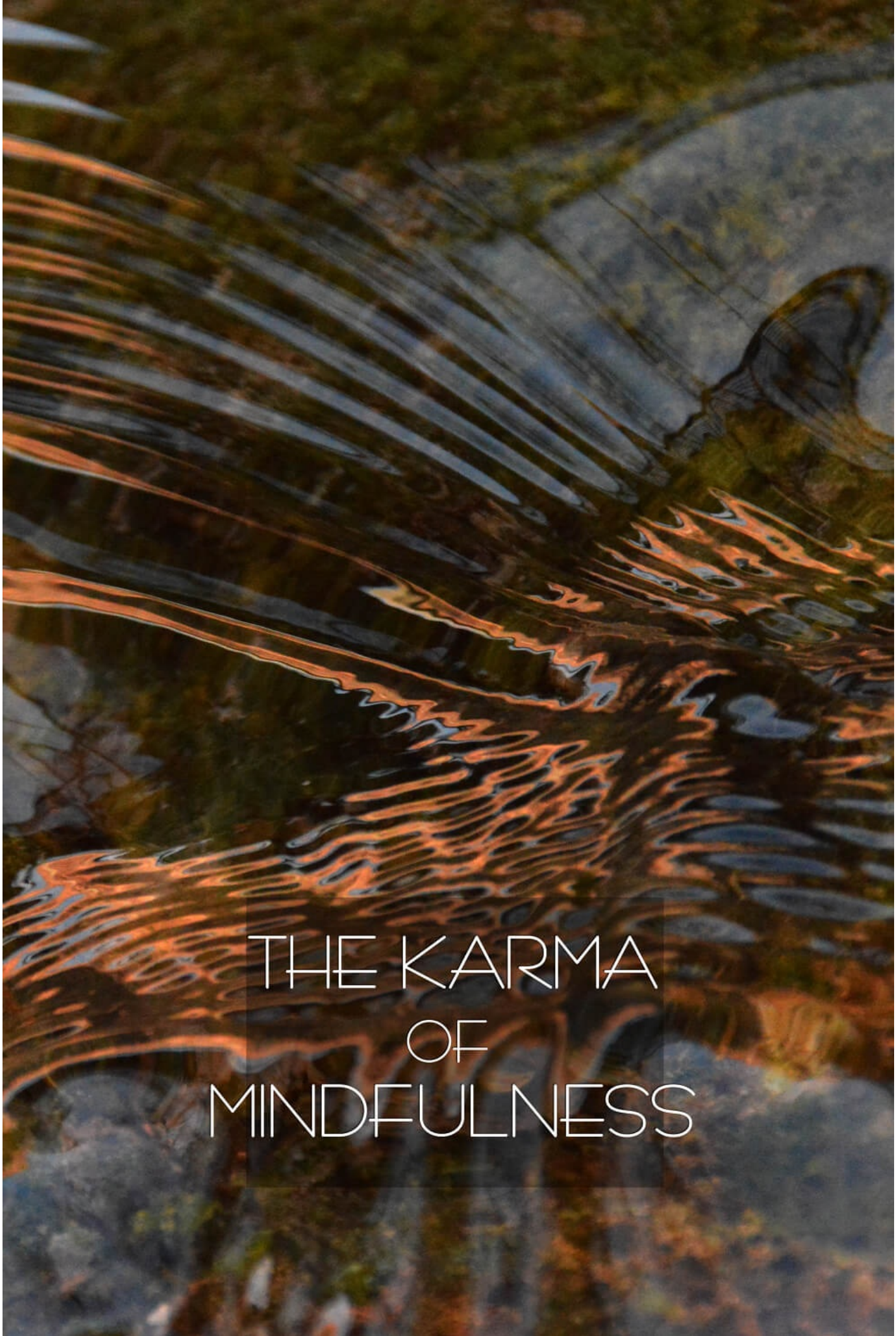
THE KARMA
OF
MINDFULNESS

The Karma of Mindfulness

THE BUDDHA'S TEACHINGS
ON SATI & KAMMA

Ṭhānissaro Bhikkhu
(Geoffrey DeGraff)

"Just as a royal frontier fortress has a gatekeeper, wise, experienced, intelligent to keep out those he doesn't know and to let in those he does know, for the protection of those within and to ward off those without, in the same way a disciple of the noble ones is mindful, endowed with excellent proficiency in mindfulness, remembering and recollecting what was done and said a long time ago. With mindfulness as his gatekeeper, the disciple of the noble ones abandons what is unskillful, develops what is skillful, abandons what is blameworthy, develops what is blameless, and looks after himself with purity."

— AN 7:63

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Preface

In May of this year, members of Le Refuge, a Buddhist group located in Auriol, near Marseilles, invited me to lead an eight-day retreat on the topics of kamma *(karma)* and mindfulness *(sati).* The retreat provided me with the opportunity to discuss the relationships between these two central Buddhist concepts, to show how the Buddha's teachings on kamma—far from being irrelevant to the practice of mindfulness—actually provide the essential grounding for understanding how mindfulness best functions in developing the mind for the purpose of putting an end to suffering and stress.

The talks of the retreat were presented in three series: a series of morning talks on mindfulness, a series of evening talks on kamma, and a series of afternoon talks on issues arising in meditation that are best understood in light of the Buddha's teachings on both kamma and mindfulness. As the retreat progressed, the three series of talks converged.

The present book is based on all three series of talks, presented chronologically, along with some of the questions submitted by people attending the retreat, which have been reordered and placed after the talks to which they seem most clearly related. The talks, the questions, and the answers to the questions have been edited and expanded so as to make their coverage of both main topics of the retreat more complete than I was able to manage on the spot.

The talks draw on suttas, or discourses, from the Pāli Canon and on the writings and talks of the ajaans, or teachers, of the Thai forest tradition, in which I was trained. For people unfamiliar with the Canon, I have added passages from the discourses at the back of the book to flesh out some of the points made in the talks. These are followed by a glossary of Pāli terms.

For people unfamiliar with the Thai forest tradition, you should know that it is a meditation tradition founded in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century by Ajaan Mun Bhūridatto. The ajaans mentioned in the talks trained under him. Of these, Ajaan Fuang Jotiko and Ajaan Suwat Suvaco were my teachers. Ajaan Fuang, although he spent some time training directly under Ajaan Mun, spent more time training under one of Ajaan Mun's students, Ajaan Lee Dhammadharo.

Many people have helped with the preparation of this book. In particular, I would like to thank the people of Le Refuge who made the retreat possible, and

Claude LeNinan, my excellent and meticulous interpreter throughout my stay in southern France. Here at Metta, the monks at the monastery helped in preparing the manuscript, as did Michael Barber, Linda Harter, Addie Onsanit, and Isabella Trauttmansdorff. Any mistakes in the book, of course, are my own responsibility.

Ṭhānissaro Bhikkhu
(Geoffrey DeGraff)

Metta Forest Monastery
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Abbreviations

AN	*Aṅguttara Nikāya*
DN	*Dīgha Nikāya*
MN	*Majjhima Nikāya*
SN	*Saṁyutta Nikāya*

References to DN and MN are to discourse *(sutta);* those to AN and SN are to section *(nipāta, saṁyutta)* and discourse. Numbering for AN and SN follows the Thai Edition of the Pāli Canon.

All translations from these texts are by the author and are based on the Royal Thai Edition of the Pāli Canon (Bangkok: Mahāmakut Rājavidyālaya, 1982).

Introduction

May 17, 2015

Good evening, and welcome to our retreat on the themes of mindfulness and kamma.

We're here this week to learn some useful skills to deal with one of the most fundamental problems in life, which is that we all desire happiness, we keep acting on the desire for happiness, and yet we often cause suffering for ourselves and others through our own actions. The Buddha, after his awakening, focused his energies on helping us solve precisely this problem. As he analyzed it, he saw that there's nothing wrong with desiring happiness. We simply don't approach that desire with enough wisdom.

One of the most basic principles of wisdom is that we need to train our minds. You may have noticed that you can be living in good conditions and yet still suffer, and that you can be happy in spite of bad conditions. Your happiness and suffering both depend on the inner condition of your mind. And the Buddha discovered that the condition of your mind doesn't have to be a random thing or left to chance. It can be trained through your own efforts. But your efforts have to be guided by wisdom. Two of the most important concepts that the Buddha used in his instructions on how to develop wisdom are mindfulness and kamma.

Unfortunately, these two concepts are often misunderstood. Kamma is misunderstood and, in the West, is generally disliked. Mindfulness is something that everybody likes even though they don't understand it properly. So this week will be devoted to understanding these two concepts and the relationship between them so that we can get the most use out of them.

The concept of kamma is usually disliked because people believe it to be deterministic, teaching that your present experience is controlled by your past kamma, which is something you're powerless to change. But as the Buddha pointed out, your present experience is shaped not only by past kamma but also by present kamma. In fact, your present kamma is more important than your past kamma in determining whether or not you suffer in the present. Present kamma deals with the way you shape your experience in the present moment. We are active beings, not passive. The mind takes an active and proactive role in shaping its experience

from moment to moment.

It's like fixing food. Our past kamma is like raw food, and our present kamma is like the act of fixing the food so that we can eat it. In fact, feeding is one of the central images in the Buddha's teachings: Because we are beings, we need to feed both physically and mentally. To feed properly, we need to know how to fix our food well.

Another reason why people don't like the idea of kamma—especially when connected with rebirth—is that they see that it's something that can't be proven, and so they'd rather just put the whole issue aside. But the question of how far the consequences of your actions go isn't something that can be put aside. Every time we act, whether we're conscious of it or not, we're calculating the balance between the effort put into the action and the results we expect to receive. And as we make these calculations, we're making assumptions about the future that can't be proven: Do we have free will? Will our actions affect only this life, or will they go on into the next?

In presenting his teaching on kamma, the Buddha is giving us a set of assumptions—or working hypotheses—that will explain why it makes sense to follow a path to the end of suffering, and that will encourage us to act skillfully in all situations. We won't know that these assumptions are actually true until we reach the first level of awakening, but we will see that these assumptions make us better, more responsible people in the meantime. Of course, some people would rather not make the effort to be more responsible, but the Buddha wasn't interested in teaching them.

A third reason why people don't like the idea of kamma is because they assume that the Buddha simply picked up the idea of kamma, unthinkingly, from what everyone in India believed at the time. This is not true. The questions of whether people actually are responsible for their actions, or kamma, and whether their actions actually shaped their experience, were hotly debated in the Buddha's time. And the Buddha had a very distinctive way of explaining kamma, unlike anything else that had been taught in India—or anywhere else.

Two principles in his teaching on kamma were especially distinctive. The first is that kamma is intention **[§4]**. In other words, action is not simply a matter of the motion of the body. It's a matter of the mind—and the intention that drives the kamma makes the difference between good actions and bad.

The second distinctive principle is that kamma coming from the past has to be shaped by kamma in the present before you can experience it. You actually experience your present kamma before you engage with the results of past kamma. Without present kamma, you wouldn't experience the results of past kamma at all. The importance of your present kamma is the reason why we meditate. When we

meditate, we're getting more sensitive to what we're doing in the present moment, we're creating good kamma in the present moment, and we're learning how to be more skillful in creating good kamma all the time, from now into the future.

Now, in learning to shape our present moment skillfully, it helps to learn lessons from other people who have learned through experience how to shape their kamma skillfully themselves. We also have to learn from our own actions, observing what we do and the results of what we do. Once we've learned those lessons, we have to remember them. If we learn them and then forget them, they're useless.

It's for this reason we need to develop mindfulness, or *sati,* which the Buddha defined as a faculty of memory: your active memory, the lessons you need to remember from the past about how to shape your experience skillfully in the present. There are people who explain mindfulness as bare attention or full awareness, but the Buddha wasn't one of them. In his use of the term, mindfulness is your active memory, your ability to keep things in mind. So, as we discuss mindfulness in the course of this retreat, try to keep the Buddha's meaning of the word in mind.

To practice right mindfulness, you combine mindfulness with two other qualities: *sampajañña,* which is to be alert to what you're doing right now and to the results you're getting from your actions; and ardency, *ātappa,* which means putting your whole heart into doing it well. You need to bring all three qualities together as you meditate so that your practice of mindfulness will be right, and will strengthen the next factor in the path: right concentration, *samādhi.*

As we meditate, we actually develop mindfulness together with concentration. Some people say that mindfulness practice is one thing; concentration is something else. But again, the Buddha was not one of those people. Mindfulness and concentration have to work together. Without mindfulness you can't remember where to stay concentrated. Without concentration, your mindfulness gets very fuzzy and forgotten. So this week we will be learning to put mindfulness and concentration together, and also to bring kamma into the mix, because mindfulness and concentration are things we intentionally *do.* You can't understand them properly or do them properly without understanding the principles of kamma.

You have to remember that you're fixing food for the mind all the time: each time you breathe in, each time you breathe out. We tend to forget this, though, because we're too intent on wanting to gobble down our experiences, whenever we can find them. We forget the lessons we've learned from the past. So we have to remember that we're here fixing food for the present moment, and we want to eat well. How we do this will also influence what we experience in the future.

Ultimately, we want to bring the mind to a place where it's so strong that it doesn't need to feed anymore at all.

This means that both mindfulness and kamma make reference to all three time frames. Mindfulness brings in what you've learned from the past and reminds you to focus on shaping things well in the present moment so that it will also have a good effect in the future. In the same way, the results of your past intentions come in from the past, providing the raw material for the food in the present; and as you fix that food in the present, it will have an influence on the food available to you well into the future.

This further means that the teachings on mindfulness and kamma work together. In fact, they're inseparable. You can't understand right mindfulness without understanding kamma, and you can't develop skillful kamma for the purpose of release without developing right mindfulness.

That's the main lesson of the retreat. If you're in a hurry to leave and go home, you can leave now because you've learned the basic lesson. But to learn it as a *skill* will take some time. That's why we're here for a week—and why the retreat is being recorded, so that you can take the lessons home and continue working on them after the week is up.

My teacher used to recommend not teaching people until they had meditated. If they haven't meditated, they won't understand anything. So the first step in learning about mindfulness and kamma will be to meditate now. That way you'll have some hands-on experience in focusing on your present kamma and in developing the three qualities of mindfulness, alertness, and ardency.

GUIDED MEDITATION

Get in a comfortable position. Sit up comfortably straight, place your hands in your lap, face forward, and close your eyes.

Think thoughts of goodwill. Goodwill is a wish for happiness—a wish for *true* happiness, both for yourself and for other people. When we wish goodwill for ourselves and for others, we're basically wishing that we and other people will understand the causes for true happiness and act on them. And this is a thought you can spread to anyone, even people who are doing unskillful things, very unskillful things, creating a lot of damage to the world. You're basically wishing that they will stop and have a change of heart, which means that goodwill is something that you can spread to everyone without hypocrisy.

We think these thoughts at the beginning of the meditation because true happiness comes from within. It comes from developing the good potentials of the mind through the skills we master in meditation. This is why there's no conflict

between your true happiness and anyone else's true happiness. So when you pose the thought in your mind, "May I be happy," it's not a selfish thought. The more you're able to develop your own inner skills, the more you will have to offer to other people as well. This is why goodwill can be developed as an unlimited attitude.

So pose that thought in your mind for a few minutes: "May I be truly happy. May I come to understand the causes of true happiness. And may I be able to act on them."

Now spread the same thought to others. Start with people who are close to your heart: to members of your family, and to very close friends. May they find true happiness, too.

Then spread the same thought out in ever-widening circles:

to people you know well and like,

to people you like even though you don't know them so well,

to people you're more neutral about,

and to people you don't like.

Remember that the world would be a much better place if everyone could find true happiness inside.

Spread thoughts of goodwill to people you don't even know. And not just people: living beings of all kinds, in all directions—east, west, north, south, above, and below, out to infinity. May we all find true happiness in our hearts.

Now bring your attention to the breath. The word "breath" here doesn't mean just the air coming in and out of the lungs. It also means the flow of energy throughout the body, which exists on many levels. On the most obvious level, it's the flow of energy that allows the air to come in and go out of the lungs. But it also includes the flow of energy in the nerves and the blood vessels, out to every pore.

So take a couple of good long, deep in-and-out breaths and notice where you feel the breath energy. If long breathing feels good, keep it up. If it doesn't feel good, you can change the breath. There are two ways of changing it. One is to consciously experiment with different kinds of breathing: long, short, fast, slow, deep, shallow, heavy, light, or any combination of those. Try various ways of breathing to see what feels best for the body right now. When you've found a rhythm and texture of breathing that feels good, stick with it for as long as it continues to feel good. If the needs of the body change, then allow the breath to change in line with them. Try to be as sensitive as you can to learn the signs in the body indicating what way of breathing will serve it best.

The other way to change the breath is to consciously pose the question in your mind, each time you breathe in: "What would feel really good right now?" And see

how the body responds on its own.

If any thoughts not related to the breath grab your attention, just drop them and you'll be right back at the breath. If the mind goes wandering off 10 times, 100 times, bring it back 10 times, 100 times. Don't get discouraged. Just keep letting the thoughts go, letting them go. And you don't have to chase them away. Even though a thought unrelated to the breath may appear in the mind, you can still feel the breath. Stay with that sensation.

Each time you return to the breath, reward yourself with an especially gratifying breath. That way the mind will be more and more inclined to keep coming back to the breath and more willing to stay there.

If there are any pains in the body, don't focus on them. Focus instead on the opposite side of the body. In other words, if there's a pain in the back, focus on the front of the torso. If pain on the right, focus on the left.

When the breath gets comfortable, there's a danger that you might start leaving the breath to follow the comfort, but that will destroy the foundation for the sense of comfort, which is your continued focus on the breath.

So to counteract that tendency, the next step is to breathe in and out aware of the entire body. And the first step in that direction is to survey the sensations of the breath in the different parts of the body, section by section.

Start down around the navel. Locate that part of the body in your awareness. Watch it for a while as you breathe in and breathe out to see what kind of breathing feels good there. If there's any tension or tightness there, allow it to relax and dissolve away, so that no new tension builds up as you breathe in, and you don't hold on to any tension as you breathe out. If it helps in dissolving the tension, think of the breath energy entering and leaving your body right at the spot where you're focused, so you don't have to create tension by trying to pull energy from anywhere else in the body. As the patterns of tension begin to dissolve away, try to notice if there are any more subtle patterns of tension, and allow those to dissolve away as well.

Now move your attention over to the right, to the lower right hand corner of the abdomen, and follow the same steps there. One, locate that part of the body in your awareness. Two, watch it for a while as you breathe in and breathe out to see what kind of breathing feels good there. And three, if there's any sense of tension or tightness there, allow it to relax.

Now move your attention over to the left, to the lower left hand corner of the abdomen, and follow the same three steps there.

Now bring your attention up to the solar plexus, right at the tip of the breastbone, and follow the same three steps there.

Now bring your attention over to the right, to the right flank.

And then to the left, to the left flank.

Then bring your attention to the middle of the chest. Try to be especially sensitive to how the breath energy feels around the heart, and breathe in a way that feels soothing there.

Now bring your attention to the right, to the place where the chest and the shoulder meet.

And then to the same spot on the left.

Now bring your attention to the base of the throat.

Now bring your attention to the middle of the head. As you breathe in and out, think of the breath energy coming in and out of the head from all directions, not only through the nose, but also through the eyes, the ears, in from the back of the head, down from the top of the head, going deep, deep, deep into the brain, gently dissolving away any patterns of tension you may feel anywhere in the head: around the jaws, around the forehead, around the eyes, at the back of the neck.

Now bring your attention to the base of the neck, right at the base of the skull. As you breathe in, think of the breath energy entering there from the back and spreading down through the neck, down the shoulders, the arms, out to the tips of the fingers. As you breathe out, think of it radiating out from all those parts of the body into the air.

As you get more sensitive to these parts of the body, if you see that one side is holding more tension than the other, relax that side and try to keep it relaxed, all the way through the in-breath, all the way through the out.

And as obvious patterns of tension begin to relax in these parts of the body, try to become more sensitive to detect subtler patterns of tension that were obscured by the more obvious ones. Allow even the slightest tension that you can detect to relax.

Now, keeping your attention focused on the back of the neck, this time as you breathe in think of the energy entering there and then going down both sides of the spine all the way down to the tailbone. Then as you breathe out, think of it radiating out from the entire spine into the air. And again, if you notice that there's more tension in one side of the back than the other, allow that side to relax. And try to keep becoming more and more sensitive even to the slightest patterns of tension in this part of the body. When you sense them, allow them to relax.

Now bring your attention down to the tailbone. As you breathe in, think of the energy entering there and going down through the hips, the legs, to the tips of the toes. And then as you breathe out, think of the energy radiating out from all those parts of the body into the air. And again, if there's more tension in one side of the

body than the other, allow that side to relax. And keep it relaxed, all the way through the in-breath, all the way through the out. As you're staying here, try to become sensitive to ever more and more subtle patterns of tension so that you can dissolve those away, too.

That completes one cycle of the survey of the body. If you want, you can go through the body again to pick out any patterns of tension you may have missed the first time around. Keep this up until you're ready to settle down.

Then choose any one spot in the body that seems most congenial or most interesting. Allow your attention to settle there and then to spread out to fill the whole body, so that you're aware of the whole body breathing in, the whole body breathing out. As your awareness spreads, think of it as exerting no pressure at all on your body. It's like the light of a candle in an otherwise dark room: The flame is in one spot, but the light fills the entire room. Or like the spider in the middle of a web: The spider is in one spot, but it's sensitive to the whole web. Try to maintain this sense of centered but broad awareness all the way through the in-breath, all the way through the out. Maintain this quality of awareness as long and as steadily as you can. Try to master it as a skill. Your attention will have a tendency to shrink, especially during the out-breath, so each time you breathe in and out remind yourself, "Whole body, whole body." Allow the breath to find whatever rhythm feels best. Your duty is simply to maintain this centered but broad awareness.

There's nowhere else you have to go right now, nothing else you have to do, nothing else you have to think about. This awareness is healing for the body and healing for the mind. It's like a medicinal cream for curing a rash on your skin. For it to work, you have to leave the cream on the skin. If you put it on and then wipe it off, it can't have any effect. This is why it's good to develop this type of awareness for a long time. Because it's still and all-around, it's a good foundation for insight to arise. But don't worry about the next step in the meditation, or when the insights will arise. They'll arise as this quality of awareness matures. Right here. Give it time.

(Meditation)

Before leaving meditation, remember that there are three steps to leaving properly.

The first is to ask yourself, "At what point in the meditation was the mind especially well-centered, still, and comfortable? Especially clear?" Then ask yourself, "Where were you focused at that point? What was your breath like? What had you been doing leading up to that point?" If you can remember these things, try to keep them in mind and see if you can apply them to the next time you meditate, to recreate the same conditions and get the same results. Now it may happen that you don't get the same results, but that simply means that you need to

be more observant the next time around. Gradually you'll become more adept at noticing what's worth paying attention to, and what's not. It's in this way that the meditation becomes a skill.

That's the first step.

The second step is to think of whatever sense of peace or wellbeing you've felt during this session and dedicate it to others, either to specific people you know are suffering right now or to all living beings in all directions: May we all find peace and wellbeing in our hearts.

The third step is to remember that even though you open your eyes, you can still be aware of the breath energy in the body, as you get up, walk around, whatever you do: Try to stay as fully aware of this breath energy as continually as you can. It may be asking too much to try to focus on the in-breath and the out-breath all the time, but just try to be aware of the quality of the breath energy in the body, and release any patterns of tension that you may detect, as soon as they arise, in the course of the day. This way you provide yourself with a good foundation for observing your mind as you go through the day. It also provides you with a sense of being grounded in your daily activities. This helps build up the momentum of your practice.

See if you can maintain this full body awareness until the next time that you sit down to meditate. That way, the next time you sit down to focus on the breath, you'll be right there.

It's like keeping a dog on a short leash. When you want it to come, it's right there. Otherwise, if you drop your awareness of the breath energy, it's like keeping your dog on a very long leash. It will wrap the leash around other people's legs, lampposts, trees—all kinds of things. When you want it to come back, you'll have to unwind the leash, which takes a very long time. So try to maintain this awareness of the breath energy as part of your whole day.

And with that thought, you can open your eyes.

Q: To be mindful, does this mean to be aware of your words, your acts, and their consequences?

A: No, mindfulness, or *sati,* is the ability to keep in mind what you should be doing. Developing alertness, *sampajañña,* means being clearly aware of your actions, your words, your thoughts, and their consequences, for the purpose of doing things skillfully. Vigilance or heedfulness is your motivation for wanting to be both mindful and alert.

Q: When you are in mindfulness, are you remembering and by this act soliciting the past, or are you firmly in the present?

A: With mindfulness, you are trying to bring only what you need to know from the past. Through the quality of alertness, you focus on the present. Try to bring the two of them together, so that you remember what you need to know from the past so as to shape the present moment well. Remember, too, that the present is not just given to you. It's also something that you're shaping in the present moment as well. Past kamma gives you the potentials for the present moment, but your present kamma is actually what shapes your experience from those potentials.

Q: Can we bring together mindfulness and "what knows" within us?

A: "What knows" within us is basically our awareness. That's present all the time. Mindfulness is the ability to remember. It's not always there or may be in the wrong place, which is why we have to train it. As for alertness, that's particularly focused on our actions and their results. So in that way, alertness gives more focus to "what knows" inside.

Q: If you are being mindful when involved in an activity that completely absorbs you, when all thoughts go away, can this be created in the case of tossing a salad or also in the work of a sculptor or musician?

A: When you are totally absorbed in your action, that is called alertness. But there should also be somewhere in the back of your mind the question: What is the skillful way to do this? That would be mindfulness. And the effort to follow through with what is skillful would be ardency.

Q: Does there exist a right mindfulness and wrong mindfulness or good mindfulness and bad mindfulness?

A: Yes, you can have either good or bad mindfulness. An example of wrong mindfulness is if you're planning to rob a bank and you keep the plans in mind as you go down to the bank. That's wrong mindfulness.

Q: Watching the beauty of the sunset or enjoying sublime music: Can this also be a form of mindfulness?

A: It can be mindfulness, but it's not necessarily right mindfulness. However, if you're watching your mind in the course of, say, looking at the beauty of a sunset, and if you see that anything unskillful is coming up and you're mindful to drop that, then that would be right mindfulness.

One evening at the monastery in Thailand, a monk visiting from Bangkok was commenting to my teacher, "Isn't the sunset beautiful?" And my teacher told him,

“Don’t focus on the sunset. Focus on the part of the mind that’s saying, ‘Isn’t the sunset beautiful?’”

Q: Could you be more precise about the message given to the monk by your master concerning the beautiful sunset? Is it a matter of distraction? Is it something that you should find of no interest at all?

A: Basically, as monks, we’re supposed to be training our minds, and so our first point of reference should always be the state of the mind in the present moment. There’s nothing wrong with beautiful sunsets, but you should make your experience of the whole thing more complete so that you can see whether it’s having a good or bad effect on the mind. In other words, you watch both the sunset and the mind watching the sunset. What you see from this larger perspective then gives you your instructions for what your ardency should do next. An important lesson in developing mindfulness and alertness is that important insights often can come if we look at the cracks in our mind states, when the mind leaves one object and goes to another. If you’re not looking for those cracks, then when you’re looking, say, at the sunsets or the flowers, or thinking about tomorrow’s meal, you’re going to miss those insights.

Q: Wasn’t the Buddha a joyous and light person?

A: Yes, after his awakening. Before his awakening, it was a different matter. As he once said, there were two qualities that allowed him to become awakened. The first was not being content with the level of skill he had reached. In other words, if he realized that there was something better, a more skillful way to act, he would go for it. The second quality was his determination that if he saw any unskillful qualities in his mind he would put them out, just as he would put out a fire on his head. Ajaan Suwat used to make a comparison with eating. When you are finished a meal, you can sit back and relax. But as long as you’re hungry, you have to do everything that you can to get food.

Q: Empathy, is this compatible with mindfulness and right resolve in the eightfold path?

A: Actually, empathy is a part of right resolve because part of right resolve is the resolve of not wanting to harm anyone, and empathy is a good antidote against any desire to do harm. This should then motivate your ardency to act skillfully with all your heart.

Q: Could you give a definition of the ideas of volition and diligence?

A: Volition is basically your will power, your desire to do something. Diligence,

in English, is often translated as heedfulness, which basically comes down to the realization that there are dangers in life, but that, through our efforts, we can avoid those dangers. So we put effort into learning how to avoid the dangers, because as the Buddha said, heedfulness is the basis of all skillful qualities. This, too, is a motivating force for ardency.

Q: The idea of always wanting to put an end to suffering, does it prevent us from seeing the peace that is always there?

A: You can get a glimpse of a sense of peace every now and then, but those glimpses are very short. In other words, the peace is not always there. It's fabricated, i.e., it depends on conditions. Because conditions can change, that kind of peace is not genuine peace. To experience genuine peace fully, you have to turn around and look at what you're doing to cause suffering. Otherwise, your old habits will keep pulling you back.

Ajaan Lee has a nice analogy for this. He said it's like salt water. Fresh water is there in the salt water, but you don't get the fresh water simply by letting it sit. You have to boil the water to separate the salt from the water. Meditation—and in particular, the ardency in your meditation—is like boiling the water, so that you can separate the salt from the fresh water.

Foundations for Mindfulness

May 18, 2015

This morning, I'd like to give an introduction to the basic concepts of mindfulness and right mindfulness, and the preliminaries for developing right mindfulness.

The Buddha has a very useful definition of mindfulness. I'll read you the passage from the Pāli Canon:

> "And what is the faculty of mindfulness? There is the case where a disciple of the noble ones is mindful, is endowed with excellent proficiency in mindfulness, remembering and recollecting what was done and said a long time ago."

That's the definition of mindfulness. The passage continues with the definition of the establishing of mindfulness:

> "He, [the disciple,] remains focused on the body in and of itself, ardent, alert, and mindful, subduing greed and distress with reference to the world. He remains focused on feelings in and of themselves… the mind in and of itself… mental qualities in and of themselves, ardent, alert, and mindful, subduing greed and distress with reference to the world. This is called the faculty of mindfulness." **[§22]**

Notice, in the definition of mindfulness, the importance of the words "recollecting" and "remembering." The Buddha wants you to practice mindfulness as a faculty of the memory. He doesn't define mindfulness as full awareness. He prefers that you have *focused* awareness. You're here not just to *be* here in the present moment. You're here in the present moment because there's work to be done: You're causing yourself suffering and you want to learn how to stop.

This fact is shown by a passage where the Buddha compares mindfulness to a person putting out a fire on his head or his turban. If your head is on fire, you don't just sit there and watch it **[§29]**. You have to do what you can to put the fire out as quickly as possible.

Also, the Buddha doesn't define mindfulness as bare attention. In fact, the Buddha doesn't have any teachings about bare attention at all. Instead, he talks about *appropriate* attention. For him, attention is a matter of the questions you bring to the present moment. And your first order of business is to figure out what the skillful questions would be. For him, the questions are: "What is skillful? What is not skillful? How do you develop what is skillful? How do you abandon what is unskillful?" To remember these questions, and to bring them to bear on what you're doing right now, is to be mindful. In fact, by keeping these questions in mind, you turn mindfulness into *right* mindfulness.

One of the Buddha's most basic definitions of the *function* of right mindfulness is simply remembering that you have to develop the right factors of the path, from right view through to right concentration, and to abandon the unskillful or wrong factors of the path, from wrong view through wrong concentration **[§26]**.

The Buddha illustrates this point with the analogy of a gatekeeper at the gate to a fortress on a frontier. The gatekeeper can't just sit there and be aware of who comes in and goes out. There may be spies from the neighboring country who want to sneak in and destroy the fortress from within, so the gatekeeper has to know who to let in and who to keep out. Here's the analogy:

> "Just as a royal frontier fortress has a gatekeeper, wise, experienced, intelligent to keep out those he doesn't know and to let in those he does know, for the protection of those within and to ward off those without, in the same way a disciple of the noble ones is mindful, endowed with excellent proficiency in mindfulness, remembering and recollecting what was done and said a long time ago. With mindfulness as his gatekeeper, the disciple of the noble ones abandons what is unskillful, develops what is skillful, abandons what is blameworthy, develops what is blameless, and looks after himself with purity." **[§28]**

Years back, I heard someone explain this image by saying that the gatekeeper doesn't have to do anything: Simply the fact that the gatekeeper is at the gate scares the enemy away and keeps the enemy out. But that's a mannequin gatekeeper, not a real one or a wise, experienced one.

In France do they have mannequin police? Where they put a mannequin dressed as a policeman in a police car? No? In America, because taxes are so low, they can't afford to have real police at all the intersections where people tend to speed, so they've invented mannequin police. They park a police car on the side of a road where they want people to slow down, and they put a mannequin dressed as a policeman in the driver's seat, to scare drivers into slowing down. It works the first time you drive past, but not after that.

At any rate, I don't think the Buddha was recommending a mannequin gatekeeper. Our defilements are too clever to be fooled by that sort of thing. The gatekeeper has to be alert and mindful, to know who he should let in, and who he shouldn't let in.

He also has to remember how to keep the bad people out.

As the Buddha pointed out, the causes of stress are of two sorts **[§21]**. With some causes you simply look at them and they go away. For example, you may have a desire that you know is stupid. The only reason it has power over the mind is if you're not paying much attention to it. If you give it your full attention, you see how stupid it is, and it goes away. These are the causes of stress that go away by simply fixing your level gaze on them.

However, there are other desires that are not so obvious. You look at them and they don't go away. Those are the ones you have to work against. The Buddha calls these the ones you have to "exert a fabrication" against. Later in the week, we will discuss what "exerting a fabrication" means. But for the time being, we can just remember that some causes of stress go away just by watching them, whereas others go away only when you work to counteract them. Bare awareness, in those cases, simply won't work. This is one of the most important things you have to keep in mind. Otherwise, your gatekeeper won't be able to keep all of the enemy spies out of your mind.

So these are the basic functions of right mindfulness: to remind you to act skillfully and to abandon unskillful behavior; to remind you of what's skillful and what's unskillful; and to remind you of what works and what doesn't work in developing what is skillful and abandoning what's not.

For example, while you're sitting here meditating, you have to remember why you are here. If thoughts of what you're going to do after the retreat come up, you remember that you should let those thoughts go because they're not what you're here for.

Second, you have to remember where you want your mind to be focused, and what to do while you're staying there. If you find that you've wandered away from the breath, you remember what to do to get back to the breath.

Now in order to develop right mindfulness, the Buddha teaches a process that he calls the "establishing of mindfulness." It's a many-faceted process, which we will begin talking about tomorrow. Because it has so many facets, it will take several days to explain.

But the Buddha also lists the preliminary causes for giving rise to strong mindfulness **[§30]**, and because the list is short, we can discuss it now. It consists of two factors: purified virtue and views made straight. "*Purified virtue*" here means

not breaking any of the five precepts: not killing, not stealing, not having illicit sex, not lying, and not taking intoxicants. If you break any of these precepts and then you try to meditate, you will start remembering the times in the past when you have harmed people. Either you will feel regret for what you did or you will deny that what you did was wrong. Either way, you are putting a wall in the mind where you try not to remember. This makes it more difficult to be mindful. If your mind has many inner walls, you will find it very hard to observe what's going on inside. However, if you have nothing in your behavior that you would regret or that you would deny, it opens the doors inside the mind, and in this way your mindfulness and alertness can get better and stronger.

As for *views made straight,* these basically come down to *right view:* understanding that the reason for your suffering comes from your own actions. Here again the Buddha describes two types of suffering. Some types of suffering simply happen because of the way the world is. The days are too hot or too cold; people die and get sick; you yourself will grow sick and age and die some day. These kinds of suffering are ultimately beyond your control. Fortunately, though, they don't have to weigh down the mind.

But there is a second type of suffering that comes from craving and ignorance: qualities in the mind itself. This is the kind of suffering that actually weighs the mind down. Because you can learn to exert control over the qualities in the mind, this is the good news of the Buddha's teachings: The suffering that weighs down the mind is the suffering over which you can gain control, and you can put an end to it. This means that if you focus on the suffering that you're creating right now and learn how to put an end to it, no type of suffering will weigh down the mind. This is why you want to focus on your actions. If you solve the problem of your own unskillful actions, you've solved all the main problems in life.

Knowing this, having this right view, helps give focus to your mindfulness.

So when we talk about mindfulness as being a faculty of the memory, it doesn't mean that we have to keep everything from the past in mind. What we have to keep in mind is the difference between skillful and unskillful actions, and what we've learned about how to bring our actions into the skillful side so that we can end the suffering that weighs down the mind.

In this way you see that the causes for mindfulness, virtue and right views, are actually closely related to kamma. The good kamma of having virtue helps to strengthen your mindfulness; having right view about kamma helps to give focus to your mindfulness.

Q: In the analogy of the gatekeeper, what is represented by the people outside

and the people inside?

A: The people outside are of two sorts, friends and enemies. The enemies are the ones you have to watch out for. Enemies include any influences from outside that would be unskillful, as well as any of your own intentions that would also be unskillful. As for the people inside, those are the soldiers of right effort. You don't want anyone coming in who would weaken your efforts.

Q:Must the guardian actively bring in certain people or keep them out?

A: Yes. The important thing is that he's not a mannequin guardian. In other words, he's not passive. He actively has to give rise to skillful qualities, and actively put an end to unskillful ones.

Q: We may think we have enough mindfulness, alertness, and ardency in the present moment, but it's difficult to memorize even one page of a book of an author, so how do we improve our attention, mindfulness, and memory?

A: By focusing on your breath and just being very careful to bring yourself back to the breath every time you leave the breath. That, over time, strengthens your mindfulness and your alertness. At the same time, review the causes for mindfulness in your life: Are your precepts pure? Are your views about action right? If not, focus on bringing those causes into line.

Q: Concerning the five precepts, the first precept is for me the most important and I forbid myself formally not to kill any animal, even an insect, or to eat any animals. As for the fifth precept, I have more difficulties. Especially here in France, one likes to drink a good glass of wine every now and then, which in my case means almost every day. So this fifth precept: Does it concern getting drunk or is it a matter of totally renouncing the use of any kind of alcoholic beverage, even a "reasonable" dose?

A: Formally, it means total renunciation of alcohol, because it's easier to say No entirely than it is to figure out the difference between a "reasonable" and an "unreasonable" amount. The more you drink, the more drinks seem reasonable. And as the Buddha said, we are already intoxicated with life, youth, and health. To add more intoxication on top of that, even just one nice glass of wine, is too much for the mind to absorb and still be skillful.

Also concerning the five precepts, the Buddha said the most important one is the fourth, against lying. That's because when you give misinformation to people, it could have a bad effect on them for a very long time, even on into the next life.

Q: I would like to return to the question of wine. It was introduced as a problem of alcoholism, but there's another dimension, the social dimension. How can one

accept or refuse a little tiny glass of champagne among friends?

A: The best way to refuse a friendly gesture of this sort is to remember that traditionally the Buddha was considered to be a doctor, a doctor who treats the illnesses of the world, the illnesses of the heart and mind. I'm sure that even in France, people will not be offended if you refuse a glass of wine on the grounds that your doctor forbids it. So when someone offers you a glass of wine or even a demicoupe of champagne, tell him "My doctor says that I can't have alcohol." You don't have to explain who the doctor is or exactly what illness the doctor is treating. Your friend won't be offended.

Q: *(Vin 3)* I'm with my friends. On the table there is a Camembert, just right; fresh bread, crusty; a bottle of Pommard open, ready to be served. I consult my doctor. Will he prescribe a Coke Light?

A: Several points. One, your doctor is not an American capitalist. There are many things he could recommend that are better than Coke Light: San Pelligrino, Orangina, Schweppes Tonic, and many others.

Two, why do friendships need alcohol? Before you meet with your friends, spread lots of goodwill in their direction, and everyone will get along much better together, even without the Pommard.

Three, you already know what Pommard tastes like. That should be enough to satisfy your curiosity.

And finally, if you spent as much time thinking of skillful ways to avoid alcohol as you have been trying to think of skillful ways to drink alcohol, you probably would have made great progress along the path by now.

Q: What is illicit sex?

A: If you are married, it means having any sex outside of the marriage. If you are not married, illicit sex means having sex with a person married to someone else, with a person who is under-age, or with a person who has taken a vow of celibacy.

Q: A "particular relationship at a distance" is an exchange of e-mails with someone who is married. Is this a breaking of the third precept?

A: It doesn't break the precept, but it puts a big crack in it.

Q: When you tell a lie, the perception of the world changes. It is necessary to remember what one has said to whom. Do you think the breaking of this precept would be a skillful way of developing mindfulness?

A: It would develop mindfulness, but it would be wrong mindfulness. It wouldn't contribute to your progress on the path.

Feelings of Pain

This morning there was a request for techniques on how to deal with physical pain while you meditate.

There are four steps in dealing with pain. The first is preventative. When you sit down to meditate, you probably know by now where pains tend to appear. Try to let the breath energy flow into that area even before the pain comes. Remember, however, that sometimes pain in one part of the body is caused by a lack of circulation in another part of the body. For instance, a pain in your knee may actually come from a lack of circulation in the middle of your back or in your face. When that's the case, you have to let breath energy flow in the middle of the back or in the face if you want to prevent the pain in the knee. The relationships between circulation of breath energy and pain can be very unusual and unexpected. So, explore for a while. Try releasing any tension you can feel anywhere in the body. And you'll find that there may be one spot where, when you release the tension there, it will improve the energy flow in the area that you usually get the pain.

When I was a young monk in Thailand, the group meditations at the monastery were an hour and a half every evening. I usually found that after fifteen minutes, I had a pain in my knee. And even though they allowed us to change positions, those who *did* change position were looked down on by the other meditators. So, in order to protect the good name of America, I tried my best not to move. I quickly realized that this required working on my breath circulation immediately as soon as I closed my eyes to meditate. In my case, I found that the pain in the knee was caused by a lack of breath energy flow in the upper back. That's how I learned the first technique for dealing with pain: the preemptive strike.

The second step, when pain has arisen, is not to focus on that spot. As I said this morning in the guided meditation, you might focus on the opposite side of the body or any spot where you can find that the breath energy is very comfortable. Stay in the comfortable spot and let the pain have the other spot. You do not have to get into the line of fire. The mind will be tempted to focus on the pain and deliver a long commentary on the pain, but you have to tell yourself not to believe a word of what it is saying. Keep reminding yourself that as long as you're in a good spot, you're not threatened by the pain. Ajaan Lee has a nice image for this technique.

He says it's like getting a mango. If there's a rotten spot in the mango, do not eat the rotten spot. Let the worms have the rotten spot. You eat just the good spot.

If you can maintain this determination, you will find that the breath energy in the spot where you're focused becomes more and more comfortable, more powerful. That's when you can move to the third step, which is to think of that comfortable energy spreading through the pain. For example, if you feel comfortable energy in the area around the heart, and the pain is in your knee, think of the energy flowing from the heart down through the body, down through the leg, through the pain, and then out to the feet, relaxing any feelings of tension you may feel in those parts of the body. Make sure that you don't stop the energy flow right at the pain. Perceive the pain as being porous—it's not a wall—and that the energy can go through it easily. In this way, you're not being the victim of the pain. You're taking a more proactive role. It's not so easy for the pain to shoot you when you're being proactive. And in this way, you feel less threatened by the pain. The voices in the mind that are complaining about the pain have less and less power.

After your concentration is well established, you're ready for the fourth step in dealing with the pain, which is to focus directly on the actual sensation of the pain, to see what the sensation is and what your perceptions about the sensation are. "Perception" here can be any images or words in the mind that arise to label the pain. Then you bring in appropriate attention: Start questioning those perceptions. For example, if there's a perception that the knee is in pain, ask yourself, "Is the knee really in pain?" Actually, the knee is one thing—it's a physical phenomenon, which in the Buddhist analysis is made up of four elementary properties: a feeling of solidity, a feeling of warmth, a feeling of coolness, a feeling of energy—but the pain is something else. It is not a physical phenomenon. It's a mental phenomenon. Even though they're in the same place, it's as if they're on different wavelengths—like the radio waves from Monaco and Marseilles going through the air of this room right now. If your radio can distinguish between the different frequencies, it can produce the sounds from the right station without interference from the others. Can you distinguish between the physical and the mental phenomena in the knee in the same way?

Other questions you might ask yourself are: "Where is the most intense point of the pain? Does it stay in the same place or does it move around? Does it come or go? When it comes, what perception comes with it? If there's any perception that intensifies the pain, can you drop that perception?"

There are many other questions you could ask. The important thing is that you learn how to take a proactive role. In other words, you're not the victim, and when you're not the victim, there's nothing that the pain can hit.

Another perception you might try to apply to the pain, to counteract the sense

of being victimized by it, is to imagine that you're sitting in the back of a car, the old sort of car where the back seats face backwards. Whatever you see on the side of the road as you're facing backwards, you're seeing it whiz past and go away. Whiz past and go away. Again and again. In the same way, when you see a moment of pain arise, you're actually seeing it whizzing past and going away. As soon as you see a moment of pain, it's going away. When another moment of pain comes, it's going away, too. If you can hold this perception in mind, you will suffer much less from the pain, and sometimes you will find that the old perception that you were previously placing on the pain was actually causing the pain. When you apply a new perception, the pain goes away. But even if the pain is still there when you change perceptions, when you have a correct perception and are applying appropriate attention, you don't have to see the pain as attacking you. Your awareness is one thing; the pain is something else. That way you can live with the pain but without suffering from it.

So you have four steps all together. The first is the preventative, the second is to stay in a comfortable part of the body, the third is to use the comfortable energy in that part and spread it through the pain to dissolve any tension that has built up around the pain, and the fourth is to investigate and question the pain, along with the perceptions around the pain.

This way, you're following the Buddha's statement that your duty with regard to pain is not to destroy it or to run away from it, but to comprehend it. To comprehend it, you need to feel not threatened by it. This is why we develop concentration: to give you the confidence that you can stay with the pain and investigate it. As for the perceptions we use in investigating the pain, and the act of applying appropriate attention to them: We'll discuss later this week how those are instances of your present kamma around the pain—the kamma of discernment, the kamma of comprehension. When you develop these skillful forms of kamma in the present, you're following the duty appropriate to the fourth noble truth, which is to develop it. When these qualities are developed, you're in a strong position to comprehend pain. And when you can comprehend it, you can go beyond it.

Q: Some people say that suffering a little bit during the meditation is part of the process, but that disturbs the concentration. What is the balance?

A: The balance in the beginning is to try to sit as comfortably as you can and to develop some skill in getting concentrated and staying concentrated on the breath. If necessary, sit in a chair. Once you get a sense of what concentration is like and how you can do it, then you can begin to meditate for longer and longer periods of time in the meditative posture to see if you can maintain the concentration in spite

of the pain. You do this because pain is an excellent whetstone for sharpening your discernment.

Q: Why should we deal with pain?

A: Because there are going to be many more pains in life. The pain of sitting for one hour in meditation is nothing compared to many of the pains we will have to encounter in the future, when faced with aging, illness, and death. So this way, you get practice in dealing with pain before it gets too serious.

Q: Is pain brought to us by evolution for a reason?

A: Evolution has its purposes. We have our purposes. Our purposes are different. We want to learn how to deal with pain and not create bad kamma and eventually to get beyond evolution.

Q: Why not just sit in a chair?

A: You learn more sitting down on the floor. Also, it's more convenient. If you learn how to sit on the floor, you can sit anywhere. You don't have to carry a chair around with you in case you want to meditate.

Q: Are all positions and pains OK?

A: No, some positions are bad for the body, and some pains are also bad if you sit with them for too long. You want to sit in a balanced posture so as not to put too much stress on any one part of the body. Similarly, if you have a pain that comes from an injury, don't push yourself too hard with it. That's when you can sit in a chair.

Q: When a fly is taking a promenade on our arms or our hands, it's bearable, but what to do when a mosquito comes flying near your ear?

A: Remember that the mosquitoes in Provence do not carry malaria, and all they're asking for is a little tiny drop of blood. If you can't endure the pain of the mosquito bite, you won't be able to endure any heavier pains. And remind yourself: If you let it bite, you're gaining double merit from practicing meditation and generosity at the same time.

Q: Can you clarify your four-element analysis of pain? It can feel hot, so that would be fire; it can feel heavy, rough, or dense, so that would be earth; it moves and flows, appears and disappears, so that would seem to be breath. Are you saying that this is not complete, not useful, not correct, or all of the above?

A: The four elements are physical. Feeling is mental: the sense of finding a sensation to be either pleasant or unpleasant. Sometimes with fire, for instance, the same sensation of warmth can feel either pleasant or unpleasant depending on your

state of mind and other factors in your situation. The same holds true for density, and the same with the sense of movement. So, it's useful to be able to separate the physical side of the pain from the mental side. That makes it easier to be with the pain and not suffer from it.

Q: I often have feelings of cold during meditation. Is it that the temperature of the body lowers during meditation?

A: In the case of some people, yes, and yet other people actually feel a sensation of heat. If you find that you're getting uncomfortably cold or hot, try to think of the opposite element that would balance it out. For instance, when you're feeling too cold, try to find the warmest spot in your body, focus on that, and then try to spread that warmth to the rest of the body. Do the opposite when you're feeling too hot: Look for the coolest spot in the body and focus there. Similarly with breath and density: If you're feeling light-headed, try to focus on the sense of density or solidity in the body. If you're feeling depressed and heavy, focus on the breath throughout the body.

Q: Is it possible that an old pain might be coming from a deep energy blockage?

A: Yes.

Q: If yes, then is goodwill one of the skillful ways of freeing the blockage?

A: Who are you spreading goodwill to? If you're spreading goodwill to yourself, it might help. Or if you're spreading goodwill to any person you associate with the blockage, that, too, can help. But the best way to free the blockage is to try to get the mind as quiet as possible. The more quiet the mind, the deeper you will be able to go into energy blockages and release them directly with the breath.

A Healthy Understanding of Kamma

We talked last night about how kamma is often misunderstood and as a result often disliked. Part of the problem, in America at least, is that the teaching on kamma is sometimes seen as psychologically unhealthy. This is because it's believed to be deterministic. As a result, the complaint is that the idea of kamma makes people get fatalistic about their own suffering, complacent about their pleasure, and callous and indifferent to other people's suffering.

But this view is based on a misunderstanding of the Buddha's actual teachings on kamma. Tonight I would like to show how the Buddha taught kamma in a way that is psychologically very healthy. The first step will be to talk about what constitutes a healthy attitude toward action. The second step will be to see how the Buddha taught a healthy attitude toward action to his own son, Rāhula. And then the third step will be to draw some implications from what he taught Rāhula.

To begin with, suppose you have a child. When you train your child, what principles would you want to teach the child to give it a healthy attitude to his or her own actions?

The first principle would be, "Think before you act. Choose carefully what you want to do because your actions do have results. Some actions can be very harmful, others can be very helpful." That's the first principle, the principle of heedfulness.

The second principle would be, "Your intentions make a difference." If the child breaks something intentionally, the punishment should be very different from when he breaks it unintentionally.

The third principle would be, "Pay attention to what you're doing and see the results you're getting. If you see that you're doing something hurtful, stop." Further, "If you see you've done something harmful, resolve not to repeat it." This is the principle of compassion.

The next principle would be, "Admit your mistakes. If you broke something, don't say that it was already broken before you stepped on it. If you've made a mistake, talk it over. Don't be debilitated by remorse. But at the same time, don't be callous about the harm you've done." This is the principle of integrity along with truthfulness.

Finally, "Learn from your mistakes so that you don't have to repeat them."

Now in order to teach your child these principles, you have to be a good parent,

too. If your child comes and says that he crashed your car, take a long deep breath, and tell him not to do it again. If you fly off the handle, your child will never admit a mistake to you ever again.

So these are the basic principles in teaching a healthy attitude toward action and toward the mistakes people make in their actions. Nobody is born totally perfect, so we have to be willing to admit the fact that we will make mistakes, but we should also be willing to learn from them.

These are actually the same principles that the Buddha taught to his son, Rāhula **[§3]**. The Commentary says that Rāhula was seven years old when the Buddha gave him those instructions. The basic instructions are these:

The first principle is to be truthful, which means not only being truthful to other people but also being truthful to yourself. As the Buddha told Rāhula, if you feel no shame at telling a deliberate lie, you're totally empty of goodness. Truth is the basis for all progress in the life of the mind.

Then the Buddha taught Rāhula how to use his actions as a way of purifying his heart and mind. First, he said, "Before you act, ask yourself, 'What are the consequences you anticipate from the action?'" This applies to actions of the body, actions of speech, actions of mind. If you foresee any harm from the action, don't do it. If you don't foresee any harm, you can go ahead and do it.

While you're doing it, if you see that it's causing any unexpected harm, stop. If you don't see any harm, you can continue with the action.

Once the action is done, you're still not done. You have to look at the long-term consequences. If you see that the action did cause harm, talk it over with someone else who has experience on the path—to gain that person's perspective on what you did wrong and what might have been better to do instead— and then resolve not to repeat the same mistake again. If you don't see any harmful consequences, take pride in the fact that your practice is developing and continue trying to get better and better.

When you look at these instructions, you see that they embody the four principles of a healthy attitude toward action—heedfulness, compassion, truthfulness, and integrity: heedfulness in that you take the results of your actions seriously; compassion in that you don't want to do any harm; truthfulness in your willingness to admit your mistakes; and integrity in taking responsibility for any harm that you've done.

These are good qualities to bring to meditation practice as well.

Other lessons that can be drawn from these instructions concerning the nature of action: what might be called the metaphysical implications of a psychologically healthy attitude toward our power of choice and the power of our actions.

• One, you are free in how you choose to act. If you didn't have freedom of choice, the whole idea of teaching a path of practice to put an end to suffering wouldn't make any sense, for no one could choose whether to follow the path or not **[§6]**.

• Two, actions have results.

• Three, your intentions are important, but good intentions are not enough. You have to learn how to make your intentions skillful. This is why we have to check the results of our actions. Simply meaning well, we can still cause harm. It's through experience, learning from our mistakes, that we learn what genuinely is helpful and genuinely is harmful.

In fact, to see things in this way is the beginning of wisdom. You may remember from the first passage in the kamma readings **[§1]**, that the question leading to discernment is, "What, when I do it, will lead to my long-term welfare and happiness?" The wisdom here consists in understanding two things. The first is realizing that happiness and suffering come from your actions. And the second is realizing that long-term happiness is better than short-term.

There's a passage in the Dhammapada where the Buddha says that if you see a long-term happiness that would come from abandoning a short-term happiness, you should be willing to give up the short-term happiness for the sake of the long-term. A British translator once translated this passage into English and added a footnote, saying that this could not possibly be what the passage really means because the principle is so basic that everybody knows it. Still, even though everybody may know it, not everybody acts on it, which is why the Buddha has to remind us.

• A fourth metaphysical implication that can also be drawn from the Buddha's instructions to Rāhula is that the results of actions follow a pattern. Otherwise, you couldn't learn from a mistake. If you do one thing today and the same thing tomorrow but get different results, you can't learn from your past actions. However, it's because there *is* a pattern to actions and their results that we can learn.

This pattern has two features. In some cases, you do an action and you can see the results immediately. This is why the Buddha recommends looking for the results of an action while you're doing it. In other cases, you don't see the results until a long time after. This is why he recommends checking the results of the action after it's done. Sometimes the patterns combine, so that you see the results both immediately and after a long time.

As we will see tomorrow, these two features of the causal pattern are very important. The fact that they are actually two patterns interacting is what allows the Buddha's teachings on causality to avoid determinism on the one hand and

chaos on the other. In other words, there are patterns, so there is no chaos; but you are free in the present moment to change your actions, which means that there is no strict determinism. In this way, the Buddha finds a middle way that allows for freedom within the patterns of cause and effect in our actions.

In fact, these interacting patterns form the basic metaphysical principle on the nature of causality that the Buddha discovered in the course of his awakening. Together they form the fourth metaphysical implication of a healthy psychological attitude toward actions: that actions have a pattern that we can learn and master, but that the pattern is not deterministic. We can use our understanding of this pattern to manipulate causes and effects in the direction we want. This pattern, and its implications, will be the theme for tomorrow night's talk.

Finally, the instructions to Rāhula carry some implications in terms of the qualities of mind that need to be trained in order to follow this practice.

The first quality is attention—in particular, appropriate attention, asking the right questions about your actions before you do them, while you're doing them, after they're done.

The second quality is ardency, which is the whole-hearted desire to be skillful. This grows directly from appropriate attention: If you see that something is skillful, you want with your whole heart to develop it. If you see that something is unskillful, you want with your whole heart to avoid it **[§23]**. This connects with the principles of heedfulness and compassion. When these two principles combine, they form the foundation of wisdom and discernment.

The third quality you need to develop is alertness, the ability to see clearly what you're doing while you're doing it, and the results you're actually getting as they arise. In other words, you don't see just what you *hope* to be getting; you see what actually happens as a result of your actions. This connects to the principle of honesty or truthfulness.

The fourth quality is mindfulness, remembering to keep asking the right questions, the ability to remember your purpose in practicing, and also the ability to remember what you've learned from past actions: where to look in the present moment, and how to handle different issues as they come up. When you combine mindfulness with ardency, they connect with the principle of integrity, in that you want to remember your mistakes and not repeat them.

These four qualities are the qualities that go together in establishing mindfulness—which is the topic for tomorrow morning's talk.

All of these qualities should be developed in all of your actions, which is why the Buddha's instructions to Rāhula are a good example of how to give beginning instructions in meditation. The Pāli word for meditation, *bhāvanā,* means to

develop—and specifically, to develop good qualities of mind. Now, this process doesn't begin only when you sit down with your eyes closed. It begins in the way you conduct your entire life, because the same mind is acting in all circumstances, whether your eyes are opened or closed. If you're dishonest in your daily life, you'll find it hard to be honest with yourself in meditation. If you're careless in your daily actions, it's hard to be careful as you meditate.

As I said earlier today, having purified virtue is one of the qualities that develop mindfulness. And one of the reasons why this is so is that the qualities of mind implicated in the Buddha's instructions to Rāhula are developed through observing the precepts. To observe the precepts requires these same qualities of mind. You need to use *appropriate attention* to ask yourself how you will observe the precepts in your life, and in particular, what changes you need to make in your behavior to bring it in line with the precepts. You also need *ardency* in the whole-hearted desire to follow the precepts strictly, *alertness* to make sure that you really are following them, and finally *mindfulness* in keeping the precepts in mind. Without these qualities, you cannot observe the precepts. When you observe the precepts, you reinforce these qualities. When they're reinforced, you can bring those developed qualities into your meditation.

It's important to realize that the lessons from these instructions to Rāhula go all the way from the most basic level of the practice to the highest. When the Buddha in another context discusses the role of emptiness as applied to concentration practice, he tells you to examine your state of mind to see where it still contains disturbance and where it's empty of disturbance. If you detect any disturbance, you ask yourself what you are doing in your concentration to cause that disturbance. When you see a perception that causes a disturbance, you let it go—in the same way that the Buddha told Rāhula to examine his actions and let go of any unskillful ones.

As you follow this process of looking for disturbances and their causes, and letting go of the causes, the state of mind empty of disturbance gets greater and greater, the disturbances and the perceptions causing them get more and more subtle, until you finally reach awakening. This process follows the same pattern that the Buddha taught to Rāhula. Examining your actions, seeing the causes and the results in your mind in the present moment, letting go of anything unskillful: This can take you all the way to the end of the path.

Several years back when I was teaching the passage on the Buddha's teachings to Rāhula to a group of people in America, there was a psychotherapist in the group. She was teaching a mindfulness-based therapy group, and so she took the instructions to Rāhula, copied them out, gave them to the members of the group for their last session together the next day. After they had read the passage, she asked

them, “What do you think of the Buddha as a teacher and a parent?” They replied, “If our parents had taught us like this, we wouldn’t need you now.”

Q: The Buddha trained Rāhula in how to comport himself so that he would not be a nuisance to other people. Unfortunately, not everyone in the world is Rāhula. What attitude should one adopt in the face of people who do things that are unreflective and who have no sense of their own limits? Should we develop patience, tolerance, forgiveness? What other things should we do, especially given that we have not yet attained the first level of awakening?

A: When dealing with difficult people, the approach we take should be determined by whether they are responsive to our actions or not. Some people are responsive and we can actually have a good influence on their actions. In that case, try to be proactive in helping them. Others are difficult to deal with and will not respond. That’s where you have to develop equanimity and forgiveness. And this is why it’s good to think about the principle of kamma in general. That helps put your actions and the other person’s actions into a larger perspective.

Q: Some people are upset because other people don’t share their point of view or because other people do things that they think are stupid or say things that are stupid or useless from their point of view. What advice can we give such people to understand that maybe the problem is not with other people but with them?

A: First, make sure the problem is not with you. Then if you see that the problem really is with that other person, you will probably have to give advice in an indirect way. This will take time, but often in cases like this, indirection—combined with a lot of compassion—is a lot more effective than direct comments.

Q: Do you think that there is a god or a creator?

A: In the Buddhist cosmology, there are gods, and some of them think that they created the world, but according to the Buddha, they did not. Many of the gods are just as deluded as human beings are, and some even more so.

There’s a famous story in the Canon, in Dīgha Nikāya 11, where a monk is meditating and begins to see some devas. So he asks them a question, which boils down to this: “Where does the physical universe end?” They reply, “We don’t know, but there are devas who are higher than we are. Maybe they know.” So the monk meditates some more and meets a higher level of devas. He asks them the same question, and they reply, “We don’t know, but there are devas who are higher than we are. Maybe they know.” So the monk gets sent up, up, up, up, up the deva bureaucracy in this way until finally he reaches a level of devas who say, “We don’t

know, but there is a great Brahmā. He should know."

So, the monk meditates some more and finally has a vision of the great Brahmā. He asks the great Brahmā, "Do you know where the physical universe ends?" And the great Brahmā answers, "I am the great Brahmā, knower of all, all-powerful, creator of all that has been and will be." Now if this were the Book of Job, the monk would have said, "OK, I understand." But this is the Pāli Canon, so the monk says, "That's not what I asked you. I want to know where the physical universe ends." But the great Brahmā simply says again, "I am the great Brahmā, knower of all, seer of all, creator of all," etc., altogether three times. Finally the great Brahmā pulls the monk aside by the arm and says, "I don't know, but I have this large multitude of followers and they believe that I know everything. They would be disappointed if I admitted my ignorance in front of them." So the Brahmā advises the monk, "Go back to the Buddha and ask him the question."

So the monk goes back to the Buddha and the Buddha says, "That's the wrong question to ask. The right question is, 'Where does the experience of the universe end?' That ends in the mind, the awakened mind, the consciousness of awakening is what goes beyond the universe."

That's the story. There is another place where the Buddha says that if you think there is a creator god who is responsible for the pleasure and pain you experience, you can't really practice the Dhamma. You have to realize that the important issues are the things that *you* create. When you solve the issue of your own creations, then you're done with the problem.

Mindfulness Practice, Stage One

May 19, 2015

Yesterday, we talked about mindfulness. This morning we will talk about the establishing of mindfulness. This is the fullest description of the way in which mindfulness becomes right mindfulness. There are basically four frames of reference or four objects that you keep in mind. But the establishing of mindfulness is more than just the objects. It's actually a process that you apply to each of these four. Here is the formula:

> "He remains focused on the body in and of itself, ardent, alert, and mindful, subduing greed and distress with reference to the world. He remains focused on feelings in and of themselves, the mind in and of itself, mental qualities in and of themselves, ardent, alert, and mindful, subduing greed and distress with reference to the world." **[§22]**

Let's go through the formula phrase by phrase. First, the phrase, "to remain focused": This is a quality of concentration. You try to keep your awareness focused continually on your object. For example, if you're focused on the body, you can be focused on the breath. Try to stay with the sensation of the breath as continuously as you can.

The phrase "the body in and of itself" or "feelings in and of themselves, the mind in and of itself, mental qualities in and of themselves" means that you don't think of these things in any other context. For example, you're focused right now on the body. You're not concerned with how this body is viewed by the world, nor are you concerned with the body's relationship to the world. You're not concerned with how it looks; you're not concerned with whether it's strong enough to do work in the world. You're simply concerned with the experience of the body right here and right now. The same principle would apply to the other frames of reference.

Then there are the three qualities that we mentioned yesterday: "ardent, alert, and mindful." Ardent, as we said earlier, means putting your whole heart into it.

You try to do it as skillfully as you can. If you see anything unskillful coming up in the mind, you try to get rid of it as quickly and as effectively as possible. You put your heart into developing skillful qualities in its place. Here's a description of ardency from the Canon:

> "And how is one ardent? There's a case where a monk, thinking, 'Unarisen, evil, unskillful qualities arising in me would lead to what is unbeneficial,' and so arouses ardency, thinking, 'Arisen, evil, unskillful qualities not being abandoned in me… unarisen, skillful qualities not arising in me… or arisen, skillful qualities ceasing in me would lead to what is unbeneficial,' he arouses ardency. This is how one is ardent." **[§23]**

This is an aspect of mindfulness practice that often gets overlooked. One of the reasons for this is that the Canon contains a very long sutta on the establishing of mindfulness, the Mahā Saṭipatthāna Sutta. Because it's so long, many people assume that it's a complete description of mindfulness practice. Yet that sutta doesn't say anything about what one does with events that arise from the body, feelings, the mind, or mental qualities. It just says to be mindful and alert to them. So people assume that you don't do anything with them. You just watch them arise and pass away.

It turns out, however, that the sutta was not intended to be a complete description of the practice. At the very beginning of the sutta, the Buddha gives the full formula for the establishing of mindfulness, and yet he then answers questions only about one part of the formula, the part concerning what it means to remain focused on any of these objects. This way of introducing the sutta implies that explanations for the remaining parts of the formula will not be discussed in the sutta. To find those explanations, you have to look in other suttas. And one of the unexplained parts of the formula is ardency.

You won't find any explicit discussions of ardency in the Mahā Saṭipatthāna Sutta, but many other suttas in the Canon do talk about what it means to deal ardently with skillful feelings and mind states, etc., or with unskillful feelings and mind states, in terms of right effort. So a complete understanding of the establishing of mindfulness requires that we include right effort in the topic as well, because right effort is the same as the quality of ardency: putting all of your heart into doing this skillfully. If something unskillful arises in the mind, you try to find the most effective way of getting rid of it. If something skillful arises in the mind, you try to keep it going. You don't just let it pass away.

That's ardency.

Alertness is the second of the three qualities. This doesn't mean simply being aware of the present moment. It's a more focused type of awareness. You're

focused on what you're doing and the results that are coming from your actions **[§§24–25]**.

For instance, right now you're focused on your breath and you're trying to see what results come from the way you're focused. As for other things that are happening right now, you don't have to pay any attention to them. The mosquitoes flying past your ear, the beam of sunlight coming through the window, the little dog running outside the door: Those are all in the present moment, but they are not what you're alert to. You want to be alert to your activity of being focused on the breath and to notice the results you're getting. You bring in ardency to correct your actions if you find that you're not getting good results.

What this means is that we're focused on being in the present not because it's a wonderful place to stay. We're focused here because this is the place where suffering is being caused through our ignorance. This is also the place where work can be done to put an end to that ignorance and so put an end to suffering.

When the Buddha talks about the importance of focusing alertness on the present moment, his emphasis is always on the fact that you don't know how much longer you have yet to live. Death could come at any time, so you focus on the essential work that has to be done right now, so that if death did come, you would be ready to go without any regret.

The actions you're doing right now include, one, your intention; two, your attention; and three, the perceptions you're using to stick with your breath and to understand it. So you focus on doing all three of these things skillfully. These, as we will explain in a later talk, are aspects of present kamma that are shaping your experience of the present moment.

To be alert to these forms of kamma: That's alertness. Then you combine it with ardency to stay focused on doing all three of these things—your intention, your attention, and your perceptions—skillfully.

Mindfulness is the third quality you bring to the practice. This, as the Buddha often says, is the directing quality or governing quality, reminding you of what good lessons you've learned from the past, how to stay alert, how to be effective with your ardency—not simply to be aware of things arising and passing away, but to give rise to skillful qualities and to make unskillful qualities pass away faster **[§27]**.

These are the three qualities we need to bring to the practice so as to turn mindfulness into right mindfulness.

Finally, the last part of the formula: "subduing greed and distress with reference to the world." This has to do with letting go of anything else that comes up to disturb your focus. You put everything else in the world aside.

I'll tell you a story. There was a woman who came once to stay at our

monastery in Thailand. Her plan was to stay for two weeks. The second day, though, she came to my teacher, Ajaan Fuang, to say goodbye because she had to go home. Ajaan Fuang asked her, "Why do you need to go home?" She replied that she was worried about her husband and children. She was afraid they couldn't live without her. Who was going to fix the food? Who was going to clean the house? And so Ajaan Fuang said, "Tell yourself that you've died. If you really did die, they would know how to fix food and clean the house themselves."

So she took that as her meditation theme: She was already dead. And that was how she was able to overcome greed and distress with reference to the world, especially greed and distress with reference to her house. As a result, she was able to stay for the full two weeks.

In the same way, while you're here focused on your breath, allow the whole rest of the world to fall away. All of your other responsibilities: Remember that when you die, you have to let them go anyhow, and the world will be able to live without you. This allows you to stay focused on where the important work is right now.

That's the formula for right mindfulness: keep focused on one of these topics, develop the three qualities—being ardent, alert, and mindful—and put aside greed and distress with reference to the world.

Now the suttas also describe three stages in mindfulness practice. For the rest of this morning's talk, I'll discuss the first stage. We'll discuss the other two stages later in the week.

The purpose of the first stage is to get the mind firmly established in its frame of reference and to learn how not to move your awareness away from where it should be. There are a couple of analogies in the Canon to describe this stage. The first one:

> "Suppose, monks, that a large crowd of people comes thronging together saying, 'The beauty queen! The beauty queen!' And suppose that the beauty queen is highly accomplished at singing and dancing, so then an even greater crowd comes thronging saying, 'The beauty queen is singing! The beauty queen is dancing!' Then a man comes along, desiring life and shrinking from death, desiring pleasure and abhorring pain. They say to him, 'Now look here, mister, you must take this bowl filled to the brim with oil and carry it on your head in between the great crowd and the beauty queen. A man with a raised sword will follow right behind you, and wherever you spill even a drop of oil, right there he will cut off your head.' Now, what do you think, monks, would that man, not paying attention to the bowl, bring heedlessness outside?" "No, lord," they said. "I have given you this simile to convey a meaning. The meaning is this: the bowl filled to

the brim with oil stands for mindfulness immersed in the body." **[§31]**

When you maintain mindfulness of the body, you cannot let your emotions pull you away: That's the crowd. You cannot let yourself get distracted by things coming in through the senses from outside: That's the beauty queen. You have to be right here with the sensation of the body: That's the bowl of oil on your head. Your mindfulness of the body has to be very firmly established. And you need to be heedful to keep it established: That's the sense of the man following behind you with a raised sword. That's one analogy.

The second analogy is quite long but it's an interesting one:

> "Once, a hawk suddenly swooped down on a quail and seized it. The quail, as it was being carried off by the hawk, lamented, 'Oh, just my bad luck and lack of merit that I was wandering out of my proper range and into the territory of others! If only I had kept my proper range today to my own ancestral territory, this hawk would have been no match for me in battle.' [You can imagine what the hawk was thinking!] 'But what, quail, is your proper range?' the hawk asked. 'What is your own ancestral territory?' 'A newly plowed field with clumps of earth, all turned up.'
>
> "So the hawk, proud of its own strength, without mentioning its own strength, let go of the quail. 'Go, quail, but even having gone there, you won't escape me.' Then the quail, having gone to a newly plowed field with clumps of earth, all turned up, and climbing on top of a large clump of earth, stood taunting the hawk, 'Come for me now, you hawk! Come for me now, you hawk!' So the hawk, proud of its own strength, without mentioning its own strength, folded its two wings and suddenly swooped down toward the quail. When the quail knew 'The hawk is coming at me at full speed,' it slipped behind the clump of earth, and right there the hawk shattered its breast.
>
> "This is what happens to anyone who wanders into what is not his proper range and is the territory of others. For this reason, you should not wander into what is not your own proper range and is the territory of others. In one who wanders into what is not his proper range and is the territory of others, Māra gains an opening, Māra gains a foothold. And what, for a monk, is not his proper range and is the territory of others? The five strings of sensuality. Which five? Forms cognizable by the eye, agreeable, pleasing, charming, endearing, fostering desire, enticing, sounds cognizable by the ear, smells cognizable by the nose, tastes cognizable by the tongue, tactile sensations cognizable by the body, agreeable, pleasing, charming, endearing, fostering desire, enticing. These, for a monk, are not his proper

range and are the territory of others.

"Wander, monks, in what is your proper range, your own ancestral territory. In one who wanders in what is his proper range, his own ancestral territory, Māra gains no opening, Māra gains no foothold. And what, for a monk, is his proper range, his own ancestral territory? The four establishings of mindfulness. This, for you, is your proper range, your own ancestral territory." [§32]

So while you're meditating, stay away from sensual thoughts—even such simple things as what you'd like the cooks here to fix for lunch. If you get involved in those thoughts, you're not putting aside greed and distress with reference to the world. You're opening yourself up to let more greed and distress come in.

Normally, as you're developing mindfulness, you should be developing it internally, in other words, focused on your own body, your own feelings, your own mind states, and your own mental qualities. However, you can also use mindfulness to deal with others' bodies, and feelings, etc., in a way that helps bring you back more firmly inside. In other words, sometimes you find yourself distracted or you lose your motivation to practice, and you need to correct that state of mind. If you remind yourself of the body and feelings and mind states and mental qualities of other people in the proper way, it can bring you back to your focus inside and reinforce your motivation. The Buddha calls this keeping focused *externally* on the body, feelings, mind states, and mental qualities in and of themselves.

For instance, if you find yourself jealous of other people, you can think about the fact that they have bodies just like yours. They, too, have pains and illnesses, so there's nothing special about the way they are. That helps to get rid of your jealousy. If you think of someone else who is beautiful, and you feel not nearly as beautiful as that person, remind yourself that human beauty is only skin deep. If you were to take off that person's skin, then even if she were a beauty queen, she wouldn't win a competition. She wouldn't even be allowed in the door. That equalizes things, and helps you to come back to the present moment.

What we're doing is changing our state of mind by developing perceptions that open up to a larger perspective. This is one of the reasons why we begin the meditation with thoughts of goodwill. We think of our own desire for happiness and then we remind ourselves that everyone else in the world has the same desire. We're suffering, they're suffering, and so we want to make sure our desire for happiness doesn't cause anyone any more suffering. We want a happiness that harms no one. This is our motivation for practicing.

This contemplation also helps put our practice into context. It helps us to see that our own suffering is not as large or special as we usually think it is. We are

subject to aging, illness, death, and separation from those we love. All other beings are subject to the same things. There's nothing special about our sufferings that would make them worth holding on to.

When we use this external focus for mindfulness as a way of reinforcing our internal focus for mindfulness, it parallels the Buddha's experience on the night of his awakening.

He gained three knowledges in the three watches of the night. His first knowledge consisted of knowledge of his own past lives.

The second knowledge came after he asked himself, "Does the fact of previous lives apply only to me or does it also apply to other people?" So he inclined his mind in the second watch of the night to think of all beings. He saw all beings dying and being reborn. And the way they were being reborn was dependent on their kamma. Their kamma, which was their intentions, also depended on their views. This was how he was able to see the general pattern in the relationship between kamma and rebirth.

Once he saw the pattern, he was able in the third watch of the night to apply the knowledge of that pattern to his own mind in the present moment. That was where he was able to see how his own views and own intentions had an effect on the state of his mind. And he discovered what were the most skillful views and skillful intentions that would enable him to go beyond birth and death entirely.

The general pattern of those three knowledges was that he started with his own story—and if you think when you're sitting here with a lot of stories, think of all the stories the Buddha had when he could remember so many thousands of lifetimes: many, many more stories than you have. Then, to get beyond that, he looked at the general pattern of all beings. That gave him the knowledge enabling him to return to the present moment and to solve the problem of suffering right there.

In the same way, when you find yourself having trouble staying with the present moment, you can start thinking about all beings, seeing that they have similar problems to you, and that wherever you go in the universe, there's still the problem of suffering. This reminds you that the only place to solve the problem of suffering is not out there, but right here in the present moment. That motivates you to focus back inside.

Another way of using mindfulness of others skillfully is when you're having a bad meditation and you think that you're a hopeless meditator. Call to mind the universe as a whole and you'll realize that there are very few people out there who have the opportunity to meditate at all. So at the moment, you're in a better position than they are, because you at least have the opportunity to meditate. That should give you some encouragement to get focused back on your breath with

some confidence that you can overcome any difficulties you encounter.

So that's the first stage in mindfulness practice, which deals with the techniques in getting your mind firmly established in its object of mindfulness, whether internally or externally. That's what we're working on right now. As for the other two stages in the practice, we will talk about those later in the week. For the moment, try to stay focused on your breath, ardent, alert, mindful, and if you have trouble staying here, try to think of things that will help encourage you to come back to the focus. Those thoughts also count as right mindfulness.

Q: When we talk of putting aside greed and distress with reference to the world, this seems to me at a height inaccessible to human beings—of course, without any real evidence—and it gives me an impression of being an inaccessible star of separation from sadness and discouragement. What are the best ways to think about this?

A: The attitude of putting aside greed and distress with reference to the world actually can happen in mundane activities as well. You can be reading a book, you can be absorbed in thinking about something abstract, and be cut off entirely from your concerns with regard to the rest of the world. They just don't occur to you. So this attitude is not unattainable. But in the course of the practice, we want to be able to attain that state at will. When you attain that state, it doesn't mean that you're unfeeling. It's simply that, at that moment, you're not feeding on the world. For instance, when you're with the breath and the sense of comfort is very satisfying, you can easily put aside your concerns for the world at that point because you're feeding on the comfort of the breath and you feel no need to feed on the world.

This analogy of feeding is very important to keep in mind. It's very central to the Buddha's teachings, for as he says, it's because we feed on things that we suffer, and that we cause one another to suffer. If we can live with the world without feeding off of it, then we can live in the world without suffering, and at the same time we're actually freer to help other people instead of seeing other people as food. Really. It's true. We can then see them clearly as individual beings with their own suffering. And when you're not concerned with your own suffering—because you have this sense of inner sufficiency—then you're in a better position to help people with the things they actually need.

Q: When we think of the fact that so few people in the world meditate, does it put us in the position where we risk becoming elitist or proud?

A: That thought is useful when you're feeling very depressed about yourself. If

you're already feeling proud about yourself, then think of all the people who are meditating better than you are. In other words, try to use a thought that is useful for bringing balance into your particular situation right now. Your thinking, like your speech, should have a sense of the right time and place.

Distracting Thoughts

Yesterday we talked about how to deal with pain in meditation. Today I would like to talk about how to deal with distracting thoughts. The Buddha lists five different methods.

All of them require that you first set your intention straight. You have to remind yourself that you really do want to free yourself from the distracting thoughts. If you can't at least start with this intention, none of the methods will work. So these five methods are examples of skillful kamma in the present.

• The first method: If you see your mind thinking about something unskillful, simply bring it back to a more skillful topic. For example, if you've been focusing on the breath and suddenly find yourself thinking about food, simply drop the thought of food and come back to the breath. And allow yourself a particularly comfortable breath to reinforce your desire to stay here.

This particular method also includes using specific topics of meditation to act as antidotes for specific types of unskillful thinking. If, for instance, you find yourself thinking a thought of anger, try to think in a way that cures the anger, such as thoughts of goodwill—goodwill for yourself, realizing that you're harming yourself with your thoughts of anger; goodwill for the other person, realizing that you don't gain anything from wishing that person ill—and then come back to the breath. Another example: You are suddenly thinking about somebody's body. The antidote is to think about taking your own body apart, imagining all the different parts inside, and then do the same in your imagination with the other person's body. Imagine putting all the different parts in separate piles on the floor. Then ask yourself which part you are attracted to. When you survey all the parts and see nothing to attract you, come back to the breath. That's the first method.

• If the first method doesn't work, focus on the drawbacks of that unskillful thought. At the same time, ask yourself: What is the allure of that thought? What kind of food do you think you're getting from it? Then ask yourself: What are the drawbacks of thinking that thought? What sort of mind states does it lead to? When you see that the drawbacks outweigh the allure, then you can let the thought go. This is called using appropriate attention with the thought.

One technique that I've found that works is, if you find yourself with a thought that you've been thinking many times, tell yourself it's like watching an old movie.

Ask yourself: Would you pay money to watch this movie? The acting is horrible, the lighting and the photography are horrible, and as they say in Thailand, the story is a stagnant water story. In other words, it's the same thing over and over and over again, so you should be sick of it. That should help do away with any attraction to that thought. With thoughts that attract you more strongly, ask yourself: If you were to think that thought for twenty-four hours, what kind of behavior would it lead to? If you realize it would involve something you wouldn't really want to do, then it's easier to let go of the thought. That's the second method.

• The third method, if the first two methods don't work, is simply to allow that thought to be in your mind, but you are not going to pay any attention to it. Think of it as a crazy person. If a crazy person tries to get your attention and you respond to the crazy person, you're going to get pulled into a crazy person's conversation and involved in a crazy person's thought world. Even if you try to drive the crazy person away, the crazy person has you. So, just pretend that the crazy person is not there. You continue doing your work. The crazy person will say things that are more and more outrageous, but if you're firm in paying him no attention, after a while he'll realize that he can't get your attention and will go away. This technique is also useful when there are loud noises while you're meditating. Remember that the loud noise doesn't destroy your breath. Your breath is still there, so just pay attention to that, and let the noise be. If it seems to be all around you, think of your body and mind as the screen on a window, and the noise is the breeze coming through the window. The screen doesn't catch the breeze, and so it isn't moved by the breeze. In the same way, you don't have to catch the noise or chase it away. That's the third method.

• The fourth method: When you become more sensitive to the breath energies in the body, you will see that when any thought comes into the mind, there will also be a subtle pattern of tension in the body. If you can sense that pattern of tension, just let it relax, and the thought will go away. It's as if the tension is a marker that allows the thought to stay in the mind. Once the tension is gone, the thought has lost its marker and it will vanish. That's the fourth method.

• The fifth method: If the other methods don't work, put your tongue against your palate, clench your teeth together, and tell yourself, "I will not think that thought." This is where you can also use a meditation word. In Thailand, they use the word *Buddho,* which means *awake.* Just repeat that over and over again very fast in your mind—*BuddhoBuddhoBuddho*—to leave no room in your mind for that thought. If you compare the different methods of dealing with unskillful thoughts with a box of tools, this last method is like a sledgehammer, which is not good for delicate work, but there are times when you need the sledgehammer whenever the

mind is really obstreperous and disobedient.

When the Buddha taught these five methods, he also illustrated them with similes. The similes help you remember the methods, which means that they're aids to mindfulness. At the same time, the similes supply you with perceptions as aids to your intention to escape the power of distracting thoughts when they arise. As we will discuss in a later talk, perceptions rank as a type of present kamma—which means that these methods are good illustrations of how the teachings on mindfulness and kamma work together.

The similes are these: The Buddha compares the first method—replacing an unskillful thought with a skillful thought—to a carpenter removing a large peg from a board by using a smaller peg. He compares the second method—seeing the drawbacks of the unskillful thought—to a teenager looking in a mirror and seeing with disgust that she has the carcass of a dead dog, snake, or human being hanging around her neck. A very graphic image, no? The third method—ignoring the thought—the Buddha compares to a man who, when noticing that something he doesn't want to see comes within visual range, closes his eyes or turns away. The fourth method—relaxing the tension around the thought—is like a man who is walking and asks himself, "Why am I walking? It would be easier to sit down." So he sits down. Then he asks himself, "Why am I sitting? It would be more relaxing to lie down." So he lies down. As for the fifth method, the sledgehammer of forcing yourself not to think the thought, the Buddha's image is of a strong man grabbing a weaker man by the throat and wrestling him to the ground. This image, too, is pretty graphic. It's when the images are graphic that they're easy to remember.

So there you are: When thoughts come up in your meditation, you have five different methods for dealing with them, along with five similes to keep the methods in mind. And you can work variations on these five methods to develop methods of your own. If you were to use only one method to deal with distracting thoughts, you'd be able to overcome only a very small range of thoughts. The thoughts that could bypass your one method would overcome your mind. It's like Singapore during World War II. The British thought that the Japanese would come by the sea, so they put all of their canons in cement pointing out to the sea. The Japanese came overland, and the canons were useless.

So to be a good meditator, make sure you have all five kinds of tools at hand. As the Buddha said, when you've mastered these methods, you will reach the point where you will think the thoughts that you want to think, and you won't have to think the thoughts that you don't want to think. You'll be the master of your thoughts and not their slave.

Q: The thoughts are arriving at an unbelievable speed. I tend to them and as soon as I realize, I am already in the film. Is there any method for being as rapid as the thoughts? Is it concentration?

A: Concentration helps, but it's also necessary to remember all five methods for dealing with disturbing thoughts—in particular, the method of just ignoring the thoughts. The film can be playing, but you can just keep it in the corner of your eye and try not to get drawn into the story. At the same time, try to make the breath as interesting as possible so that you lose interest in the story of the film.

Q: You say that disturbing thoughts can be associated with a marker in the body, a marker in the breath energy. How can one locate this marker among all of the various energies that circulate around the body?

A: You have to be very alert and attentive. When the thought arises, the marker will arise at the very same time. If you can see, at the beginning of the thought, that there's a change in your feeling of the body, that's the marker.

Q: Is it that every thought necessarily creates a physical tension, especially in the level of the center of the brain or the center of the skull, or do there exist thoughts that do not create any tension at all?

A: For any thought to remain in mind, it requires a certain marker so that there will be something for the mind to refer to from one moment of attention to the next. Small points of tension in the body are the usual marker for our thoughts—and these can be located in any part of the body, not just the head—so there will be a certain tension with every thought.

In fact, as your mind gets more and more quiet and you actually see a thought beginning to form, you will notice that the tension comes first, and then your recognition or perception of what the thought is about comes after that.

When you're doing concentration practice, this is one of the ways of keeping thoughts from coming into your mind. The little stirring of tension will appear someplace in your body—although at that point it's hard to tell whether it's in your body or in your mind. It's right where the body and mind meet. If you see that little knot of tension appearing, the way I explain it to myself in English is that you "zap" it. You use breath energy to dissolve it away. And then the potential for the thought goes, even before you recognize what meaning you were going to give to the tension to turn it into a thought. Then your mind can return to its base.

It's like that image I gave earlier of the spider on a web. As soon as there's a slight stirring anywhere on the web, the spider goes right there, takes care of what needs to be taken care of, and then goes back to its original hiding spot.

Q: In the book, *With Each & Every Breath,* you discuss the notion of *bhava.* Does this relate to distracting thoughts? Could you explain this in more detail?

A: *Bhava* translates as "becoming," a state of being that *develops.* And it basically means that you take on an identity in a particular world of experience. This can happen on many levels. All of us here have taken on the identity of "human being" on the human level right now. That counts as becoming on an external level.

Becoming also takes place on an internal level. In fact, this happens in the mind all the time, and when you meditate you'll first begin to learn about the process as you try to stay away from distracting thoughts.

The process of becoming first centers on a desire. Suppose you have a desire for lavender honey and you know that in Moustiers they sell really good lavender honey. The parts of your experience that are relevant to the lavender honey—the store, the road to the store, what you'll do with the honey when you get it: That's the world in that particular becoming. The part of you that wants the honey and can obtain the honey: That's your identity in that world of experience. Notice that this identity has two parts. The part that can obtain the honey is your self as producer—the part that can potentially produce the happiness you want. The part that wants to enjoy the honey is your self as consumer—the part that wants to taste that happiness.

These kinds of desire happen all of the time throughout the day. When you've had enough lavender honey, you may have a desire for water. Then the lavender honey is no longer relevant in that world of experience. What is relevant is where the water is now. And an even more graphic example: They say that when an alcoholic goes into your house, he will figure out very quickly where you keep your alcohol. That's the relevant part of his world of experience. This means that even though we all live in the human world and have the human level of becoming in common, we also have our individual becomings inside the mind. If you have a room with 60 different people, you will have at least 60 worlds in the room. Sometimes it's 60-times-60, because our becomings can multiply very quickly.

But becoming is not only a matter of distracting thoughts. When we're meditating, we're actually creating a type of becoming, although in this case, because the becoming of a concentrated mind is so steady and still, it allows us to see the processes of becoming as they happen. So this kind of becoming is part of the path.

Here again, though, desire forms the nucleus for the state of becoming. We *want* the mind to be concentrated. To fulfill that desire through the meditation, the breath is relevant. The way your body feels in the present moment is also relevant. Those are the relevant parts of your world. And you as the meditator are the

identity you take on in this world: You want to master the abilities to produce the pleasure of concentration so that you can consume it. Hopefully, during this time, lavender honey and the identities and worlds that surround lavender honey will not be relevant. They're part of the world outside—the part for which you're supposed to put aside greed and distress. Otherwise, they become the dominant becoming in the mind, and the becoming of concentration around the breath gets pushed off to the side.

That's becoming.

Kamma & Causality

The texts tell us that after the Buddha's awakening, he sat in meditation for 49 days, experiencing the bliss of release. However, when he reported his awakening to others, his shortest expression of what he experienced was a principle of causality. Many people find this disappointing. They would like to hear that enlightenment has lots of lights and action, and they want to hear about all of the blissful and wonderful things the Buddha experienced during those 49 days.

A second reason why people are disappointed by the fact that the Buddha summarized his awakening in terms of a causal principle is because causality seems very dry. It's a question of metaphysics, and many people like to believe that the Buddha avoided metaphysics and taught only psychology instead. It's true that he avoided many metaphysical questions—such as whether the universe was finite or infinite, eternal or not—but he avoided them not because they were metaphysical, but because they were irrelevant to developing the path to the end of suffering.

However, there are some metaphysical issues that are relevant to the path. Because the Buddha taught a path of action, he had to teach a metaphysics of action, to show how action works. His reason for focusing on this principle of causality as the most basic lesson of awakening was to show us how the mind works, and particularly, how we can use the actions of the mind to put an end to suffering. This is why he had to explain causality to show what human action is, what it can do, and why. And as I explained last night, the principle of causality he awoke to is directly related to a psychologically healthy attitude toward action, an attitude that enables us both to live skillfully in general, and in particular to master the path of action that the Buddha taught. So the metaphysics and the psychology he taught actually fit seamlessly together.

Causality was a very hotly debated topic in India during his time. Some teachers taught determinism; other people taught chaos; others said that human action had no power at all. So the Buddha had to explain causality to show that human action was capable of putting an end to suffering and that we have the freedom to choose to follow the path to the end of suffering—or not.

We have to remember that, for the Buddha, the mind is basically an active phenomenon. And his basic image for your mind's relationship to the environment is that you like to feed. You start with desire that comes from hunger. We take on a

sense of becoming, which is a sense of your identity in a particular world of experience. The world, here, is related to whatever you want to feed on, and your sense of identity has to do with two things. One is your sense of what abilities you have to find the happiness you want. This is called your self as a producer. The other sense of self concerns your identity as the being who is going to experience that happiness. That's the self as consumer. Both of these senses of self need to feed. The producer needs nourishment to produce; the consumer can't stand not feeding.

Because the mind is proactive, we approach all experience with a question: "What to do?" As long as hunger is driving the mind, the question becomes, "What to do in order to feed our hunger?" Our intentions aim at finding an answer to that question. We want to escape the feeling of pain that comes with hunger, and we want to feel the pleasure that comes when our hunger is assuaged. We pay attention to this question and our perceptions are shaped by it. We're doing this all the time, creating kamma this way in the present all the time. And our kamma gives results—sometimes what we want, sometimes not.

Now, the Buddha's explanation of the principle of causality to explain kamma sounds very simple on the surface. It's composed of two pairs of principles working together:

> "When this is, that is.
> "From the arising of this, comes the arising of that.
> "When this isn't, that isn't.
> "From the stopping of this, comes the stopping of that." **[§7]**

At first glance these statements seem to say nothing more than that there are causes and there are effects. That's the first impression you get. But when you look more carefully at them, taking the connected statements in pairs, you see that there are two principles interacting.

The first pair is this: "When there is this, there is that. When this isn't, that isn't." This describes causality in the present moment. The cause is simultaneous with the result, and when the cause disappears, the result immediately disappears.

The second pair describes causality over time. "From the arising of this, comes the arising of that. From the stopping of this, comes the stopping of that." The cause may appear and disappear at one time, but the effect can come and go either right away or much later.

An example of the first kind of causality would be if you put your finger on the stove. You don't have to wait until your next lifetime to get the result. Similarly, if you spit into the wind, it's going to come right back at you immediately. That's simultaneous causality.

An example of the second type of causality: When you plant a seed in the field, you won't get a mature plant right away. It will take time, well after you stopped the action of planting the seed.

What does this have to do with us? Our experience consists of the combination of these two principles. At any one moment in time, you will have the results of some past actions appearing. You also have your present actions, along with some of the results of those present actions. From the point of view of kamma, this means that your experience is shaped to some extent by past actions, but also by present actions, and the present actions are actually the most important ones to attend to because you have freedom of choice concerning which actions you'll do in the present. Your past actions are like raw material for the present moment, and your present actions are the act of shaping that raw material into an experience.

To compare this to food: Your past actions provide the raw food, and your present actions put it in a form that you can actually feed on it. As a matter of fact, you experience your present kamma prior to your past kamma, in the same way that you find food only after the act of looking for it.

This point comes in dependent co-arising: As we will see, present kamma consists of fabrication and the sub-factors coming under the factor of "name" in name and form. Past kamma is the experience of the six senses **[§9],** which comes after the factors of fabrication and name **[§8].** What this means in terms of our direct experience is that by the time we're aware of sensory input, we're already primed to experience it in a certain way. This fact can cause us a lot of trouble, but it also opens the way to free us from suffering. If suffering depends on the way we prime our minds, then if we prime them in a skillful way, we don't have to suffer even when the input from the senses—past kamma—is bad.

So in this way you have two principles of causality combining to form a causal pattern that follows some regular laws but nevertheless allows for freedom of choice. This combination is also precisely what would be required in order to develop skills. It's because actions and their results follow a certain regular pattern that we can learn from them. It's because we have freedom of choice in the present moment that we can use what we've learned to become more and more skillful.

All of this is why the Buddha never says that someone deserves to suffer because of an action. He simply says that certain actions tend to lead to certain results. But those results will also be shaped by the state of mind when those results come. If we develop a good state of mind in the present, we don't have to suffer even when encountering the effects of our bad past kamma. If we didn't have this ability to choose our approach to the present moment, we would simply have to suffer from our past actions. And as the Buddha noted, if this were the case, no one could reach an end of suffering or gain awakening **[§14]**.

Now, because the two different principles are interacting, they create a complex system. In physics, these are called nonlinear systems, which have many feedback loops. An example of a feedback loop would be what happens when you put a microphone connected to a loudspeaker in front of the loudspeaker. A sound picked up by the microphone will get amplified many, many times until it's deafening. That's called a positive feedback loop, not because it's positively good, but because it tends to intensify the original event.

Another example would be a heater connected to a thermostat in the same room: When the heater raises the room temperature to a certain point, the thermostat will turn it off. When the room cools to a certain point, the thermostat will turn the heater back on. This is called a negative feedback loop—again, not because it does anything negative, but because the two members work in different directions to keep each other in check.

As we're practicing, we're going to learn that our mind has many feedback loops, both positive and negative, and we're going to try to take advantage of that fact: to intensify the things that we want to intensify, and to keep in check the things that would cause suffering if they got out of control.

One first step in taking advantage of feedback loops comes from realizing that complex nonlinear systems actually come from many simple patterns working together. The practical lesson is that we should first learn those simple patterns and not be too concerned with the complicated ways those patterns can interact. If you're skillfully in control of the simple patterns and consistently trying to develop skill in your actions, the results—however complicated—will eventually get better and better. There may be some ups and downs, given that your past actions are still influencing the system, but the overall trend will tend upward.

For example, in meditation, if you focus on the breath long enough, developing mindfulness, alertness, and ardency, you may not know when the results are going to come, and you may experience many setbacks, but you can have confidence that, given the fact that you keep trying, the results will eventually come at some time.

The primary simple pattern of causality at work in the mind and in the world concerns moral decisions: Skillful intentions lead to pleasant results, and unskillful intentions lead to unpleasant results. This means that you can learn from your past skillful and unskillful actions, and you don't simply approach the present moment with totally fresh eyes. You may have heard some people say that each new present moment is a unique moment, but that would mean that anything you learned from the past would be irrelevant for deciding what to do right now. The Buddha, however, says that there are causal patterns that are true across the board. If you can keep those patterns in mind, then you can know how to approach any moment skillfully.

An example would be the four noble truths **[§2]**: knowing what suffering is, what its cause is, what its cessation is, and what the path to its cessation is, and knowing also that each of those carries a duty. Suffering is to be comprehended, its cause is to be abandoned, its cessation is to be realized, and the path is to be developed. You can apply this framework to any moment in time and reap beneficial results.

However, complex patterns, even though they start from simple principles, do become complex as they create feedback loops, and the feedback loops feed into one another. In particular, the complexity relative to our practice to put an end to suffering comes from the psychology of a conscious mind. Sometimes intention comes before sensory input, but it can also come after. Consciousness can come both before and after craving. But even though these facts may make training the mind complex, in the practice we can learn how to take advantage of this complexity, because these feedback loops allow you to change your mind at many points in the system of causes and effects.

Now, there are two major drawbacks in trying to master a complex system. The first is that sometimes no clear pattern is visible in the short term. Think of weather systems, for instance. Even though weather is shaped by some very basic physical principles, we all know how inaccurate weather predictions tend to be. This is because weather is a complex system. The same happens in our own minds. This is one of the reasons why we suffer from the results of our intentions, even though we don't intend to suffer, because sometimes it's very difficult to see any direct connection between our intentions, on the one hand, and the pleasures and pains we feel on the other. If lightning struck every time you did something unskillful, nobody would do anything unskillful. The problem is that often we don't directly see the connection.

In fact, as the Buddha said, it's not always the case that our actions in this lifetime will yield their results in this lifetime. Sometimes their results won't even come in the next lifetime. They'll come only many lifetimes down the line **[§§12–13].** This means, of course, that we can experience the results of actions done many lifetimes ago, with no idea at all of where those results come from. This not only allows us to do unskillful things without thinking we're going to suffer, but it can also drive us crazy.

Some scientists once did an experiment with pigeons. With one group of pigeons, every time a pigeon pressed a green button, it got food. Every time it pushed a red button, it got nothing. These pigeons were very well adjusted. They pushed just the green button and paid no attention to the red one. With the other group of pigeons, though, if a pigeon pushed a green button, sometimes it got food and sometimes it didn't. If it pressed the red button, sometimes it got food and

sometimes it didn't. These pigeons became neurotic because they couldn't trust the buttons that fed them. This is human life. This is also why when we meditate there are a lot of ups and downs.

So, that's the first drawback of a complex system. It's because of this drawback that we need to learn Dhamma from people like the Buddha, who was able to gain an enlarged perspective that allowed him to see the patterns that we would otherwise miss.

The second drawback is related to the first. Because complex patterns are so unstable and, in their details, unpredictable, there's no guarantee that, when you change the input, the system will show the effects of your actions right away. This means that when you start practicing, there's no way of predicting how soon you'll see the results you want. Sometimes you can meditate for days, for example, and see very little change in your mind. At other times, the changes come pretty quickly. It's all too easy, in the first case, to get discouraged, or in the second case to get complacent. It's because of this drawback that we need close contact with the Saṅgha—people who have encountered the same vagaries in their practice, and can give you timely help: encouragement when you need it, and warnings when you get complacent.

It's in this way that the Buddha, Dhamma, and Saṅgha help us overcome the aspects of complex causality that would otherwise work to our detriment.

But there are three other features of complex patterns that actually work to our advantage—if we know how to make use of them.

The first deals with a feature I've already mentioned: the fact that feedback loops can be negative or positive. This gives you some control over what you do and don't want to develop in the mind. If there's a skillful quality you want to develop, you can try to create a positive feedback loop to make it stronger: This is what we do when we develop a sense of pleasure while focusing on the breath. Over time, the pleasure strengthens our concentration, and the concentration strengthens the pleasure and rapture. In this way, when they reinforce each other, they can provide nourishment for other skillful qualities in the mind as well.

On the other hand, if there's an unskillful quality you want to weaken—or if your skillful qualities are getting out of balance—you can create a negative feedback loop to bring things under control. For instance, if you're thinking thoughts of lust, reflection on the unattractiveness of the body helps to bring those thoughts in check. Or if you're getting a little overcome by pleasure and rapture in your concentration, you can remind yourself to bring your focus to a more subtle level of energy in the body, and that brings the rapture under control.

The second feature of complex patterns that we can use to our advantage is called *scale invariance.* What this means is that patterns operating on the small

scale also operate on the large scale. For example, scientists sometimes can create weather patterns in laboratories, and that can teach them about weather patterns in real life.

The same principle applies to the mind. If you learn how to deal with what's going on in the present moment, you learn the larger patterns of kamma as they apply over large spans of time. And when you learn about the larger patterns of kamma over large time scales, they can teach you lessons about how to deal skillfully with your mind in the present. In fact, that's what the Buddha did on the night of his awakening. He learned about the pattern of intention and views on the large scale in his second knowledge, and then applied that pattern to his mind in the present moment in the third knowledge.

A third feature of complex patterns that we can use to our advantage is that in any complex system, the principles that put the system together can also be used to take the system apart. For example, in mathematics there is something called the three-body problem. A French mathematician, Henri Poincaré, discovered that if you traced the gravitational relationship among the Earth, the Sun, and the Moon —which is a complex system—it's possible for the Moon's trajectory to reach a point called a *resonance.* When it reaches a resonance, it will leave its orbit and go flying off in a direction that cannot be predicted—even though up to that point it has been following the laws of gravity. The laws of gravity interact in a way that gets the Moon out of the laws of gravity and its relationship to the Earth.

In the same way, even though our experience is created by fabrication, and our experience of space and time is shaped by our actions, we can still use our actions to get outside of those dimensions, to gain release.

Sometimes you hear the idea that it's impossible to reach an unconditioned dimension through the conditions created by actions, but that idea comes from understanding causality in an overly simplistic way. When we understand that causality in the mind is complex, that complex system allows us to use our intentions to get beyond intentions. This is how the Buddha's path works. Even though suffering is caused by actions of the mind, we can use actions of the mind to get beyond suffering.

This is why the Buddha expressed his short explanation of his own awakening in terms of his double principle of causality. It's because our actions fall into a causal pattern that we can learn from our actions. At the same time, the complexity of the pattern allows us to have freedom of choice and to use that freedom of choice to attain the ultimate freedom.

So for a quick review of how we can take advantage of the Buddha's principle of causality:

- First: because complex patterns come from simple patterns, we focus on the

simple patterns. We don't have to try to comprehend the whole thing. In fact, the Buddha said that if you tried to comprehend all of kamma, you'd go crazy **[§11]**. But if you understand that there are certain patterns that the mind follows, and that kamma follows certain patterns—in other words, skillful intentions lead to pleasant results and unskillful intentions lead to unpleasant results—that's all you have to focus on: the simple patterns. Try to create as many skillful causes as you can, and learn to have some patience as the results take their time to work out.

• Second, about scale invariance: If you understand your mind here in the present moment, you understand the issues of becoming throughout the universe, and vice versa. This is why, when we focus on the breath right now, we're learning about principles at work in our experience of the entire cosmos. It's also why learning about kamma on the large scale can help us in our understanding of the mind in the here and now.

• The third principle is that you can attain something that is unconditioned by developing the conditions of your mind. This is what makes ultimate freedom possible, and why fabricating a path to an unfabricated dimension actually makes sense.

Q: You've said that in saṁsāra everything is conditioned, which means that also my choices are conditioned, but if there is free choice, does that mean that there is an unconditioned part of me which allows for me to make the choice, is that the case?

A: Absolute freedom lies very close to freedom of choice. It doesn't cause freedom of choice, so you can't say that an unconditioned part of you allows you to make the choice. But an unconditioned dimension can be accessed by exercising freedom of choice. As we meditate, we try to exercise freedom of choice more and more consciously by becoming more and more skillful in our choices. The more skillful our choices, the more we'll create conditions in the mind where we can see even more subtle levels of what's involved in making a choice.

Most people don't fully exercise their freedom of choice. They simply allow their old habits to take over. But when we decide to meditate, we're going against our old habits, which means that we're trying to exercise more and more freedom of choice. Once we discover what those choices are, where the freedom lies in those choices, we will also discover that there is a point where the mind is free not to make any choices at all. That's the point where the unconditioned is found. That's the first stage of awakening. So it's by pursuing freedom of choice, which deals in conditions, that you find ultimate, unconditioned freedom.

Q: Does all the raw material for our present experience come from past kamma? Or do other forces outside of us play a role as well?

A: There's a sutta **[§10]** where the Buddha is asked if everything we experience comes from past kamma, and he says No: Past kamma is only one member of a long list of things that give rise to feelings of pleasure and pain. Other members in the list include such things as bodily imbalances, changes of the season, and mistreatment of the body. But then in another sutta **[§9]**, he says that the experience of all the six senses should be viewed as old kamma. The six senses, of course, include the body, which is the means by which we experience things like bodily imbalances and the change of the seasons. So in the final analysis, your experience of these things *would* count as old kamma. As for mistreatment of the body, that would count as new kamma.

The best way to make sense of these two suttas is to note that the list in the first sutta comes from the medical treatises of the Buddha's time. From the point of view of the Buddha's theory of kamma, this list can be used as a way of explaining how kamma, old and new, works through the laws of the physical world so that you can figure out how to treat illness and pains. If you can track down the physical cause of a pain, you treat the physical cause. You don't just chalk it up to old kamma and leave it at that. Only when you can't succeed in treating the pain through physical causes do you class it as an old kamma pain and simply try to work around it.

So yes, the raw material of your experience all comes from past actions, but it can come in different ways—some of which can be manipulated by our knowledge of science and medicine, some of which can't. The Buddha's main emphasis is on training the mind so that when we're in situations where we can't shape things through science or medicine, we still won't have to suffer when the raw material from our past kamma is mostly bad.

Q: Does the law of kamma guarantee that justice will always be done?

A: No. Remember that it deals only in tendencies—certain types of actions *tend* to lead to certain results—but that the larger field of each individual's past kamma, plus his or her present kamma, can influence a particular kamma plant either to yield abundant fruit or hardly any fruit at all **[§13].** This means that when you sow seed in your kamma field, you get the same kind of plant whose seed you sow, but the size of your harvest will vary in line with many other factors, some of which may not seem fair.

The suttas tell the story of a murderer, Aṅgulimāla, who killed a large number of people but then had a massive change of heart, trained under the Buddha, and became an arahant. After he became an arahant, the result of his kamma from killing all those people was simply that people would throw rocks at him when he

was on his almsround. You can imagine that the relatives of the people he killed would be unhappy that he didn't suffer more than that, but if you put yourself in his place, you can see that it's a good thing that justice isn't always done. As the Buddha said, if we had to pay back all the bad kamma we've done in the past before reaching awakening, no one would ever reach awakening **[§14].** His main purpose in teaching was to help us put an end to suffering, regardless of whether that suffering is "deserved" or not.

Q: With regard to the three-body problem, it's going to take many millions of years for the moon to reach the resonance where it leaves its orbit around the Earth. I don't have that much time.

A: Fortunately, the mind is not like the moon. The moon doesn't know what it's doing. We as human beings are able to know what we are doing. And we can direct our minds into that spot of resonance where we can make our way out of saṁsāra. The spot will be found right at the point where attention and intention meet in the present moment.

Mindfulness of the Body, Stages One & Two

May 20, 2015

As I said yesterday morning, there are four frames of reference for establishing mindfulness, and the body in and of itself is one of them. This morning I would like to talk about using the breath as a way of establishing the body as your frame of reference.

Remember the basic formula for establishing mindfulness: to keep focused on the body in and of itself, ardent, alert, and mindful, putting aside greed and distress with reference to the world.

When we're focused on the breath, that counts as being focused on the body in and of itself.

To be mindful means keeping the breath in mind, i.e., reminding yourself to stay with the breath.

To be alert means being very clearly aware of the breath as it comes in and goes out. It also means being very aware of the other breath sensations in the body as they are occurring. It also means being alert to whether your mind is staying with the breath, and to what results you're getting from your efforts to stay with the breath.

To be ardent in this context means that if your mind wanders away from the breath, you bring it right back. You don't stop to sniff the flowers and listen to the birds. You get back to the breath immediately. You put your whole heart into it.

While you're with the breath, ardency has several additional meanings. The Buddha describes these in four steps. The first step is, if the breath is long, then you discern that it's long. The second step is, if the breath is short, you discern that it's short. The purpose of these two steps is to get more and more sensitive to how the breathing feels in the body. It also gives you a sense of the choices you have in the present moment. In other words, you can see the kamma that you're creating in relationship to the breath in the present on a very simple level, and you're free to change it as you see fit. You're free to choose long breathing or short breathing, and as Ajaan Lee explains, you can expand on the variations of long and short by

exploring other variations in the breath as well: heavy breathing, light breathing, fast, slow, shallow, deep. This fosters your sensitivity to what the breath is doing in your body.

In the next two steps, the Buddha uses the word "training." When you breathe in, you train or tell yourself, "I will breathe in aware of the whole body." When you breathe out, you tell yourself, "I will breathe out aware of the whole body." This is another feature of ardency. You set up a clear intention, making up your mind that you're going to do something skillful. In this case, you make up your mind to expand your awareness. The intention here, too, is a type of kamma in the present moment.

The fourth step is, in the Buddha's words, to calm bodily fabrication. You tell yourself, every time you breathe in, "I will breathe in calming bodily fabrication." When you breathe out, you tell yourself, "I will breathe out calming bodily fabrication." The word "fabrication," or *saṅkhāra,* here has to do with what you are intentionally doing in the present moment to shape your experience. The term "bodily fabrication" means the breath, because there is an element of intention in the way you breathe, and this element of intention has an effect on the way you experience your body as a whole. As you begin to see the effect that the breath has on the whole body, you take advantage of the fact that you have the choice to make that effect more calming throughout the body.

Now, as he says elsewhere, one good way to calm the body is first to develop a sense of rapture—an energizing sense of fullness in the body. Then, when the body has been nourished by rapture, it will calm down, not from being forced to be calm, but because it feels naturally inclined to grow calm from that sense of fullness. So "calming bodily fabrication" can sometimes mean that you use the way you breathe to develop a sense of rapture in the body before you try calming it down. The sense of fullness and calm will then help you to stay more firmly in the present.

Those are the four steps. This is how we use the breath to be aware of the body in and of itself. The ardency here is in trying to be more aware of what the breath is doing, to see the effect that it is having, and adjusting the breath to have a better and better effect.

While you're doing this, you're developing two further qualities of mind. One is insight, or *vipassanā,* and the other is tranquility, or *samatha.* According to the Buddha, insight is a matter of learning how to see fabrication in the present moment. Tranquility is a matter of trying to make the mind calm in the present moment. So when you use your knowledge of fabrication to make the mind calm, that combines insight and tranquility.

This practice also leads to the second stage of mindfulness practice. I'll read the

passage from the Canon describing this stage.

> "What is the development of the establishing of mindfulness? There is the case where you remain focused on the phenomenon of origination with regard to the body, you remain focused on the phenomenon of passing away with regard to the body, you remain focused on the phenomenon of origination and passing away with regard to the body, ardent, alert, and mindful, subduing greed and distress with reference to the world." **[§34]**

Two words in this description need to be explained. The first is "origination." To be focused on origination here doesn't mean simply seeing things arising. It means seeing the *causes* for their arising—what causes them to arise. If you've studied science at all, you know that you don't know causes simply by watching things passively. You have to change conditions to see which conditions have an effect and which conditions don't have an effect. This means that you have to get involved proactively.

For instance, if you want to know about eggs, you don't just put some eggs on the table and sit there looking at them. You have to do something with the eggs. You try to make scrambled eggs, soufflés, omelets, and meringues—and in the course of doing things with the eggs, you learn about causation as it relates to eggs.

In the same way, if you want to understand origination with regard to the body or mind, you have to do something with the body and the mind. For instance, you try to create a state of concentration by focusing the mind on the body and—through trial and error, as you manage to get the mind more and more concentrated—you learn about the body, you learn about the mind. In particular, you get to see what effect the body has on the mind, and what effect events in the mind have on the body. That's the point to know in regard to the word, "origination."

As for the phrase, "with regard to the body": You're not going to be seeing only the body while you stay focused on the breath. You will also be aware of feelings and mind states. But to stay with your frame of reference, which is the breath, you want to look at feelings and mind states only as they relate to the breath. Sometimes feelings will arise, sometimes different mind states will arise, but you always want to relate them to the breath. When a feeling of pleasure arises, you want to see how it's related to the breath. If you see a certain mental state of calm arising or a state of disturbance in the mind, you always want to see how that's related to the breath. That's what it means to see something "with regard to the body."

So in this stage, what we're doing is trying to create a state of concentration, and we want to understand it with regard to the breath: how we create a state of

pleasure, a state of stillness in the mind, through manipulating the breath. We also want to see how different events in the mind, such as different perceptions or different intentions, will also contribute to getting the mind focused on the breath, how different ways of paying attention to the breath will lead to a state of concentration.

As our mindfulness practice grows into a concentration practice **[§33]**, the three qualities we've been talking about—being mindful, ardent, and alert—mature into three factors of the first jhāna. Mindfulness matures into directed thought, in that you remember to keep your thoughts focused on the breath. The attitude of alertness matures into singleness of object, because you're totally alert to the relationship between the mind and the breath, focused on keeping the mind with the breath and not thinking about anything else except as it relates to the breath. As for ardency, that turns into evaluation. You evaluate how the breath feels so that you can make it more comfortable, and then you evaluate how to make use of that comfort, for instance, by spreading that sense of comfort throughout the body. Then you also evaluate how to keep your mind steadily with that sense of the breath so that you can be both calm and alert at the same time. This involves asking yourself the right questions about how to do all of this skillfully. This, of course, is appropriate attention.

So in this way, you bring all three qualities—mindfulness as directed thought, alertness as singleness of object, and ardency as evaluation, together with appropriate attention—together around one object. That's how they combine to become one, creating the oneness of jhāna.

Because they're all focused on the breath, this means that you develop the first jhāna without thinking about them or about the first jhāna. Instead, you're thinking about and observing the breath. The result of these three qualities, when they get gathered together like this, is that there will be a sense of ease or pleasure and also a sense of what the Buddha calls *pīti,* which can be translated as rapture or as refreshment. This constitutes the first step in right concentration.

Now in the course of learning how to get the mind concentrated like this, there will be a period of trial and error. This requires that you learn how to see when you make mistakes and how to correct for them. And in doing so, you learn about cause and effect in the mind. This is sometimes called learning how to read your own mind. There's a passage in the Canon that gives an analogy for this stage of the practice. I'll read it first.

> "Now suppose that there is a wise, experienced, skillful cook who has presented the king or the king's minister with various kinds of curry, mainly sour, mainly bitter, mainly sweet, alkaline or non-alkaline, salty or non-salty. He picks up on the theme of his master, thinking, 'Today, my master

likes this curry or he reaches out for that curry or he takes a lot of this curry or he praises that curry. Today, my master likes mainly sour curry. Today, he likes mainly bitter curry, mainly peppery curry, mainly sweet curry, alkaline curry, non-alkaline curry, salty curry, today my master likes non-salty curry or he reaches out for non-salty curry or he takes a lot of non-salty curry or he praises non-salty curry.' As a result, he is rewarded with clothing, wages, and gifts. Why is that? Because the wise, experienced, skillful cook picks up on the theme of his own master. In the same way, there is case where a wise, experienced, skillful monk remains focused on the body in and of itself, ardent, alert, and mindful, putting aside greed and distress with reference to the world. As he remains focused on the body in and of itself, his mind becomes concentrated, his defilements are abandoned. He picks up on that theme. As a result, he is rewarded with a pleasant abiding in the here and now together with mindfulness and alertness. Why is that? Because the wise, experienced, skillful monk picks up on the theme of his own mind." **[§35]**

There are several points worth noting in this image of the cook. First of all, the cook has to be proactive. He can't simply put the raw food on the table for the king. He has to fix the food first. This is what we do as we put together a state of concentration. We have to be proactive. We can't simply sit here and wait for concentration or other skillful states to arise. We have to put an effort into making them arise.

The next step is that the cook has to be observant to see what kind of food the king likes. He can't ask the king, "What do you want today?" Kings expect their cooks to anticipate their desires. So the cook has to be observant, watching the king's behavior and then adjusting his cooking to please the king's taste. This is the function of evaluation and ardency in the meditation. You have to learn how to read your own breath, how to read your own mind, and then make adjustments in the concentration—by adjusting the breath, adjusting the focus of the mind, and adjusting your perception of the breath. Then you evaluate the results and make further adjustments as necessary. This is what is meant by "picking up on the theme of your own mind": You learn how to read the telltale signs of what the mind wants, and you learn how to satisfy those wants so as to induce it into a stronger state of concentration.

As for those three things you adjust: We've already talked about adjusting the breath. Some days the mind likes short breathing, some days it likes long breathing, sometimes it gets tired of the breath and wants to use another meditation topic—just like a king, who can be very picky about his food. So you try to provide the mind with a topic that will help it settle down.

As for adjusting the focus of the mind, we've discussed that, too. When you're sleepy, it's wise not to focus on the area of the stomach, for that will make you even sleepier. If you have a headache, keep your focus no higher than the base of the throat—I myself used to get migraines often, and I found that the best places to focus to alleviate the pressure in the head were in the lower back, in the palms of the hands, and in the soles of the feet. This, though, is something you have to explore on your own.

As for adjusting your perceptions: The role of perception here concerns how you visualize the breath to yourself. There are some ways of visualizing the breath that actually make it harder to breathe. If you think of the breath as coming in only through the nose, then you have just a tiny opening to pull the breath through, so you end up putting more pressure on the body, the neck, or the head to breathe. But if you think of the body as like a large sponge, with lots of pores, lots of openings for the breath energy to go in and out, that image actually makes it easier to breathe because you put less pressure on the body. If it so happens that the breathing stops, you don't get afraid that you're going to die because you know that the breath energy will come in and go out if it needs to.

Also, you can use your perceptions to create a sense that all of the breath energy channels in the body are connected. When they're all connected, then there's less and less need to breathe. It's at this point that you can put evaluation aside and simply be with the feeling of the still breath, because your brain is using a lot less oxygen. The oxygen that comes in through the pores of the skin is enough.

In California there's a town called Laguna Beach, and every year they put on what's called the Festival of the Arts. They have a large revolving stage on which they recreate many famous paintings and statues. For statues, they go down to the beach and find the men and the women with good-looking bodies, then they cover them with white paint and pose them in the position of, say, David or Venus, and put them on the revolving stage. When they first started doing this several decades ago, they discovered that if they covered the statue's body entirely with white paint and put it out on the stage, the statue would faint in front of the audience, which was not good for the show. Then they learned that if they left part of the back uncovered, there would be no problem, because the oxygen would be able to come through the uncovered part of the skin. So apparently, we get some of our oxygen through the skin. If the brain is using very little oxygen because it's still, then the oxygen coming in through the skin will be enough to keep the body functioning.

This is an example of a perception that helps with the breath to allow the breath to become more calm without our getting afraid that we're depriving ourselves of oxygen.

So these are some ways of learning how to read your mind, providing food for the mind, and seeing what kind of food the mind likes.

If you learn how to read your mind in this way, you begin to see the process of cause and effect at work in your own mind in the present moment. At the same time, as you get better at creating a greater sense of wellbeing in your body and mind, this intensifies two qualities: insight and tranquility. Mindfulness becomes stronger. Concentration becomes stronger. Your understanding of your own body and mind becomes stronger. These qualities reinforce one another through positive feedback. This is why we take a proactive attitude toward the meditation. Otherwise, these qualities wouldn't develop.

This is what it means to take the body in and of itself as your frame of reference, through the first two stages of establishing mindfulness, to develop both mindfulness and concentration.

Q: Could you go into more detail on the ideas of breathing with the energy of the breath and breathing with the entire body?

A: The flow of energy here refers to any sense of energy you may have in the body. Some energies are still, some move, some are trying to move but are blocked: Those are the ones you work with. We use the word "breath" because these energies are connected with your breathing. So when you're breathing with your whole body, it's not a matter of air coming in and out, it's simply the energy flowing in and out of the body. This is something that's already there in the body. It's simply a matter of becoming more and more sensitive to it. And then once you get a sense that these sensations really are energy, and not solid or heavy, then you find that you can move the energy around more comfortably.

There is also an energy that exists around the body. If you get sensitive to that, then you can make use of that as well, thinking of it coming in any part of the body where there's pain. For example, if you have pain in your back, think of the energy just outside of the back entering there. Now, in the beginning, you may not be sensitive to these energies, and this is when you have to use a little bit of visualization to help remind yourself that these things are possible. Sometimes that visualization will actually help with the flow.

Q: Could you please be more precise about the notion of a clear mind? Because sometimes I have trouble making a distinction between mental calm and sleepiness, where the mind is very heavy even though it has full awareness of the body.

A: In a case like this, you try to wake up your mind by giving it something to do in the present moment. You might resume a survey of the parts of the body. The

important thing is that you have some questions in mind. The questions can help keep you awake. For example, when you're surveying the body, you can ask yourself, "Where is there any stress that I haven't found yet? Or are there any parts of the body that I've been ignoring?" The questioning helps to rouse your interest, and to keep you alert and clear.

The Thai ajaans often talk about trying to develop the same mental state as a hunter. The hunter has to stay very quiet so as not to scare away the animals, but at the same time has to be very alert. Otherwise the animals will go right in front of him and he won't see them. So try to have the attitude of a hunter, realizing that something subtle may come by while you're meditating, so you have to be very alert in order to see it. The difficulty here is similar to that of a hunter. When the hunter goes to a place—for example, to bag a rabbit—he can't say, "I want the rabbit to come by no later than 4 o'clock because I want my dinner at 6." He has to be willing to wait for however long it takes for the rabbit to come by. In the same way, you have to be ready at all times. The rabbits of the mind will come when they will come, without having made any prior arrangement with you or asking what's convenient for your schedule.

Q: During meditation, I arrive fairly easily at a sense of mental calm. I'm aware I'm not the body nor am I identified with the body, but this does not last long. What to do to make this last longer?

A: You have to go back and work more with the body, so as to get more and more familiar with the relationship between the mind and the body. Some people find it easy to reach the state you described, but it's because you haven't fully understood the relationship between the mind and the body that this state doesn't last long. You still have unfinished business with regard to the relationship to the body. Also, some people have trouble relating to the body, a problem that may be related to traumatic incidents earlier in life. So try to return to your sense of your body by looking for a place in your body where you feel safe. Try to make that your foundation, and as you feel solidly at ease there, see if you can gradually expand the range of your safe place until you feel more and more at ease with the body as a whole. Only when you're fully at ease with the body will you be ready to go into states of concentration where the body fades away and yet you are solidly there: alert and fully conscious of what's going on.

Q: You mentioned a stable place in the body that comes deeper than the other steps. On reaching that, can you pose questions and receive answers?

A: Before entering deep concentration, you can pose a question, and when you exit you may have a response—but even if you get a response, you can't fully trust it. You have to put it to the test to see if it's genuine. If it gives directions for what

to do in a particular situation, and it seems in line with what you know of the Dhamma, try following its instructions and see what results you get. If the results are good, you've learned something useful. If they aren't, you've also learned something useful: that you can't trust everything that arises even in a deeply concentrated mind.

While you're in deep concentration, the first step is to learn how to stabilize your awareness of it. The second step is to learn how to maintain it. As you get better and better at maintaining it, you'll begin to see that even in that stable state there can be ups and downs in the level of stress or tension. This shows that deep concentration, too, is a fabricated state. So the next question will be: What are you doing when the stress goes up, what have you stopped doing when the stress goes down? Asking questions like this is the third step, called putting the concentration to use. When you see the connection between your actions and the ups and downs, that will help you comprehend the stress and abandon the mental action that's its cause. When you've mastered all three steps, that's when you really benefit from the practice of concentration.

Past Kamma

Last night, we talked about the fact that your present experience is composed of three things: results from past actions—and here "actions" mean "intentions"—your present intentions, and the results of your present intentions.

Tonight I'd like to talk about the attitude we should have toward our past actions.

We can't go back and change those actions, but we find that we do have various ways of dealing with their results as they come up in the present moment.

There's a teaching that you sometimes hear, that to know a person's past actions, look at that person's present condition; to know a person's future condition, look at his present actions. This, though, is much too simplistic. It assumes that we have a single kamma account, like a single bank account, and what you see in the present moment is the running balance.

Actually what you see in the present moment is only one small piece of a person's past kamma. For instance, you may see someone who seems to be happy, with lots of good fortune in life, but that person has many seeds of kamma in his background and some of those seeds can be very bad. In the same way, you may see someone who seems very unfortunate right now—in other words, some bad seeds are sprouting right now—but they may also have some very good seeds in their background that are either ready to sprout or may sprout sometime in the future.

The image that the Buddha uses to help us understand our past kamma is not a bank account. It's a field full of seeds. In some of his explanations of this image, the soil in the field represents your past kamma. In other words, your field has some good soil and some bad soil. In some of the other ways he explains this image, the seeds represent the kamma, but the message is the same: You can have good seeds and bad seeds in your field. In either case, he says that in the present moment you can add water to the seeds in some parts of the field and you will encourage some of them to grow, which means that you have to be very careful about what you water.

Now in some cases, the seeds are not ready to sprout no matter how much water you add. Some are ready to sprout only if you add water, and some will sprout whether you add water or not. In any case, the "water" stands for your

attention and your delight in things. So that's what you have to watch out for: *what* you're paying attention to, *how* you're paying attention to it, and what kind of delight you find in it.

This fact has many implications. One is that you don't need to ask which deed in the past left which seed in the field. As I mentioned last night, if you tried to trace back all of your past kamma, you'd go crazy **[§11]**. So, sometimes when you hear someone asking, "Oh, what kamma caused all these people to die?" Or: "Why is this person suffering?" you know the general principle: that there was some bad kamma in the past, but you don't know exactly what the actions were. The Buddha's recommendation is that you focus instead on accepting that there are good and bad seeds in your field and in the fields of other people, and then proceed from there. If we had only good seeds, we wouldn't be human beings. We'd be up in one of the heavens some place. All you have to focus on is watering the right seeds and planting good new seeds in your own field, and to encourage other people to water and plant the right seeds in theirs. That's the first implication.

The second implication is that there's no need for remorse over your past bad actions, because remorse can be debilitating. Simply recognize the fact that you have made mistakes, resolve not to repeat them, and then spread thoughts of goodwill to yourself and to all other beings **[§19].** Remember that the simple intention to incline your mind in a skillful direction is, in and of itself, already a skillful action. Nourish that inclination. That's the second implication.

The third implication is that there are many potentials in the present. For example, there are potentials for pain as well as potentials for pleasure right here in your body. You can make yourself miserable by focusing unskillfully on the potentials for pain, and you can actually get the mind in a good state by focusing skillfully on the potentials for pleasure. If your focus is skillful, using the right intentions and perceptions, you can focus even on the potentials for pain in a way that puts the mind in a good shape.

The same principle applies to the potentials in the mind. Your mind has the potential both for many skillful attitudes and for many unskillful attitudes. Here it's important to note that the Buddha never says that the mind is naturally good or naturally bad. He notes instead that the mind is very changeable—it can change so quickly that even he, the master of apt analogies, couldn't find an analogy for how quick it is to change. Even "the flash of an eye" is too slow by comparison. He also notes that the mind has potentials in both directions, skillful and not skillful. So, to be wise, we focus on developing the skillful attitudes and learn how to undercut or weaken the unskillful ones. We do this by watering our skillful attitudes with our attention and delight.

Our problem is that we often delight in unskillful attitudes. We have a potential

for anger, and sometimes we really enjoy it. The Buddha said what you should try to do is develop a delight in developing what's skillful, and a delight in abandoning what's unskillful. This is one of the traditions of the noble ones.

Some of the implications of the Buddha's teachings on past kamma apply directly to your meditation. For example, if you find that there's a lot of pain, don't just sit there with the pain. Ask yourself skillful questions about it. This would count as the water of appropriate attention. At the same time, look for alternative potentials in the body and then develop those.

I'll give you an example. Several years back, we had a meditation session out under the trees in the monastery, and it was a beautiful day: a light breeze; the temperature was just right. And for me, it was a very pleasant meditation. However, a woman in the group had brought along a friend who had never meditated before. After the end of the meditation, the friend announced to the group, "I have never suffered so much in my life." She suffered because of what she was paying attention to: how she couldn't move, how much pain she was feeling, how bored she was. If you pay inappropriate attention to the things that you don't like about the present moment, you actually weaken yourself. If you focus on the potentials for strength, this gives you more strength. This is one of the ways that we can learn to develop endurance and patience: You don't focus on the difficulties. You focus instead on the areas that are energizing. Try to create a good positive feedback loop.

And finally, many of the same implications of the Buddha's teachings on past kamma apply to the attitudes you should take when dealing with other people. This is an example of scale invariance, in that the same lessons apply on different levels of your experience, both inside and out.

When you're dealing with other people, pay attention to the fact that—just as you have a large field full of many different seeds of kamma, but you don't know what those seeds are—other people have their own large but unknown fields, too. This means that if you see someone suffering, you don't just say, "That's their kamma," and just leave it at that. You have to remember that here's your chance to help them, because you may have the seeds for that same kind of kamma in your background as well. If you ever fall into their situation, would you want the people around you to be indifferent? Here's your chance to develop the kind of kamma that would lead other people to want to help you.

There's also the possibility that the person who is currently suffering may have some good seeds that are just about ready to sprout. All you have to do is give that person the right help and encouragement, and those good seeds will be able to sprout.

So, you don't know the other person's potentials, just as you don't know your

own. The right attitude is that you always focus on the possibility that there are some good potentials in all of us. In this way, thinking about past kamma in the correct way actually encourages an attitude of compassion for the sufferings of others.

It also encourages an attitude of heedfulness about your own possible sufferings. Even though things may be going well right now, you never know when some bad seeds may mature and sprout, so you should always prepare your mind not to be overcome by pleasure or pain, so that you'll be able to endure whatever comes up and deal with it skillfully.

This is why we develop concentration and discernment to get rid of our greed, aversion, and delusion: so that no matter what plants come up in our field, none of them will cause us to suffer or to act in ways that create more seeds for future sufferings.

Q: I was in a situation where I was forced to do something that harmed someone else. How do I live with this fact so that it is not too heavy to bear?

A: Remember that kamma depends on many different factors. When you're forced into doing something harmful, the kamma is much less heavy than if you had done it on your own initiative through anger or ill will. Remember, too, the Buddha's recommendation that you not get involved in thoughts of remorse. Instead, simply recognize that it was a mistake and resolve not to repeat the mistake. Then spread thoughts of goodwill to yourself, to the person you harmed, to the people who forced you to do the harm, and then to all beings. You spread goodwill to yourself to give yourself more encouragement to do good now and into the future. You spread it to others to strengthen your desire not to harm anyone at all.

Mindfulness of Feelings & Mind States

May 21, 2015

Yesterday, we talked about the first frame of reference, the body. Today, we'll talk about the second frame and the third: feelings in and of themselves and mind states in and of themselves. These are the frames of reference most often described as entailing passive awareness, simply watching feelings and mind states arising and passing away without doing anything with them. However, the Buddha did not describe these frames in this way. Feelings and mind states are both fabricated: fabricated by present intentions working with potentials coming in from the past.

You may have noticed this yourself: If you don't give continual attention to the breath, the breath will feel one way, will create one kind of feeling tone in the body and mind; but if you pay careful attention to the breath, it will create a different kind of feeling tone. This shows the extent to which your feelings depend on your actions in the present.

The Buddha wants you to take advantage of this fact, and to apply ardency to it: trying to shape the most skillful approach to feelings and mind states here and now.

When we're focusing on feelings, we want to see them as part of a process: to discern what kind of actions they come from and also where the feelings lead. When we look for the causes of feelings, our primary focus is on present kamma: What kind of present actions will emphasize pleasure, and what kind of present actions will lead to more pain? As for the question of where feelings lead, our primary focus is on what sort of effect they will have on the mind. Some kinds of pleasure are actually good for developing concentration and discernment, and some kinds are bad. Some pains are good for developing concentration and discernment, and some are bad. When you know where these feelings come from, then you can manipulate the causes so as to have a good effect on the mind.

This is the meaning of the middle way in dealing with pleasure and pain. The term "middle way" doesn't mean that we go for middling pleasures or middling pains. Instead, we regard only one pleasure—the pleasure of nibbāna or unbinding — as the true goal, and we try to perceive or attend to other pleasures and pains in terms of whether they lead to that goal or away from it. So we aim at pleasures that

come from skillful actions and that lead to skillful mind states. We also learn how to relate to pains in ways that will lead to skillful mind states—as in the instructions I gave for dealing with pain the other day.

Here it's useful to think again of the image of the good cook who can take even bad ingredients and still make good food. Cheese is a good example. What is cheese? Moldy milk solids. Normally, we wouldn't eat mold, but it tastes good—right?—when we eat cheese. This means that someone in the past discovered how to take mold and make it into good food. We want to be able to deal with our pleasures and pains in a similar way.

When the Buddha talks about pleasures and pains, he talks about two main kinds. On the one hand, there are what he calls pleasures of the flesh, pains of the flesh, and feelings of neither-pleasure-nor-pain of the flesh. On the other, there are pleasures, pains, and feelings of neither-pleasure-nor-pain that are not of the flesh.

Feelings "of the flesh" are feelings related to input from the senses: the eyes, ears, nose, tongue, body, and the mind as it relates to sensory input. Feelings "not of the flesh" are feelings related to the practice of concentration and the noble attainments.

In terms of pleasures of the flesh—which are sensory pleasures—the Buddha says that we ordinarily get obsessed with passion around those pleasures. With ordinary pains of the flesh, we become obsessed with irritation—in other words, we want to get rid of them. As for feelings of neither-pleasure-nor-pain of the flesh, we tend to be ignorant of them, i.e., we don't pay them any attention. We're more interested in the pleasures and pains. If we begin to pursue pleasures and pains of this sort, we become obsessed with either passion or irritation.

So what the Buddha has us do instead is to develop pleasures, pains, etc., that are not of the flesh. These have to be consciously developed. Here pleasure not of the flesh is the pleasure of concentration. The same holds true for equanimity not of the flesh. As for pain not of the flesh, that's the frustration we feel when we find ourselves on the path but we haven't reached the goal. This pain is actually something the Buddha encourages us to develop. Sometimes you hear that the desire for awakening is an obstacle to awakening, so you should just be happy right where you are—but you'll never get to the end of the path that way. The real obstacle to awakening is an immature relationship to your desire for awakening. When you become mature in your relationship to that desire, it actually becomes part of the path.

What this means is that you see you have a goal, and there is a road going to the goal. An immature attitude focuses on the goal, gets impatient, and loses the path. It's like driving to a mountain on the horizon. If you're driving in that direction and keep your eye on the mountain all the time, you're going to drive off

the road. But if you know that this road leads to the mountain, then you focus on the road and follow it carefully. That's a mature relationship to your desire. In other terms, you focus on the causes, and the causes will lead you to the results. So these are the pleasures, pains, and neither-pleasures-nor-pains that the Buddha has us pursue: the pleasure and equanimity of concentration, and the pain of wanting to be enlightened.

To apply this to your meditation: When you're dealing with feelings as you're sitting here right now, there will be some potentials for pains in some parts of your body, and potentials for feelings of pleasure or neutral feelings in other parts of the body. You have the choice of where you're going to focus your attention. Most of us tend to focus on pains and we miss the fact that there are potentials for pleasure in other parts of the body. One of the skills in meditation is learning how to focus on the more pleasant parts and to develop them.

This is very similar to a book printed in America several years ago, called *Drawing on the Right Side of the Brain*. The right side of the brain is the side that tends to focus not on words but on preverbal sense impressions. The book teaches you how to use your preverbal sense impressions to draw a face. The author points out that most people, when they try to draw a face, will draw eyes, nose, mouth, and so on, but their drawings tend not to look realistic because they tend to draw their *idea* of eyes or their *idea* of mouths. So instead, she recommends that when you draw a face, you draw the spaces *between* these things, i.e., the parts of the face that you don't normally pay attention to and for which you don't have ready names. For example, she has you draw the space between the mouth and the nose, between the nose and the eyes, between the eyes and the eyebrows, between the eyebrows and the hairline. She found that when people do this, even if they aren't trained artists, they can draw very realistic faces, because they're drawing something for which they don't have a word. It's as if they're seeing those spaces for the first time, and they're rendering their immediate impression.

When you focus on the body while you're meditating, you have to take a similar attitude. In other words, don't focus on the pains. Focus on the spaces in between the pains and you'll see that there's actually a feeling of pleasure there. It may be very mild, but if you pay continual attention to it, that sense of mild wellbeing will grow stronger. This is one of the ways in which we deal with the potential for feelings in the present moment: You can develop a sense of pleasure that is actually conducive for concentration.

In another sutta—Majjhima 137 **[§36]**—the Buddha talks about different ways of relating to pain, pleasure, and equanimity. There's the pain, pleasure, and equanimity of a householder on the one side, and the pain, pleasure, and equanimity of a renunciate on the other. The pain of a householder is not getting

what you want in terms of sights, sounds, smells, tastes, tactile sensations, and mental events. That's householder pain. The pleasure of a householder is getting what you want in terms of the six senses. The equanimity of a householder is being determined that your mind will not be affected by any of the input of the six senses. Now, for most of us when we encounter householder pain, we try to find householder pleasures. But the Buddha said that a more skillful way of dealing with householder pain when you meet with it, is to go for renunciate pain, which is what I mentioned before: the desire to reach the goal, which at the moment is painful because you're not there yet.

The same with householder equanimity: In the sutta, this is described as being nonreactive to all six senses. This would also apply to the practice of simply letting things go without reacting to them and trying to find a sense of peace there. Now, if you just stop there, you're still staying on the householder level. In order to go beyond that level to renunciate pleasure and equanimity, you have to realize that you can't just stop with non-reactivity, for even though it carries a subtle sense of wellbeing, it's still on the level of fabricated experience. It's not going to last. If you want to find something more lasting, you have to understand how the mind fabricates that experience and be able to take that apart totally. Only then can you find the greater pleasure and equanimity of nibbāna.

This means that, even when feeling that state of non-reactive equanimity, you have to develop renunciate pain: the sense of having a goal that lies beyond where you are right now. The purpose of this is to motivate us to do the practice. When we do the practice, we can reach the pleasure of the renunciate, which is the pleasure that comes from reaching the goal. Even though renunciate pain is a kind of pain, it's like the tension in the string of a bow. Only when there's tension in the bowstring can the arrow fly a long distance. Otherwise, if we just stay with householder pain and householder pleasure, we don't go anywhere. It's like a bow whose string is slack. It may be relaxed, but it doesn't accomplish anything.

So, when the Buddha's talking about feelings as a frame of reference for establishing mindfulness, he wants us to see where our pleasures and pains are, where they come from—in particular, what present actions they come from—and where they go. Then we can use that understanding to develop the pleasures and pains that will actually lead to awakening. This is the role of ardency when dealing with feelings.

When we're dealing with mind states, the same principles apply. The mind has the potential for greed and also the potential for non-greed. There's the potential for aversion and the potential for non-aversion. There's the potential for delusion and the potential for non-delusion. We usually don't look for these potentials, or see them as potentials, because normally the mind is focused outside and doesn't

really look at itself. It's like sitting in a movie theater and focusing entirely on the screen.

But when you're practicing mindfulness of mind states, it's like going to the side of the theater, and instead of looking at the screen, you look at the audience. You see that there's a flickering light-beam over their heads, flashing many different colors on the screen. Now if you were part of the audience and were watching the screen, you would perceive that there are people on the screen in different locations, with a story that makes sense. But when you look from the side of the theater, you just see all these things simply as flashing colors, and you see instead the audience laughing and crying, all simply because of flashing colors.

In a similar way, you want to look at the audience in the mind and see where their states of mind are going to lead them—where they come from, where they go. In other words, you're looking at the mind as it's engaged in the world, but you're not engaged along with it. You simply want to pay attention to what present actions these mind states come from, where they lead, which ones should be developed, which ones should be abandoned.

When the Buddha is teaching breath mindfulness, and talks about being aware of the mind states as a frame of reference, he doesn't say that you just watch mind states coming and going. He actually recommends that you do something with them.

> "He [the meditator] trains himself, 'I will breathe in sensitive to the mind.' He trains himself, 'I will breathe out sensitive to the mind.' He trains himself, 'I will breathe in gladdening the mind.' He trains himself, 'I will breathe out gladdening the mind.' He trains himself, 'I will breathe in steadying the mind.' He trains himself, 'I will breathe out steadying the mind.' He trains himself, 'I will breathe in releasing the mind.' He trains himself, 'I will breathe out releasing the mind.'" **[§37]**

What this means is you don't just sit there and watch the mind. You become sensitive to the mind first, and then see what needs to be done with it—as in the instructions I gave the other day for dealing with distracting thoughts. If you see that the mind's in an unskillful state, you do what you can to put it in a skillful state. For instance, in the terms given in the passage just now, if the mind is lacking in energy or feeling discouraged, then you try to find ways of gladdening it. If the mind is too scattered or unsteady, you try to make it steady through whatever meditation methods will work. If the mind is being trapped by something such as sensual desire, ill will, sleepiness, restlessness or anxiety, or uncertainty, you try to find a way to release it. And in this way you bring the mind into a state that's more conducive to being on the path.

So, when you're focusing on mind states, you're not simply watching them come and go. If they're unskillful mind states, you try to find ways of making them go away faster. If they're skillful, then you try to find ways of getting them to come and stay **[§27].**

In both of these cases—with feelings and mind states—the act of taking them as frames of reference means watching them as they are happening and being less concerned with the *object* of the feeling or the object of the mind state, and more concerned with the *role* of the feelings and mind states as parts of a process: where they come from, what results they produce. Then you ardently try to direct them in a skillful direction. This is how using these two frames of reference actually becomes part of the path.

When the Buddha discusses these two frames of reference in connection with mindfulness of breathing, he doesn't advise leaving the breath when you focus on them. Instead, he has you stay with the breath, and watch feelings or mind states in relationship to the breath. This is one of the ways in which you can use the breath to direct your feelings and mind states in a skillful direction because, as he said, when you pay careful attention to the breath, that will create feelings of pleasure. Those feelings of pleasure will have a good influence on your mind state, leading to greater concentration. At the same time, staying with the breath strengthens your mindfulness and alertness, so that you can see more clearly what you're doing and remember the lessons you learn from your actions.

So when you're paying attention to these two frames of reference, don't abandon the breath. It's one of the tools that you can use as you're being ardent, alert, and mindful to develop your sensitivity to all these frames of reference in a way that leads you further and further along the path.

Q: How can one nourish joy? You've already told us about goodwill, are there other skillful methods?

A: There are quite a few skillful methods, such as the contemplation of your own generosity and the contemplation of your own virtue. Seeing that you have made progress on the path is a skillful form of pride. So when you're feeling that you're a no-good meditator, call to mind times in the past when you were generous when you didn't have to be, to remind yourself that you do have some goodness to you. Similarly with your virtue: Think of the times you could have broken the precepts but you didn't. Again, that gives you a sense of your own goodness.

Another way of giving rise to a sense of joy is to think of some aspect of the Buddha, the Dhamma, or the Saṅgha in whichever way you find inspiring. For example, if you're inspired by the Buddha's wisdom or by his kindness and

compassion, think about those themes for a while. That can be a source of joy. If you're feeling very discouraged in your practice, read passages about the members of the Saṅgha. Some of the arahants in the past described their experiences and in particular talked about the difficulties they went through. Some of them had been so discouraged in the practice that they were ready to commit suicide. You can remind yourself that you're not that bad off. If someone like that can attain awakening, so can you.

Q: Once you come back to a sense of joy, how do you maintain or heighten this sense of joy in the face of all the suffering of all the living beings in the world when you become very sensitive to it?

A: The first thing to remember is that taking on the sorrows of others does not alleviate their sorrows. If you have a sense of inner joy, you're actually in a better place to help them. Probably the worst enemy of this joy is the sense of feeling guilty that you're being happy when they're not. This sense of guilt may come from our Christian background. So when that thought comes up, remind yourself that there's no need to feel guilty, and that your ability to maintain inner joy gives you more strength which, if you want, can provide you with the stamina to help other people where you can.

At the same time, you have to realize that there are many people you can't help, and in this case, the most skillful attitude is one of equanimity. One point that I forgot to mention during the last talk is that to maintain equanimity, you have to be able to follow those five ways of dealing with distracting thoughts that I mentioned the other day. The mind has the tendency to want to make you feel guilty for being equanimous even when equanimity is the wisest attitude to develop. You have to very quickly cut those thoughts off.

Meditation on Kamma

We've talked about how meditation is a type of kamma. Kamma can also be a topic of meditation. This contemplation is aimed primarily at giving the mind a sense of values—as to what is important in life, what things are not important—and to give us even more motivation to do what is skillful and to avoid what is not.

• One contemplation on kamma is based on the definition of kamma in what is called mundane right view. This definition is useful to contemplate because it shows that taking kamma seriously is not a selfish attitude. Some people say that if you're concerned with your kamma, you're not concerned about other people. But when you actually look at how the Buddha introduces the topic of kamma, he focuses on what we might call the social virtues: the virtues that make human society pleasant and amenable to our wellbeing—in the sense that "our" wellbeing means everybody's. Here's the definition:

> "There is what is given, what is offered, what is sacrificed. There are the fruits and results of good and bad actions. There is this world and the next world. There is mother and father. There are spontaneously reborn beings, there are contemplatives and brahmans, who, faring rightly and practicing rightly, proclaim this world and the next after having directly known and realized it for themselves." [§2]

If you look at this definition as a whole, you see that it affirms the teachings on kamma and on rebirth. For example, the "spontaneously reborn beings" are the beings reborn in the heavens, the hells, or the realms of the hungry ghosts. Notice that this passage is not saying that one *knows* about kamma or rebirth; instead, these teachings are for you to adopt as working hypotheses. We take these hypotheses as basis assumptions for our practice, but we won't be able to confirm them until our first taste of awakening.

The passages related to the social virtues are the ones that sound the strangest. For example, "There is what is given." This sounds perfectly obvious, but it had a special meaning in the time of the Buddha. For millennia, the brahmans had been preaching about the virtue of giving, especially when things were given to brahmans. In the texts of old brahmanical ceremonies for making merit for the dead, for example, there's a part of the ceremony where the brahmans will address

the bereaved and say, "We are speaking in the voice of your dead relatives: 'Give to the brahmans!'" When the bereaved gave to the brahmans, the brahmans—again assuming the voice of the dead relatives—said, "Give more!"

You can imagine the reaction that eventually developed. Over the centuries, there sprang up schools of contemplatives who said, in reaction, that there is no virtue in giving. One of their arguments was that people do not have free will, therefore even when they give things, it doesn't mean anything because they had no choice in the matter. Another argument against the merit of giving was that when people die, that's the end, there's nothing left over, so there's no virtue in giving to something that will eventually die and be totally annihilated.

So when the Buddha was saying that there *is* what is given, he was basically saying two things. One is that we have free will. We have the choice of giving or not giving, so there is virtue in giving. Two, he was saying that there is something more to the human being than just the body. There's something that goes beyond the body. When you give to a human being—or to any being, in fact—you're giving something to someone who has worth.

An important point in the Buddhist approach to giving is that the Buddha never said to give only to Buddhists. Instead, he said, "Give wherever you feel inspired or you think the gift would be well used." So by affirming the fact that "there is what is given," the Buddha was affirming one of the basic social virtues, because "giving" here includes not only giving material things, but also more immaterial things. You give of your time, you give of your energy, you give of your knowledge, you can give of your forgiveness, you can give the gift of the Dhamma. It's through these gifts that human life becomes worthwhile and human society becomes helpful for everyone within it.

The second phrase that sounds strange is, "There is mother and father." Again, this sounds almost too obvious to say, but again in the Buddha's time it had a deeper meaning. Those contemplatives who said that no one has any free will also drew the conclusion that the help that your mother and father gave you when you were young has no meaning because they had no choice in the matter; therefore you don't need to feel any gratitude toward them. So when the Buddha was saying that there *is* mother and father, he was saying basically that they *did* have the choice. They chose to help you when they could have chosen to abort you. They didn't abort you, and they helped you gain all the capabilities you need in order to function in society. So even if they weren't perfect parents, they still deserve your gratitude.

This principle applies to all the people who have helped you. You have to realize that they had the choice of whether or not to help, and in many cases it took a lot of effort to offer that help. This is why they deserve your gratitude.

In Thailand there is a saying that gratitude is a sign of a good person. The reasoning behind this is that if you appreciate the help that you have received from others and show gratitude for the effort that they put into it, you will also be more likely to provide help to others.

So you can see that the Buddha's teachings on kamma affirm the social virtues of generosity and gratitude. Without these two virtues, human society would be chaos. Therefore, the Buddha is encouraging us to develop these virtues in ourselves as well. And his teaching on kamma—as following a pattern that allows for free will—is what actually allows for these virtues to have meaning and to make sense.

• Another contemplation on kamma is contained in the passage called the Five Recollections, which is repeated daily in chants in many Buddhist monasteries and centers like Le Refuge. The first four reflections say, basically: "I am subject to aging, I am subject to illness, I am subject to death, I am subject to separation from all that I love." In the Thai translation, instead of saying "subject to," they say that aging is normal, illness is normal, death is normal, separation is normal. It's when we accept these things as normal that we can begin acting heedfully in life.

Finally, the fifth reflection is this:

> "Now based on what line of reasoning should one often reflect that I am the owner of my actions, heir to my actions, born of my actions, related through my actions, and have my actions as my arbitrator, whatever I do, for good or for evil, to that will I fall heir? There are beings who conduct themselves in a bad way, in body, in speech, and in mind, but when they often reflect on that fact, that bad conduct in body, speech, and mind will either be entirely abandoned or grow weaker." **[§20]**

This reflection on kamma, like the other four reflections, teaches heedfulness. But it also teaches confidence: That through the power of our actions, we can find a way out of the sufferings of repeated birth and death. We keep in mind the fact that our only true possessions—given that we are subject to aging, illness, death, and separation—are our actions and their results. Ajaan Suwat liked to comment that the Buddha often teaches that this thing is not-self, that thing is not-self, this thing is not mine, that thing is not mine, but then would have you say to yourself, "I am the owner of my actions." In this case, the sense of "I" does not increase your clinging. It actually makes you more heedful of your only real treasures—your actions and their results—and confident that developing skillful actions will really make a difference. So the "I" here is a useful "I" to develop for the sake of following the path.

Now, if you look at your actions over the past week or so, what kind of

treasures are they? Are they something that you want to put in a suitcase and carry with you on into the future? If they're not, you know what to do this week. You have to act in ways that will create treasures that you would like to keep with you. You have to treat your actions as your most important possessions.

There's a passage in the Canon where King Pasenadi comes to see the Buddha in the middle of the day and the Buddha asks him, "Where have you come from in the middle of the day, great king?" And this is an instance where the king is remarkably frank. "I've been spending my time," he said, "in the sorts of things that people intoxicated with power and obsessed with greed are obsessed with." And so the Buddha asks him, "Suppose that there were a reliable man coming from the east, saying that there's a massive mountain moving in from the east, trampling all living beings in its path. Another trustworthy man comes from the south and says that there's a massive mountain coming in from the south, crushing all living beings in its path. Another reliable man comes from the west.... Another one comes from the north and says there's another massive mountain coming in from the north. So all together there are four massive mountains moving in from the four directions, trampling all living beings in their wake. Given that human life is so rare and you have heard this news, what would you do?"

The king replies, "There's only one thing I should do: calm my mind and do what is skillful and meritorious."

So the Buddha says, "Death is moving in on you. Given that human life is so precious, what should you do?"

And the king repeats, "There's only one thing I should do: calm my mind and do what is skillful and meritorious."

This is the principle of heedfulness combined with confidence: realizing that human life is short, that our actions make a difference, and the only thing that we can take from our life is our actions and their results. So we become more careful about what we choose to do.

The Buddha in another case talks about seven treasures that he says are worth much more than gold or silver. These treasures are seven qualities of mind: conviction, virtue, a sense of shame, a sense of compunction, learning, generosity, and discernment. Each of these qualities is something you can take with you after you die. Even here in this life, fire will not burn them, water will not wash them away, kings and thieves will not take them. (I think it's interesting that the Buddha put heads of state and thieves in the same passage.)

When you reflect on each of these qualities, you realize that they protect you from doing unskillful things even when it's otherwise difficult to resist doing such things. You sometimes read about people living in times of war: When one side does something really awful, the other side takes that as an excuse to do something

awful in return. It's very rare to find people who hold to their values and behave nobly in difficult situations like that. But if you have a sense of conviction, a sense of shame, a sense of compunction, a sense of discernment, these treasures will prevent you from doing things that you will later regret. I've learned of people who have done something really horrible in a war and then for the rest of their lives they say, "I would give a million dollars if I could go back and undo that thing." This means that these qualities, the qualities that would have protected them from doing that thing in the first place, are more valuable than a million dollars. That's the principle of heedfulness.

- A third contemplation builds on the second one.

> "A disciple of the noble ones considers this: I am not the only one who is the owner of my actions, heir to my actions, born of my actions, related through my actions, and have my actions as my arbitrator. Whatever I do for good or for evil, to that will I fall heir. To the extent that there are beings, past and future, passing away and rearising, all beings are the owners of their actions, heir to their actions, born of their actions, related through their actions, and have their actions as their arbitrator. Whatever they do for good or for evil, to that will they fall heir. When he or she often reflects on this, the factors of the path take birth. He or she sticks with that path, develops it, cultivates it. As he or she sticks with that path, develops it, cultivates it, the fetters are abandoned, the obsessions destroyed." **[§20]**

This takes the last contemplation and extends it from yourself to all beings. It gives rise to a different quality of mind. It goes beyond heedfulness and extends to something called *saṁvega.* Saṁvega means a sense of dismay, a sense even of terror, at having to stay in this world with no end in sight, always being required to do good actions, and otherwise in danger of falling into deep suffering. In other words, in order to find wellbeing, we constantly have to keep doing good actions again and again and again. No matter where we go, no matter what level of being we're reborn on, we're constantly doing actions and it's very easy when we're suffering to say, "Oh, I don't have the strength to do good actions." When we're very happy, it's very easy to become complacent and to let our good actions slip. So when you think about the danger of continuing to stay in this world of actions, with the constant requirement to be heedful and skillful no matter where you go, it gives rise to a sense of saṁvega.

But on this level, too, the reflection on kamma also gives rise to a sense of confidence that there must be a path of practice to get out of all this. And that's what the noble eightfold path is: a path of action that leads to the end of action **[§5].** As the passage says, when you reflect on these facts, it gives rise to the

motivation to follow the path to awakening so that you don't have to come back to any world at all.

Now it turns out that actions inspired by heedfulness and those inspired by saṁvega are in many cases the same: generosity, virtue, and meditation. So as we're following the path, we try to contemplate kamma in order to make sure that we're heedful to act in ways that are skillful, and also to give us the inspiration to find the path that leads to the point where we can go beyond action entirely. In other words, we look for the actions that will lead us to the end of action **[§5].**

It's in this way that contemplation of kamma is a useful adjunct to meditation and is something that we should always try to keep in mind.

Q: So there's no self. So in that case, who acts and who creates the kamma?

A: The Buddha never said that there is no self. When he teaches *not*-self, he's teaching a technique, a strategy for getting rid of attachment.

There's a common misconception that the Buddha starts with the idea of there being no self, and in the context of no self teaches the doctrine of kamma, which doesn't make sense: If there's no self, who does the kamma and who receives the results? But that misconception gets the context backwards. Actually, the Buddha starts with the doctrine of kamma, and then views ideas of "self" and "not-self" as types of kamma. In other words, he focuses on seeing the way we define our sense of self as an action. Then the question becomes, when is the activity of identifying things as your self skillful, and when is it not? When is the activity of identifying things as not-self skillful, and when is it not?

There are some instances where the Buddha advises using a skillful sense of self to help you on the path, to give you the motivation to practice and the encouragement that you're capable of the practice. There are other instances where he teaches the concept of not-self, to teach you to abandon any attachments that are not worth identifying with, so as to help you go further on the path. At the end of the path, you let go of both concepts. So if you ask who's doing your kamma, the answer simply is you.

Q: What purpose does a spiritual life fulfill when you speak of no-self?

A: Again, there's a distinction between no-self and not-self. No-self would be to say that there is no self. Not-self simply says that there are certain things that are not yourself or are not worth clinging to as you or yours. It's a value judgment, not a metaphysical position. The Buddha did not teach no-self, but he did teach not-self. He didn't answer the question as to whether there is a self or is not a self. But he did teach not-self as a strategy, a strategy to let go of your attachments. When

you let go of your attachments entirely, the mind reaches a dimension outside of space and time. It's the ultimate happiness, and as Ajaan Suwat used to say, when you experience the ultimate happiness, you don't worry about whether there is or is not a self to experience it. The experience in and of itself is sufficient. If you'd like to know more on this topic, look at the book, *Selves and Not-self*. It's available on dhammatalks.org. In French and in English.

Q: Kamma and Rebirth. As an individual, one accumulates personal kamma during one's entire life, but Buddhism refutes reincarnation, the idea of a soul or a self that goes from one body to another. Still, it speaks a lot about rebirth. So then what is reborn and how is individual kamma transmitted from one life to the next? Without this transmission, it would not be able to find one, or at least would not be possible outside of this life?

A: The question of what is reborn is one that the Buddha didn't answer. He just said that kamma does transmit. Instead of talking about *what* gets reborn, he talks about *how* rebirth happens, which involves a series of processes over which we can gain conscious control. He doesn't say how kamma gets carried along in those processes, but he simply says that the results of your kamma are there, waiting for you on the other side, like your relatives. And depending on whether your kamma is good or bad, the kamma waiting for you on the other side will either be good or bad relatives. Scary, no?

Q: After the falling apart of the physical body, is there still something that lives? And if there is, could you please say more about it?

A: The Buddha said that consciousness does not have to depend on the body. It can also continue to function when supported simply by acts of craving and clinging—in which case the craving at the moment of death, realizing that it can't stay in this body, will go for another body. Consciousness clings to that craving, and then to the body that the craving pulls it to. That's how rebirth happens. The Buddha doesn't talk much about *what* it is that's reborn, but does talk about *how* it happens, because how it happens is something that you are responsible for and something that you can learn how to train yourself to do skillfully. If you become really skillful, then you don't have to go finding a new rebirth. At that point there's simply the consciousness of awakening, which is outside of space and time.

Q: Kamma and Rebirth, second try. How does individual kamma migrate from this life to the next one? Is this a relevant question? If no, how can our next life be better if we don't have the benefit of a kind of karmic legacy? Thank you, Ajaan, for clarifying this "critical" question.

A: It's not a matter of migrating. Our kamma is actually what creates our experience of the next life—or rather, it supplies the raw material for our experience of the next life. When we leave this life and go to the next one, it doesn't feel like we're going someplace else. Just as we have a sense of our present life as "right here," the next life will also have a sense of being "right here," right at our consciousness. It's like going from one dream to another. Even though the appearance of the location in the second dream is different from the location in the first, it still has a sense of happening "right here" just as the first one did.

To give another example, when you're in France, France seems like "right here." When you're in Florida, Florida seems like "right here." So the kamma that we create right now does create, as I said, the raw material for our next lifetime, but it doesn't have to go anyplace else to do that. It all stays right here. So you don't have to be afraid of missing out on your legacy. Just make sure that your legacy is good —because even if it's not good, it will still be your legacy.

Q: Volume Three in Kamma and Rebirth: An unborn consciousness. If I correctly understand, there is among the foundations of consciousness something that is unborn, independent of the five khandhas, a continuum impregnated by our old kamma, tendencies, potentials, etc., on which our next life is going to be established. Could you please say a little bit more about this base of consciousness? Can one say that one would see it in meditation?

A: There is an unborn consciousness but it does not participate in anything. It doesn't participate in kamma; it's not impregnated by anything; it doesn't participate in going to the next life. As the Buddha explained the process of rebirth, our normal consciousness can be based on craving and clinging, and the clinging and craving then build on that consciousness. In this way they keep each other going indefinitely. The unborn consciousness is not involved in any of this. The way to find it in meditation is to follow the path, developing your concentration together with your discernment, to the point where you have your first taste of awakening.

Q: Without the five senses, can there be a consciousness?

A: Yes, consciousness can survive totally on the sense of the mind. At the moment of death, all it has to latch onto is craving, and that craving is what leads to a new rebirth.

Q: If there is rebirth in a cycle, why is there not a fixed number of souls? Why are there more and more millions of human beings every ten years?

A: Do you think the human beings are coming just from the human realm? There are lots of beings on the levels of animals, in the hells, in the many heavens,

so the new human beings could be coming from lots of different sources that we can't count. I don't think there has been a census of hell in a long time.

Q: When you speak of rebirth on different levels, hungry ghosts and devas, what is that?

A: Hungry ghosts and devas are levels of beings that some people who meditate can actually see. Basically, devas are beings who live with a lot of happiness. Hungry ghosts, as their name indicates, live with a lot of hunger because their only nourishment is the merit of others that has been dedicated to them. Pictures of hungry ghosts in Thailand have very large stomachs and extremely small mouths.

There is a story they tell of a hungry ghost. Hungry ghosts tend to live around monasteries because that's where merit is being dedicated, just like dogs going to a place where a lot of food is being handed out. A hungry ghost was once living up in the rafters in the meditation hall of a particular monastery. One night a group of people came from Bangkok. Now, in Thailand when groups of people come to a monastery, they sleep in the meditation hall. These people were lying in a row on the floor of the hall, and the hungry ghost looked down and noticed that their feet weren't even. So he went down and pulled them in line so that their feet were all even. When he got back up in the rafters, he noticed that their heads weren't even. So he went down and pulled them in line so that their heads were all even. He went back up into the rafters and noticed that their feet weren't even. This went on all night, and the people didn't get any sleep. This has become a famous analogy in Thailand for people who try to straighten everything out and never come to an end.

Q: Is there a level of human beings in rebirth?

A: What do you think we are? We are beings that have been reborn as human beings, after having come from who-knows-where. As for higher levels, those are the devas.

Q: At our death can we be reborn, find again the people who are dear to us, who have died and are in another life?

A: Yes, we can. As I explained yesterday, it's through our kamma that we are related. The people to whom we are dear, or are dear to us: We have lots of kamma with them, so we're likely to meet them again.

Q: What is merit in Buddhism?

A: Merit has two meanings in Buddhism. The first meaning covers the actions that are skillful, leading to a happiness that harms no one. These actions include acts of generosity, virtue, and meditation. The second meaning of merit is the sense of wellbeing and happiness inside that results from doing meritorious actions.

When we dedicate merit to others, we're basically hoping that they will be happy and appreciate our skillful actions, too.

Q: When each of us has our own personal kamma, the act of dedicating a part of our merit to others, to other people, including animals, spirits, and devas, etc., with the purpose of ameliorating their kamma: Would this serve any purpose other than being just a symbolic gesture of our own generosity?

A: The Buddha says that if someone has been born as a hungry ghost, then the merit we dedicate to that person will automatically reach that person, because hungry ghosts know immediately when someone has dedicated something to them. If they rejoice in the merit, then their act of rejoicing is meritorious, and allows them to gain in that merit. If they don't rejoice, they don't get anything. Similarly, devas can also know this, and the same conditions apply: If they rejoice in the dedication, the act of rejoicing brings them happiness. If they don't rejoice, they gain no merit.

As for beings on other levels, there's a chant in Thailand that says, "If the devas know of my act of merit, could they please notify the other people that I am dedicating my merit to." Now, devas don't always do as they're asked, so you can never be sure that this will reach someone else. But you dedicate the merit just in case there are those who can know of it and appreciate your merit. Their act of rejoicing in your merit becomes their own merit.

Two stories to go along with this: My teacher had a student who, before she started meditating, used to practice magic. She insisted that it was white magic, but you never know. In any case, she thought that her powers of magic could negate any past kamma. But her meditation started teaching her otherwise. In particular, as she began meditating, she began to see visions of hungry ghosts. She didn't like this and wanted it to stop. But my teacher told her to use this as a good lesson in kamma. First, ask the hungry ghost what it did to get such a bad rebirth. She found that hungry ghosts, unlike prisoners, tended to be very honest in reporting the wrong they had done. Then my teacher told her to dedicate the merit of her meditation to the hungry ghosts, and in some cases they were actually able to escape from the state of being a hungry ghost. But in some cases they weren't. Their kamma was still too heavy. So, other people's ability to accept your merit dedication really varies from case to case.

The second story, from the Pāli Canon, deals with the topic of devas not always doing what they are asked to do. There was once a monk living in the forest, and one day he went down to a pool of water to bathe. There was a lotus in the pool, so he leaned over to smell the lotus. Immediately, a deva appeared and accused the monk of being a thief of a scent. The monk said, "Oh, come on! You're being too

stringent!" And the deva said, "Look, if you're really serious about the practice, even the slightest unskillful thought or action is something you should stay away from." The monk was a little shocked and then thanked the deva for warning him. Then he added, "If you ever see me doing anything like this again, please warn me again." And the deva said, "I'm not your servant. You look after your own practice," and then disappeared.

Q: What is the power of your last wish or last intention before the moment of death?

A: The strength of your last mind state really depends on the totality of your kamma. Other things you have done prior to that moment may actually outweigh the power of that mind state. For instance, if you have any particularly heavy kamma—and "heavy" in this case means either very, very good or very, very bad —that will be more powerful. If there's anything that you've done habitually during life, that will also have more power than your last mind state—which means that you've got to practice until it becomes a habit. If you've been habitually practicing, that will help push you through. But the important principle to remember is that every skillful intention counts, even if everything around you and inside your body is falling apart. It's never too late to make a skillful choice.

Q: Suppose you know you're going to die in three minutes. How do you train your mind at that point?

A: The first point of advice is: Don't wait until you're two or three minutes from death. Try to practice in advance as much as you can. But if you suddenly realize that death is imminent, remember that you really have to let go. Of everything. The Buddha's advice is that if you're worried about what you're leaving behind, the first order of business is to get rid of all worries. You have to drop all worries about your family or any unfinished business in this world, because as the Buddha said, even if you're worried about these things, at this point you can't help them. So, one, don't worry about things you're leaving behind.

Then, two, if you're concerned about leaving behind human sensual pleasures, remember that the pleasures of heaven are better than human pleasures. Even better than Pommard.

There's one discourse, a sutta, where the Buddha recommends telling a person on his or her deathbed about the pleasures of each level of heaven, saying that each one as you go up is better than the lower one, so set your mind on the higher one rather than the lower one. But then the Buddha recommended telling the person that even the devas in the higher levels still suffer from a sense of self-identification. In other words, there's a sense of clinging to their idea of who they

are. A greater wellbeing would be to let go of any sense of self-identity entirely.

Now, if you only have two or three minutes, you can skip all of those levels of heaven and just remind yourself: “Anything that comes up in the mind is not me, not mine. Let it go, let it go, let it go.” And remember that your awareness will outlast anything else that comes up: thoughts, pains, visions of this place or that, this person or that. So stay with that awareness. Then, if you can get away from those concerns, try to do away with any sense of self around that awareness. If you can learn how not to identify with any sense of self around that awareness, then awakening is possible at the moment of death.

Present Kamma : Learning to be a Good Cook

Last night we talked about past kamma. Tonight I'd like to talk about present kamma. So please meditate, because as you're meditating, you're doing kamma right now. These instructions will make a lot more sense if you're looking at the mind in action as it meditates.

Present kamma is of two types. One is the kamma that you bring into the situation; the other is your immediate reaction to the situation. The more important of the two is the first one, because it involves the intentions with which you shape the experience to begin with. Remember the Buddha's image of feeding: Our intentions are most often concerned with deciding where we're going to look for food right now, and how we're going to fix it. The Buddha's instructions on present kamma are basically designed to teach us to become better and more observant cooks.

The first instruction of a good cook is to choose your ingredients well. In most cases, you have a wide range of ingredients to choose from. Of course, there will be some times when nothing but bad ingredients are forced on you. In other words, everything sprouting in your kamma field is bad. That will be the topic for tomorrow's talk. Here we'll focus on making the best use of a variety of things coming up in the present under better conditions: how to choose your ingredients when you have a choice, and how to learn some good skills as a cook to fix those ingredients well. These skills will then aid you during the times when all the ingredients forced on you are bad.

The main instruction in choosing your ingredients is to stay away from bad potentials if you can. This principle applies inside and out. There's a story they tell of a martial arts master in China. His students were going to give a demonstration of their skills one day in a pavilion out in the forest. On the road to the pavilion was a donkey. The donkey had a reputation for kicking everyone who came past. So as the martial arts students were on their way to the pavilion, they decided, "Let's test our martial arts against the donkey." The first student took one stance, and the donkey kicked him across the road. The second student said, "You fool, that's not how it's done." So he took another stance, but he, too, was kicked across

the road. All the students tried their different stances, and they were all kicked across the road. So they realized, "There must be one more stance that the teacher hasn't taught us yet." So they hid behind the bushes on the side of the road to watch the teacher when he came, to see what stance he would take. When the teacher came along, he saw the donkey—and he walked 'way around it. The stance that he hadn't taught his students was this: If you can avoid bad potentials, avoid them. Focus on the good ones. That's the main instruction with regard to the ingredients.

Now for your techniques. The Buddha talks about two sets of techniques as we approach the present moment. The first one comes in his description of dependent co-arising under the factor called "name" **[§8].** These techniques include intention, attention, perception, and feeling, along with contact, which here means the interrelationships among the other four—as when you perceive an intention or pay attention to a perception. You can make use of any of these techniques or any combination of these techniques to fix your food in the present. In other words, you can change your intention, your attention, your perception, or your feeling as you approach a particular incident or a particular situation.

You can see this in action when you're working with the breath. In terms of intention, you can change the place where you're focusing, or your intention of what you want to do with the breath energy, and that will change your experience of the breath. In terms of attention, you can pay attention to the questions you're asking about the breath. For example, if you ask yourself what would be a comfortable breath, the breath will change. When you change your perception with regard to the breath—for example, perceiving the breath as a whole body process, the energy flowing through the nerves and the blood vessels—that, too, will change your experience of the breath. The factor of contact among these things is what allows you to make these adjustments.

The same set of techniques applies to how you deal with pain in the course of meditation. Think back on the instructions I gave the other day on dealing with pain: If pain arises, you can change your intention from giving in to the pain to actively probing and questioning it. Your relationship to the pain will change depending on the perceptions you hold in mind and the questions about the pain that you pay attention to. If one set of perceptions and questions doesn't work, try to think up another one.

Recall the Buddha's instructions to Rāhula. If you see that an action is unskillful, you stop and then try another action. In this way, you're developing your faculty of judgment. But it's important to see that there are different kinds of judgment. Here we're not exercising the judgment of a judge in a court who's making a final decision of guilt or innocence. Instead, we're exercising more the judgment of a

craftsperson who's looking at what he's doing while he's doing it. If he notices that he's making a mistake, then he can adjust to correct for the mistake. In other words, you judge your meditation as a work in progress. In this way your powers of judgment become a useful part of the meditation.

Once you've learned how to develop these mental techniques toward your meditation, you can use the same principles to deal with situations outside. For example, if you have a difficult situation at work, first you ask yourself, "Is my intention here skillful? Am I paying attention to the right things? Is part of my problem the way I'm perceiving the situation? Can I change my perception of the situation?" In this way, you approach the situation as an experiment or as a work in progress. In the course of doing this, you begin to see many potentials in the situation that you may not have seen before.

The Buddha's second set of descriptions of the skills that we apply to the present moment comes under the factor of fabrication, or *saṅkhāra,* again in dependent co-arising **[§8].** There are three types of fabrication. The first is bodily fabrication, which is the breath. The second type is verbal fabrication, which is directed thought and evaluation. This is how we talk to ourselves. We direct our minds to a particular topic and then we evaluate it: asking questions about it, making comments about it. All of this is verbal fabrication. The third type of fabrication is mental fabrication, which is composed of perceptions and feelings.

These three forms of fabrication overlap somewhat with the factors under "name." Both sets contain perception and feeling, and intention and attention are closely related to directed thought and evaluation. In fact, all three sorts of fabrications contain an element of intention. That's how they're related to present kamma. The three fabrications are a little broader in their range than the factors under "name" because they include the experience of the breath as a tool in shaping the present moment as well.

We see the three types of fabrication most directly as we're engaged in breath meditation. The breath we're focusing on is bodily fabrication. As we get more sensitive to it, we begin to see how our intentions are involved in the way we breathe. And we have freedom to choose different patterns of breathing. We're also engaged in directed thought and evaluation of the breath. We're applying our different perceptions to the breath, and we're creating different kinds of feelings around the way we concentrate on the breath. These are all things we can choose to do one way or another.

If distracting thoughts come up while you're trying to focus on the breath, you can use the different types of fabrication to release yourself from them as well. Remember, as I told you when describing the Buddha's five techniques for dealing with distracting thoughts, the first requirement is that you establish the intention

to get out of those thoughts. Otherwise, the techniques won't work. Some of the techniques deal primarily with mental fabrication, as when you try to perceive a thought as undesirable. Others deal primarily with bodily fabrication, as when you try to relax the tension of fabrication surrounding the thought. At the same time, some of the techniques deal primarily with the factors under "name," as when you turn your attention away from the thought and just let it be.

So as we engage in breath meditation, we're becoming more sensitive to how we shape our present experience through these three types of fabrication, or through the factors of "name." And we'll find that there are some situations where kamma potentials coming in from the past make things difficult in the present moment, yet we can learn the different skills to work around them. Then, once we become more sensitive to these processes in our body and mind, we can start applying these skills to other situations in life.

You may remember that in one of the earlier talks during the retreat we talked about different ways you deal with the causes of suffering. Some causes of suffering go away when you just look at them; others require that you engage in what the Buddha calls, "exerting a fabrication" **[§21].** And when the Buddha's talking about fabrication in this context, he's talking about these three kinds of fabrication.

For example, suppose that you're feeling a strong sense of anger and you want to get over it. The first thing you do is to look at your breath. Usually when you're angry, your breath is disturbed, which aggravates the anger. So, remember what you've learned to do with the breath in meditation: calm the breath down, breathe through any tightness you may feel in your chest or your abdomen, and in this way you begin to reclaim your body from the anger, which has hijacked it. You make the breath your own again. That's bodily fabrication.

When the body feels calmer, it's easier to think clearly about the situation. This is where you apply directed thought and evaluation. And you can start asking yourself, "What, in the long term, would be the most skillful thing to do in this situation?" In other words, you're not going just by your emotions or impulses. You're looking at the long-term results.

Finally, with mental fabrication, you ask yourself, "What perceptions are you holding in mind that are aggravating the situation? For example, do you perceive yourself as a victim? Are you carrying perceptions of other times when you were a victim? Can you change those perceptions?"

Another perception that's a troublemaker when you're angry is that, when passing judgment on the other person, you subconsciously perceive yourself as a judge in a court and you're free to decide whether the person is guilty or innocent, without perceiving that the judgment will have any effect on you. But when you

perceive that the consequences won't touch you, you tend to get heedless. To prevent this, the Buddha advises changing the perception: Consider yourself as a person traveling through the desert. You're hot, trembling, and thirsty. You see a small puddle of water in the footprint of a cow. You need the water, but you realize that if you try to scoop it up with your hand, you'll make it muddy. So what do you do? You get down on all fours and you slurp up the water. Even though this is not a dignified position, it's what you need to do.

In the same way, we sometimes need the perception that other people have at least *some* goodness to them, because that will nourish our ability to do good in response to them. The perception of their goodness is like water nourishing our own. And so even though we may be angry with the other person and we don't feel in the mood to look at the person's good traits because it hurts our pride, we should still realize that we need their goodness to nourish our goodness. Otherwise, if we see the entire human race as basically bad, it's going to be very difficult to treat people well. If we look for their goodness, we benefit in being more inclined to act skillfully. This comes from applying a totally different perception to the situation.

This is one example of how you can apply these different kinds of fabrication or the instances of intention, attention, feeling, and perception to approach the present moment with strength and with clarity. That way you will be more likely to do the most skillful thing.

So the Buddha's basic instructions are similar to what you would give to train a good cook: Choose your good ingredients if you can. Develop your skills so that even though you're sometimes stuck with bad ingredients, you can create a good situation in the present moment, providing yourself with good food now, at the same time planting new seeds for good food into the future.

Q: Did I hear you say to look not for the weakest link in the factors of dependent co-arising for a way to dismantle the samsaric building system, but to use its strengths as an example of gravity as well as tighter chain systems such as *nāma-rūpa-viññāṇa* in terms of their potential for representing the whole, as in your scale invariance analogy?

A: No. Basically what you want to do when you're dealing with dependent co-arising is to bring more knowledge to all of the factors, and this means knowledge in terms of the four noble truths. Try to see the various factors in terms of which noble truth they fall under, and then try to apply the right duty to them. In some cases, this will involve strengthening some of the skillful factors—such as strengthening skillful forms of fabrication—but it also means weakening some of the unskillful ones. It's in the course of strengthening the skillful ones and

weakening the less skillful ones that you will find the weakest links and be able to cut them with knowledge.

Mindfulness of Dhammas I : Noble Truths, Hindrances, & Factors for Awakening

May 22, 2015

For the past three mornings we've been talking about the first three frames of reference: the body in and of itself, feelings in and of themselves, and mind states in and of themselves. Today we're going to start talking about the fourth frame of reference. The Pāli word for this frame of reference is *dhammas*. In English we translate it as mental qualities. And what we have under this topic are five different lists of mental qualities.

It's important, when trying to understand this frame of reference, to remember that all dhammas come under the four noble truths. The four noble truths are a list under this frame of reference—the most important list—but they're not just a list of names or things. They provide a framework that you apply to your experience, one that divides experience into four categories: suffering, its cause, its cessation, and the path to its cessation. Each category has a duty, which means that each truth is not just something to know about, but it's also something that you have to put into practice. For example, (1) if you see suffering, you try to comprehend it, which means trying to understand it to the point of dispassion. (2) If you see that something is a cause of suffering, your duty is to abandon it. (3) If you see the cessation of suffering happening, your duty is to realize what's going on. All too often, when craving ceases, we don't pay attention to the fact that the suffering coming from the craving also ceases. We're more interested in moving on to the next craving. So the duty with regard to the third noble truth is not to move on to the next craving, but to look for the cessation of suffering as the craving ceases. (4) If you see that some quality is part of the path, your duty is to develop it. For instance, if a moment of concentration arises, you don't just let it pass. You try to maintain it and help it to grow **[§27].** In each of these cases, the truth assigns a duty, which is the responsibility of ardency to carry out.

As for other lists of dhammas, they all fall under these four categories. As

Venerable Sāriputta once said, the four noble truths contain all of the other dhammas in the same way that the footprint of an elephant can contain the footprints of all other animals that walk on land. This means that when you see where any of the other members of the other lists of dhammas fall in the scheme of the four noble truths, you know which duty to apply to them. For example, today we're going to be talking about two of the lists mentioned under the fourth frame of reference: the five hindrances and the seven factors for awakening. The hindrances are a cause of suffering, so they are things to be abandoned. The factors for awakening come under the path, so they're qualities to be developed.

In this way, each list is a framework for understanding what you should be *doing*. It's a guide for your ardency. This means that you don't just watch things arise and pass away. When something arises, you try to recognize where it fits into one of these lists. And then you can know what duty you have with regard to it: to try to make it arise more, or to try to make it pass away and not come back.

Last night we talked about the different ways you can shape your experience in the present moment, and you can apply those techniques both to the hindrances and to the factors for awakening. For example, remember the list of qualities that came under the factor of name: perception, feeling, attention, and intention. When a hindrance arises, the first thing you need to do is use perception: You need to perceive it as a hindrance. This is because we rarely perceive these things as hindrances. Instead, we tend to perceive them as our friends. When sensual desire arises, you very rarely say to yourself, "Oh, what a hindrance!" You say, "Hey, I like this. This is a friend." Whatever the desire says is worthy of desire, you tend to agree: "Yes, this really is desirable."

So, the first step in getting out of this tendency is to perceive, "Yes, this actually is a hindrance." That's so that you don't fall for its lies. Once you perceive that it is a hindrance, you pay attention to it in terms of the four noble truths. That's an act of appropriate attention.

Then you remember your intention, which is to gain concentration. You remember your intention to stay with the path. This requires mindfulness.

Once you've recognized that the desire is a hindrance, then you try to take it apart. Approach it first as a problem of bodily fabrication. How are you breathing while you're entangled in this hindrance? Can you change the way you breathe? Remembering to ask this question will enable you to reclaim your breath. Once you've reclaimed your breath, you can view the hindrance with a little more detachment.

Then you can approach the hindrance through verbal fabrication. In other words, you try to evaluate why you like this hindrance, and then you try to think of its drawbacks. For example, with sensual desire, the Buddha says that we're not

so much attracted to sensual objects. We actually enjoy the desire—the thinking and planning in anticipation of the object—more. You can see this in action. Suppose you decide you want to go over to Moustiers for some pizza. You can spend two hours here in the meditation hall deciding which kind of pizza you want and thinking about how good the pizza will be. When you actually get to Moustiers, the actual amount of time that you spend eating the pizza is probably only about ten minutes. Excuse me, that's how we eat in America. Here it would take half an hour, but that's still less than the two hours you spent thinking about it.

But suppose that the pizza place is closed. You can take it in stride. You tell yourself, "That's OK, the ice cream places are open." As long as you can find something else to desire, you're perfectly fine. But if someone were to tell you you're not allowed to desire pizza or any other food at all, then you would really rebel—which shows that you're attached more to the desire than to the pizza. It's good to reflect on that fact: Why are you so attached to planning for future sensual pleasures? What do you think you get out of it?

When you reflect on your desire in this way, it's called thinking about the allure: trying to find exactly what gratification you get simply in thinking about sensual pleasures. What do you think you're gaining from engaging in that kind of thinking? The Buddha compares it to a dog chewing on some old bones that offer no nourishment at all. But as Ajaan Lee says, we like the taste of our saliva, so we keep on chewing anyhow.

The next step is to evaluate the drawbacks of the sensual desire. The drawbacks of pizza are not so bad, but think about what someone described yesterday as a "particular relationship." Those have lots of drawbacks. Our culture—and this applies both to France and to America—tells us that sensual desires are good, and we very rarely want to think about their drawbacks. But if you don't think that sex has drawbacks, go to a divorce court. I don't know about France, but in America divorce court is the most dangerous court in the entire court system. They actually need two or three bailiffs per court: A bailiff is an armed policeman stationed in the court who enforces peace in the court. Each divorce court has to have two or three bailiffs, where other courts can get by with only one. Do they do that in France, too? No? Maybe that tells you something about America. But it does point out the fact that there are a lot of drawbacks to sexual relations. When they turn sour, they can easily turn violent. If sex were totally good, no one would feel bad over the sex they had in the past with a person who later betrayed them. The wonderful nature of sex would more than compensate for the later disappointment.

You can also think of all the stupid things you've done in the past because of sexual desire. If you're honest with yourself, you'll be able to find some way for

realizing that the sensual desire you're feeling has drawbacks that far outweigh the gratification, and that you'd be much better off focusing on the breath to let the mind gain a sense of inner peace and calm instead.

This contemplation of the allure of the desire and the drawbacks of the desire will require you to figure out which way of thinking about and evaluating these issues will be most effective for your mind. In this case, again, your intention has to be strong. If your intention is strong enough, these techniques should be able to get you past the hindrance.

So these are some of the ways that you can use your knowledge of fabrication to deal with the hindrances.

Another example would be dealing with restlessness and anxiety. In this case, you have to ask yourself, "Why am I drawn to this type of thinking? Why do I want to worry?" Part of your mind may insist that it doesn't like to worry, but the fact that you keep coming back to the worry means that another part, which may be more hidden under denial, gets some satisfaction out of worrying. Often when you're worried about the future, that part of your mind tells you, "If I worry about this enough, I will be able to take care of the situation. If I don't worry, I'm being irresponsible." But you have to remember that you really don't know what's going to happen in the future. What you *do* know is that if you waste your energy worrying, you'll have less energy to deal with problems when they actually arise—whether they're problems you anticipate or problems you never anticipated. What you *will* need when a problem actually comes will be more mindfulness, more alertness, more discernment. When you think about this, you realize that you'd be better off meditating in order to develop those qualities. This is another way in which you use mental and verbal fabrication to get yourself past the hindrances.

A similar principle applies to the factors of awakening. First you have to perceive them as your friends here on the path, pay attention to them in a way that helps to develop them, and maintain your intention to keep on developing them to make them grow stronger. Actually, when you're abandoning the hindrances, you're already developing the first three factors for awakening: mindfulness; analysis of qualities, which is a factor of discernment; and then persistence, which is the same thing as ardency. The remaining four factors for awakening are rapture, calm, concentration, and equanimity.

Now, you may have noticed as we've been meditating this week, we're already using the three kinds of fabrications to develop these qualities. In other words, breath, which is bodily fabrication; directed thought and evaluation, which are verbal fabrications; and perception and feelings, which are mental fabrications. By directing your thoughts and perceptions to the breath in a way that creates feelings of pleasure, you're fostering all the factors of awakening.

Now, as you develop the factors for awakening, you have to bring them into balance, because some of the factors are active and others are passive. The active factors are analysis of qualities, persistence, and rapture. The passive ones are calm, concentration, and equanimity. If your mind is out of balance, you have to take a good look at it to see which side needs to be strengthened. The image the Buddha uses is of trying to start a fire. If the fire is too weak, you add more fuel. If the fire is too strong, you pour some water or ashes on it. In the same way, if your mind is too sluggish, you want to develop the more active factors: analyzing what's going on in the mind, putting in some effort to raise your level of energy, and trying to develop an energizing sense of rapture. It's not the time to develop the passive factors. Otherwise, that would be like putting water on a weak fire. It would put the fire out.

If your mind is too active, you try to develop the more passive factors: calm, concentration, and equanimity. If you develop the active factors at a time like that, it's like putting more fuel into fire that's already too strong.

In developing each of these factors, the Buddha says that it's important to apply appropriate attention in every case. For example, if you're feeling doubtful, he encourages you to develop analysis of qualities, which means that you look for qualities at work in your mind and try to identify them as either skillful or unskillful. As you learn to divide things into these two terms, you begin to see more clearly what's happening in your mind, along with the results that arise from what's happening, and that can get rid of some of your doubts about how to proceed.

Another example would be rapture. A frequent question is how to give rise to rapture, and the Buddha gives a very vague answer: There are potentials for rapture in the body, so you pay appropriate attention to them. That doesn't give you much to work with, but from personal experience I've found that there are certain parts of the body that have a nice pleasant feeling, nothing particularly impressive, but if you can locate them and give them some space, they can develop a sense of fullness, which is one of the manifestations of rapture.

For example, experiment right now. Focus your attention on the area at the back of your hands. Try to relax that part of the body and be very careful to keep that part of the body relaxed all the way through the in-breath, all the way through the out. Don't put any pressure on it at all. After a while, that part of the body will gain a sense of fullness. The blood is allowed to flow into all the vessels there. Once you sense that fullness, allow it to spread up your arms and into your torso, ideally into your heart, and then you'll have rapture. Now in your case, your beginning spot may not be at the back of the hands, but if you survey the body often enough, after a while you'll find your own spots. This is an example of using perception,

attention, and intention to give rise to and to strengthen the factors for awakening.

So, in summary, when the Buddha's talking about using dhammas as a frame of reference, it's not simply a matter of watching these things arise and pass away. Instead, he's giving you a framework for understanding your duty with regard to ardency so that you can know what to do with these events in the mind: encouraging the skillful ones to arise and grow, and getting the unskillful ones to pass away and not return. This is how you use these lists of dhammas as part of the path.

We'll continue with this frame of reference tomorrow because it contains two more lists, which are the sense media and the clinging-aggregates.

Sublime Attitudes

This afternoon I'd like to discuss the theme of the four *brahma-vihāras,* which are translated as sublime attitudes. This is a meditation topic where issues of mindfulness and kamma come together. On the one hand, the practice of the brahma-vihāras is a type of right mindfulness because it's associated with right resolve—and remember that remembering to develop right resolve is a type of right mindfulness. On the other hand, the development of the brahma-vihāras is a type of good mental kamma that helps strengthen your motivation to develop further good kamma in your thoughts, words, and deeds. It nourishes your motivation to find a happiness that doesn't harm you and doesn't harm anyone else, for the sake of your own long-term happiness and for theirs.

The brahma-vihāras are also associated with kamma in that they are one of the ways of developing a skillful state of mind here in the present moment as protection from the results of your own past bad kamma. When your mind is engaged in any of these attitudes to the point where they're unlimited, then if any results of past bad kamma come, they won't have much impact on the mind in the present. The Buddha gives the image of a large lump of salt. If you take that lump of salt and put it in a tiny cup of water, you won't be able to drink the water. But if you take that same lump of salt and put it into a large river of clean water, you can still drink the water of the river. Developing the brahma-vihāras is like making your mind like that large body of water **[§14].**

Now, there are a couple of misunderstandings about the brahma-vihāras that need to be cleared up. The four brahma-vihāras are attitudes of unlimited goodwill, unlimited compassion, unlimited empathetic joy, and unlimited equanimity. The first one, goodwill, in Pāli is *mettā.* Often mettā is translated as loving-kindness, but that's one of the misunderstandings. Mettā has nothing to do with love. It's all about goodwill. You can have goodwill for people without loving them and even without liking them—in fact, when you don't like people, that's when you need to develop mettā for them the most.

Basically, goodwill—when understood in the light of kamma—is the wish that people understand the causes for happiness and act on that understanding. This is something you can wish for anyone, even people who are very evil or whom you dislike intensely. Ajaan Fuang once told me about a snake that had entered his

room one night and had stayed there for several days. Ajaan Fuang used it as a test for his own fear. He spread thoughts of goodwill to the snake every day, and after a while he realized that he had reached the point where he didn't have any ill will for or fear of the snake. But he also realized that the situation was dangerous for both of them.

So one evening, he sat and meditated, spreading lots of goodwill to the snake, and in his head he addressed these words to the snake: "It's not that I don't like you, but we're of different species, so it would be easy for misunderstandings to arise between us. I think it would be safer for both of us if you left the room. There are many other places out there in the forest that would be safer for you to stay." And the snake left the room.

Now in a case like this, you can't say that you really love the snake, and probably the snake really wouldn't want your love, but it would appreciate your goodwill: that you don't want to harm it and that you want it to be happy even if that means staying apart from one another.

A second misunderstanding about the brahma-vihāras: Sometimes you hear people say that mettā is the primary innate quality of the mind. Actually, unskillful and skillful habits are both innate to the mind, and you have to learn how to develop the skillful ones very consciously. You need to develop goodwill and the other brahma-vihāras because ill will, harmfulness, resentment, and passion are no less innate to the mind than they are.

In some instances this will require more effort than in others. This parallels the Buddha's teachings on how to deal with different causes of stress. In some cases, you only have to look at the cause of stress and it will go away. In other cases, you have to exert fabrication in order for it to go away. Similarly with mettā: With some people, you just think about them and you immediately feel mettā for them. In other cases, you really have to exert a fabrication. And this involves all three of the fabrications we've been talking about this week.

First you try to breathe calmly to get a feeling of ease and fullness in the body —this is bodily fabrication combined with one aspect of mental fabrication.

Then you direct your thoughts toward that person and you evaluate why you find it difficult to feel goodwill for him or her. Then you reason with yourself, reminding yourself that there really is no good reason not to feel goodwill. And however skillfully you can think your way into an attitude of goodwill, that would count as verbal fabrication.

Then you try to use whatever perceptions would make it easier for you to feel goodwill. This would be the other aspect of mental fabrication. For example, you hold in mind the perception of the image of the footprint of the cow. In other words, you think about the good qualities of that person, and then you drop any

attention to whatever bad qualities they may have. If it so happens that you can't think of any good qualities in that person, that's when you have to develop compassion. Here the perception to hold in mind is the Buddha's image of seeing someone out in the desert lying alone on the side of the road, sick, with no one to help him. Instinctively, you would feel compassion for that person. In the same way, if you see people with no good qualities at all, you really have to feel sorry for them: They're creating a lot of bad kamma for themselves. This is a skillful use of perception. That's the first brahma-vihāra.

The next two brahma-vihāras—compassion and empathetic joy—are extensions of mettā. Compassion is what you feel if you have goodwill for all beings but you see that there are some beings who are suffering or are doing actions that would lead to suffering. You have to feel compassion for them and wish that they would stop those actions.

Empathetic joy is what your goodwill feels for people when you see that they are happy or are doing things that will lead to happiness. You don't feel resentful of them; you don't feel jealous of them. If you do feel some jealousy, the Buddha recommends this perception: In the many, many lifetimes you've been through, you have experienced the same pleasure that that person is experiencing now. It left you, and in time it will leave the other person. The fact that the other person may be better off than you right now means very little in the larger scheme of things. There's no need to be jealous. It's the same way with compassion. If you see someone suffering, you remember that you have suffered in that way, too. In this way, your compassion is not condescending and your empathetic joy is not a hypocritical disguise for jealousy.

The fourth brahma-vihāra is equanimity. Equanimity is expressed in a different manner from the other three. The first three are expressed with the phrase, "May all beings be happy" and "May they do this" and "May they do that." In other words, it's a wish. Equanimity is expressed by a statement of fact. "All living beings are the owners of their actions, heir to their actions, and so forth." This is not a wish; it's a statement of fact. There's no "may" there at all.

Equanimity is the appropriate emotion to feel when you see that there are beings who are doing things that will cause suffering and that no matter what you do, they will not stop. Or they are suffering from something in their past actions, and no matter how hard you try to help them you cannot stop that suffering. This is when the Buddha has you reflect on the fact of kamma: All beings are owners of their actions, and there are some cases where their actions prevent you from helping them or your own lack of skill prevents you from helping them. So for the time being, you have to put your concern for their happiness aside, remembering—being mindful of the fact—that you have limited abilities and a limited amount of

strength. If you waste your energy trying to help people you cannot help, it saps the strength that you could have devoted to people you *can* help. So for the time being, you have to put aside your concern for the people you can't help and focus instead on the areas where you *can* make a difference—realizing that some day there may come a time when you can help, but for the time being you have to be patient. In this way, equanimity is not hard-heartedness. It's simply bringing discernment to your goodwill.

When you're trying to develop equanimity, it's also useful to remember the Buddha's five strategies for putting aside distracting thoughts. Otherwise, your mind may try to make you feel guilty for developing equanimity, and you have to use your tools for separating yourself out from those thoughts.

If you can develop these unlimited mind states, you can begin to trust yourself more as you deal with difficult people and difficult situations. In this way, the brahma-vihāras provide a good motivation for doing skillful kamma now and into the future, at the same time providing you with protection from the results of any unskillful kamma you did in the past.

So they're good attitudes to keep in mind, and skillful qualities to develop with ardency.

Q: The fact that I, the self, am sending thoughts of goodwill to others: Does this not risk developing an even bigger ego?

A: There is such a thing as a healthy and an unhealthy ego. An unhealthy ego doesn't care about the happiness of others. A healthy ego does care about the wellbeing of others, because it realizes that your happiness can't last if it's built on the sufferings of others. Also, remember that the simple fact of your spreading thoughts of goodwill will not necessarily make them happy, but it does help establish your motivation to act skillfully with regard to all people, even those you don't like. The first beneficiary of this practice is thus you; secondarily, through your actions based on goodwill, it benefits other people. So sending thoughts of goodwill is actually a way of keeping your ego in line.

Q: Sometimes I get in touch with the suffering of others and then experience very strong sadness. How do you advise handling that?

A: The first step is to spread thoughts of goodwill to those people. If there is something you can do for them, then do that. If there's nothing you can do, then you have to move from goodwill to equanimity, which is the thought that all of us have our own kamma, and if you focus on things where you can't make a difference, then you'll deplete the energy you could otherwise use to help people

you actually can help. It's one of the hard parts of being a human being that we can't help everyone who is suffering. So you try to focus on the cases where you can be of help.

Q: When you speak of sending thoughts of goodwill to ourselves and to others who are dear to us, concretely how can that person sense it? Does the person have a sense of being lighter or happy at that moment or on that day?

A: This depends both on how receptive the person is and on the strength of your own concentration and goodwill. It's like a radio tower sending out a signal. If the signal is weak, it doesn't go far. And if the radio isn't turned on, it won't receive anything, either. Some people are like radios turned on, and others like radios turned off. However, the main reason that we spread goodwill is to make sure that our *own* intention is in line with the Dhamma, so that when we look for happiness, we want a happiness that doesn't harm anybody. Whether or not other people can sense your thoughts of goodwill, try to make your thoughts of goodwill have an impact on your actions.

Q: On the subject of the metaphor of the radio: The transmitter that you are making reference to is the heart or the mind, right?

A: Right.

Q: Could you please then explain how to develop the power of the transmitter?

A: Basically, through concentration. That's what gives more power to the goodwill you send out. Ajaan Suwat used to say that when you meditate, you want to spread thoughts of goodwill at the beginning of the meditation and at the end. When you do it at the beginning of the meditation, it's basically for you, to get your mind in the right state to meditate. When you spread thoughts of goodwill at the end, that's for other people, because your mind should then be more powerful.

Q: Regarding equanimity and mettā: What short meditation can one do in order to return to equanimity when one finds oneself in the agitation of life?

A: The reflection on kamma is a good one. You have to remember that each person has his or her own kamma, and all you have to fall back on now is your own kamma, so you have to get the mind as calm as you can, right away, and see that any other attitudes that would pull you out of equanimity at that point are not good for you. They could lead you to bad kamma, so they're worth letting go.

Q: Emptiness and equanimity. Is it correct to associate the two? Is equanimity the skillful attitude to take, to develop in the face of the emptiness of all conditioned phenomena?

A: Don't be in too great a hurry to develop equanimity. We first need to develop a sense of conviction and a sense of determination in the path. This has to be motivated by goodwill for ourselves and goodwill for all other beings. Equanimity is most useful when you come up against issues that you cannot resolve. Develop equanimity for those issues so that you can focus your attention more skillfully on things that you can resolve. The equanimity of people who have gained awakening comes from the fact that they are no longer feeding on conditioned phenomena and so they can participate in the world when they see it's skillful, and remain unconnected with the world in areas where it's not.

As for the emptiness of all conditioned phenomena: In the original texts, this means that all phenomena are empty of self—they're not you, they're not yours. But here again, don't be in too great a hurry to see everything as empty. For the sake of the practice, we hold on to some things—such as our actions and intentions—as ours, and we try to use what control we do have over them to make them skillful. Apply the idea of "empty of self" only to habits and other actions that you can see are unskillful to do. As your standards for what counts as skillful grow more refined, you'll be letting go on more refined levels until finally there's nothing more to let go.

Cooking Past Bad Kamma

Last night we talked about developing skillful kamma in the present dealing with good and bad potentials coming in from the past, comparing it to being a cook trying to prepare good food from both the good and the bad produce coming in from your field. The raw material coming in from the field: That's what's coming from your past kamma. Your skills as a cook: That's your present kamma. We also noticed that these skills come under two main headings in the Buddha's teachings. Under the category of name, there are attention, intention, perception, feeling, and contact. Under the category of fabrication, there are three kinds: bodily fabrication, which is the breath; verbal fabrication, which is directed thought and evaluation; and mental fabrication, which is perception and feeling. You will notice that there's some overlap between these two categories. Both contain feeling and perception, and attention is very close to evaluation.

Tonight I'd like to talk in a little more detail about how to deal with bad produce coming in from the field. Usually, we want to have a choice as to the kind of food coming in from the field, but sometimes the field is producing nothing but bad kamma. You can't really feed off the crop then. So you have to feed off your present kamma instead. This will also include the skills and right views that you have developed over time, which means that they are another type of past kamma: in other words, our experiences and skills gained in the meditation. Having experience in meditation is like having a spare field to produce alternative crops when the main crop is bad.

This is one of the reasons we have to keep practicing meditation again and again: so that these alternative crops will always be ready to sprout. We keep applying right view to our actions so that it becomes habitual. Otherwise, think of how badly the mind will thrash around when faced with illness and death.

The Buddha talks about how your present state of mind can make a huge difference in your experience of past kamma. This is where he discusses the image of the lump of salt that I mentioned this afternoon. Let me read you the passage:

> "Monks, for anyone who says in whatever way a person makes kamma, that is how it is to be experienced, there's no living of the holy life, there's no opportunity for the right ending of stress. Or for anyone who says when a person makes kamma to be felt in such and such a way, that's how its

result is experienced, there is the living of the holy life, there is the opportunity for the right ending of stress. There is the case where a trifling, evil deed done by a certain individual takes him to hell. There is the case where the very same sort of trifling deed but done by another individual is experienced in the here and now and for the most part barely appears for a moment.

"Now a trifling deed done by what sort of individual takes him to hell? There is the case where a certain individual is undeveloped in contemplating the body, undeveloped in virtue, undeveloped in mind, undeveloped in discernment, restricted, small-hearted, dwelling with suffering. A trifling, evil deed done by this sort of individual takes him to hell. Now a trifling, evil deed done by what sort of individual is experienced in the here and now and for the most part barely appears for a moment? There is the case where a certain individual is developed in contemplating the body, developed in virtue, developed in mind, developed in discernment, unrestricted, large-hearted, dwelling with the unlimited. A trifling, evil deed done by this sort of individual is experienced in the here and now and for the most part barely appears for a moment.

"Suppose that a man were to drop a lump of salt into a small amount of water in a cup. What do you think? Would the water in the cup become salty because of the lump of salt and unfit to drink?" — "Yes, lord." — "Now suppose that a man were to drop a lump of salt into the River Ganges. What do you think? Would the water in the River Ganges become salty because of the lump of salt and unfit to drink?" — "No, lord."

"In the same way, there is the case where a trifling, evil deed done by one individual [the first] takes him to hell, and there is the case where the very same sort of trifling deed done by another individual is experienced in the here and now and for the most part barely appears for a moment." **[§14]**

The basic principle being explained here is that kamma is not tit-for-tat. In other words, if you kill three people, you don't have to be killed three times in response. The actual principle is that kamma tends to create a certain type of result, in terms of pleasure or pain—notice the word, "tends"—but the strength of that result depends on the state of mind when the kamma ripens. The skills of being developed in body, virtue, mind, and discernment; the skills of being unrestricted and large-hearted: These make all the difference when past bad kamma is ripening.

Three of these skills require explanation. The first is the quality of being large-hearted. This is a matter of fabricating goodwill and all of the other brahma-vihāras. If you can develop these qualities of mind, they will mitigate the results of bad past kamma. Because we talked about these developments in detail this

afternoon, we can move on to the other two.

Those are the skills of being developed in body and developed in mind. In the Buddha's eyes, being developed in body doesn't mean making your body large and strong. In another sutta, Majjhima 36, he defines being developed in body as knowing how not to be overcome by pleasure. In the same sutta, he defines being developed in mind as knowing how not to be overcome by pain. The purpose of working both with pleasure and with pain in our meditation is to develop these two skills.

One of the ways we learn not to be overcome by pleasure is by learning how to develop the pleasure of concentration. By gaining mastery over this type of pleasure, we can learn to see sensual pleasures as less and less important. And in the course of mastering concentration, we also have to learn how not to be overcome by the pleasure of the concentration itself. You may have noticed when the breath becomes pleasant and you've dropped your focus on the breath to focus on the pleasure, the mind gets very fuzzy and then begins to drift away. To maintain your concentration, you have to maintain your focus on the breath.

That means that you have to learn how not to be overcome by the pleasure. You let the pleasure do its work, whereas your work is to stay with the breath. As you master this aspect of concentration, you learn an important skill in not being overcome by the effects of past kamma, whether good or bad.

As for dealing with pain, there are many ways of developing your present kamma so that you're not overcome by pain. One is to develop the perceptions of the five recollections that we discussed the other day. In particular, you want to learn how to perceive pain as something normal. Our society regards aging, illness, and death as aberrations, but that attitude leaves us defenseless when they inevitably come, and so we're more likely to be overcome by them. Remember: Aging, illness, and death are *normal.* Keeping these facts in mind makes it easier not to get upset when pain comes.

Other teachings that help us to deal with pain: One is the Buddha's instruction concerning our duty with regard to suffering, which is to comprehend it. This directs us to use our intentions more skillfully. Instead of following the intention to run away from the pain or to suppress the pain, our intention turns to comprehend the pain. If we intentionally take a more proactive stance toward pain, we drop the mind's tendency to perceive itself as targeted or victimized by the pain.

As for attention, the Buddha tells us to ask the proper questions about the pain. For example, some questions to avoid asking include: "How long have I been experiencing this pain?" "How much longer am I going to have to experience this pain?" If you ask these questions, you're taking the past, adding the future, and piling them both on the mind in the present moment, weighing it down. Now, the

present moment cannot carry all that weight. So if these questions come up in the mind, just let them go, let them go, for they serve no positive purpose at all. Remember that there are many other questions that would serve better to make you more proactive in trying to comprehend the pain as we discussed the other day. Pay attention to those.

Finally, when you deal with pain, you can also develop more skillful perceptions around it—which, again, we discussed the other day. The important point in all these perceptions is to learn how to see the pain as something separate: separate from the mind, separate from the body. This, too, allows the pain to be much less of a weight on the mind.

When dealing with either pleasure or pain in the present moment, attention plays a major role: asking the proper questions when either pains or pleasures arise. For instance, when dealing with pleasure, you treat pleasure not as a goal but as a tool. In other words, you don't try to wallow in the pleasure as much as you can, asking yourself, "How much happiness can I squeeze out of the pleasure by wallowing here in it?" Instead you ask, "What can I do with this pleasure in order to improve the quality of the mind?" Similarly, you learn how to ask the right questions about the pain so as to investigate it. This includes, for example, the questions about the shape of the pain or the intentionality of the pain. You ask these sorts of questions to flush out any ignorant ideas you may have about pain, ideas that may be hanging on from your childhood, when you had to encounter pain before you understood language. By casting light on those hidden notions, you can free yourself from their power.

Now in addition to physical pain, the Buddha also talks about how not to suffer from the words of other people. The first thing is to learn how to depersonalize their words. The Buddha recommends two ways of doing this.

First, from Majjhima 28: The next time somebody curses you, just tell yourself, "An unpleasant sound has made contact at the ear." See if you can leave it at that. Don't add any extra stories. Don't ask any questions that would add more pain to the unpleasant contact, such as, "Why is this person saying this, why is he abusing me, why doesn't he like me, why is he evil" etc., etc. Try to keep the sound just at the ear and don't suck it into the mind.

There's an analogy that I've found useful—and, of course, this didn't come from the Buddha—and that's to make sure that your mind is not like a vacuum cleaner. When a vacuum cleaner goes through a room, it leaves all the good things behind and takes in all the bad things: the dust and the dirt. So if you find yourself taking in those unpleasant sounds and making them into big issues in the mind, do what you can to turn the vacuum cleaner off.

That covers the Buddha's first strategy for depersonalizing unpleasant words.

The Buddha's second strategy, from Majjhima 21, is to reflect on the different types of human speech that can occur in the world. There are kind words and unkind words. There are true words and untrue words. There are words that are helpful; there are words that are unhelpful. There are words said with a well-meaning mind, and words said with an ill-intentioned mind. This is normal human speech. So when something unkind, untrue, unhelpful is said to you through someone's ill intent, tell yourself, "This is normal human speech. The fact that you're being subjected to this is nothing unusual." This helps to depersonalize the words.

Several years back, a friend of mine gave me a dictionary of recent Thai slang. In Thailand, they have a Royal Academy very much like the French Academy, which, among other things, creates the official dictionary of the Thai language. The slang dictionary is called the Outside-of-the-Academy Dictionary. As I was reading through the dictionary, learning about new Thai slang words, it struck me that more than half were insults. Modern society is very creative at developing new ways to insult one another. So when you are being insulted, just remind yourself, "This is normal." That makes it a lot easier to take.

The Canon gives two other stories that help give additional skillful perceptions for dealing with hurtful speech. One, also in Majjhima 21, is called the Simile of the Saw. Suppose, the Buddha says, that a group of bandits have pinned you down. They take a two-handed saw and try to cut off your arms and legs. Even in a case like that, the Buddha says, you should not let your mind be overcome by ill will. Instead, you should try to develop a sense of goodwill even for the bandits. In fact, start with them and then expand your goodwill to fill the entire universe. Make your goodwill as expansive as the Earth—something no one can harm. Make your goodwill even more expansive, as vast as space, which no one can harm. In other words, try to develop and maintain the perception that your mind is expansive, much bigger than the harm that anyone can do to you. If you keep this simile in mind—that even if someone is trying to kill you, you should still have goodwill for that person—then, the Buddha asks, "Is there any type of speech that you could not bear?" No. The pain of the speech is so much less, and with that perception in mind, any ill will you might feel seems too petty to be worthy of your attention.

That's the first perception to hold in mind.

The second one comes in Majjhima 145, in the story of a monk named Puṇṇa. Puṇṇa was going to a very uncivilized section of India and so went to say goodbye to the Buddha. The Buddha said to him, "Those people in that area are very uncivilized. They're known to be very rough. What will you do if they insult you?"

Puṇṇa replied, "If they insult me, I will say to myself, 'These are very good people in that they're not hitting me.'"

And the Buddha said, “What if they hit you?”

“I will say to myself, ‘These are very good people in that they’re not stoning me.’”

“Suppose they stone you?”

“I’ll say, ‘These are very good people in that they’re not stabbing me.”

“What if they stab you?”

“I’ll say, ‘These are very good people in that they’re not killing me.”

“What if they kill you?”

“I will tell myself, ‘At least my death wasn’t a suicide.’”

And the Buddha said, “You’re fit to go.”

So these are some of the perceptions that help us to deal more skillfully with pain and insults. When you have these skills—

- these different perceptions,
- these different intentions with regard to pleasure and pain,
- the different things you pay attention to—in other words, the different questions you ask yourself about pleasure and pain,

—then you will find that you can deal much more skillfully with bad kamma that’s coming in from the past, without creating bad kamma in the present and without really suffering from your past kamma at all.

So try to develop these skills on a daily basis. That way you will have your alternative field of kamma ready to draw on when your other fields yield nothing but rotten vegetables.

Mindfulness of Dhammas II : The Six Sense Media

May 23, 2015

Yesterday morning we talked about the dhammas as a frame of reference, focusing on two of the topics that are directly related to meditation practice: the five hindrances and the seven factors for awakening. In each case, these fall under the four noble truths. The five hindrances come under the cause of suffering, and the seven factors for awakening come under the path, which means the hindrances should be abandoned and the factors for awakening should be developed.

This morning I want to talk about another list of topics that's useful in all situations. It's the six sense media: the eyes and forms, ears and sounds, nose and smells, tongue and tastes, body and tactile sensations, and mind and ideas. All of these things are neutral, but when you hold this frame of reference in mind you particularly want to pay attention to see what kind of clinging is arising, related to the eyes and forms or the other sense media. This is a useful framework as you go through the day because it's directly related to sense restraint.

Now, when we talk about sense restraint, it doesn't mean putting blinders on your eyes and not looking, or putting earplugs in your ears and not listening. Instead, it's a matter of paying attention to *why* you're looking, and what happens as a *result* of your looking. For many of us, we think that sense objects provoke the mind, but as you look more and more closely at how you look at things, you begin to realize that often you're looking for provocation. You want to provoke some lust in your mind, or some anger. This means that lust is doing the looking, or anger is doing the looking, and so they've taken over your eyes and ears to search for something to provoke them even further.

I'll give you an example. At the monastery, one of the few opportunities the monks have to leave the monastery is when they go pick someone up at the airport. One of the monks once admitted to me that he would often volunteer to do this because it was his opportunity to look for beautiful people. At one point he realized that this was bad for his practice, so he decided to take a different tack: He was going to look for all the signs of aging at the airport, and when he did, he

realized there were lots of signs of aging that he had never noticed before. They were there, almost everywhere, but he had missed them because he was looking for something else.

So, when you're exercising sense restraint, you want to understand the act of looking or listening, etc., as part of a causal process. You do this to make sure that the way you look or listen, etc., is an exercise in skillful kamma in the present. In other words, you have to understand your intention for looking, what you're paying attention to, and what perceptions you bring to things. For example, if you decide to perceive human beings as beautiful, you'll find that it has one sort of impact on the mind. If you change your perceptions—for example, you imagine taking off the skin of every person you look at—it'll have a different effect on the mind. This shows you again the power of kamma in the present.

This knowledge is especially useful for dealing with clinging as it arises.

Here it's important to understand that there are four types of clinging. The first is sensual clinging, which, as we explained yesterday, is not just a matter of clinging to sensual objects. We actually cling to our sensual desires. An example, of course, is wine. Wine is grape juice that has gone bad. However, there are magazines about wine, books about wine, discussions of wine, attitudes about which wines make you look sophisticated or wealthy when you drink them, the attitude that it required a lot of merit to be born in France so that you can enjoy all the best wines in the world: All of this over spoiled grape juice. People are more attached to this kind of thing than to the wine itself. This is an example of sensual clinging.

The second kind of clinging is clinging to habits and practices. This refers to the feeling that you have to do certain things in certain ways regardless of what the consequences are. I'll give you an example. There was a biologist in Austria who raised geese in his backyard. One year a mother goose had a baby goose and a few weeks later she died, so the orphaned baby goose began to imprint on the biologist. In other words, it regarded the biologist as its mother. Everywhere the biologist went, the baby goose would follow. As autumn approached, the biologist realized that he had to bring the goose inside, so one day instead of feeding the goose outside, he simply walked into the house. The goose, hungry, followed. But as soon as the goose got inside the house, it freaked out because it had never been inside a building before.

Now, the house was arranged so that the main hall ran from the door to a large window in the back. Halfway down the hall was a stairway that went up to the right to the second floor, where the biologist lived. When the biologist went in, he went up the stairs, but the young goose ran for the window, thinking that it could escape through it. When its owner called it, and it realized that it couldn't get out

the window, the goose turned around and then went up the stairs. That's where it got to eat.

From that point on, every time the goose entered the house, it would go first to the window, turn around, and then head up the stairs. With the passage of time, the trip to the window got shorter and shorter until finally the goose would simply go to that corner of the stairway, shake its foot at the window, and then go up the stairs.

One evening the biologist came home late from work. The goose was very hungry, so as soon as the door was open, it ran in and went straight up the stairs. Halfway up the stairs, though, it stopped and started to shake all over. Then finally it went very deliberately down the stairs, over to the window, and then back up the stairs.

Many of us are just like the goose. In America, psychologists talk about listening to your inner child, but when you're clinging to habits and practices—your habitual way of doing things—you're listening to your inner goose. That's the second type of clinging.

The third kind of clinging has to do with views: views having to do with the world, views having to do with yourself, views having to do with politics, all kinds of views. If you hold to them as being ends in themselves, thinking that simply having the view is a goal in itself or that it makes you a better person than other people with different views, that's clinging to views.

The fourth kind of clinging is clinging to an idea of what you are: either that you have a particular type of self or that you have no self.

Now, of these four types of clinging, three of them actually have skillful versions. You can cling skillfully to skillful habits, to right views, and to skillful views of a sense of your self. In fact, these three kinds of skillful clinging are an essential part of the path.

When we're practicing sense restraint, we're trying to see if any of these four kinds of clinging are arising, because these are things that we feed on.

So as you go through the day, try to figure out what you're feeding on as you look and listen, etc., to the sensory world outside. If you see that an unskillful type of clinging is arising, try to let it go. As long as you're on the path and skillful forms of clinging arise, try to develop those. There will come a point when you want to abandon all forms of clinging, but that's at the end of the path. In the meantime, try to foster skillful types of clinging as you go through the day.

The Buddha recommends perceiving mindfulness of your body—such as mindfulness of breathing—as a post, and sense restraint as a leash that ties you to the post. As long as you can make the body comfortable through the breath, you will be less likely to go looking for food through your eyes, ears, nose, etc. When

you're no longer so hungry, it'll be easier to recognize instances of clinging as they try to take over your senses, and instead to let them go.

This is called bringing your life into the practice so that the whole life becomes part of the practice. That way, the practice isn't done only when you're sitting with your eyes closed or when you're on a retreat. It's done every time you look at something or listen to something. In that way, it can develop momentum.

Training in Skillful Kamma

We've mentioned many times that kamma is complex and that it's very difficult to draw direct connections from one action to its results or to predict how soon those results will come to fruition. Nevertheless, there are patterns of cause and effect from which we can learn, so that we don't have to reinvent the Dhamma wheel every time we act. These patterns are most clearly related to the practice of virtue, but we will see—in line with the principle of scale invariance—that they relate to the practice of concentration and discernment as well.

Remember, these are all patterns of *tendencies.* Given that we, for the most part, are doing all kinds of things all the time, our karmic mix may weaken or strengthen these tendencies. But knowing what the tendencies are will help give us guidance as to which actions are good to add to the mix and which are best avoided.

To begin with, there are eight principles of unskillful actions that tend to lead to specific kinds of undesirable results in the next life. Taking life leads to a short life in the next lifetime. Stealing leads to the loss of one's own wealth. Illicit sexual behavior leads to rivalry and revenge. Telling lies leads to being falsely accused. Divisive tale-bearing leads to the breaking of one's friendships. Abusive speech leads to unappealing sounds—an interesting connection. Frivolous chattering leads to words that are not worth taking to heart. The drinking of fermented and distilled liquors—and this includes even the best wines—leads to mental derangement. That's one set of patterns **[§15].**

Another set of patterns: If you harm beings with your fists, with clods, sticks, or knives, it leads to being sickly when you're reborn. If you're ill-tempered and easily upset, even only when lightly criticized, if you grow offended, provoked, malicious and resentful, if you show annoyance, aversion, and bitterness, then when you're reborn you will tend to be ugly. If you're envious, if you envy, begrudge, and brood about other people's gains, their honor, respect, reverence, then when you're reborn you'll tend to be uninfluential. Nobody will want to listen to you. If you do not give food, drinks, cloth, or other gifts to people worthy of respect, then you'll tend to be poor when you're reborn. If you are obstinate and arrogant, if you don't give respect to those who deserve respect, then you'll tend to be low-born whenever you are reborn. If you don't ask reliable people about what's skillful or not, you will tend to be reborn without much wisdom or discernment.

That's the negative side of the list. There's also a positive side: If you refrain from harming other beings physically, you will tend to be reborn with good health. If you're not easily provoked to show anger, you will tend to be reborn beautiful. If you're not envious of others, you will tend to be influential. If you give gifts, you will tend to be reborn wealthy. If you're respectful to those who deserve respect, you will tend to be high-born. If you ask reliable people about what's skillful or not, you will tend to be reborn with wisdom and discernment **[§16].**

There's another general principle, which is that if you engage frequently in one kind of act, it tends to lead you to do other similar acts. For example, if you harm other beings in search of power, then you don't want the truth to be found out. Because you go into denial, you have less and less opportunity to learn the truth about anything worthwhile **[§17]**. As a result, you'll find it easy to engage in actions that become more and more unskillful: a positive feedback loop that leads in a downward spiral. On the other hand, if you're virtuous—which includes being truthful—any vows you make tend to succeed. If you use that success wisely, that becomes a positive feedback loop that leads upward.

Many of these principles are codified into precepts and rules, but don't think that they relate only to external behavior. If you practice in line with them, they also translate into internal virtues in the practice of concentration and discernment. Ajaan Lee, for example, gives some nice similes for how those first eight principles also apply to concentration practice.

To begin with, the taking of life: When you're sitting and concentrating and your mind is beginning to settle down, don't kill your goodness. Don't kill your concentration. Look after its life carefully.

As for stealing, don't steal other people's bad qualities to think about. You never asked their permission to take their bad qualities and to brood over them. If you're going to steal their qualities, take their good ones and think about those instead. Ajaan Lee also says that if you take the bad words of other people and brood over them, it's like taking something they've spit out and then eating it yourself. And then when you get sick, who are you going to blame?

As for avoiding illicit sexual behavior, this refers to not getting involved in sensual fantasies while you're meditating.

As for the precept against telling lies: Don't lie to yourself about your meditation, and don't lie to others. "Lying to others" refers to this: When you're sitting here, you look like you're meditating, but are you really meditating? If you're not, you're lying.

Divisive tale-bearing: Don't get involved in any thoughts that would split you away from your friends, i.e., your breath and your body here in the present moment.

As for abusive speech, don't get involved in any inner tirades against yourself that would get you discouraged. Sometimes you'll hear of Thai ajaans yelling at their students, criticizing their behavior, but as they explain it, they're trying to strengthen the student's morale, not weaken it. So if you have to criticize your behavior to yourself in order to get back on the path, do it in a way that lifts your spirits—and sometimes the criticism will have to be strong to get the desired effect—but don't do it in a way that gets your spirits down.

Frivolous chattering refers to any random thoughts that come in and pull you away from the breath.

And as for the drinking of fermented and distilled liquors, this refers to sitting here with no mindfulness and alertness. Your mind is supposed to be following the path, but it's weaving back and forth, and finally falls down on the side of the path in a stupor, without any mindfulness.

These are some of the ways in which the eight unskillful external actions are related to the internal action of practicing concentration.

As for discernment, the practice of abandoning unskillful actions and developing skillful ones develops discernment on two main levels. On the first level, discernment deals with clearly seeing which is which: what's skillful, what's not. On the next level, you develop your discernment by learning how to motivate yourself effectively to develop what's skillful and to abandon what's not. In some cases, this is easy; in others, not. The cases where it's hard: Those are the ones that force your discernment to grow.

A sutta passage describes four kinds of actions: There are actions that are pleasant to do and give a profitable result, and actions that are unpleasant to do and give an unprofitable result. These two are no-brainers. It's easy to motivate yourself to do the first sort of action and to avoid the second sort. However, there are also some kinds of actions that are unpleasant to do, but they are profitable. There are others that are pleasant to do, but are unprofitable. And it's in reference to these last two types of actions that the Buddha says you can be known either as a fool or a wise person. I'll read you the passage:

> "As for the course of action that is unpleasant to do, but that, when done, leads to what is profitable, it's in light of this course of action that one may be known as a fool or a wise person. For a fool doesn't reflect, 'Even though this course of action is unpleasant to do, still when it is done, it leads to what is profitable,' so he doesn't do it, and thus the non-doing of that course of action leads to what is unprofitable for him. But a wise person reflects, 'Even though this course of action is unpleasant to do, still when it is done, it leads to what is profitable,' so he does it, and thus the doing of that course of action leads to what is profitable for him. As to the course of action that is

> pleasant, but that, when done, leads to what is unprofitable, it's in light of this course of action that one may be known as a fool or a wise person. For a fool doesn't reflect, 'Even though this course of action is pleasant to do, still when it is done, it leads to what is unprofitable,' so he does it, and thus the doing of that course of action leads to what is unprofitable for him. But a wise person reflects, 'Even though this course of action is pleasant to do, still when it is done, it leads to what is unprofitable,' so he doesn't do it, and thus the non-doing of that course of action leads to what is profitable for him." **[§18]**

As this passage shows, one measure of your discernment is your ability to talk yourself out of doing things that you like to do but you know would lead to bad results. You have to learn how to use psychology with yourself and motivate yourself to avoid things that are unprofitable. At the same time, if something is unpleasant to do but you know that ultimately the results will be good, a sign of discernment is knowing how to talk yourself into doing it. In either case, discernment here is pragmatic, strategic. It doesn't deal with abstractions. It grows by learning how to look for the good results and using psychology to get yourself to act in a way that will yield those results.

So, in looking at these various courses of action, you can see that skillful kamma is not just a matter of precepts or of external virtue. It also relates to concentration and discernment. All levels of skillful action are interrelated. This also means, though, that having good virtue and understanding the principles of kamma are an important foundation for the entirety of the path. The skills you develop when dealing with actions on the external level will help you on the internal level too.

And don't think that this training stops at the foundation. It can actually take you all the way to the end of the path.

We've had a number of questions about why we focus on the issue of skillful and unskillful actions when instead we could focus on a sense of emptiness or space around those actions. The questions seem to assume that the issues of skillful and unskillful action are like a briar patch that you'd rather avoid if possible. But in reality, you can't avoid it. Awakening isn't in the air or the space around us. Awakening is found by going through the middle of the briar patch, but the briars are only on the outside of the patch. Once you get to the inside of the patch, the plants inside are a lot nicer.

Remember what I said a few days ago, that ultimate freedom is found next to our freedom of choice in the present moment, and we get to know that freedom of choice best by trying to get more sensitive as to what is skillful and what is unskillful in our actions. In the beginning this may be difficult, but as you get more and more adept at it, the path becomes more joyful. And it's in the middle of the

patch of briars that the ultimate happiness lies. The emptiness and spaciousness outside the briar patch are conditioned things. Only when you understand that they're conditioned and will eventually let you down: That's when you'll be willing to go into the patch.

Q: Don't you think that asking ourselves which stage we have reached is a reinforcement of our ego?

A: I'm not asking you to ask which stage you've reached. Simply notice, when you're doing something, whether it works or not. I'm also asking you to become more sensitive to the results of the action.

Q: Personally, I'm content with simply walking along the path and improving myself to get further and further away from suffering. What do you think of that?

A: That's perfectly fine. To alleviate suffering is a perfectly fine motivation, but ideally you won't rest content with just a little bit of improvement. It's not a question of focusing on which stage you're at, it's simply realizing that the less suffering you cause, the better it is for you and for other people—and if you're really attentive and honest, you can lessen suffering to a level you wouldn't have dreamed possible.

Mindfulness of Dhammas III : The Five Clinging-Aggregates

For the past two days, we've been talking about the fourth frame of reference. So far, we've talked about the four noble truths, the five hindrances, the seven factors for awakening, and the six sense media. There's only one list remaining, which is the list of the five clinging-aggregates. This is the list where the practice of mindfulness and the teachings on kamma come together in a profound way.

The five aggregates are these: form, feeling, perception, fabrication, and consciousness. You may find these terms familiar because we've been talking about them most of the week. Feeling, perception, and fabrication are the activities we use to take the raw materials from our past kamma and fix them as food for consciousness. That gives us four of the aggregates right there.

Form is the remaining one. Basically, it applies to your body, but also to any physical impressions at the five senses.

Now these five aggregates cover the raw material from the past, but they also include our present actions and the results of our present actions. In other words, they cover a lot. In particular, they analyze our experience in a way that allows us to see how we feed on things.

Think of when you're physically hungry. On the one hand, there's your body, and on the other hand, there are the possible things outside that you could eat. All of those come under form.

Then there's the feeling of hunger and the feeling of fullness that comes after you have eaten. Those come under feeling.

Then there's perception. This applies to your perception of your hunger, as when you recognize a hunger for bread, a hunger for cheese, a hunger for salt, a hunger for water, whatever. You learn how to recognize what the hunger is and then you look around to see what kind of food will fit that hunger. For example, when you're a young child exploring the world around you, one of the first things you do when you find something new is to put it in your mouth to see if it's food. And this is how we get the perceptions of "food" and "not-food." All of this comes under perception.

Fabrication covers your intention to eat, your attention to the different things

around you that you could eat, and all the other processes you have to follow in order to take raw food and make it edible: chopping it, cooking it, mixing it with other things.

And then finally, there's the consciousness of all these things.

So looking at experience in terms of the five aggregates helps us to focus our attention on what the Buddha says is our fundamental activity as beings: Beings have to eat. This is how they continue to be. Without taking in food—physical, mental, and emotional—we couldn't maintain our identity as beings.

Now the Buddha wants us to perceive this feeding as suffering, because only when we get past this kind of activity can we find a true state of happiness. But because our identity is centered on feeding, this perception goes against the grain. We normally turn a blind eye to the suffering that our feeding causes, largely because we can't imagine not feeding; we don't want to look too closely at the harm we're doing. We don't even think of what we're doing as feeding.

So a lot of the training lies in sensitizing ourselves to what we're doing as we feed, so that we'll be more inclined to give the Buddha the benefit of the doubt—maybe there is something better than the identity we create out of feeding; maybe there's an experience of happiness that doesn't need to feed.

As we go through our practice, one of the purposes of what we're doing is to get more and more sensitive to these activities. In fact, it's necessary to see that they are activities. When we hear the word "aggregate," it sounds like a pile of gravel, but we have to realize that these are activities, actions that we do. The Buddha defines the aggregates as verbs: We feel, we perceive, we fabricate, and so on. And the question always with any activity is whether it's worth doing or not. As we're developing virtue, concentration, and discernment, we're using these activities to shape our experience in a more skillful way. In fact, the more skillful we get at these activities, the more we understand them. This is why you can't let go of any clinging to these activities simply by knowing that they're suffering. You have to explore them first through your own skills.

The practice of concentration is a primary example. When you're practicing concentration, form would be breath. The feeling would be the sense of ease that comes when focusing on the breath. Perception would be the mental images you hold in mind concerning the breath that help you stay with the breath. Fabrication would cover all of your activities to make the concentration better: in other words, making your attention stronger, making your intention stronger, and making your evaluation more subtle. And then finally, consciousness is awareness of all of these things.

In this way, concentration becomes our food on the path. As we get better at fabricating this form of food and we develop a more appreciative taste for it, we

begin to look at the other ways that we feed on life and we can see areas in which they are harmful, ways that are simply not worth the effort. This is one of the ways in which concentration helps us to let go of very unskillful activities that we would otherwise hold onto.

When the Buddha has us use the five clinging-aggregates as a framework for establishing mindfulness, the main focus is at the point in the practice when we get the mind in a good state of concentration and are ready to develop discernment. And this is where the emphasis on "clinging" comes in. You may remember the four types of clinging, which are clinging to sensuality, clinging to habits and practices, clinging to views, and clinging to a theory about your self-identity.

Now, the Pāli word for "clinging," *upādāna,* can also mean feeding. What you begin to realize as your understanding of meditation grows more subtle is that you not only feed on your present experience, using the activities of the aggregates, but you are also feeding on the activities that you do to shape that experience. In fact, that's where your sense of your self is most centered. You feed not just on food but also on the way you feed. You cling to the way you feed, and you identify yourself strongly around it.

Once this point comes into focus in your meditation, you can begin to take the clinging apart. You begin to see that no matter how skillfully you shape your present experience, you're never finished. You have to keep doing it again and again. This may not be disturbing at the beginning, especially as you're gaining mastery over the concentration, but at some point there comes the realization that this is becoming burdensome. The work will never end. Even though your mind can gain good states of concentration, with a sense of ease, a sense of pleasure that causes no harm, it's not good enough. You want something better than that.

This is when you turn in to look more deeply, and in particular at the act of fabrication. You see that it's composed of acts of intention and attention—and because the mind is growing more and more quiet, you can now see very subtle acts of intention and attention. Your attention is always directed to what to do next, what to do next, what to do next, what to do next. Your intention at that point is to find something that goes beyond this. And there comes a point when you realize that your choices come down to very simple ones: either to stay here where you're focused or to go focus someplace else. But you also see that either choice will involve stress.

At that moment you begin to realize that there's another choice, which is neither here nor there, and that you don't have to keep asking the question, what to do, what to do. You abandon both attention and intention, and that's the moment when things open up in the mind. This is where the first level of awakening can occur.

One of the first things you realize when you experience the result of this letting go is that the Buddha was right. There really is a dimension that can be experienced that's deathless, totally outside of space and time. There's no fabrication. None of the aggregates are there, and yet there's still an awareness—beyond the senses, even the sense of the mind. When you return from that state, you realize that there was nothing you did to create it. This is the point that's called the end of kamma **[§5].**

This is how mindfulness practice and issues of kamma come together, because this last stage of the practice corresponds to the third stage of mindfulness practice, which the suttas describe as follows:

> *"Or his mindfulness that 'There is a body'… 'There are feelings' … 'There is mind' … 'There are mental qualities' is maintained (simply) to the extent of knowledge & recollection. And he remains independent, unsustained by [not clinging to] anything in the world." — DN 22*

In other words, at this stage you're not doing anything else beyond simply remembering to notice what's present. It's only on this level, after you've done all the work of developing the skills of the path, that you can simply be noting what you've developed. This is the level of mindfulness that's on the verge of awakening.

Remember what we said the other day about points of resonance in complex systems—the points where the system, following its own inner laws, falls apart. In mathematical terms, this happens when the equations describing the workings of the system reach a point where one of the members in the equations gets divided by zero. This, of course, produces an undefined result, which means that if an object within the system—like the Moon—strayed into a resonance point, it would no longer be defined by the causal network determining the system. It would be set free.

In a similar way, when the mind is on the third level of mindfulness practice, it's doing only one thing: remembering to notice. And as Ajaan Lee once said, when the mind is one, it's possible to make it zero. In other words, you can go from one repeated intention to zero intention in the present, and when there's zero intention in the present—which is not easy, but it's possible—there is no present experience. The mind is freed to a dimension outside of time and space. That's the first taste of awakening.

So we've been talking this week about mindfulness and kamma, and finally we've come to this point where mindfulness practice and the understanding of kamma come fully together. Actually, they've been intertwined all along. Mindfulness is a matter of remembering to do things as skillfully as possible, and the more skillful you become, the more sensitive you become. When you get

sensitive to the activities of clinging and the activities of the aggregates—seeing them both as activities, and seeing the clinging as suffering—this is how you fulfill the duty with regard to the five clinging-aggregates, which, because they are the first noble truth, is to comprehend them. To comprehend means to overcome any passion for them. When you abandon passion, you let go of clinging to these things, and you no longer fabricate them. When you don't fabricate them, you don't have to put a stop to them. They cease on their own.

When we talk about the issue of not-self and apply it to the aggregates, remember that not-self is not a teaching on a metaphysical issue. It's more a value judgment—a judgment as to what's worth doing and what's not. Remember that the aggregates are actions. As long as they're helpful on the path, you engage in them, you feed on them—in other words, you have to cling to them. But when you've reached the point when you don't have to do anything more, then there's no advantage to holding onto them. They're not worth doing anymore. That's when you let go.

And as for what's left after that happens, neither the term "self" nor "not-self" applies, because those terms are perceptions, and at that point perception no longer serves a purpose.

After the first stage of awakening is reached, you return to your experience of space and time, but now your relationship to it is different. You no longer doubt the Buddha's teachings, you no longer believe that the aggregates really are you, and you no longer cling to habitual actions. You see that actions are a means to an end, and the best actions are those that continue developing the path until you've reached total awakening.

So this is how the teachings on mindfulness and kamma come together. When they take you all the way to full awakening, then you no longer need them for the sake of your own happiness. Mindfulness has done its work, your kamma has become as skillful as possible, and you come to a dimension where there is no more kamma, no more duties, nothing more that you need to feed on because the mind has no more hunger. As long as you're still alive, you're actually in a position where you can help people more effectively because of the fact that you're no longer embroiled in the need to feed.

Now this may seem very far away, but file it away for your mindfulness to draw on, because when you're following the path, sometimes it's good to have a map. When you reach an attainment that seems interesting or important, check it against the map. If there's still any sense of hunger, a sense of stress of any kind, even very subtle, then you're still not at the end. There's still more to do—because when the Buddha taught awakening, he taught total freedom from all these things. This may mean extra work, but it's well worth the effort. When absolute freedom is

possible, don't you want to find out what it's like?

Q: I've come to meditation to help me bear the atrocities of the world. What is awakening? Is it a moment of conscience when one embraces all the sorrows of the world, and in that case means hello to all sorrows or is it on the contrary a state of total forgetfulness and egotism, in that case it would be hello to guilt? So, which is it?

A: Neither. Remember the image of feeding. Ordinarily, we feed on the world, both physically and mentally, in order to gain happiness and maintain our identity as beings. But when you gain full awakening, the mind no longer needs to feed because it already has enough in terms of its own happiness. When you've reached that state, you can engage in the world without having to feed on it. You can help those whom you can help, and you don't have to suffer in cases where you can't help. In this way, you're neither embracing the sorrows of the world nor are you running away from them. Instead you have a different relationship to the world entirely. You bring gifts to the world without needing to ask anything from it.

Q: Are there different degrees of awakening?

A: Yes. There are four levels altogether. The first level is stream-entry, when you gain your first experience of the deathless. This guarantees that you will be reborn no more than seven more times, and that none of those rebirths will ever fall below the human level. The second level is once-returning, which guarantees that you will return only once more to the human world and then gain full awakening. The third level is non-return, which guarantees that you will never return to this world. Instead, you will be reborn in a very high level of heaven, one of the Brahmā worlds called the Pure Abodes, and gain full awakening there. The fourth level is arahantship, which frees you from birth and death entirely.

The different levels have different results because they cut through different levels of defilement, called fetters, that bind you to the processes of birth and death. Stream entry cuts through the fetters of self-identity views, doubt, and attachment to habits and practices. Once-return weakens passion, aversion, and delusion, but doesn't cut through them. Non-return cuts through the fetters of sensual passion and irritation. Arahantship cuts through the fetters of passion for form, passion for formlessness—these two refer to passion for the different levels of jhāna—restlessness, conceit, and ignorance.

Q: Once those levels have been attained, are they fully attained?

A: Final awakening is totally attained, once and for all. As for the lower levels of awakening, mindfulness is still not total, so people who have attained those levels

can still be reborn, and when they are reborn, they forget the attainment they had before. But they are guaranteed to re-attain it in their next life.

Q: When we leave this life after having with a certain amount of difficulty achieved a certain degree of awakening, when we return, do we return with the same degree of awakening after having pursued it, or is it necessary to start all over again?

A: We do start over again, but it's going to be easier the next time around.

Q: When a person's entered into the stream, then when he is reborn, does he forget the fact? Is it that they lose the peace of mind that they had?

A: Yes. They also forget the fact that they had that attainment, and they can also be trained in wrong views. And they can break some of the precepts. But when they come across the Dhamma, they realize that this is what they really believe in. And he or she is guaranteed to have the stream-entry experience again at some point in the next life, and so will discover that peace and that solidity of virtue all over again.

Q: Is it possible to have fear of awakening?

A: Yes, it is possible to have fear of awakening. Usually it's a matter of your defilements. They don't want you to be awakened. There's also fear of abandoning your sense of who you are, which is why the Buddha has you focus not on what you *are* but on what you're *doing*. When you focus on your actions, then the fear of awakening gets weaker because you see more and more clearly that your actions are causing suffering, but if you make them more skillful the suffering goes down. As you keep pursuing the issue of skillful actions in greater precision, your own concern about what you *are* goes down as well. And that weakens your fear of awakening.

Q: Can one attain awakening without practicing meditation?

A: No.

Kamma & Mindfulness Together

May 24, 2015

Last night we talked about awakening and the last stages of the path leading there. The purpose was to give you a general idea of where the path is going and to give rise to a skillful desire to follow the path.

However, whenever talking about awakening, there are always two dangers. The first danger is thinking that awakening is so far away that you give up any hope of attaining it. The other danger comes from the fact that there are many stages of concentration that sound very similar to awakening, and if you attain one of those you may think that you've attained awakening when in fact you haven't. You're still stuck in a fabricated state.

In both cases, the danger lies in giving up your pursuit of being more skillful in your actions. The path to the end of suffering exists, but you stop or turn around.

One way to avoid these dangers begins with having a right understanding of both kamma and mindfulness. Remember that the important principle underlying kamma is based on the causal pattern that the Buddha discovered during his own awakening: that our present experience is composed of the results of past actions, our present actions—in particular, our present intentions—and the results of our present intentions. He also realized that the fact of having a present experience comes from our present kamma. Without present intentions, the results of past actions—and, of course, the result of present intentions—wouldn't appear in our experience. This is because, as he explained in dependent co-arising, our experience of our present intentions comes prior to our experience of the past kamma known through the senses.

Some of the lessons to be drawn from this are that we are free to make choices in the present, but there are also patterns that we can learn from. In other words, by paying careful attention to our choices and their results, we can learn from them to become more and more skillful in our actions now and into the future.

Another lesson is that ultimate freedom lies right here next to our freedom of choice. So the more attention we pay to our choices, the closer we get to ultimate freedom.

This is where the practice of mindfulness comes in. Remember that mindfulness

is not simply being aware of the present or simply accepting what's happening. It actually involves three qualities. First, pay attention right here to your actions and results: That's alertness. Second, maintain the whole-hearted intention to make choices that are more and more skillful: That's ardency. Then keep all of this in mind, remembering that it's always possible to learn from your mistakes—and from the things you've done well—which enables you to act more skillfully on into the future. Keeping this in mind is mindfulness.

If you follow these understandings of kamma and mindfulness and apply them to the practice of the noble eightfold path, you will become more and more sensitive to your actions, and more and more sensitive to the process of fabrication in the present moment. In particular, as you observe the precepts and practice right concentration, you increase your sensitivity so that if any spacious state arises in your practice, you will be more likely to see whether it's fabricated. This helps to protect you from that second danger, of over-estimating your attainment.

As for the first danger, even though you may not reach awakening any time soon, if you keep this understanding of kamma and mindfulness in mind and apply it to your actions, your life becomes a progressively better life. You learn to delight in abandoning unskillful qualities and to delight in developing skillful qualities. Right there you possess what the Buddha called one of the values of the noble ones. You become less harmful to yourself and others.

This teaching is also empowering: You realize you have the power to make skillful changes in your life, and the ability to suffer less and less from what you cannot change. The sense of self that you develop around doing this becomes a healthy sense of self: one that develops around the willingness always to learn. As long as you need a sense of self, this is a good one to have.

In following these teachings, you also develop what the Buddha called the seven noble treasures. These are forms of wealth that don't take anything away from anyone else and place no burden on the world. They are treasures that support you in this lifetime and also on into your next lives.

First, you develop a sense of conviction that your actions really do make a difference, and therefore it really is important to be very careful about them.

Second, you develop your virtue, which basically means avoiding any action that you know would be harmful. This is a type of protection. If you have not harmed others, then no harm will come to you. When you look back on your own actions, there's nothing to regret. This allows you to open your mind more, and, as we noted the other day, if there's no reason for regret, it's easier to be mindful because more of your memory is open and available to you. There are no walls hiding things away.

Third, you develop a very healthy sense of shame, which means that, at the

thought of doing something unskillful, you would feel ashamed to do it. This also means that if you realize you've done something unskillful in the past, you try not to suffer remorse for it. You realize that we all make mistakes and the best thing, when you recognize a mistake, is to learn from it so as not to repeat it. That's the most that can be expected of a human being. That's the third noble treasure.

The fourth noble treasure is a sense of compunction. This means that if you look at an action and see that it would have harmful consequences, you take that fact seriously. You do your best to avoid any harmful long-term consequences. A good test for thinking about the long term is this: Ask yourself, "Suppose on my deathbed, I look back on my life and I think about the choices I'm making right now. What would I like to look back on as the choice I made?" That'll give you a good guide as to what would be a skillful course of action. That's the fourth noble treasure.

The fifth noble treasure is learning, especially learning the Dhamma. Try to read as much good Dhamma as you can, listen to good Dhamma, try to associate with people who embody the good Dhamma in their actions. Then, when the lessons you learn from these things are appropriate for any difficult situation that comes up in your life, they will come rushing to your aid. In my own case, the year after Ajaan Fuang died, there was a lot of disturbance in the monastery. Even in monasteries, they have power struggles. And as I was dealing with many difficult situations, some of the things that Ajaan Fuang said came to mind and gave good guidance as to what to do. So in this way, learning is a treasure because it helps you figure out what to do in cases where otherwise you would feel lost. That's the fifth noble treasure.

The sixth noble treasure is generosity. If you learn to be generous, on the one hand your own mind becomes broader and so you have a larger mind to live in. It's like living in a large house. Everywhere you look around, there's space. If you're not generous, it's like living in a narrow house. On the other hand, the fact that you're generous also helps in your social life. It helps to break down boundaries between you and the people around you, and makes social life a lot more congenial. That's the sixth noble treasure.

The seventh is discernment, which is your ability to distinguish what is skillful from what is not. You take what you've learned from the Dhamma on this issue and apply it to your actions, and over time you become more and more able to distinguish these things on your own. That way your own discernment becomes more reliable. Wherever you go, you can depend on your own discernment to see you through any difficulties. Ajaan Lee made a comparison. Of these noble treasures, he said, this last is the most important. If you have discernment, then even if all you have is a machete, you can set yourself up in life.

So as we pay more and more attention to our actions, being mindful of the lessons we've learned from them as we follow the path of virtue, concentration, and discernment, we develop more and more our ability to lighten the load of suffering in our lives. Of all the treasures that exist in the world, this ability is the most valuable.

Readings : Kamma

§1. "This is the way leading to discernment: when visiting a contemplative or brahman, to ask: 'What is skillful, venerable sir? What is unskillful? What is blameworthy? What is blameless? What should be cultivated? What should not be cultivated? What, when I do it, will be for my long-term harm & suffering? Or what, when I do it, will be for my long-term welfare & happiness?'" — *MN 135*

§2. *Mundane right view:* "There is what is given, what is offered, what is sacrificed. There are fruits & results of good & bad actions. There is this world & the next world. There is mother & father. There are spontaneously reborn beings; there are contemplatives & brahmans who, faring rightly & practicing rightly, proclaim this world & the next after having directly known & realized it for themselves." — *MN 117*

Transcendent right view: "Knowledge with reference to stress, knowledge with reference to the origination of stress, knowledge with reference to the cessation of stress, knowledge with reference to the way of practice leading to the cessation of stress." — *MN 141*

§3. At that time Ven. Rāhula [the Buddha's son who, according to the Commentary, was seven at the time] was staying at the Mango Stone. Then the Blessed One, emerging from his seclusion in the late afternoon, went to where Ven. Rāhula was staying at the Mango Stone. Ven. Rāhula saw him coming from afar and, on seeing him, set out a seat & water for washing the feet. The Blessed One sat down on the seat set out and, having sat down, washed his feet. Ven. Rāhula, bowing down to the Blessed One, sat to one side.

Then the Blessed One, having left a little bit of the remaining water in the water dipper, said to Ven. Rāhula, "Rāhula, do you see this little bit of remaining water left in the water dipper?"

"Yes sir."

"That's how little of a contemplative there is in anyone who feels no shame at telling a deliberate lie."

Having tossed away the little bit of remaining water, the Blessed One said to

Ven. Rāhula, “Rāhula, do you see how this little bit of remaining water is tossed away?”

“Yes, sir.”

“Rāhula, whatever there is of a contemplative in anyone who feels no shame at telling a deliberate lie is tossed away just like that.”

Having turned the water dipper upside down, the Blessed One said to Ven. Rāhula, “Rāhula, do you see how this water dipper is turned upside down?”

“Yes, sir.”

“Rāhula, whatever there is of a contemplative in anyone who feels no shame at telling a deliberate lie is turned upside down just like that.”

Having turned the water dipper right-side up, the Blessed One said to Ven. Rāhula, “Rāhula, do you see how empty & hollow this water dipper is?”

“Yes, sir.”

“Rāhula, whatever there is of a contemplative in anyone who feels no shame at telling a deliberate lie is empty & hollow just like that.

“Rāhula, it’s like a royal elephant: immense, pedigreed, accustomed to battles, its tusks like chariot poles. Having gone into battle, it uses its forefeet & hindfeet, its forequarters & hindquarters, its head & ears & tusks & tail, but will simply hold back its trunk. The elephant trainer notices that and thinks, ‘This royal elephant has not given up its life to the king.’ But when the royal elephant… having gone into battle, uses its forefeet & hindfeet, its forequarters & hindquarters, its head & ears & tusks & tail & his trunk, the trainer notices that and thinks, ‘This royal elephant has given up its life to the king. There is nothing it will not do.’

“In the same way, Rāhula, when anyone feels no shame in telling a deliberate lie, there is no evil, I tell you, he will not do. Thus, Rāhula, you should train yourself, ‘I will not tell a deliberate lie even in jest.’

“What do you think, Rāhula: What is a mirror for?”

“For reflection, sir.”

“In the same way, Rāhula, bodily actions, verbal actions, & mental actions are to be done with repeated reflection.

“Whenever you want to perform a bodily action, you should reflect on it: ‘This bodily action I want to perform—would it lead to self-affliction, to the affliction of others, or to both? Is it an unskillful bodily action, with painful consequences, painful results?’ If, on reflection, you know that it would lead to self-affliction, to the affliction of others, or to both; it would be an unskillful bodily action with painful consequences, painful results, then any bodily action of that sort is absolutely unfit for you to do. But if on reflection you know that it would not cause affliction… it would be a skillful bodily action with happy consequences, happy

results, then any bodily action of that sort is fit for you to do. [Similarly with verbal actions & mental actions.]

"While you are performing a bodily action, you should reflect on it: 'This bodily action I am doing—is it leading to self-affliction, to the affliction of others, or to both? Is it an unskillful bodily action, with painful consequences, painful results?' If, on reflection, you know that it is leading to self-affliction, to affliction of others, or both… you should give it up. But if on reflection you know that it is not… you may continue with it. [Similarly with verbal actions & mental actions.]

"Having performed a bodily action, you should reflect on it.… If, on reflection, you know that it led to self-affliction, to the affliction of others, or to both; it was an unskillful bodily action with painful consequences, painful results, then you should confess it, reveal it, lay it open to the Teacher or to a knowledgeable companion in the holy life. Having confessed it… you should exercise restraint in the future. But if on reflection you know that it did not lead to affliction… it was a skillful bodily action with happy consequences, happy results, then you should stay mentally refreshed & joyful, training day & night in skillful mental qualities. [Similarly with verbal actions.]

"Having performed a mental action, you should reflect on it.… If, on reflection, you know that it led to self-affliction, to the affliction of others, or to both; it was an unskillful mental action with painful consequences, painful results, then you should feel horrified, humiliated, & disgusted with it. Feeling horrified… you should exercise restraint in the future. But if on reflection you know that it did not lead to affliction… it was a skillful mental action with happy consequences, happy results, then you should stay mentally refreshed & joyful, training day & night in skillful mental qualities.

"Rāhula, all the contemplatives & brahmans in the course of the past who purified their bodily actions, verbal actions, & mental actions, did it through repeated reflection on their bodily actions, verbal actions, & mental actions in just this way.

"All the contemplatives & brahmans in the course of the future.… All the contemplatives & brahmans at present who purify their bodily actions, verbal actions, & mental actions, do it through repeated reflection on their bodily actions, verbal actions, & mental actions in just this way.

"So, Rāhula, you should train yourself: 'I will purify my bodily actions… my verbal actions… my mental actions through repeated reflection.' That's how you should train yourself."

That is what the Blessed One said. Gratified, Ven. Rāhula delighted in the Blessed One's words. — *MN 61*

§4. "Intention, I tell you, is kamma. Intending, one does kamma by way of body, speech, & intellect.

"And what is the cause by which kamma comes into play? Contact.…

"And what is the diversity in kamma? There is kamma to be experienced in hell, kamma to be experienced in the realm of common animals, kamma to be experienced in the realm of the hungry shades, kamma to be experienced in the human world, kamma to be experienced in the heavenly worlds. [In the Buddhist cosmology, sojourns in hell or in heaven, as in the other realms, are not eternal. After the force of one's kamma leading to rebirth in those levels has worn out, one is reborn elsewhere.] …

"And what is the result of kamma? The result of kamma is of three sorts, I tell you: that which arises right here & now, that which arises later [in this lifetime], and that which arises following that.…

"And what is the cessation of kamma? From the cessation of contact is the cessation of kamma; and just this noble eightfold path… is the path of practice leading to the cessation of kamma.

"Now when a disciple of the noble ones discerns kamma in this way, the cause by which kamma comes into play in this way, the diversity of kamma in this way, the result of kamma in this way, the cessation of kamma in this way, & the path of practice leading to the cessation of kamma in this way, then he discerns this penetrative holy life as the cessation of kamma." — *AN 6:63*

§5. "Monks, these four types of kamma have been directly known, verified, & announced by me. Which four? There is kamma that is dark with dark result. There is kamma that is bright with bright result. There is kamma that is dark & bright with dark & bright result. There is kamma that is neither dark nor bright with neither dark nor bright result, leading to the ending of kamma.

"And what is kamma that is dark with dark result? There is the case where a certain person fabricates an injurious bodily fabrication, fabricates an injurious verbal fabrication, fabricates an injurious mental fabrication. Having fabricated an injurious bodily fabrication, having fabricated an injurious verbal fabrication, having fabricated an injurious mental fabrication, he rearises in an injurious world. On rearising in an injurious world, he is there touched by injurious contacts. Touched by injurious contacts, he experiences feelings that are exclusively painful, like those of the beings in hell. This is called kamma that is dark with dark result.

"And what is kamma that is bright with bright result? There is the case where a certain person fabricates a non-injurious bodily fabrication… a non-injurious verbal fabrication… a non-injurious mental fabrication.… He rearises in a non-injurious world.… There he is touched by non-injurious contacts.… He

experiences feelings that are exclusively pleasant, like those of the Beautiful Black Devas. This is called kamma that is bright with bright result.

"And what is kamma that is dark & bright with dark & bright result? There is the case where a certain person fabricates a bodily fabrication that is injurious & non-injurious… a verbal fabrication that is injurious & non-injurious… a mental fabrication that is injurious & non-injurious.… He rearises in an injurious & non-injurious world.… There he is touched by injurious & non-injurious contacts.… He experiences injurious & non-injurious feelings, pleasure mingled with pain, like those of human beings, some devas, and some beings in the lower realms. This is called kamma that is dark & bright with dark & bright result.

"And what is kamma that is neither dark nor bright with neither dark nor bright result, leading to the ending of kamma? Right view, right resolve, right speech, right action, right livelihood, right effort, right mindfulness, right concentration. This is called kamma that is neither dark nor bright with neither dark nor bright result, leading to the ending of kamma.

"These, monks, are the four types of kamma directly known, verified, & announced by me." — *AN 4:237*

§6. "Having approached the contemplatives & brahmans who hold that… whatever a person experiences—pleasant, painful, or neither pleasant nor painful — is all caused by what was done in the past, I said to them: 'Is it true that you hold that… whatever a person experiences… is all caused by what was done in the past?' … They admitted, 'Yes.' Then I said to them, 'Then in that case, a person is a killer of living beings because of what was done in the past. A person is a thief… unchaste… a liar… a divisive speaker… an abusive speaker… an idle chatterer… covetous… malevolent… a holder of wrong views because of what was done in the past.' When one falls back on what was done in the past as being essential, monks, there is no desire, no effort [at the thought], 'This should be done. This shouldn't be done.' When one can't pin down as a truth or reality what should & shouldn't be done, one dwells bewildered & unprotected. One cannot righteously refer to oneself as a contemplative." — *AN 3:62*

§7. "When this is, that is. From the arising of this comes the arising of that. When this isn't, that isn't. From the stopping of this comes the stopping of that." — *AN 10:92*

§8. "From ignorance as a requisite condition come fabrications.

"From fabrications as a requisite condition comes consciousness.

"From consciousness as a requisite condition comes name-&-form.

"From name-&-form as a requisite condition come the six sense media.

"From the six sense media as a requisite condition comes contact.

"From contact as a requisite condition comes feeling.

"From feeling as a requisite condition comes craving.

"From craving as a requisite condition comes clinging/sustenance.

"From clinging/sustenance as a requisite condition comes becoming.

"From becoming as a requisite condition comes birth.

"From birth as a requisite condition, then aging & death, sorrow, lamentation, pain, distress, & despair come into play. Such is the origination of this entire mass of stress & suffering.…

"And what is *name-&-form?* Feeling, perception, intention, contact, & attention: This is called name. The four great elements & the form dependent on the four great elements: This is called form. This name & this form are called name-&-form…

"And what are *fabrications?* These three are fabrications: bodily fabrications, verbal fabrications, mental fabrications. These are called fabrications.

"And what is *ignorance?* Not knowing stress, not knowing the origination of stress, not knowing the cessation of stress, not knowing the way of practice leading to the cessation of stress: This is called ignorance.

"Now from the remainderless fading & cessation of that very ignorance comes the cessation of fabrications… the cessation of consciousness… the cessation of name-&-form… the cessation of the six sense media… the cessation of contact… the cessation of feeling… the cessation of craving… the cessation of clinging/sustenance… the cessation of becoming… the cessation of birth. From the cessation of birth, then aging & death, sorrow, lamentation, pain, distress, & despair all cease. Such is the cessation of this entire mass of stress & suffering."

{"And what is the way to the cessation of ignorance? Just this noble eightfold path."} — *SN 12:2 { MN 9 }*

§9. "What is old kamma? The eye is to be seen as old kamma, fabricated & willed, capable of being felt. The ear… The nose… The tongue… The body… The intellect is to be seen as old kamma, fabricated & willed, capable of being felt. This is called old kamma.

"And what is new kamma? Whatever kamma one does now with the body, with speech, or with the intellect. This is called new kamma.

"And what is the cessation of kamma? Whoever touches the release that comes from the cessation of bodily kamma, verbal kamma, & mental kamma. That is

called the cessation of kamma.

"And what is the path of practice leading to the cessation of kamma? Just this noble eightfold path: right view, right resolve, right speech, right action, right livelihood, right effort, right mindfulness, right concentration. This is called the path of practice leading to the cessation of kamma." — *SN 35:145*

§10. Moliyasivaka: "There are some contemplatives & brahmans who are of this doctrine, this view: 'Whatever an individual feels—pleasure, pain, neither-pleasure-nor-pain—is entirely caused by what was done before.' Now what does Master Gotama say to that?"

The Buddha: "There are cases where some feelings arise based on bile [i.e., diseases and pains that come from a malfunctioning gall bladder]. You yourself should know how some feelings arise based on bile. Even the world is agreed on how some feelings arise based on bile. So any contemplatives & brahmans who are of the doctrine & view that whatever an individual feels—pleasure, pain, neither-pleasure-nor-pain—is entirely caused by what was done before—slip past what they themselves know, slip past what is agreed on by the world. Therefore I say that those contemplatives & brahmans are wrong.

"There are cases where some feelings arise based on phlegm… based on internal winds… based on a combination of bodily humors… from the change of the seasons… from uneven ['out-of-tune'] care of the body… from attacks… from the result of kamma. You yourself should know how some feelings arise from the result of kamma. Even the world is agreed on how some feelings arise from the result of kamma. So any contemplatives & brahmans who are of the doctrine & view that whatever an individual feels—pleasure, pain, neither pleasure-nor-pain —is entirely caused by what was done before—slip past what they themselves know, slip past what is agreed on by the world. Therefore I say that those contemplatives & brahmans are wrong." — *SN 36:21*

§11. There are these four inconceivables that are not to be conjectured about, that would bring madness & vexation to anyone who conjectured about them. Which four?

"The Buddha-range of the Buddhas [i.e., the range of powers a Buddha develops as a result of becoming a Buddha] is an inconceivable that is not to be conjectured about, that would bring madness & vexation to anyone who conjectured about it.

"The jhāna-range of a person in jhāna [i.e., the range of powers that one may obtain while absorbed in jhāna]….

"The [precise working out of the] results of kamma….

"Conjecture about [the origin, etc., of] the world is an inconceivable that is not to be conjectured about, that would bring madness & vexation to anyone who conjectured about it." — *AN 4:77*

§12. "There are, headman, some contemplatives & brahmans who hold a doctrine & view like this: 'All those who kill living beings experience pain & distress in the here-&-now. All those who take what is not given… who engage in illicit sex… who tell lies experience pain & distress in the here-&-now.'

"Now there is the case where a certain person is seen garlanded & adorned, freshly bathed & groomed, with hair & beard trimmed, enjoying the sensualities of women as if he were a king. They ask about him: 'My good man, what has this man done that he has been garlanded & adorned… as if he were a king?' They answer: 'My good man, this man attacked the king's enemy and took his life. The king, gratified with him, rewarded him. That is why he is garlanded & adorned… as if he were a king.'

"Then there is the case where a certain person is seen bound with a stout rope with his arms pinned tightly against his back, his head shaved bald, marched to a harsh-sounding drum from street to street, crossroads to crossroads, evicted through the south gate, and beheaded to the south of the city. They ask about him: 'My good man, what has this man done that he is bound with a stout rope… and beheaded to the south of the city?' They answer: 'My good man, this man, an enemy of the king, has taken the life of a man or a woman. That is why the rulers, having had him seized, inflicted such a punishment upon him.'

[The Buddha then cites similar cases where some people are rewarded for stealing, engaging in illicit sex, and lying, whereas other people are punished.]

"Now, what do you think, headman: Have you ever seen or heard of such a case?"

"I have seen this, lord, have heard of it, and will hear of it [again in the future]."

"So, headman, when those contemplatives & brahmans who hold a doctrine & view like this say: 'All those who kill living beings [etc.] experience pain & distress in the here-&-now,' do they speak truthfully or falsely?"

"Falsely, lord."

"And those who babble empty falsehood: Are they moral or immoral?"

"Immoral, lord."

"And those who are immoral and of evil character: Are they practicing wrongly or rightly?"

"Wrongly, lord."

"And those who are practicing wrongly: Do they hold wrong view or right

view?"

"Wrong view, lord."

"And is it proper to place confidence in those who hold wrong view?"

"No, lord." — *SN 42:13*

§13. "There are four kinds of person to be found in the world. Which four? There is the case where a certain person takes life, takes what is not given [steals], engages in illicit sex, lies, speaks divisively, speaks abusively, engages in idle chatter; is covetous, malevolent, & holds wrong views. On the break-up of the body, after death, he reappears in the plane of deprivation, the bad destination, the lower realms, in hell.

"But there is also the case where a certain person takes life…holds wrong views [yet], on the break-up of the body, after death, he reappears in the good destinations, in the heavenly world.

"And there is the case where a certain person abstains from taking life, abstains from taking what is not given…is not covetous, not malevolent, & holds right views. On the break-up of the body, after death, he reappears in the good destinations, in the heavenly world.

"But there is also the case where a certain person abstains from taking life, abstains from taking what is not given… is not covetous, not malevolent, & holds right views [yet], on the break-up of the body, after death, he reappears in the plane of deprivation, the bad destination, the lower realms, in hell.…

"In the case of the person who takes life… [yet] on the break-up of the body, after death, reappears in the good destinations, in the heavenly world: either earlier he performed fine kamma that is to be felt as pleasant, or later he performed fine kamma that is to be felt as pleasant, or at the time of death he adopted & carried out right views. Because of that, on the break-up of the body, after death, he reappears in the good destinations, in the heavenly world. But as for the results of taking life… holding wrong views, he will feel them either right here & now, or later [in this lifetime], or following that.…

"In the case of the person who abstains from taking life… [yet] on the break-up of the body, after death, reappears in the plane of deprivation, the bad destination, the lower realms, in hell: either earlier he performed evil kamma that is to be felt as painful, or later he performed evil kamma that is to be felt as painful, or at the time of death he adopted & carried out wrong views. Because of that, on the break-up of the body, after death, he reappears in the plane of deprivation, the bad destination, the lower realms, in hell. But as for the results of abstaining from taking life… holding right views, he will feel them either right here & now, or later [in this

lifetime], or following that." — *MN 136*

§14. "Monks, for anyone who says, 'In whatever way a person makes kamma, that is how it is experienced,' there is no living of the holy life, there is no opportunity for the right ending of stress. But for anyone who says, 'When a person makes kamma to be felt in such & such a way, that is how its result is experienced,' there is the living of the holy life, there is the opportunity for the right ending of stress.

"There is the case where a trifling evil deed done by a certain individual takes him to hell. There is the case where the very same sort of trifling deed done by another individual is experienced in the here & now, and for the most part barely appears for a moment.

"Now, a trifling evil deed done by what sort of individual takes him to hell? There is the case where a certain individual is undeveloped in [contemplating] the body, undeveloped in virtue, undeveloped in mind, undeveloped in discernment: restricted, small-hearted, dwelling with suffering. A trifling evil deed done by this sort of individual takes him to hell.

"Now, a trifling evil deed done by what sort of individual is experienced in the here & now, and for the most part barely appears for a moment? There is the case where a certain individual is developed in [contemplating] the body, developed in virtue, developed in mind, developed in discernment: unrestricted, large-hearted, dwelling with the unlimited. A trifling evil deed done by this sort of individual is experienced in the here & now, and for the most part barely appears for a moment.

"Suppose that a man were to drop a lump of salt into a small amount of water in a cup. What do you think? Would the water in the cup become salty because of the lump of salt, and unfit to drink?"

"Yes, lord.…"

"Now suppose that a man were to drop a lump of salt into the River Ganges. What do you think? Would the water in the River Ganges become salty because of the lump of salt, and unfit to drink?"

"No, lord.…"

"In the same way, there is the case where a trifling evil deed done by one individual [the first] takes him to hell; and there is the case where the very same sort of trifling deed done by the other individual is experienced in the here & now, and for the most part barely appears for a moment." — *AN 3:101*

§15. "Monks, the taking of life — when indulged in, developed, & pursued — is something that leads to hell, leads to rebirth as a common animal, leads to the

realm of the hungry shades. The slightest of all the results coming from the taking of life is that, when one becomes a human being, it leads to a short life span.

"Stealing — when indulged in, developed, & pursued — is something that leads to hell, leads to rebirth as a common animal, leads to the realm of the hungry shades. The slightest of all the results coming from stealing is that, when one becomes a human being, it leads to the loss of one's wealth.

"Illicit sexual behavior — when indulged in, developed, & pursued — is something that leads to hell, leads to rebirth as a common animal, leads to the realm of the hungry shades. The slightest of all the results coming from illicit sexual behavior is that, when one becomes a human being, it leads to rivalry & revenge.

"Telling lies — when indulged in, developed, & pursued — is something that leads to hell, leads to rebirth as a common animal, leads to the realm of the hungry shades. The slightest of all the results coming from telling lies is that, when one becomes a human being, it leads to being falsely accused.

"Divisive tale-bearing — when indulged in, developed, & pursued — is something that leads to hell, leads to rebirth as a common animal, leads to the realm of the hungry shades. The slightest of all the results coming from divisive tale-bearing is that, when one becomes a human being, it leads to the breaking of one's friendships.

"Abusive speech — when indulged in, developed, & pursued — is something that leads to hell, leads to rebirth as a common animal, leads to the realm of the hungry shades. The slightest of all the results coming from abusive speech is that, when one becomes a human being, it leads to unappealing sounds.

"Frivolous chattering — when indulged in, developed, & pursued — is something that leads to hell, leads to rebirth as a common animal, leads to the realm of the hungry shades. The slightest of all the results coming from frivolous chattering is that, when one becomes a human being, it leads to words that aren't worth taking to heart.

"The drinking of fermented & distilled liquors — when indulged in, developed, & pursued — is something that leads to hell, leads to rebirth as a common animal, leads to the realm of the hungry shades. The slightest of all the results coming from drinking fermented & distilled liquors is that, when one becomes a human being, it leads to mental derangement." — *AN 8:40*

§16. "There is the case where a woman or man is one who harms beings with his/her fists, with clods, with sticks, or with knives. Through having adopted & carried out such actions, on the break-up of the body, after death, he/she reappears in the plane of deprivation.… If instead he/she comes to the human state, then

he/she is sickly wherever reborn. This is the way leading to sickliness: to be one who harms beings with one's fists, with clods, with sticks, or with knives.…

"There is the case, where a woman or man is ill-tempered & easily upset; even when lightly criticized, he/she grows offended, provoked, malicious, & resentful; shows annoyance, aversion, & bitterness. Through having adopted & carried out such actions, on the break-up of the body, after death, he/she reappears in the plane of deprivation.… If instead he/she comes to the human state, then he/she is ugly wherever reborn. This is the way leading to ugliness: to be ill-tempered & easily upset; even when lightly criticized, to grow offended, provoked, malicious, & resentful; to show annoyance, aversion, & bitterness.…

"There is the case where a woman or man is envious. He/she envies, begrudges, & broods about others' gains, honor, respect, reverence, salutations, & veneration. Through having adopted & carried out such actions, on the break-up of the body, after death, he/she reappears in the plane of deprivation… If instead he/she comes to the human state, then he/she is not influential wherever reborn. This is the way leading to being uninfluential: to be envious, to envy, begrudge, & brood about others' gains, honor, respect, reverence, salutations, & veneration.…

"There is the case where a woman or man is not a giver of food, drink, cloth, sandals, garlands, scents, ointments, beds, dwellings, or lighting to priests or contemplatives. Through having adopted & carried out such actions, on the break-up of the body, after death he/she reappears in the plane of deprivation.… If instead he/she comes to the human state, he/she is poor wherever reborn. This is the way leading to poverty: not to be a giver of food, drink, cloth, sandals, garlands, scents, ointments, beds, dwellings, or lighting to priests or contemplatives.…

"There is the case where a woman or man is obstinate & arrogant. He/she does not pay homage to those who deserve homage, rise up for those for whom one should rise up, give a seat to those to whom one should give a seat, make way for those for whom one should make way, worship those who should be worshipped, respect those who should be respected, revere those who should be revered, or honor those who should be honored. Through having adopted & carried out such actions, on the break-up of the body, after death, he/she reappears in the plane of deprivation.… If instead he/she comes to the human state, then he/she is low-born wherever reborn. This is the way leading to a low birth: to be obstinate & arrogant, not to pay homage to those who deserve homage, nor rise up for… nor give a seat to… nor make way for… nor worship… nor respect… nor revere… nor honor those who should be honored." — *MN 135*

§17. "Monks, there are these three roots of what is unskillful. Which three? Greed is a root of what is unskillful, aversion is a root of what is unskillful,

delusion is a root of what is unskillful.

"Greed itself is unskillful. Whatever a greedy person fabricates by means of body, speech, or intellect, that too is unskillful. Whatever suffering a greedy person — his mind overcome with greed, his mind consumed—wrongly inflicts on another person through beating or imprisonment or confiscation or placing blame or banishment, [with the thought,] "I have power. I want power," that too is unskillful. Thus it is that many evil, unskillful qualities/events /actions—born of greed, caused by greed, originated through greed, conditioned by greed—come into play.

[Similarly with aversion and delusion.]

"And a person like this is called one who speaks at the wrong time, speaks what is unfactual, speaks what is irrelevant, speaks contrary to the Dhamma, speaks contrary to the Vinaya. Why…? Because of having wrongly inflicted suffering on another person through beating or imprisonment or confiscation or placing blame or banishment, [with the thought,] 'I have power. I want power.' When told what is factual, he denies it and doesn't acknowledge it. When told what is unfactual, he doesn't make an ardent effort to untangle it [to see], 'This is unfactual. This is ungrounded.' That's why a person like this is called one who speaks at the wrong time, speaks what is unfactual, speaks what is irrelevant, speaks contrary to the Dhamma, speaks contrary to the Vinaya.

"A person like this—his mind overcome with evil, unskillful qualities born of greed… of aversion… of delusion, his mind consumed—dwells in suffering right in the here-&-now—feeling threatened, turbulent, feverish—and at the break-up of the body, after death, can expect a bad destination." — *AN 3:69*

§18. "As for the course of action that is unpleasant to do but that, when done, leads to what is profitable, it's in light of this course of action that one may be known… as a fool or a wise person. For a fool doesn't reflect, 'Even though this course of action is unpleasant to do, still when it is done it leads to what is profitable.' So he doesn't do it, and thus the non-doing of that course of action leads to what is unprofitable for him. But a wise person reflects, 'Even though this course of action is unpleasant to do, still when it is done it leads to what is profitable.' So he does it, and thus the doing of that course of action leads to what is profitable for him.

"As for the course of action that is pleasant to do but that, when done, leads to what is unprofitable, it's in light of this course of action that one may be known… as a fool or a wise person. For a fool doesn't reflect, 'Even though this course of action is pleasant to do, still when it is done it leads to what is unprofitable.' So he does it, and thus the doing of that course of action leads to what is unprofitable for

him. But a wise person reflects, 'Even though this course of action is pleasant to do, still when it is done it leads to what is unprofitable.' So he doesn't do it, and thus the non-doing of that course of action leads to what is profitable for him."
— *AN 4:115*

§19. "There's the case, headman, where a certain teacher holds this doctrine, holds this view: 'All those who take life are destined for the plane of deprivation, are destined for hell. All those who steal.... All those who indulge in illicit sex.... All those who tell lies are destined for the plane of deprivation, are destined for hell.' A disciple has faith in that teacher, and the thought occurs to him, 'Our teacher holds this doctrine, holds this view: "All those who take life are destined for the plane of deprivation, are destined for hell." There are living beings that I have killed. I, too, am destined for the plane of deprivation, am destined for hell.' He fastens onto that view. If he doesn't abandon that doctrine, doesn't abandon that state of mind, doesn't relinquish that view, then as if he were to be carried off, he would thus be placed in hell.

"[The thought occurs to him,] 'Our teacher holds this doctrine, holds this view: 'All those who steal.... All those who indulge in illicit sex.... All those who tell lies are destined for the plane of deprivation, are destined for hell.' There are lies that I have told. I, too, am destined for the plane of deprivation, am destined for hell.' He fastens onto that view. If he doesn't abandon that doctrine, doesn't abandon that state of mind, doesn't relinquish that view, then as if he were to be carried off, he would thus be placed in hell.

"There is the case, headman, where a Tathāgata appears in the world, worthy & rightly self-awakened, consummate in clear knowing & conduct, well-gone, a knower of the cosmos, unexcelled trainer of those to be tamed, teacher of human & divine beings, awakened, blessed. He, in various ways, criticizes & censures the taking of life, and says, 'Abstain from taking life.' He criticizes & censures stealing, and says, 'Abstain from stealing.' He criticizes & censures indulging in illicit sex, and says, 'Abstain from indulging in illicit sex.' He criticizes & censures the telling of lies, and says, 'Abstain from the telling of lies.'

"A disciple has faith in that teacher and reflects: 'The Blessed One in a variety of ways criticizes & censures the taking of life, and says, "Abstain from taking life." There are living beings that I have killed, to a greater or lesser extent. That was not right. That was not good. But if I become remorseful for that reason, that evil deed of mine will not be undone.' So, reflecting thus, he abandons right then the taking of life, and in the future refrains from taking life. This is how there comes to be the abandoning of that evil deed. This is how there comes to be the transcending of that evil deed.

"[He reflects:] 'The Blessed One in a variety of ways criticizes & censures stealing… indulging in illicit sex… the telling of lies, and says, "Abstain from the telling of lies." There are lies I have told, to a greater or lesser extent. That was not right. That was not good. But if I become remorseful for that reason, that evil deed of mine will not be undone.' So, reflecting thus, he abandons right then the telling of lies, and in the future refrains from telling lies. This is how there comes to be the abandoning of that evil deed. This is how there comes to be the transcending of that evil deed.

"Having abandoned the taking of life, he refrains from taking life… he refrains from stealing… he refrains from illicit sex… he refrains from lies… he refrains from divisive speech… he refrains from abusive speech… he refrains from idle chatter. Having abandoned covetousness, he becomes uncovetous. Having abandoned malevolence & anger, he becomes one with a mind of no malevolence. Having abandoned wrong views, he becomes one who has right views.

"That disciple of the noble ones, headman—thus devoid of covetousness, devoid of malevolence, unbewildered, alert, mindful—keeps pervading the first direction [the east] with an awareness imbued with good will, likewise the second, likewise the third, likewise the fourth. Thus above, below, & all around, everywhere, in its entirety, he keeps pervading the all-encompassing cosmos with an awareness imbued with good will—abundant, expansive, immeasurable, without hostility, without malevolence. Just as a strong conch-trumpet blower can notify the four directions without any difficulty, in the same way, when the release of awareness through good will is thus developed, thus pursued, any deed done to a limited extent no longer remains there, no longer stays there.

"That disciple of the noble ones… keeps pervading the first direction with an awareness imbued with compassion… empathetic joy… equanimity, likewise the second, likewise the third, likewise the fourth. Thus above, below, & all around, everywhere, in its entirety, he keeps pervading the all-encompassing cosmos with an awareness imbued with equanimity—abundant, expansive, immeasurable, without hostility, without malevolence. Just as a strong conch-trumpet blower can notify the four directions without any difficulty, in the same way, when the release of awareness through equanimity is thus developed, thus pursued, any deed done to a limited extent no longer remains there, no longer stays there." — *SN 42:8*

§20. "Now, based on what line of reasoning should one often reflect… that 'I am the owner of my actions, heir to my actions, born of my actions, related through my actions, and have my actions as my arbitrator. Whatever I do, for good or for evil, to that will I fall heir'? There are beings who conduct themselves in a bad way in body… in speech… and in mind. But when they often reflect on that

fact, that bad conduct in body, speech, & mind will either be entirely abandoned or grow weaker.…

"A disciple of the noble ones considers this: 'I am not the only one who is the owner of my actions, heir to my actions, born of my actions, related through my actions, and have my actions as my arbitrator; who—whatever I do, for good or for evil, to that will I fall heir. To the extent that there are beings—past & future, passing away & re-arising—all beings are the owners of their actions, heir to their actions, born of their actions, related through their actions, and have their actions as their arbitrator. Whatever they do, for good or for evil, to that will they fall heir.' When he/she often reflects on this, the [factors of the] path take birth. He/she sticks with that path, develops it, cultivates it. As he/she sticks with that path, develops it, & cultivates it, the fetters are abandoned, the obsessions destroyed."
— *AN 5:57*

Readings : Mindfulness

§21. "And how is striving fruitful, how is exertion fruitful? There is the case where a monk, when not loaded down, does not load himself down with pain, nor does he reject pleasure that accords with the Dhamma, although he is not fixated on that pleasure. He discerns that 'When I exert a fabrication against this cause of stress, then from the fabrication of exertion there is dispassion. When I look on with equanimity at that cause of stress, then from the development of equanimity there is dispassion.' So he exerts a fabrication against the cause of stress for which dispassion comes from the fabrication of exertion, and develops equanimity with regard to the cause of stress for which dispassion comes from the development of equanimity. Thus the stress coming from the cause of stress for which there is dispassion through the fabrication of exertion is exhausted, and the stress resulting from the cause of stress for which there is dispassion through the development of equanimity is exhausted." — *MN 101*

§22. "And which is the faculty of mindfulness? There is the case where a disciple of the noble ones is mindful, is endowed with excellent proficiency in mindfulness, remembering & recollecting what was done and said a long time ago. He remains focused on the body in & of itself—ardent, alert, & mindful—subduing greed & distress with reference to the world. He remains focused on feelings in & of themselves… the mind in & of itself… mental qualities in & of themselves—ardent, alert, & mindful—subduing greed & distress with reference to the world. This is called the faculty of mindfulness." — *SN 48:10*

§23. Ven. MahāKassapa: "And how is one ardent? There is the case where a monk, (thinking,) 'Unarisen evil, unskillful qualities arising in me would lead to what is unbeneficial,' arouses ardency. (Thinking,) 'Arisen evil, unskillful qualities not being abandoned in me…' … 'Unarisen skillful qualities not arising in me …' … 'Arisen skillful qualities ceasing in me would lead to what is unbeneficial,' he arouses ardency. This is how one is ardent." — *SN 16:2*

§24. "And how is a monk alert? There is the case where feelings are known to the monk as they arise, known as they become established, known as they subside.

Thoughts are known to him as they arise, known as they become established, known as they subside. Perceptions are known to him as they arise, known as they become established, known as they subside. This is how a monk is alert."
— *SN 47:35*

§25. "And how is a monk alert? When going forward & returning, he makes himself alert; when looking toward & looking away… when bending & extending his limbs… when carrying his outer cloak, his upper robe, & his bowl… when eating, drinking, chewing, & savoring… when urinating & defecating… when walking, standing, sitting, falling asleep, waking up, talking, & remaining silent, he makes himself alert. This is how a monk is alert." — *SN 36:7*

§26. "Right view is the forerunner. And how is right view the forerunner? One discerns wrong resolve as wrong resolve, and right resolve as right resolve: This is one's right view.… One makes an effort for the abandoning of wrong resolve & for entering into right resolve: This is one's right effort. One is mindful to abandon wrong resolve & to enter & remain in right resolve: This is one's right mindfulness. Thus these three qualities—right view, right effort, & right mindfulness—run & circle around right resolve." — *MN 117*

§27. "This holy life is lived… with mindfulness as its governing principle.… And how is mindfulness the governing principle? The mindfulness that 'I will make complete any training with regard to good conduct that is not yet complete, or I will protect with discernment any training with regard to good conduct that is complete' is well-established right within. The mindfulness that 'I will make complete any training with regard to the basics of the holy life that is not yet complete, or I will protect with discernment any training with regard to the basics of the holy life that is complete' is well-established right within. The mindfulness that 'I will scrutinize with discernment any Dhamma that is not yet scrutinized, or I will protect with discernment any Dhamma that has been scrutinized' is well-established right within. The mindfulness that 'I will touch through release any Dhamma that is not yet touched, or I will protect with discernment any Dhamma that has been touched' is well-established right within.

"This is how mindfulness is the governing principle." — *AN 4:245*

§28. "Just as a royal frontier fortress has a gatekeeper—wise, experienced, intelligent—to keep out those he doesn't know and to let in those he does, for the protection of those within, and to ward off those without; in the same way, a disciple of the noble ones is mindful, endowed with excellent proficiency in

mindfulness, remembering & recollecting what was done and said a long time ago. With mindfulness as his gatekeeper, the disciple of the noble ones abandons what is unskillful, develops what is skillful, abandons what is blameworthy, develops what is blameless, and looks after himself with purity." — *AN 7:63*

§29. "If, on examination, a monk knows, 'I usually remain covetous, with thoughts of ill will, overcome by sloth & drowsiness, restless, uncertain, angry, with soiled thoughts, with my body aroused, lazy, or unconcentrated,' then he should put forth intense desire, effort, diligence, endeavor, relentlessness, mindfulness, & alertness for the abandoning of those very same evil, unskillful qualities. Just as when a person whose turban or head was on fire would put forth intense desire, effort, diligence, endeavor, relentlessness, mindfulness, & alertness to put out the fire on his turban or head; in the same way, the monk should put forth intense desire, effort, diligence, endeavor, relentlessness, mindfulness, & alertness for the abandoning of those very same evil, unskillful qualities." — *AN 10:51*

§30. Ven. Uttiya: "It would be good, lord, if the Blessed One would teach me the Dhamma in brief so that, having heard the Dhamma from the Blessed One, I might dwell alone, secluded, heedful, ardent, & resolute."

The Buddha: "In that case, Uttiya, purify the very basis with regard to skillful mental qualities. And what is the basis of skillful mental qualities? Well-purified virtue & views made straight. Then, when your virtue is well purified and your views made straight, in dependence on virtue, established in virtue, you should develop the four establishings of mindfulness.… Then, when in dependence on virtue, established in virtue, you develop these four establishings of mindfulness, you will go beyond the realm of Death." — *SN 47:16*

§31. "Suppose, monks, that a large crowd of people comes thronging together, saying, 'The beauty queen! The beauty queen!' And suppose that the beauty queen is highly accomplished at singing & dancing, so that an even greater crowd comes thronging, saying, 'The beauty queen is singing! The beauty queen is dancing!' Then a man comes along, desiring life & shrinking from death, desiring pleasure & abhorring pain. They say to him, 'Now look here, mister. You must take this bowl filled to the brim with oil and carry it on your head in between the great crowd & the beauty queen. A man with a raised sword will follow right behind you, and wherever you spill even a drop of oil, right there will he cut off your head.' Now what do you think, monks? Would that man, not paying attention to the bowl of oil, bring heedlessness outside?"

"No, lord."

"I've given you this simile to convey a meaning. The meaning is this: The bowl filled to the brim with oil stands for mindfulness immersed in the body."
— *SN 47:20*

§32. "Once a hawk suddenly swooped down on a quail and seized it. Then the quail, as it was being carried off by the hawk, lamented, 'O, just my bad luck and lack of merit that I was wandering out of my proper range and into the territory of others! If only I had kept to my proper range today, to my own ancestral territory, this hawk would have been no match for me in battle.'

"'But what, quail, is your proper range?' the hawk asked. 'What is your own ancestral territory?'

"'A newly plowed field with clumps of earth all turned up.'

"So the hawk, proud of its own strength, without mentioning its own strength, let go of the quail. 'Go, quail, but even having gone there you won't escape me.'

"Then the quail, having gone to a newly plowed field with clumps of earth all turned up and climbing up on top of a large clump of earth, stood taunting the hawk, 'Come for me *now,* you hawk! Come for me *now,* you hawk!'

"So the hawk, proud of its own strength, without mentioning its own strength, folded its two wings and suddenly swooped down toward the quail. When the quail knew, 'The hawk is coming at me full speed,' it slipped behind the clump of earth, and right there the hawk shattered its breast.

"This is what happens to anyone who wanders into what is not his proper range and is the territory of others. For this reason, you should not wander into what is not your proper range and is the territory of others. In one who wanders into what is not his proper range and is the territory of others, Māra gains an opening, Māra gains a foothold. And what, for a monk, is not his proper range and is the territory of others? The five strings of sensuality. Which five? Forms cognizable by the eye—agreeable, pleasing, charming, endearing, fostering desire, enticing. Sounds cognizable by the ear.… Smells cognizable by the nose.… Tastes cognizable by the tongue.… Tactile sensations cognizable by the body—agreeable, pleasing, charming, endearing, fostering desire, enticing. These, for a monk, are not his proper range and are the territory of others.

"Wander, monks, in what is your proper range, your own ancestral territory. In one who wanders in what is his proper range, his own ancestral territory, Māra gains no opening, Māra gains no foothold. And what, for a monk, is his proper range, his own ancestral territory? The four establishings of mindfulness.… This, for a monk, is his proper range, his own ancestral territory."" — *SN 47:6*

§33. "Having abandoned the five hindrances—imperfections of awareness that weaken discernment—the monk remains focused on the body in & of itself—ardent, alert, & mindful—subduing greed & distress with reference to the world. He remains focused on feelings… mind… mental qualities in & of themselves—ardent, alert, & mindful—subduing greed & distress with reference to the world. Just as if an elephant trainer were to plant a large post in the ground and were to bind a forest elephant to it by the neck in order to break it of its forest habits, its forest memories & resolves, its distraction, fatigue, & fever over leaving the forest, to make it delight in the town and to inculcate in it habits congenial to human beings; in the same way, these four establishings of mindfulness are bindings for the awareness of the disciple of the noble ones, to break him of his household habits, his household memories & resolves, his distraction, fatigue, & fever over leaving the household life, for the attainment of the right method and the realization of unbinding.

"Then the Tathāgata trains him further: 'Come, monk, remain focused on the body in & of itself, but do not think any thoughts connected with the body. Remain focused on feelings in & of themselves, but do not think any thoughts connected with feelings. Remain focused on the mind in & of itself, but do not think any thoughts connected with mind. Remain focused on mental qualities in & of themselves, but do not think any thoughts connected with mental qualities.' With the stilling of directed thoughts & evaluations, he enters the second jhāna."
— MN 125

§34. "And what is the development of the establishing of mindfulness? There is the case where a monk remains focused on the phenomenon of origination with regard to the body, remains focused on the phenomenon of passing away with regard to the body, remains focused on the phenomenon of origination & passing away with regard to the body—ardent, alert, & mindful—subduing greed & distress with reference to the world.

"He remains focused on the phenomenon of origination with regard to feelings… with regard to the mind… with regard to mental qualities, remains focused on the phenomenon of passing away with regard to mental qualities, remains focused on the phenomenon of origination & passing away with regard to mental qualities—ardent, alert, & mindful—subduing greed & distress with reference to the world. This is called the development of the establishing of mindfulness.

"And what is the path of practice to the development of the establishing of mindfulness? Just this noble eightfold path: right view, right resolve, right speech, right action, right livelihood, right effort, right mindfulness, right concentration.

This is called the path of practice to the development of the establishing of mindfulness." — *SN 47:40*

§35. "Now suppose that there is a wise, experienced, skillful cook who has presented a king or a king's minister with various kinds of curry: mainly sour, mainly bitter, mainly peppery, mainly sweet, alkaline or non-alkaline, salty or non-salty. He picks up on the theme *[nimitta,* sign, signal] of his master, thinking, 'Today my master likes this curry, or he reaches out for that curry, or he takes a lot of this curry, or he praises that curry. Today my master likes mainly sour curry.… Today my master likes mainly bitter curry… mainly peppery curry… mainly sweet curry… alkaline curry… non-alkaline curry… salty curry… Today my master likes non-salty curry, or he reaches out for non-salty curry, or he takes a lot of non-salty curry, or he praises non-salty curry.' As a result, he is rewarded with clothing, wages, & gifts. Why is that? Because the wise, experienced, skillful cook picks up on the theme of his own master.

"In the same way, there is the case where a wise, experienced, skillful monk remains focused on the body in & of itself… feelings in & of themselves… the mind in & of itself… mental qualities in & of themselves—ardent, alert, & mindful —subduing greed & distress with reference to the world. As he remains thus focused on mental qualities in & of themselves, his mind becomes concentrated, his defilements are abandoned. He picks up on that theme. As a result, he is rewarded with a pleasant abiding here-&-now, together with mindfulness & alertness. Why is that? Because the wise, experienced, skillful monk picks up on the theme of his own mind." — *SN 47:8*

§36. "'The thirty-six emotions to which beings are attached should be known': Thus was it said. And in reference to what was it said? Six kinds of house-based happiness & six kinds of renunciation-based happiness; six kinds of house-based distress & six kinds of renunciation-based distress; six kinds of house-based equanimity & six kinds of renunciation-based equanimity.

"And what are the six kinds of house-based happiness? The happiness that arises when one regards as an acquisition the acquisition of forms cognizable by the eye—agreeable, pleasing, charming, endearing, connected with worldly baits—or when one recalls the previous acquisition of such forms after they have passed, ceased, & changed: That is called house-based happiness. [Similarly with sounds, smells, tastes, tactile sensations, & ideas.]

"And what are the six kinds of renunciation-based happiness? The happiness that arises when—experiencing the inconstancy of those very forms, their change, fading, & cessation—one sees with right discernment as it has come to be that all

forms, both before and now, are inconstant, stressful, subject to change: That is called renunciation-based happiness. [Similarly with sounds, smells, tastes, tactile sensations, & ideas.]

"And what are the six kinds of house-based distress? The distress that arises when one regards as a non-acquisition the non-acquisition of forms cognizable by the eye—agreeable, pleasing, charming, endearing, connected with worldly baits—or when one recalls the previous non-acquisition of such forms after they have passed, ceased, & changed: That is called house-based distress. [Similarly with sounds, smells, tastes, tactile sensations, & ideas.]

"And what are the six kinds of renunciation-based distress? The distress coming from the longing that arises in one who is filled with longing for the unexcelled liberations when—experiencing the inconstancy of those very forms, their change, fading, & cessation—he sees with right discernment as it has come to be that all forms, both before and now, are inconstant, stressful, subject to change and he is filled with this longing: 'O when will I enter & remain in the dimension2 that the noble ones now enter & remain in?' This is called renunciation-based distress. [Similarly with sounds, smells, tastes, tactile sensations, & ideas.]

"And what are the six kinds of house-based equanimity? The equanimity that arises when a foolish, deluded person—a run-of-the-mill, untaught person who has not conquered his limitations or the results of action & who is blind to danger—sees a form with the eye. Such equanimity does not go beyond the form, which is why it is called house-based equanimity. [Similarly with sounds, smells, tastes, tactile sensations, & ideas.]

"And what are the six kinds of renunciation-based equanimity? The equanimity that arises when—experiencing the inconstancy of those very forms, their change, fading, & cessation—one sees with right discernment as it has come to be that all forms, both before and now, are inconstant, stressful, subject to change: This equanimity goes beyond form, which is why it is called renunciation-based equanimity. [Similarly with sounds, smells, tastes, tactile sensations, & ideas.]

"'The thirty-six emotions to which beings are attached should be known': Thus was it said. And in reference to this was it said.

"'With regard to them, depending on this, abandon that': Thus was it said. And in reference to what was it said?

"Here, by depending & relying on the six kinds of renunciation-based happiness, abandon & transcend the six kinds of house-based happiness. Such is their abandoning, such is their transcending. By depending & relying on the six kinds of renunciation-based distress, abandon & transcend the six kinds of house-based distress. Such is their abandoning, such is their transcending. By depending & relying on the six kinds of renunciation-based equanimity, abandon & transcend

the six kinds of house-based equanimity. Such is their abandoning, such their transcending.

"By depending & relying on the six kinds of renunciation-based happiness, abandon & transcend the six kinds of renunciation-based distress. Such is their abandoning, such is their transcending. By depending & relying on the six kinds of renunciation-based equanimity, abandon & transcend the six kinds of renunciation-based happiness. Such is their abandoning, such their transcending.

"There is equanimity coming from multiplicity, dependent on multiplicity; and there is equanimity coming from singleness, dependent on singleness.

"And what is equanimity coming from multiplicity, dependent on multiplicity? There is equanimity with regard to forms, equanimity with regard to sounds… smells… tastes… tactile sensations [& ideas: this word appears in one of the recensions]. This is equanimity coming from multiplicity, dependent on multiplicity.

"And what is equanimity coming from singleness, dependent on singleness? There is equanimity dependent on the dimension of the infinitude of space, equanimity dependent on the dimension of the infinitude of consciousness… dependent on the dimension of nothingness… dependent on the dimension of neither perception nor non-perception. This is equanimity coming from singleness, dependent on singleness.

"By depending & relying on equanimity coming from singleness, dependent on singleness, abandon & transcend equanimity coming from multiplicity, dependent on multiplicity. Such is its abandoning, such its transcending.

"By depending & relying on non-fashioning,5 abandon & transcend the equanimity coming from singleness, dependent on singleness. Such is its abandoning, such its transcending.

"'Depending on this, abandon that': Thus was it said. And in reference to this was it said." — *MN 137*

§37. "Now how is mindfulness of in-&-out breathing developed & pursued so as to be of great fruit, of great benefit?

"There is the case where a monk, having gone to the wilderness, to the shade of a tree, or to an empty building, sits down folding his legs crosswise, holding his body erect, and setting mindfulness to the fore. Always mindful, he breathes in; mindful he breathes out.

"[1] Breathing in long, he discerns, 'I am breathing in long'; or breathing out long, he discerns, 'I am breathing out long.' [2] Or breathing in short, he discerns, 'I am breathing in short'; or breathing out short, he discerns, 'I am breathing out

short.' [3] He trains himself, 'I will breathe in sensitive to the entire body.' He trains himself, 'I will breathe out sensitive to the entire body.' [4] He trains himself, 'I will breathe in calming bodily fabrication [i.e., the in-&-out breath].' He trains himself, 'I will breathe out calming bodily fabrication.'

"[5] He trains himself, 'I will breathe in sensitive to rapture.' He trains himself, 'I will breathe out sensitive to rapture.' [6] He trains himself, 'I will breathe in sensitive to pleasure.' He trains himself, 'I will breathe out sensitive to pleasure.' [7] He trains himself, 'I will breathe in sensitive to mental fabrication [i.e., perception & feeling].' He trains himself, 'I will breathe out sensitive to mental fabrication.' [8] He trains himself, 'I will breathe in calming mental fabrication.' He trains himself, 'I will breathe out calming mental fabrication.'

"[9] He trains himself, 'I will breathe in sensitive to the mind.' He trains himself, 'I will breathe out sensitive to the mind.' [10] He trains himself, 'I will breathe in gladdening the mind.' He trains himself, 'I will breathe out gladdening the mind.' [11] He trains himself, 'I will breathe in steadying the mind.' He trains himself, 'I will breathe out steadying the mind.' [12] He trains himself, 'I will breathe in releasing the mind.' He trains himself, 'I will breathe out releasing the mind.'

"[13] He trains himself, 'I will breathe in focusing on inconstancy.' He trains himself, 'I will breathe out focusing on inconstancy.' [14] He trains himself, 'I will breathe in focusing on dispassion [or: fading].' He trains himself, 'I will breathe out focusing on dispassion.' [15] He trains himself, 'I will breathe in focusing on cessation.' He trains himself, 'I will breathe out focusing on cessation.' [16] He trains himself, 'I will breathe in focusing on relinquishing.' He trains himself, 'I will breathe out focusing on relinquishing.'

"This is how mindfulness of in-&-out breathing is developed & pursued so as to be of great fruit, of great benefit.

"And how is mindfulness of in-&-out breathing developed & pursued so as to bring the four establishings of mindfulness to their culmination?

"[1] On whatever occasion a monk breathing in long discerns, 'I am breathing in long'; or breathing out long, discerns, 'I am breathing out long'; or breathing in short, discerns, 'I am breathing in short'; or breathing out short, discerns, 'I am breathing out short'; trains himself, 'I will breathe in…&… out sensitive to the entire body'; trains himself, 'I will breathe in…&…out calming bodily fabrication': On that occasion the monk remains focused on the *body* in & of itself—ardent, alert, & mindful—subduing greed & distress with reference to the world. I tell you, monks, that this—the in-&-out breath—is classed as a body among bodies, which is why the monk on that occasion remains focused on the body in & of itself—ardent, alert, & mindful—subduing greed & distress with reference to the world.

"[2] On whatever occasion a monk trains himself, 'I will breathe in…&…out

sensitive to rapture'; trains himself, 'I will breathe in…&…out sensitive to pleasure'; trains himself, 'I will breathe in…&…out sensitive to mental fabrication'; trains himself, 'I will breathe in…&…out calming mental fabrication': On that occasion the monk remains focused on *feelings* in & of themselves—ardent, alert, & mindful—subduing greed & distress with reference to the world. I tell you, monks, that this—careful attention to in-&-out breaths—is classed as a feeling among feelings, which is why the monk on that occasion remains focused on feelings in & of themselves—ardent, alert, & mindful—subduing greed & distress with reference to the world.

"[3] On whatever occasion a monk trains himself, 'I will breathe in…&…out sensitive to the mind'; trains himself, 'I will breathe in…&…out gladdening the mind'; trains himself, 'I will breathe in…&…out steadying the mind'; trains himself, 'I will breathe in…&…out releasing the mind': On that occasion the monk remains focused on the *mind* in & of itself—ardent, alert, & mindful—subduing greed & distress with reference to the world. I don't say that there is mindfulness of in-&-out breathing in one of lapsed mindfulness and no alertness, which is why the monk on that occasion remains focused on the mind in & of itself—ardent, alert, & mindful—subduing greed & distress with reference to the world.

"[4] On whatever occasion a monk trains himself, 'I will breathe in…&…out focusing on inconstancy'; trains himself, 'I will breathe in…&…out focusing on dispassion'; trains himself, 'I will breathe in…&…out focusing on cessation'; trains himself, 'I will breathe in…&…out focusing on relinquishing': On that occasion the monk remains focused on *mental qualities* in & of themselves—ardent, alert, & mindful—subduing greed & distress with reference to the world. He who sees with discernment the abandoning of greed & distress is one who watches carefully with equanimity, which is why the monk on that occasion remains focused on mental qualities in & of themselves—ardent, alert, & mindful—subduing greed & distress with reference to the world.

"This is how mindfulness of in-&-out breathing is developed & pursued so as to bring the four establishings of mindfulness to their culmination." — *MN 118*

Glossary

Ajaan (Thai): Teacher; mentor.

Arahant: A "worthy one" or "pure one"; a person whose mind is free of defilement and thus not destined for further rebirth. A title for the Buddha and the highest level of his noble disciples.

Bhava: Becoming. A sense of identity within a particular world of experience. The three levels of becoming are on the level of sensuality, form, and formlessness.

Brahmā: An inhabitant of the higher heavenly realms of form or formlessness.

Brahman: A member of the priestly caste, which claimed to be the highest caste in India, based on birth. In a specifically Buddhist usage, "brahman" can also mean an arahant, conveying the point that excellence is based not on birth or race, but on the qualities attained in the mind.

Brahma-vihāra: A mental attitude that, when developed to a level where it can extend without limit to all beings, is conducive to rebirth in one of the Brahmā worlds. There are four altogether: unlimited goodwill *(mettā),* unlimited compassion *(karuṇā),* unlimited empathetic joy *(muditā),* and unlimited equanimity *(upekkhā).*

Deva (devatā): Literally, "shining one." A being on the subtle levels of sensuality, form, or formlessness, living either in terrestrial or heavenly realms.

Dhamma: (1) Event; action; (2) a phenomenon in and of itself; (3) mental quality; (4) doctrine, teaching; (5) nibbāna (although there are passages describing nibbāna as the abandoning of all dhammas). Sanskrit form: *Dharma.*

Gotama: The Buddha's clan name.

Jhāna: Mental absorption. A state of strong concentration focused on a single sensation or mental notion.

Kamma: (1) Intentional action; (2) the results of intentional actions. Sanskrit form: *Karma.*

Khandha: Aggregate; physical and mental phenomena as they are directly experienced; the raw material for a sense of self: *rūpa*—physical form; *vedanā*—feelings of pleasure, pain, or neither pleasure nor pain; *saññā*—perception, mental label; *saṅkhāra*—fabrication, thought construct; and *viññāṇa*—sensory consciousness, the act of taking note of sense data and ideas as they occur. Sanskrit form: *Skandha.*

Māra: The personification of temptation and all forces, within and without, that create obstacles to release from *saṁsāra*

Nibbāna: Literally, the "unbinding" of the mind from passion, aversion, and delusion, and from the entire round of death and rebirth. As this term also denotes the extinguishing of a fire, it carries connotations of stilling, cooling, and peace. Sanskrit form: *Nirvāṇa.*

Pāli: The language of the oldest extant Canon of the Buddha's teachings.

Samatha: Tranquility, steadiness of mind.

Saṁsāra: Transmigration; the process of wandering through repeated states of becoming, with their attendant death and rebirth.

Saṁvega: A sense of dismay over the meaninglessness and futility of life as it is ordinarily lived, combined with a strong sense of urgency in looking for a way out.

Saṅgha: 1) On the conventional *(sammati)* level, this term denotes the communities of Buddhist monks and nuns; 2) on the ideal *(ariya)* level, it denotes those followers of the Buddha, lay or ordained, who have attained at least stream-entry, the first stage of awakening.

Sutta: Discourse.

Tathāgata: Literally, one who has "become authentic *(tatha-āgata)*" or who is "truly gone *(tathā-gata)*"*:* an epithet used in ancient India for a person who has attained the highest religious goal. In Buddhism, it usually denotes the Buddha, although occasionally it also denotes any of his arahant disciples.

Vinaya: The monastic discipline, whose rules and traditions comprise six volumes in printed text. The Buddha's own term for the religion he taught

was, “This Dhamma-Vinaya.”

Vipassanā: Clear-seeing insight into the processes of fabrication in the mind, with the purpose of developing dispassion for those processes.

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