when there's just one monkey, it's as if there were lots of them. It writhes around, scratching here, picking there, grimacing and crossing its eyes, looking forward, looking back, running up and running down, with no time at all to sit still in one place. Our minds are like monkeys in this way. They can't really stay still. They writhe around, reaching out here, reaching out there, thinking now about the future, thinking now about the past. When we put the jewels of royalty—i.e., concentration—on its head, it's no different from putting a costume of diamonds and jewels on a monkey. Even if your outside

costume is that of a monk but the reality inside you isn't a monk, then you're not really a monk. If your outside costume is that of a female lay follower but the reality inside of you isn't a female lay follower, then you're not really a female lay follower. You're just deceiving people who are stupid, for the sake of a living and for your own momentary entertainment and delusion. It serves no genuine purpose at all.

Time is something of high value, so don't be complacent about short periods of time. Hurry to put some goodness into yourself as quickly as you can. Don't tell yourself that it's too late or that you can't do it. Aṅgulimāla was a great bandit who had killed almost 1,000 people, and he was about to kill his mother. But when he met the Buddha and listened to the Buddha's Dhamma, he turned his heart around. He abandoned all his evil ways and set his heart on developing goodness for just one day, and he was able to become an arahant, washing away an entire lifetime of evil. This shows that doing good, even for just a little while, can wash away huge amounts of evil.

This is why we're taught to develop concentration, which is the highest form of merit, and which can push you all the way to true happiness.

The power of good and evil is like a magnet that pulls the mind to do good or evil and then be born in good or evil places in line with its pull. If we do good or evil, it's as if we leave magnets behind in the world. Those magnets will pull our minds to their level. People who aren't intelligent enough to know how to avoid or extract themselves from the power of good and evil are sure to be pulled along by the force field of these magnets. They'll have to keep swimming around in the world of rebirth. This is why wise people try to find a way to cut the force field so that they can escape its power and float free. In other words, they do good and cut the force field. They do things that may not be good, and they cut the force field. They don't let these things connect. In other words, they don't get attached to the things they've done. They don't keep fondling them. This is what it means to be discerning: knowing how to cut the force fields of the world.

Our discernment is like light, and there are three levels to it: low-level discernment, which is like the light of a torch; intermediate discernment, which is like the light of a candle or a kerosene lantern; and high-level discernment, which is like electric light.

To get light from a torch, you need to use a lot of fuel. And even though it's bright, it creates smoke. This is like the discernment that comes from being generous: It requires a lot of financial resources, and you sometimes have to contend with resistance from people outside.

The light of a candle or gas lantern is like the discernment that comes from observing the precepts. You have to exercise a lot of care and use your powers of endurance to keep them pure. Lantern-light requires fuel and a wick. As for candlelight, it requires a wick and some wax. If you have wax but no wick, you can't get any light. And both lantern-light and candlelight create smoke and soot, so neither of them counts as being entirely

good.

As for electric discernment, there's no need for fuel, and it doesn't create smoke or soot. It's easy to use: Whenever you want it, by day or by night, just flip on the switch. This refers to the discernment that comes from developing concentration. The power of the mind, when it's pure and firmly established, gives rise to the light of knowledge—liberating insight—enabling us to see events clearly, both in the area of the world and of the Dhamma. When we can make the mind clean and pure, it gives rise to concentration and to the light of discernment—*paññā-pajjoto*—which is like electric light or the light of the sun, which shines all twelve hours of the day. This kind of discernment is the discernment of the noble ones.

All three forms of merit—generosity, virtue, and meditation—depend on discernment. When we develop discernment, we'll know how to look for merit on our own. And what kind of light will we want—torchlight, candlelight, lantern-light, or electric light? Death is like darkness. When the time comes to die, outside light won't be of any use to us. Our speech, hands, feet, arms, and legs won't be of any use to us. They won't be able to help us at all. Our eyes won't be able to see any light. No one will hear what we have to say. Our hands and feet won't be able to move. Our possessions won't be able to help us. The only resource that will be able to help us is our discernment, making sure that greed, aversion, and delusion don't get provoked, maintaining the mind in a state free from greed, free from aversion, free from delusion. We'll be able to separate these three things—body, mind, and defilement—out from one another, in the same way that we separate the wick of a candle from its wax. The fire of defilement will then have to go out, because the wick and the wax lie in separate places and don't make contact.

In the same way, if we can separate the body from the mind, our normal awareness will have to go out. But when it goes out, that doesn't mean that awareness is annihilated. It's still there, but as a special form of awareness that doesn't depend on the body or mind and yet can still be aware. It's just like fire going out from a candle: It's not annihilated. There's still plenty of fire potential left in the world. It's there by its nature, simply that it isn't involved with any fuel. This kind of fire is better than the kind that requires fuel, because it doesn't wear anything out. It's simply there by its nature. This kind of merit is more wonderful than anything else.

The fire potential is something that exists everywhere, even in ice cubes. If we can separate the body, the mind, and defilement from one another, there'll be no more heat. The mind won't be hot, and instead will be cool at all times. The light of fire arises from the spinning of waves. If there are no waves, there'll be no spinning. The waves are like defilement. If we can cut through the waves, the spinning will stop. There will be no more birth. Greed, aversion, and delusion are like waves—or like the wick of a candle. If we cut out the wick, leaving only the wax, fire will have no place to catch hold and so will have to go out. When the candle goes out, it's like the death of human beings: The fire leaves the candle, but the fire potential isn't annihilated. In the same way, the mind that goes out

from the body isn't annihilated. If it can remain on its own, without having to depend on a body, it doesn't appear in any way, shape, or form anywhere at all. That's the awareness of nibbāna.

This is the kind of awareness that's really like electric light. Whenever we want it, it's there for us to know. Sometimes even if we don't want to know, we still end up knowing. As for ordinary people, even if they want to know things, they often don't know; they often don't see even when they want to see. That's like torchlight or candlelight: If there's no fuel, there's no way it can be bright.

This is why we're taught to train our minds to be firmly established in concentration —because the mind well-trained is what gives rise to the light of discernment that doesn't get deluded: the discernment that knows for sure.

For this reason, I ask that we all set our minds on acting truly. Be generous, and make it truly generous. Be virtuous, and make it truly virtuous. Meditate, and make it truly meditation. If you're a monk, be a true monk. If a novice, be a true novice. If a lay follower, be a true lay follower. Don't put on costumes simply to deceive other people. Don't put on a play for the world to see.

When you truly practice the Dhamma, you're sure to get true results, i.e., happiness. If your practice isn't true, the results won't be true. This will lead to discouragement. Your conviction in the Buddha's teachings will grow weak, your generosity will wither away, your precepts will be defiled and impure, and your meditation will get lazy. Eventually, you'll blame the Buddha's teachings, saying they're not true, and so you'll give up. This is the harm that comes from not acting truly.

For this reason, if you want true happiness, remember these words and try putting them into practice to polish your minds. In this way, the time you've set aside from your worldly responsibilities to look for goodness for yourself won't go to waste. You'll acquire the merit and skillfulness to dress yourself up and be beautiful in the way I've described.

Recollection of Virtue

September 20, 1960

One of the things that defiles the mind is *gaṇa-palibodha:* concern over the group. You're entangled with the group, or with the individuals in the group. This is called *gaṇa-palibodha.* Your mind isn't at peace, and when the mind isn't at peace, it gains no happiness or ease. It's not conducive for sitting in concentration.

The things that make concentration difficult are of two sorts:

1) We know that something is an enemy of concentration, but we can't withstand it because the current of defilement is great. This is one reason why the mind can't settle down.

2) We don't know, we're not aware, we practice in a way that's not circumspect. This is a cause that gives rise to defilement. This sort of defilement can stand in the way of the paths and the fruitions. It's a *magg'āvaraṇa*—an obstacle that prevents people from walking in line with the path.

The obstacles that prevent us from walking in line with the path can arise from our lack of knowledge—and they can cause harm. This is why we have to study and practice in a way that's circumspect. And this is why we have Dhamma talks every day, so that we can do away with this lack of knowledge and give rise to knowledge in its place. In this way, we can practice correctly. The heart will tend toward stillness.

There are two areas that have to be dealt with. The first is what I mentioned just now: We know that something is an enemy, but we can't withstand it. Sometimes we know, sometimes we forget, sometimes we have a lapse of mindfulness through the pressure of defilements. This is one sort of thing that can prevent the paths and fruitions.

The second area concerns the things we don't know at all. We don't know that they're wrong; we don't know when we do something wrong. This can give rise to defilement.

Most of the areas where we don't know have to do with our precepts and virtue. When we know that something's wrong or that it creates a disturbance in the mind—we don't want it to happen, we're aware, but we can't resist it—that's usually an affair of concentration. When our virtues are defiled, our concentration gets defiled, and that in turn becomes a *magg'āvaraṇa,* an obstacle to following the path and gaining results.

When this is the case, you don't have any path to follow. And that means that you're walking all over the place. You're guided just by your feet and knees, which simply go wherever they like. You keep on wading through the jungle, going uphill and down,

sometimes through clearings, sometimes through the bush, stepping on thorns and stumps. Sometimes you step into mud and get all splattered, like a person with no path to follow.

But still you don't die. You can keep going and you don't die, but it irritates people who know the path. It's hard to travel with someone who doesn't know the path. It's like traveling together with a blind person. When you tell a blind person, "Come here, come here," it's hard. Even though you point with your hands, the blind person doesn't understand. If the blind person is deaf too, that's it. It's really difficult. It's really hard to travel together with the deaf and the blind. So what can you do? You don't have to travel together. You first have to find medicine to put into their eyes so that they can at least see *some*thing. That's all there is to it. And you have to cure their ears. When their eyes and ears start to recover, then you can travel together.

To cure your ears means taking an interest in instructions and criticism, the teachings that point out the path of defilement and tell you that that's a way you shouldn't follow. If you take an interest, then your deafness will gradually disappear, bit by bit. If you don't take an interest, you'll keep on being deaf.

The same with your eyes: You have to put drops in them. It's too much to ask others to put drops in your eyes for you. You have to learn how to help yourself. How do you help yourself? *You have to observe and take note of things.* Whether other people explain things or not, you have to observe and take note: When they act in that way, what are they getting at? When they use this sort of behavior, what are they getting at? That's when you can understand what's going on. When you understand in this way, it means that you can put drops in your own eyes.

With some people, even if you use a stick to pry open their eyelids, they still won't open. That's when they're impossible. But if your eyes aren't very dark, you don't have to look at a lot of things. You see something once, and that's all you need. You can take it as a standard that you can keep putting into practice. You don't need lots of examples. Otherwise, you won't be able to set yourself up in business. If you're not intelligent, you won't be able to set yourself up in business at all. Think of shoemakers or tailors: They need only one example, and they can make hundreds of shoes or pieces of clothing. They can succeed in setting themselves up in business.

It's the same with people of discernment. Even if you see only one example, you can take it as a warning to train yourself and to keep on practicing. When this is the case, it lightens the task of making your eyes better.

The same with cleaning out your ears: Most of us want other people to put drops in our ears, but we have to treat our own ears. The duty of the teacher is simply to give you the medicine that you then put in your ears yourself. What this means is that when you're criticized, you don't throw it away or shrug it off. You take it to contemplate the reason behind it. Don't abandon your responsibility.

Wherever you go: Even when the teacher says something only once, you can put it to use for the rest of your life. That's what it means to have good ears.

The same with good eyes: You see an example only once and you can take it as a standard by which you keep on practicing. When this is the case, you begin to recover. With some people, though, the teacher can set hundreds and thousands of examples, but they can't master even one of them. They can't look after themselves. They can't depend on themselves. It's hard for them to give rise to purity.

So if we're not circumspect in both of these areas, our virtue gets defiled. This is called having virtue that's not pure. Virtue that's not pure is a *magg'āvaraṇa.* The results that would arise from purity of virtue can't arise. The mind isn't at peace; it has no concentration. When your virtue isn't pure, practicing concentration is hard.

So now I'd like to talk about virtue so as to improve the situation, so that you'll have knowledge and understanding. That way you can practice cleansing your virtue to make it pure. As it's explained in the texts on the 40 topics of meditation, recollection of virtue is one of the topics for tranquility meditation. There are two ways of recollecting and reflecting on your virtue.

1) You recollect the purity of your virtue—this is called *parisuddha-sīla.*

2) You examine where your virtue isn't pure. You take stock of where it's lacking, or *dusīla.*

You have to look at both sides. If you look and see that you have some suspicions that your virtue isn't pure, try to make up the lack and make it more pure. Don't let yourself have any worries about your behavior or your precepts. That's when your precepts will lead to stillness of mind—in line with the fact that recollection of virtue counts as a theme for tranquility meditation.

Only when you reflect on your virtue and your mind can come to stillness, does it count as recollection of virtue. If, when you reflect, you see that your virtue isn't pure, how will the mind come to stillness? When you reflect on the purity of your virtue and can see it clearly, the mind lets go of the matter. It's like taking an inventory of things in your house: This isn't missing; that isn't missing. When nothing's missing, you can fall asleep easily. But if you take an inventory and find that something's missing, you can't get any sleep at all.

When you examine your precepts and see that they're pure and impeccable in every way, then the mind can immediately grow calm and still. This purity leads to stillness of the heart. For this reason, don't be heedless or careless. The training of the mind involves your manners and behavior. It involves your virtue and precepts. So don't be heedless and careless. Don't see virtue and the precepts as minor matters or low. We have to make the mind into Dhamma, and it's hard to make it Dhamma when there's no virtue. As long as the mind isn't steady, it's not Dhamma. And when the mind isn't Dhamma, it's defiled.

Its virtue isn't pure.

So now I'll explain virtue for you.

When virtue is divided into precepts, in terms of its expressions, there are the five precepts, the eight, the ten, and the 227 precepts. This is called counting virtue in words and expression. When we talk in terms of its meaning—in other words, we don't focus on the words, we focus on the levels of its quality—as in the phrase, "*sātthaṁ sabyañjanaṁ kevala-paripuṇṇaṁ,* entirely perfect in its expression and meaning": This means that we shouldn't think that genuine virtue is restricted to the precepts. Aside from the precepts, there's more and it's difficult. For that reason, there are different ways to analyze the quality of virtue.

For example, ordinary virtue means following the precepts in an ordinary way. Noble virtue means following them by bringing in the Dhamma as well. These are different levels of quality.

As for our duties, there are two kinds.

Pahāna-kicca: the duty to abandon. Whatever the Buddha stated in a precept as something improper—"Stop. Don't": All that has to be cut away. Don't get involved.

Bhāvanā-kicca: the duty to develop. Whatever is something that should be brought into being because it's good, beautiful, and virtuous, you have to develop within you. Don't let the matter slide. Don't shirk your duties. Practice training yourself to be circumspect.

These are the two kinds of duties. No matter which set of precepts you follow, they fall under just these two kinds of duties.

The duty to abandon, in brief, applies to the gross forms of unskillful behavior that we have to give up. For example, don't kill, don't steal, don't engage in sexual misconduct, don't tell lies, and don't take intoxicants. These crude forms of behavior fall under the duty to abandon. You have to give them up absolutely. These things—which are termed *ādi-brahmacariyā,* the basics of the holy life—are things we have to abandon as a first step. The next step, *abhisamācāra,* or higher conduct—falls under the duty to develop. We have to give rise to this. Don't shirk your duties.

Each of us has these two kinds of duties. The duties expressed in the words of the precepts are called the basics of the holy life. Those that deal with the manners of people who are virtuous—the types of behavior that are external signs of virtue—are called higher conduct.

What are the external signs of people who are virtuous? The external signs, called higher conduct, have three characteristics.

1. They're clean. Cleanliness is a sign of a person of pure virtue. Remember

this well.

2. They have the beauty of orderliness. This kind of beauty is a sign of a person of pure virtue.

3. They're impeccable. Their minds aren't weighed down by their manners and behavior. This is what's meant by purity of virtue.

All three of these characteristics are signs of a person of pure virtue. All three of these things fall under the duty to develop.

Here I'd like to add some extra explanations. They're things we've all met with, because after all, we aren't children. We've all learned these things and practiced these things, but we may not know the training rules behind them, so we've been right in some ways and wrong in others. Some duties we follow and others we shirk—because we don't think that what we're doing will cause any harm. So I'd like to focus on this point a little more.

The cleanliness connected with higher conduct isn't like the cleanliness connected with the basics of the holy life. With the basics of the holy life—such as not killing—our physical actions are clean in one way. With higher conduct, it's different. You don't have to kill animals to be unclean in higher conduct. For example, you don't sweep the area where you sit. You don't wipe it clean. This is called being a dirty person, and it's a breach of your virtue. Where you sleep is messy. You don't put things away. Whatever you should put away, whatever you should use, is piled all over the place. This is called being unclean. Don't think that it doesn't harm your virtue.

Even when you're just standing around: Take the example of Ven. Sāriputta. He was going to go for his almsround, but he didn't have enough hands. One hand was holding his robe, another hand was rolling it up over his shoulder, so with his foot he brushed away the leaves on the path for his almsround. He didn't have enough hands. He went that far to maintain the cleanliness of where he was standing.

The same with the place where you're sitting: We're taught to open our eyes wide to look around us. Is there something in the place where you want to sit? And is it a place where it's appropriate for you to sit or not? Is it too close to the elder monks or to your teacher? Contemplate first. "Is this a place where I should stand? Is it a place where I should sit? Is it in line with my position in the community?"

In addition, is the place where we want to sit messy? And when we sit there and happen to make a mess, then when get up and leave, we have to clean it up well. Otherwise, someone else will have to clean it up, and we'll feel ashamed.

Like people in the old days: If someone they hated came to sit in their house, then when that person left they would immediately splash water on the place where that person had sat, because they felt that it had become dirty. We don't go that far. All I ask is that if you leave footprints in a place, sweep them away. If dust or dirt from your sitting cloth gets on the floor, then clean it away when you get up. Don't make other people clean it

away. Otherwise, your virtue won't be pure.

When the place where you sit is clean, it's a sign of a person of pure virtue. When the place where you stand is clean, it's a sign of a person of pure virtue. When the place where you walk is clean, it's a sign of a person of pure virtue. The paths that you use, whether you use them alone or in common with other people: Open your eyes wide to see what condition they're in. If there's something wrong, is it something that can't be helped? Or is it something you can help fix? Can you maintain it in good shape or make it better? Whether it's of use to you or to whomever, contemplate it and fix what you can. *Do some goodness for the place.* Whether it's a path that you use or that other people use, whether it's your own personal path—where you do walking meditation—or it's a public path: If it doesn't look clean to the eye and it's something you can take care of, take it on as your duty. Only if it's more than you can fix should you let it go.

Then there's the issue of your own personal filth. For example: spitting on the path. For monks, it's an offense of wrongdoing. It's a breach of higher conduct. If you throw away cigarette ashes, the remains of betel nut, or the remains of your food on a path, it's an offense. For monks, it's an offense of wrongdoing; for laypeople, a breach of higher conduct. It's a sign of a person lacking in virtue.

And it's forbidden in the Vinaya, in the meal protocols. Just now I didn't give a full explanation. The Vinaya says that when a monk makes use of the four requisites—cloth, almsfood, medicine, and lodgings: In the area of food, it says that if you bring it back to eat but you don't eat it all, you should take care of it well. Don't just throw it anywhere at all where people will see it. Otherwise, they'll lose faith. It's a sign that you're shirking your duties. If it's something that you can still use tomorrow—like salt—put it in a salt container. If it's sugar, put it in a sugar container and close it well. Have a place where you can keep these things, called a *kappiya-kuṭi.*

As for leftovers, take care of them well. Pour them out of your bowl—if there's a spittoon, pour them into the spittoon with respect—and clean everything out of the bowl. Don't scatter things around the place. If there's a layperson, have him dig a deep hole and then pour the leftovers down the hole. Don't be messy. Don't let there be the smell of leftover food. Whatever shouldn't be saved for a later day, bury it. If you can't bury it, cover it with dirt. Whatever can be saved for a later day, store it carefully.

This is what's said in the meal protocols. There are a lot of things said in the meal protocols.

So keep the place where you stay clean. This is a sign of a person whose virtue is pure.

The same principle applies to where you walk, where you stand, where you sit, where you lie down.

Don't make a mess of the place where you sleep. Keep the place clean. You can't lie there all night long. You have to walk here and there, and so your feet may get dusty and your skin sweaty, all of which will stain the place where you sleep. So keep it clean of

anything that will cause harm, as with things that carry germs. For example, if you don't keep your sleeping place clean, things like bedbugs and fleas will bring germs along with them. So keep the place clean. The world calls this "sanitation." When you see that the places where you sit, sleep, stand, and walk are clean, your eyes light up. Your heart feels at ease. If you look at the road and see pig shit or dog shit, your heart shrinks and you want to run away. These things are signs of virtue that's not pure.

Don't see that the issues of manners are too lowly for you to be concerned with them. They can damage your virtue.

These are issues concerning the place. The next level deals with issues around things. The way you treat your things is a sign of your virtue. What kinds of things? The four requisites. These things have to be kept clean. And what are the four requisites? The first is food—anything that we swallow into the body.

The second is clothing. The Pāli word, *cīvara,* doesn't refer only to ochre robes—or yellow robes or red robes or whatever. Any piece of cloth, whatever the color, whether it's a shirt or a blouse, a woman's skirt or a man's trousers, all comes under *cīvara,* simply that that's not how we generally use the word. *Cīvara* simply means "cloth." Whether it's woven of flax, silk, or cotton, once it's a piece of cloth it counts as *cīvara.* It's the second requisite.

The third is *senāsana*, which means lodging or dwelling place. It doesn't mean only a monk's hut or a monastery hall. A layperson's home or shack is also called *senāsana,* just that we don't generally use the word that way. We've borrowed the Pāli word only in the area of the religion, but it means the same sort of thing for laypeople, too. This is the third requisite.

The fourth requisite is *gilāna-bhesajja:* medicine for curing disease. In the Vinaya, this is divided into four sorts, all of which come under our phrase, "medicine for curing disease." For the monks, the Vinaya sets rules that don't apply to laypeople. It divides medicine into four types that are important to know, so I'd like to go into some detail here. The things that we eat and swallow come under these four headings: *yāva-kālika,* to be eaten in the right time; *yāma-kālika,* to be eaten that day; *sattāha-kālika,* to be eaten within seven days; and *yāva-jīvika,* to be eaten as long as one's life.

The food that comes under *yāva-kālika:* Starting with the eight precepts, you can't eat that food after noon at all. You can eat it only from the dawn of that day until noon. This is the lifespan of food for people who observe these precepts. In simple terms, it covers the food that we eat.

The second type, *yāma-kālika,* is what you can drink only for the span of that day. This covers juice drinks. When fresh juice is made in the morning, you can drink it only until dawn of the next day. You can drink it from this morning through this night. When the sky lightens again, you can't drink it any more. When a monk has received it to his hand, he can drink it only for this period. Once it's made from the fruit and has come to his

hand—even if it hasn't come to his hand on that day, he can't eat it the next day, because it tends to spoil. It'll make him sick. This is called *yāma-kālika*, the juice drinks that are appropriate for contemplatives.

Sattāha-kālika, seven-day medicine: This covers ghee, butter, oil, honey, and sugar. Once a monk has received any of these, he has to eat them within seven days. Past seven days, he has to throw them away, or if he doesn't throw them away, he has to give them to a layperson...

Yāva-jīvika: Medicine that comes under this category, once it's been handed to a monk, is something he should store well, and he can keep on taking it until it's gone—no matter how many days it takes. Once there's no more left, that's the end of its lifespan. If there's still some left, you can keep on taking it. For example, things like quinine, aspirin, root medicines that are not mixed with any food.

Foods and medicines, taken together, all fall under these four categories, because they're all things to be consumed.

So whether these categories apply directly to us in the way we practice as monks, or whether they apply only indirectly to us as laypeople—in terms of the things we prepare to give to monks—we have to be clean. If we're not clean, it carries a blemish—a blemish for those who prepare it, a blemish for those who consume it. All of this comes under the area of higher conduct.

In short, what this means is that (1) you search for these things in purity, with a right and fair intention, in a way that harms no one. You search in ways that are appropriate for your station—monks can search for things in one way; their supporters can search in other ways—but they all come under the principle of searching with purity. For example, monks can describe the virtue of generosity to laypeople, but whether the laypeople will give donations or not, we don't try to force them even in gentle ways.

For a monk to search in purity means that, in the morning, after he wakes up, he leaves his hut, carrying his bowl, wearing his robe, including his outer robe, and—restrained in his manners—goes out like royalty. What does it mean to go out like royalty? "If they give a lot, I'm happy. If they give just a little, I'm happy. If they don't give anything at all, I come back laughing until my cheeks hurt." You don't show any desire. You don't show any greed. You simply go out in line with your duty. This is really skillful and meritorious. Whether you get anything or not is none of your business. You don't have any power to determine whether you receive anything. It's your duty as a contemplative to go, so you go in line with your duty.

This is called searching for things in the right way, without any greed sneaking in. If greed sneaks in, there hardly seems to be anyone to put food in your bowl; if they do put food in your bowl, it doesn't taste good.

This is why, when you go searching for food, you have to follow all the steps carefully, starting with the way you wear your robes, the way you walk, the way you're composed in

your behavior, the way you leave the monastery, and the way you return. Once you return, you stay composed in your behavior to the end of the meal. Make sure that you're pure and impeccable, clean in every way.

This covers the area of searching. Once you've searched for and received food or medicine, the next step is (2) knowing how to consume it.

There are many ways of consuming food and medicine, depending on their lifespan. With some things, you have to sit down while you consume them. With others, you don't. With some things, you can consume them lying down. With others, you can eat them while you're sitting but not while you're standing. With others, you can eat them sitting, walking, or lying down. With some things, you can consume them when not fully dressed. For example, if you're going to eat your food in your own room, you don't have to wear your upper robe. But if you eat your food out in the open without wearing your upper robe, it's an offense of wrongdoing. With some things—like betel nut—you can consume them while you're walking, but with food, you can't eat it while you're walking. Which things you can eat while you're walking, standing, sitting, or lying down: You have to know all these categories.

In general, these are the sorts of things that people with manners already know, so it's simply a matter of being careful and composed.

Once you come to the place where you eat—some people know only how to eat, but not how to put away. Some people know only how to eat, but they don't know one another. What does it mean not to know one another? As soon as you get something, you stuff it into your mouth. Your companions are all around you, but they don't get a bite. This is wrong, too. You have to be circumspect in how you carry out your duties. To begin with, you have to know where to sit and eat, so that it's in line with your seniority. Some people don't even know how to eat. They just sit down and start stuffing things into their mouths without first getting a cup of water to drink. When they finish eating, their mouths are all parched and dry. I've even seen monks do this. *When you don't know how to eat, you shouldn't be eating.* To know how to eat means (a) knowing the right place to sit and eat, (b) do you have a water container? Do you have a glass? Do you have a spittoon? People who are well trained: How do they eat? You have to learn how to read, starting with how to read the place for you to sit, how to read your bowl, how to read your robes, how to read your spittoon, how to read your glass, how to read your water container, how to read the water you should drink. Learn how to decipher all of these things.

When you have your place to sit, in line with your seniority, when you've arranged your robe so that you're properly covered, then the next step is to sit with a nice posture. If you eat with your head tilted too far back, it's like an animal eating. If your head is tilted too far forward, it's like a crow picking at a corpse. So keep your head upright. Don't tilt it too far forward or back. Keep it in balance.

And know how to wear your robe while you eat. In some places, they eat with

everything scattered all over the place. Their robes fall off as they dig right in. Sometimes they don't even wear their upper robe. They haven't even removed their bowls from the bowl bag, and they dig right in. Sometimes they finish eating and have no water to drink. This is called not knowing how to eat in line with the meal protocols. In some places, they play music and sing—they strike their spoons on their plates or glasses, and talk up a storm. This is not at all appropriate for contemplatives who are maintaining the precepts.

When the meal is over, you have to know how to put things away. Whatever can be saved to eat in the afternoon, you have to put it away well. For example, on the almsround they may have given you some sugar to use in the afternoon. So you put it away. But if you've mixed it with your food, you can't keep it. The same with other medicines.

Leftovers come in three categories: what you should put away to eat later, what you should give to laypeople or novices, and what you should throw away. With things that you should put away, if you don't put them away properly, there's an offense. For laypeople, it's a blemish. As for things you should throw away, if you don't throw them away, it's an offense. What you should put away, you have to put away. What you should throw away, you have to throw away.

Or you can say that, when putting things away, some things to be put away can be eaten later and some things can't. Things that can't be eaten have to be totally put away. Things that can be eaten shouldn't be totally put away. For the most part, if it's something that can be eaten later, people tend to put it totally away. In other words, they're afraid that their companions will see it and take it to eat. As for things that should be totally put away, they leave them out in the open. In other words, the trash in the spittoons gets thrown all over the place. As for food that you can give to laypeople to eat, you shouldn't keep it in hiding. Otherwise, it spoils your virtue.

When you're putting things away, you have to learn how to read what you should be doing. Don't be a burden on others. You have to be circumspect in how you behave. If your hands are free, help your companions. Help put things away; help sweep up and wipe things down.

As for your own personal things, know how to wash them. Wash your bowl so that it's impeccably clean. All your utensils: Clean them well. As for the water you drink with the meal: When the meal is over, throw it away. Don't leave a drop in the container. Pour out the water and dry the container with a cloth. If you don't throw it out, and drink it in the afternoon, it counts as food in the wrong time. For monks, it's an offense. For laypeople, it's a blemish on their virtue.

For example: You take a glass and fill it by plunging it in a large water jar. After drinking from the glass after the meal, you plunge it in the water jar again. The food from your mouth that's now on the glass turns all the water in the jar into food that can't be eaten in the afternoon. This is why we're taught not to plunge our drinking glasses into water jars, and why we have a separate water filter to take water from water jars and to

keep out dust and little living beings.

Here I'd like to talk a little bit more about putting food away. Leftover food that no one can eat should be put away well. When you throw it away, do it in a place that's far from the paths where people walk. Bury whatever should be buried; if there's no place to bury it, throw it in a designated place far away. Be neat and orderly in how you do it. This is called being established in higher conduct.

All of the issues surrounding food and its consumption: If I were to talk for three days, I wouldn't come to the end of them. So I'll just talk about the major issues, for you to take as a standard for judging other things.

The same general principles apply to lodgings, medicine, and cloth: You have to know (1) how to search for them, (2) how to keep them and store them, (3) how to keep them clean, (4) how to know when they've worn out beyond use or disappeared, and (5) how to know what will give pleasure to your companions. Once you know these things, behave in line with what's appropriate.

For example, with cloth: You have to know first how to search for it; second, how to store it, how to dye it, how to wash it, how to scald it, how to scrub it with soap; how to air it, how to dry it.

If you scrub with soap a robe that simply needs to be washed in cold water, it's wrong. If you simply wash in cold water a robe that needs to be scrubbed with soap, it's wrong. If you dye a robe that simply needs to be scalded, it's wrong. That's the way things are. This is called knowing how to care for your robes.

For example, you go for alms in the village and your robes catch a few drops of rain, or they're just a little sweaty. There's no need to wash them. Simply air them in the sun for a bit and they're dry. If you leave them out too long in the sun, it's wrong. To air in the sun means that you leave them for just a few moments. If you air them in the sun from morning to evening, it's called baking.

The same point applies to laypeople. If it's a piece of clothing that you should just air in the sun, but you leave it out in the sun, it's wrong. "Leaving out in the sun" means leaving it there a long time. "Airing in the sun" means that it's there for just a moment.

As for a robe that should be left to dry in the sun, if you just air it in the sun, it's wrong. If it's wet, you have to leave it there long enough for it to really get dry. If you simply air it, it's wrong. You put it away and find that tomorrow it smells musty.

If a robe has to be washed, it's wrong just to leave it in the sun. It'll smell really foul. If it's dirty or soiled, you have to wash it. Simply leaving it in the sun doesn't accomplish anything.

There are three ways of drying robes: airing them in the sun, drying them in the sun, and baking them. Airing is for when the robes are just a little sweaty. They're not really dirty. You air them in the sun or the breeze for a few moments and then you put them away. There's no need to leave them in the sun. If the robe needs to be left in the sun,

don't just air it. If it just needs to be aired, don't leave it in the sun. As for baking robes: What sort of robes *should* be baked? The kaṭhina robes. Once they're washed and dyed, you have to dry them over a fire. Otherwise, they won't be finished in time. If you simply hang them on the line, the kaṭhina will fail. This is called emergency cloth.

In addition to this there's scalding, washing, dyeing, and scrubbing with soap. When you scald a robe, you don't use cold water. If the robe is smelly or stained with sweat, take water that's boiling hot and pour it over the robe. Knead it around with your hands until the stain is out, squeeze the robe until it's just damp, and then dry it in the sun. This is called scalding the robe. Some people, when a robe should be scalded, scrub it with soap instead. They scrub it until it's almost torn, and the soap washes the dye away, leaving the robe white. If you simply wash a robe that should be scalded, it's wrong. To scald means that you use boiling water. To wash means that you use cold water. To scrub means that you use soap. To dye means that you use coloring. There are many ways of caring for the cloth. If you simply wash in cold water a robe that should be scrubbed with soap, it doesn't get clean. If you scrub with soap a robe that should be washed in cold water, the robe turns white.

Once you've learned these skills and know the situations in which to use them—you know about scalding, washing, scrubbing, and dyeing—then you learn about how to cut and sew your robes until you've mastered these skills as well.

Then there's knowing how to use your robes. How do you wear your lower robe? How do you wear it when you go into a village? How do you wear it when you're in the monastery? When you do physical labor, how do you wear it? When you're alone, how do you wear it? When you're sitting with guests, how do you wear it? When you know how to do these things properly, this is called knowing how to use your robes.

Some people know how to use their robes, but they don't know how to store them. They have only two robes, but they leave them spread out as if they're casting a net to catch fish. Only two or three robes, but they leave them out all over the place. If you know how to store your robes, they don't take up much space. With some people, the hut is stuffed with robes until it's too confining to live, even though they don't have anywhere near 100 robes.

The same with laypeople: Their houses are filled with clothing. If you really stored it properly, it wouldn't take up that much space. But it's all flagrantly out in the open, a sign of bad manners. This is an important matter. You have to know how to store things properly. How many kinds of clothing do you have? All the way from the cloths to wipe your feet to the cloths you wrap around your head: You have to know how to wash them, how to store them, how to use them in a manner that's proper and lovely to look at.

The affairs of robes are very similar to those for food. If an old rag is torn, put it away out of sight. If people see it, it looks messy. Keep things in their proper places. If a robe should be washed, wash it. If it should be dried in the sun, dry it in the sun. When you

want to use it, it'll be close to hand. If you get a nice piece of cloth, don't put it away too well. The Vinaya has a rule against that. If you get a good piece of cloth, you have to tell your friends. If you don't tell them, it's an offense. In Pāli this is called *vikappa:* Take your cloth and let it have two owners. That's so that you won't be miserly. This is what's formulated in the Vinaya.

And here again: If I were to speak on these issues for three days, I wouldn't come to the end of them. So I'll say just this much on the topic of cloth.

There are similar rules around lodgings, i.e., houses, huts, meeting halls, private places, public places like restrooms and sanctuaries. You have to know how to keep them clean. Open your eyes so that they see wide: What's broken, what needs to be maintained as it is, what can be improved? Open your ears and eyes wide, so that you can do a thorough job of helping to look after the monastery. Each of us should have big, big eyes. When you stay here in the monastery, your eyes have to be as big as the monastery; your ears have to be as big as the monastery. Whatever's fallen into bad shape, you have to take an interest in it. Whatever can be improved, whatever's about to be damaged, whatever should be maintained as it is to give convenience to yourself and others: Look after it.

The affairs of lodgings are (1) search for them in purity. Don't go around putting a squeeze on people's hearts in any way at all. If you have a place to stay, stay there. If you don't, sleep on the ground. Don't be overly impressed by comfort. That way you don't have to be a slave to anyone at all. You have to be the master. That's what it means to be a monk. To be a master means that you stay quiet. "If you want me to stay, I'll stay. If you don't want me to stay, I'll go." Make the sky your roof, the stars your lamps, the trees your walls, and the ground your stone dais. When you can make your heart as large as the world like this, then wherever you stay, you're at your ease. And when this is the case, you don't have to search for anything in an inappropriate or corrupt way.

(2) Once you've searched for things in a pure way, then you have to know how to look after them. Whatever's damaged, whatever should be maintained as it is: Look after things thoroughly and all around.

In the affairs of lodgings, the same principles apply as to food and robes. If each person looks after his or her duties, then everything is clean. Where you sit is clean, where you lie down is clean, where you stand is clean, where you walk is clean, your food is clean, your clothing is clean, your lodgings are clean, your medicine is clean. This is a sign of a person of virtue. But you don't yet have the beauty of order.

What I've explained is just the first point.

The second point: the beauty of order. This kind of beauty is different from cleanliness. It comes from keeping things in a neat and tidy fashion. Cups and glasses, plates and bowls—everything: Keep them in their places. For example, pots and pans should stay in their kitchen. Cups, bowls, and utensils should stay in their places so that they're pleasing to the eye. Make sure that everything stays in its place. Don't leave them

mixed up in a mess. For example, suppose that a dog slept with a person: How could that look beautiful? Dogs have to sleep under the house, cats have to sleep in the house, people have to sleep on their pillows and mats. When this is the case, it's beautiful.

All your utensils: Wherever they belong, that's where you put them. And once something has a place, don't force it to move around often. Otherwise it'll become homeless. First it stays in this home, then it stays in that home, and after a while it won't have any home at all. If you've kept it in this spot, let it stay in this spot. If there's no real need, don't force it to run off somewhere else.

Most people don't have any manners in this area, which is why their lives don't have any beauty. Today you keep something in one room; tomorrow you put it somewhere else. Today it's in the house; tomorrow it's under the house, and when you look for it, your eyes practically split open and you still can't find it.

This is called a breach of manners, in that it's not beautiful. There's an example that I've heard people tell. There was a couple in the time of Luang Pibul [Prime Minister of Thailand, 1938–44, 1948–57], when they got women to wear skirts. Before then, women had worn a cloth whose ends went between the legs and were tucked under the belt behind the back, so it was easy to tell the difference between a woman's cloth and a man's sarong. But now women were wearing skirts. And this couple kept her skirts next to his sarongs. Then they forgot. He didn't intend to do it that way, but they kept her skirts under the foot of the bed and his sarongs off to one side.

Then on that day, I don't know whether he was in a hurry or what, but it was a little dark when he came home, and he put his sarong next to his wife's skirt. Then next morning, when it was light, he was in a hurry to go to the market for a cup of coffee. He had barely rubbed the sleep out of his eyes when he grabbed his sarong, put it on, and rushed out for his coffee. But he was really absent-minded. If he hadn't noticed when he put it on, he should have looked down when he was walking down the street, but he didn't look down. He was wearing his wife's heavy silk skirt. And that's how he sat, drinking coffee in a Chinese shop as if nothing was wrong, feeling no sense of embarrassment.

Meanwhile, his wife was looking for her skirt. "Hey. Where'd my skirt go?" She practically turned the house upside down. Finally she told her daughter, "Go look for you father. See where he's gone. He's taken my skirt. All I can see is his sarong." The daughter ran to the market and saw her father sipping coffee as if nothing was wrong. She looked around, left and right, and didn't know what to say. "Dad, Dad. You're wearing Mom's skirt."

"What? I had no idea. I wondered what was wrong. It felt kind of stiff. It's heavy silk." So he hurried back, but he rolled her skirt up so that it was tied around his waist, afraid that his friends would see him wearing his wife's skirt. He rolled it up so that they wouldn't see the design on the cloth. But he was naked from the waist down as he hurried home: How bad a breach of manners can you get? But he wasn't embarrassed about that.

He was embarrassed that he was wearing his wife's skirt. He wasn't embarrassed about his own skin. The skin he used to be embarrassed about, he wasn't embarrassed about now. He was embarrassed about the skirt, afraid that his friends would tease him, "Hey, this old fool's wearing his wife's skirt." As for his daughter, she was embarrassed in his place, and so went running back to the house.

This is what it's like with people who have no sense of beauty. They don't keep their things in a beautiful way; they don't wear them in a beautiful way. It can lead to a really bad breach of manners. Don't think that this is a minor matter.

When we know how to keep things in a neat and orderly way, it's called both clean and beautiful. So how are things kept neat and orderly? Some things you use only once in a long, long while. Some things you use once every seven days. Some things you use in the morning but not in the afternoon. Some things you use all day long. So with all of these things, you have to find a place for them. Have pity on them. Otherwise, they'll jump at each other. Glasses, for instance, can jump at each other. I've heard it happening. Somebody grabs three glasses at once, they jump and kick one another—*peng!*—and then break. That's actually a breach in your virtue. If we people jumped at one another this way, our heads would be split open. Glasses don't even have any consciousness, but they can still jump at one another.

So you have to be careful. What you should arrange on a tray, what you should carry in your hand, what you should carry over your shoulder; when you should use one hand, when you should use two hands: You have to learn how to read these things so that you can put things in order.

These are called *kalyaṇa-dhamma,* the qualities of people who are beautiful people. The things are kept in a beautiful way; the people are beautiful. If things aren't kept in a beautiful way, the people aren't beautiful.

Just look around you. When we're all sitting still here like this, it looks beautiful. If some of you were standing, some were walking, some were talking, what kind of beauty would there be? If we tried doing that, it would spoil our society together.

It's the same with our belongings and utensils. When they're not kept in order, they clutter the eye, they clutter the ear, they clutter everything every step down the line. For that reason, you need to have a sense of how to arrange them in an orderly way, in line with their duties, in the same way that a work supervisor knows how to arrange workers. What do supervisors do? What do *their* supervisors do? They arrange their workers in order.

It's the same with an orchestra of xylophones and gongs. There's an order to what they do. They just sit there, hitting away at their instruments—*ngong, ngeng, ngong, ngeng*—and get paid to do it. If they hit their instruments without any pattern, without any order, *who* would go to listen?

This is why, when things are orderly, you feel at ease. All you have to do is look at

them, and you smile to yourself. When you want something, you grab for it and immediately you've got it. Otherwise, it's like that old guy who grabbed for his sarong and immediately was wearing his wife's skirt. That's too much to take.

So remember this. When things are in order, it's beautiful. Even things that have gone to waste should be dealt with in an orderly way—like food waste. Throw it in the spot where it's been thrown before. Don't just throw it any old place. Store things where they've been stored before, and put them neatly in order. It's beautiful, and it gives many good results. One is that your eyes feel at ease just looking at them. Two, when you want something, it's easy to find. Three, the things themselves rarely get damaged. It's good in every way.

This is called being beautiful.

The next step is that, when these first two steps are mastered, your heart is at ease. When your heart is at ease, you have no more worries or concerns. This lack of worry and concern makes your heart cheerful. When you look at things, your eyes are at ease. When you hear people using them, your ears are at ease. When you think about how the belongings you've used are now kept in order, your heart isn't weighed down. It feels at ease. This is what's called *sīla-visuddhi,* purity of virtue. When your virtue is pure, it's easy to get the mind into concentration. And what does that mean? There have been people who have reached stream-entry while standing putting food in a monk's bowl. Some have reached stream-entry while fixing food in the kitchen. Some have reached stream-entry while gathering flowers in the garden. What does that come from? Purity of virtue. That's when it's not hard to get into concentration—when the mind is at ease.

1. When we get up and fix food, there's no conflict among us.
2. We get the plates in which to serve the food that we've gained in a pure way.
3. We see the monks coming for alms, and they're pure in their virtue. Our hearts feel cheerful when we put food in their bowls. The cheerfulness of a heart when it feels at ease gives rise to purity of virtue and purity of mind. Purity of virtue is a *sot'aṅga,* one of the factors for stream-entry. It's not all that difficult. You can reach the paths and their fruitions while putting food in a monk's bowl —if your virtue is pure.

But if your virtue isn't pure, then no matter how much you sit with your eyes closed in concentration, all that settles down are your eyelids. Your mind is jumping out through the skin in front of your eyes and running all over the place. This is the power of defilement when the heart isn't clean and bright. It keeps pushing the mind around so that it can't find any peace.

When we take an inventory of these issues—beginning with cleanliness, and going on to beauty and then to ease of mind, purity of mind—when these three aspects of virtue have arisen in a person or a group, then concentration comes easily. It's not blocked by

magg'āvaraṇa, the obstacles to the path. The paths and fruitions can then be near to hand whether you're sitting, standing, walking, or lying down.

For this reason, I've discussed *abhisamācāra,* higher conduct, as a part of giving rise to recollection of virtue as a topic of meditation. Take an inventory of yourself. Whatever is lacking or incorrect in terms of the standards of the Buddha's teachings, correct it in a way that gives rise to peace, orderliness, and beauty. Whatever is already good, keep being intent in practicing in line with it. When we as Buddhists set our minds on practicing in this way, we're sure to succeed in achieving our aims, and we'll experience safety and happiness for a long time to come—

as I have shown in this discussion of virtue on the topic of higher conduct and the practices of quality coming under the topic of virtue.

So I'll end here.

Treating the Mind

December 24, 1960

If a monk doesn't take proper care of himself when he's ill, he's punished in three ways: by the Dhamma, by the devas, and by human beings. When this is the case, regardless of whether he dies or recovers from his disease, it doesn't serve any purpose.

How does the Dhamma inflict punishment? When illness comes and you understand that the illness is yours or that you're a sick person, when you can't separate the body and mind into two separate things because you don't have enough stillness of mind to withstand the causes of the illness, the punishment is that you suffer from the pain.

To say that devas inflict punishment means this: Whoever practices the duties of a contemplative in good fashion tends to have devas looking after him. But when illness arises and you don't keep control over your behavior and you show a lot of distress, it causes the devas to be disillusioned and disgusted—the fault being that you don't maintain the stillness appropriate to your state as a contemplative. The devas are then bound to inflict punishment.

How do human beings inflict punishment? When you make yourself someone hard to care for. You don't have any endurance; you don't act in ways appropriate for the fact that you're sick. You're hard to please and entangled in sensual desires. You're a residence for the hindrances—i.e., you let the hindrances overcome the mind. The mind then is bound to lose its power and strength. And this causes the people around you to despise you.

So when you're sick, you should give rise to heedfulness both by day and by night. This will lead to well-being. Otherwise, your lack of heedfulness will cause the disease to grow stronger.

If you simply understand that "I'm in the hospital to treat my disease," that's a misunderstanding. You have to understand that "I'm developing *saṁvega* and practicing the duties of a contemplative that will lead to release from all suffering and stress." Tell yourself that, instead of treating the disease, you're treating your heart and mind. After all, you're not the doctor. You don't have to get too involved or worried about the affairs of the body. That's simply a waste of your mind's strength. Your duty as an ill person is to use your mindfulness to look after your mind, that's all. Whether the disease is serious or not, whether you'll recover or die: That's not your business. You have to set your mind on thinking like this. That's what's right.

Dedication

sabbe sattā sadā hontu
averā sukha-jīvino
kataṁ puñña-phalaṁ mayhaṁ
sabbe bhāgī bhavantu te

May all beings live happily,
always free from animosity.
May all share in the blessings
springing from the good I have done.

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