

DHAMMA

for
the
Asking

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A Collection of Dhamma Talks

By Ajahn Suchart Abhijāto

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*“The Gift of Dhamma
Excels All Other Gifts”*

- The Lord Buddha -

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C O N T E N T S



- 01 Insight into Buddhism *1*
- 02 The Path to Enlightenment *19*
- 03 Dhamma to Phra Farang *41*
- 04 Twins *73*
- 05 The Key to Success in Meditation *107*
- 06 Q & A with Monks and Laypeople *117*
- 07 Laypeople from Singapore *127*
- 08 The Unsatisfactory Nature of Existence *141*
- 09 Q & A with an Australian Layperson *155*
- 10 The Mind and Its Endless Rebirth *163*
- 11 Asian University Students *225*
- 12 Laypeople from Malaysia *251*
- 13 Lady from Hong Kong *277*
- 14 Laypeople from Singapore *285*
- 15 Western Monks from Wat Marpjan *299*
- 16 Asian University Students *315*
- 17 Laypeople from California *333*
- Addendum *361*
- Glossary *363*
- Related Websites for Further Reading *373*

01

Insight into Buddhism

January 11, 2007

The following is an interview Ajahn Suchart gave to a Pattaya cable TV channel.

Interviewer: Can you please be so kind to tell us a bit about your background before you became a monk?

Tan Ajahn: I was born 59 years ago in Bangkok. When I was about ten, my parents moved to Pattaya. They sent me to a school in Bangkok, an American missionary school founded by a Christian denomination called the Seventh-Day Adventist. It is now called the Ekamai International School and teaches in English based on the American educational system.

After graduating from high school, I worked for about a year and a half as a translator/interpreter, saved some money, went to college in the States, in California, and graduated in civil engineering.

After that I returned home and took time off, learning about things that I wanted to know, especially religion.

Eventually I started to practise some Buddhist meditation and found it to be profitable for me, in the sense that I gained peace of mind. I was very happy inwardly.

So I wanted to have more of this. The only way to do it is to become a monk, because a monk's main goal is to seek peace of mind by practising meditation. In order to do this, we have to relinquish all of our material comfort and seek only spiritual peace and happiness. That's the reason why I became a monk in 1975. I have been a monk for about thirty-two years now.

Interviewer: What is the daily routine of a monk in the temple here?

Tan Ajahn: The daily routine starts at about four o'clock in the morning. When the bell is rung, monks will attend a morning meditation and chanting session, with about an hour of meditation in the main shrine followed by chanting for about thirty minutes. After that we prepare ourselves to go on our alms-round to collect food for our meal. We go to several villages around the temple. We have pickup trucks and minibuses to take us to the villages where we walk for about half an hour. Then we come back to the temple's dining hall where we share the food we have collected, and receiving more food from people who come from other areas like Pattaya or Rayong.

A special day called an "observance day" happens once a week, which in Thai we call "Wan Phra." This is the weekly religious holiday when Buddhists come to the temple to do their religious duties, like giving food

to the monks, and taking the five precepts: abstaining from killing, stealing, adultery, lying, and drinking alcohol. These are the five main precepts that the Buddha gave lay Buddhists to observe in order to keep them safe and sound from all kinds of trouble. Before we eat, I give a thirty-minute talk, just like I am talking to you now, telling the lay people about the various aspects of the Buddha's teaching.

When I finish talking, the monks start eating. The lay people also eat the food that is left over from the monks. After that, we go our separate ways. The laypeople go home, while the monks stay and clean up the dining hall. Then the monks go back to their living quarters and are free to do more meditation, study the scriptures or just rest. In the afternoon, at about three o'clock the monks are allowed to have some refreshments, like coffee, tea, or fruit juice. The monks here eat only once a day following the forest tradition.

You see, there are two kinds of traditions in Thai Buddhism: the city tradition and the forest tradition. City monks eat two meals a day: a light meal in the morning and one before noon, at about eleven o'clock. The city monks' main duty is to study the scriptures, while the forest monks wander in the forest seeking the quiet of the forest to practise meditation. They eat once a day because that's easiest when living in the forest. People who give food are usually farmers who have to go to work in the rice fields after giving food. The practice of eating once a day also assists our meditation because the less we eat, the less drowsy we become when we meditate. When we eat a lot, we usually fall asleep.

Let's come back to the duty of the monks. In the afternoon, at about three the monks will go to a place we call the 'coffee shop' where we can have some refreshments: hot or cold drinks. After that we help sweep the paths and the temple grounds. Then we wash and get ready for the evening session of chanting and meditation, which starts around six p.m. and lasts an hour and a half until seven-thirty. Then we go back to our quarters to do more meditation, sitting or walking meditation, go to sleep, and get ready for the next day, which starts around four in the morning.

This is the routine that we do every day. There is no holiday for us. Actually being a monk is already a holiday in the sense that we don't have to work, pay bills or pay any rent. Nothing. Everything is paid for. The only thing expected from us is to observe the three duties of a monk:

1. Do good.
2. Abstain from doing evil.

3. Purify the mind by eliminating the three mental defilements, namely greed, hatred, and delusion, which are the cause of all the troubles in the world and in ourselves. We are not content or happy because of these three defilements. If we could get rid of all of them, we would be peaceful at all times. We would never crave for anything.

Interviewer: What is the *kamma* of life, and how do we maintain a happy life at all times?

Tan Ajahn: *Kamma* in Buddhism means action: what we do by way of our thoughts, words and deeds, which is the cause of our happiness or sorrow. So, we have to watch what we do, what we say and what we think. Especially what we think, because it is the one that tells us what to do and what to say. Like today, before you could come here, you first had to think that you wanted to come to see me. Then you had to tell your friends to get all the equipment ready and get here. *Kamma* is the three actions of thoughts, words and deeds that can be good, bad or neither. If you do good, you become happy. You feel good. Like, if you want to go help someone today, you can go give food to the elderly or handicapped. Maybe it's your birthday and you want to do something good. When you do this, you will feel good. On the other hand, if you steal or say something bad to other people, you will feel bad after having done it. If you do good all the time, you'll always be happy. But if you do bad, you'll always feel bad.

That's why the Buddha stressed the two actions that I mentioned earlier: do good deeds and avoid doing bad ones. In addition, you also have to get rid of the three defilements, namely greed, hatred and delusion, because they are the root causes of our bad actions, even if you might not think so. When you want something and you can get it legally or morally, then it's okay. But if you can't afford it and yet you still want it, you might have to steal it or rob a bank just so you can get the money to buy it or do what you want to do. It's because of your greed. You have desire. You want to do this and that.

But really you don't have to do anything to be happy. Just sit still. We cannot sit still because our greed keeps pushing us to go and acquire things and get into trouble. We have to compete with other people and may have to do things which are not proper, not right, or not legal. This gets us into trouble. But if we can overcome our greed and desire to have this and have that, to do this or do that, then we can just stay at home, safe and sound.

So, the root cause of all our problems is greed, hatred and delusion. When we want something and someone stops us from getting it, we get mad at that person. We get angry and want to do something bad to that person. What causes us to become greedy is our delusion, not knowing what true happiness is. Our delusion always tells us that there's something better on the other side of the fence, that the grass is always greener on the other side. But, in truth, there's nothing in this world that can really bring us true happiness.

Everything is tainted with trouble, pain, anxiety and worry because everything changes, never remaining the same. When we get what we want, at first, it's good. Then, in a few days' time, it turns sour or goes bad and we have to look for something else. This applies to everything: humans, animals, and animate or inanimate things. The Buddha said they are all impermanent and become the cause of our mental stress, anxiety and worry.

If we want to have a peaceful, calm life, then we have to relinquish these things, not relying on them. This is what we call wisdom. We have to be able to tell ourselves that everything in this world isn't worth the effort. It's better to live without those things. But it's hard

to do because our delusion and greed keeps pushing us, preventing us from staying put, staying at home, and not doing anything. We feel terrible, bored, lonely and miserable when we have nothing to do.

But these feelings can be overcome with the practice that the Buddha prescribed for all Buddhists, namely the three actions of doing good, avoiding evil and eliminating the three defilements. Doing good means giving things to other people, helping other people. Avoiding doing evil means not hurting other people, keeping the five precepts. In order to eliminate the defilements of greed, hatred and delusion, we have to meditate.

We have to sit down and concentrate on one particular mental object, the breath for instance. Just focus on that object and try to avoid thinking about anything. Just concentrate on our breathing. When breathing in, be mindful of breathing in. When breathing out, be mindful of that. Watch our mind. Don't let it go think about other things. If we persist in keeping our mind focused on our breathing, sooner or later, our mind will converge and drop into calm, like a golf ball that we hit into a hole. When the ball falls into the hole, it cannot move around.

In the same way, when the mind converges into single-mindedness, it will rest and become at peace with itself. At that stage, we will experience spiritual bliss, a sense of well-being, calm and contentment. If we have experienced this even just once, we will know that this is the answer to life. This is what we are all looking for. It's the Buddhist Holy Grail.

Interviewer: For those who have sinned, can they be redeemed?

Tan Ajahn: No. Sin or unwholesome action, once committed, will bring results that will hit us sooner or later. Maybe not in this life time. Maybe in the next life. The immediate result that we can feel right away is in the mind. We feel bad, worried and afraid. When we see a cop, we can get very scared. This is already the result of our sin. We cannot absolve or wash it away.

Interviewer: Is there really hell or heaven after life?

Tan Ajahn: Hell and heaven are already here in this life and also in the afterlife. When we feel good after having done something good, this is heaven already. It's all in the mind. When we do something bad, we feel bad, which is hell already, right in this life. In Buddhism, heaven and hell also exist after we die, depending on our *kamma*, that which what we have previously done.

For instance, when we die and it's time for our bad deeds to bear fruit, then we'll have to go to hell. If it's time for our good deeds to bear fruit, then we'll go to heaven. But heaven or hell is not a place or a location. It's a state of mind.

The nature of the mind is very difficult to grasp. We all have a mind. Without the mind, we would not be conscious or be able to feel or know. The mind is the consciousness, the one who knows, the seed of our emotions, our suffering and happiness, resulting from what we do, say and especially what we think.

When we think good thoughts, we feel good. We are already in heaven at that moment. Whatever we do, good or bad, will accumulate and become a habit that will compel us to do it again and again.

Heaven and hell are inside the mind, which cannot be perceived with the naked eyes. The only way to perceive the mind, to get to know the mind, is through meditation whereby we focus our attention on one particular mental object, such as the in-and-out breath until the mind converges and rests in peace and calm. That's when we will get to see the mind, because during that time the mind is temporarily detached from the body and all sensual objects like sights, sounds, smells, tastes, and tactile objects that come through the corresponding sense doors of the eyes, ears, nose, tongue and body. There we'll see the mind in its pure form and will know that heaven and hell are in the mind itself.

Because when the body breaks up, the mind doesn't break up with the body. The mind will continue on with the state of mind that we have developed. If we have consistently done good, good mental states like heaven and *Nibbāna* will appear. In *Nibbāna*, the mind is totally free from all forms of suffering because the three defilements of greed, hatred and delusion have been completely eliminated. If we have consistently done bad, woeful states of mind like stress, worry and anxiety will consume the mind. This is hell.

So, to answer your question about whether hell and heaven really exist, the answer is yes. It's not a place or location though, but rather a state of mind at the time of

the body's dissolution. It can last for a long time, but will eventually disappear and a new state of mind will take over. If it is a happy state of mind, it is heaven. If it is a state of mind consumed by the fire of suffering, anxiety, worry, hate and fear, it is hell that will remain for a while and will eventually be supplanted by another state of mind. This process goes on and on, driven by the *kamma* that we have committed previously, until we once again reap the state of mind of a human being. We will then take a human birth again. Or if we have the state of mind of an animal, then we will be born as an animal.

The thing that separates humans from animals is the observance of the five precepts. If we can keep the five precepts, we are creating the state of mind of a human being. But if we keep breaking the five precepts, we are creating the state of mind of animals. It's good and bad *kamma* that makes us humans or animals and that sends us to heaven or hell.

Interviewer: You told us about the duty of a monk in a temple, but what do you think the duty of a lay Buddhist is?

Tan Ajahn: For lay people, the three categories of action that I mentioned earlier also apply, but at a lower level of intensity. Doing good for lay people means helping other people, like helping the sick, elderly, needy, and also the monks because monks have no occupation. They rely on the support of the lay people to exist. That's why lay people give food to the monks every morning if there are monks who happen to pass by their house. If not, they will wait until the weekly religious observance

day to come to the temple to give food to the monks. This is just a brief example of what I mean by doing good. But it can cover every form of charity and everything you do that is beneficial and not harmful to other people and animals. If you see stray dogs and give them food and shelter, this is also doing good. But Thai Buddhists believe that giving to monks will earn them the most merit because monks study and practise the teaching of the Buddha and then teach the lay people who have no time to study themselves. So, they have to rely on the monks to teach them the Dhamma.

To avoid doing evil is to maintain the five precepts, which are suitable for lay people: to abstain from killing, stealing, committing adultery, lying, and consuming alcoholic drinks. The reason why we have to abstain from alcohol is because we will lose our ability to control our thoughts and minds. We will think crazy things and then do crazy things that will hurt other people. But if you really wanted to drink, you should first tie yourself to a bed or something so that when you get drunk, you'll just go to sleep and will not hurt yourself or other people.

To eliminate greed, hatred and delusion effectively, we have to meditate. The simplest form of meditation for lay Buddhists is to chant Buddhist verses. By concentrating on chanting and not thinking about other things, the mind will gradually become calmer and more content because it has no time to think and worry. This is the simplest form of meditation that will develop to a more advanced level when we will just concentrate on one particular mental object, such as the in-and-out breath.

The goal of meditation is twofold: mental calm and wisdom or insight into the true nature of all physical and mental processes. Once the mind is calm, it becomes reasonable, logical and unemotional, ready to be taught the truth of life that we will all have to face. Having been born, we are all subject to aging, sickness and death, which no one can escape. The best way to face them is to be ready for them.

The body doesn't know that it will age, get sick and die — the mind does. Due to delusion, the mind thinks the body is itself and clings to it. When the body becomes sick, old and dies, the mind thinks that it is the one that gets sick, gets old and dies, when in fact it doesn't. The mind, as I said, goes on after the dissolution of the body.

So we have to teach the mind to be brave, to face up to the truth of the body. Once the mind becomes calm and composed, it will accept it and be free from anxiety and agitation. This is the development of wisdom in Buddhism: to know the truth of life and face it squarely and calmly. Because the mind doesn't get old, get sick or die; it's the body that does. Due to delusion, the mind thinks that it is getting old, getting sick and dying.

Once the mind has learned the truth and embraces it, the mind will no longer resist or be afraid. It will accept it just like anything else, just like the rain, a storm, and good or bad weather. They come and go, but the mind doesn't change with these things. The mind just knows.

These are the three duties that the Buddha prescribed for Buddhists. We practise charity, abstain

from morally objectionable behaviour by keeping the five precepts, and practise meditation to calm the mind and instil it with the truth of impermanence.

Interviewer: How do we get rid of material possessions, and why do we have to do that?

Tan Ajahn: Material possessions have both beneficial and harmful consequences. We need some materials in order to live a comfortable life. The body needs the four requisites of food, shelter, clothing, and medicine to maintain life. But we shouldn't have more than we need. The surplus will only be a burden we have to take care of. If we live a simple life, we can get rid of a lot of material possessions. Ask yourself these questions every time you want something: "Do I need it? Can I live without it?" If you can live without it and don't really need it, then you shouldn't have it.

Interviewer: What do you think of people's perception of Buddhism in today's age?

Tan Ajahn: Today, people's understanding of Buddhism is quite far from the core of the Buddhist teachings. The Buddha always taught the principle of *kamma*. You have to rely on yourself. Even the Buddha cannot help you. But sometimes people go to the temple, pray, and ask for things from the Buddha images. This is not the teaching of the Buddha, because the Buddha always said that you are your own refuge.

You have to do good in order to reap good outcomes. You have to avoid doing bad if you don't want to reap bad consequences. You have to overcome your greed, hatred

and delusion. But instead you go to the Buddha with your greed. You want your wife or husband to be faithful to you. You want to always have good health. These are things the Buddha can't give you because good health depends on how you live your life. If you abstain from alcohol and exercise a lot, you'll have better health than someone who drinks and doesn't exercise. You have to rely on yourself, not the Buddha. The Buddha is just a teacher.

But most Thai Buddhists don't realize this. We think the Buddha is a god who will always answer our prayers and wishes. If we want to be admitted into a university, we pray to the Buddha, spending three days at a temple hoping that we will be accepted by the university. Sometimes it happens — not because of our prayers — but because we studied hard and have the qualifications. That's all. Those who cannot separate cause from effect will believe that Buddha images and famous monks can work magic for them. If they need anything, they will donate some money and pray for it. When they get it, they will tell other people how good and effective a certain monk or Buddha image is. People will then rush to that particular monk or Buddha image without thinking that it's just a coincidence. Many Thai Buddhists have this erroneous belief because they don't study the Buddha's teachings.

Interviewer: Why do foreigners become monks and stay in the temple, and what makes them so interested in Buddhism?

Tan Ajahn: Because they study Buddhism, they understand and appreciate the teaching, and know that if they practise they will benefit from it. Just like me, when I first studied Buddhism and applied it in my daily life by practising meditation, I found something that I never had before right inside myself, something inside all of us. But we keep looking outside. We look for money and material possessions. But we are never truly happy with what we have because material possessions are not the answer to our happiness. The real happiness is waiting for us inside ourselves. By meditating we can corral the mind into a state of single-mindedness where we will experience the kind of happiness that we have never experienced before.

This is one of the reasons why foreigners become monks in Thailand. First they study the Buddha's teaching, and then they practise it in their daily life by giving to charity, abstaining from bad behaviour, and meditating. Experiencing the results makes them want to have more. The best way to do this is to become a monk. And there's no better place in the world to become a monk than in Thailand, because Thailand has a long established tradition of monkhood. I think this is the reason why most foreigners come to Thailand to become monks. Plus the fact that they have found that acquiring material possessions is not the answer. They come from countries more advanced and developed in material products than Thailand and know that those things are not the happiness they are looking for.

Interviewer: How many of them are here with you today?

Tan Ajahn: Right now we have only one, a young American man who is an exchange student with the Rotary Club. He came to talk to me a few months ago when he first arrived and wanted to know more about Buddhism. I told him, and he wanted to try, so he became a monk. He is staying here now and observing the daily routine that I mentioned to you. I asked him how he was, and he said he was very happy.

Interviewer: Lastly, what words of wisdom would you give to our foreign audience?

Tan Ajahn: My word of advice to you is to be thankful to have come across the teachings of the Buddha, because what the Buddha knew and what he told us is a hard-to-come-by transcendental truth that will make us happy all the time and free us from all forms of stress and grief. If you study his teachings and apply them in your daily life, I'm sure you'll always be happy.

First of all, the Buddha said you have to do good by giving to charity, helping those who are less fortunate than you are. Secondly, don't hurt other people, no matter what you do. Thirdly, find some peace of mind by doing meditation. You can start by mentally chanting some verses you know. Just keep chanting and not thinking about anything, in order to rid your mind of restlessness. When you think, you agitate your mind. When you stop thinking, the agitation will disappear. You will then have peace of mind and happiness. The Buddha said that the happiness that arises from peace of mind surpasses all other happiness.

But it's not easy to do, because the mind by its nature keeps thinking all the time, like a monkey that keeps moving from one tree branch to the next. The mind thinks about one story, then moves on to the next story, on and on. At the same time, it creates all kinds of emotions along with it. If you think good thoughts, you'll feel good. If you think bad ones, you'll feel bad. If you helped someone today, making him happier and improving his life, when you think about it, you'll feel good. If you did something bad to someone, hurting someone, when you think about it, you'll feel bad.

Learn how to control your mind. Steer your mind to think good thoughts, and prevent it from thinking bad ones. In order to do this, you have to live simply. If you don't, your greed will push you to do things that you'll regret later on. If you live simply, you won't do things that will cause problems or hurt other people.

So this is my advice to you: Be happy with what you have. Live as simply as you can. Just have the four requisites of life: food, shelter, clothing, and medicine. Once you have these, there's no need to have anything else because what you have will give you problems and stress. When you possess something, you want to keep it as long as possible, but things don't last forever or remain the same. They always change. They come and they go. If you cling to them, you will feel terrible when they leave you. Take it as it comes. Don't cling. Then you will always be happy. I hope what I have said to you today will more or less help you to understand Buddhism and the monkhood. Thank you.



02

The Path to Enlightenment

August 22, 2007

Let me start by welcoming you all to Thailand and to Buddhism. Buddhism is the teaching of the Buddha, an enlightened person who knows what we don't know and sees what we don't see, namely the mind, the other half of ourselves. We only see our body, but we don't see the mind. We don't know what the mind is and don't know how to make our mind happy. Instead we tend to do the opposite. We make our mind unhappy all the time. We are worried, anxious and restless. We don't know how to take care of our mind. We don't even know that we have a mind to look after. So we only take care of our body and our desires. This is where the problem is. We don't know what the mind needs, what makes the mind happy. We need someone like the Buddha to tell us. If we believe him and follow his teaching, then our mind will always be happy and content.

Buddhism arises from the enlightenment of the Buddha. After the Buddha became enlightened, he spread this knowledge to other people. People who heard and

took up his teaching eventually became enlightened. They then helped spread this knowledge further until today. Buddhism is now 2550 years old. Why is Buddhism still practical and useful today? It's because it can teach us to find what we're looking for, which is happiness and contentment, while nothing else in this world can. No matter how much money we have, we will still be hungry and want more. We will never find contentment or be free from stress, anxiety, worry and fear because we don't know how to do so.

What we should know is that our existence, our life, is composed of two parts: the body and the mind. The body is the servant, while the mind is the master. Before the body can do anything, like standing, walking, going here and there, it first has to be commanded by the mind. For example, first the mind has to think that you want to come to Thailand. Then your body begins making preparations, getting your passport, visa, and money ready. The mind initiates all our physical and verbal actions, which can be either good, bad, or neither good nor bad. A good action generates feelings of peace and happiness. A bad action creates stress, anxiety, worry, agitation and restlessness. Action that is neither good nor bad produces neither good nor bad feelings. These are the three types of actions that are initiated by the mind.

Good action is when we think of doing something good for other people, like helping other people or buying a piece of cake for your friend's birthday. It makes you and your friend feel good. This is a good action. Bad action is when you hurt someone, like stealing your friend's camera. It makes you feel bad and worried that you might

be caught. Your friend also feels bad. This is a bad action resulting in bad feelings. Action that is neither good nor bad is when you neither hurt nor help other people, like eating, exercising and sleeping. These three types of actions are called *kamma*: actions of body, speech and mind. The most important action is the mental action, what you think. The Buddha, therefore, teaches us to watch our mind and thoughts and steer them in the right direction, the good direction. Every time you want to do something good, you should do it right away. Don't wait. Every time you want to do something bad, you must stop right away because it will hurt yourself and other people.

The Buddha teaches the way to perfect peace of mind, to be free from bad feelings in three stages: charity, morality and mental development. Charity is being generous by giving or helping others. Give away what you don't need and keep what you need. Instead of spending your money on luxury items or going out, which doesn't benefit you mentally, you should give that money to charity. It will make you content and happy.

Morality is abstaining from hurting others by observing the five precepts:

1. Abstain from killing other living beings, whether animals or human beings.

2. Abstain from stealing or taking things that do not belong to you.

3. Abstain from sexual misconduct such as adultery. You should have one partner at a time, one husband or one wife.

4. Abstain from telling lies. You should tell the truth. If you cannot tell the truth just keep quiet.

5. Abstain from taking stuff that will intoxicate your mind, like alcoholic drinks or drugs because you will not be able to watch and control your thoughts or distinguish good from bad, right from wrong.

These five precepts will protect you from getting into trouble, both externally and internally. Outwardly, you will not run into trouble with other people, the law or the police. Inwardly, you will not worry or be afraid that you will be caught or punished for what you've done.

Mental development is to make your mind higher and better. Right now your mind is unstable. You are continually bombarded by all kinds of emotions. One day you feel good, and then the next day you feel bad. Sometimes you get mad; sometimes you are sad, sometimes you are happy. You cannot control these emotions. By developing your mind, you will be able to control both your mind and emotions. Eventually you will always be at peace and happy.

Mental development is divided into two parts: calm and insight. First you calm the mind by going to a secluded, quiet place, sitting cross-legged in a lotus position, closing your eyes and concentrating on a meditation object to prevent your mind from thinking about other things. If the mind keeps thinking, it will not be still, calm and stable. When you think about something you don't like, you feel bad. If you think about something you like, you'll want to go for it. You will not be still and

peaceful. You can be peaceful only when you stop thinking. You can do this by concentrating your mind on a meditation object, like your breathing. Just be mindful of your breathing. When you breathe in, know you're breathing in. When you breathe out, know you're breathing out. Just be aware of your breathing, not letting your mind think about other things.

To prevent yourself from falling asleep you should sit with your back straight but relaxed. Don't be tense. Put your hands on your lap palm up, your right hand over your left hand, close your eyes and just watch your breathing. Focus your attention at the tip of your nose where the air makes contact as it comes in and out. Make sure you don't think about other things. If you do, come back to your breathing. Breathing in, you know you're breathing in. Breathing out, you know you're breathing out. Just be aware whether you are breathing in or out, whether the air is coarse or subtle. Just be aware of it. Don't force your breathing. Be natural. Do not think of the past, things that already happened this morning or yesterday, nor of the future, things that will happen tomorrow.

The goal of calming meditation is to get rid of your thinking. If you persist in your concentration, sooner or later, your mind will gradually become calmer and calmer and eventually it will drop into the state of single-mindedness that feels like falling into a well, where it stops thinking. Once you have reached that state, you don't have to concentrate on your breathing anymore because you have achieved your goal. However long you might remain in that state, just leave it alone. For most

beginners the mind will remain just briefly, maybe just a few seconds and then it will withdraw from that state. While you are in that state, you'll feel a sense of peace, happiness, and liberation from all kinds of anxiety and worry. All emotions will disappear. Your mind will be clear like still water.

If you can do this, you will know how to clear your mind when you feel bad. It doesn't do you any good to become worried or be sad about things externally because you can't do anything about them anyway. You cannot control things around you. They can make you mad, sad, worried and unhappy. With meditation you can eliminate them by concentrating on your breathing and forgetting about the things that upset you. You can remain peaceful and happy for a while. But you cannot remain in meditation all the time as you'll have to come out and face the world, face your problems and your responsibilities. You can face them calmly if you have insight, understanding the nature of things around you. They all have three common characteristics.

The first is impermanence. All things are impermanent, unstable and constantly changing. For instance, our body does not remain the same. Every second it is slowly changing. We are getting older and older all the time. If you don't believe me, go back and look at a picture you took of yourself ten years ago, and look at yourself now, and you will see that you don't look the same. It's the same body that has gradually evolved into what you are now. It will not remain as it is because ten years from now it will look different from today. This is impermanence or change. Everything around us changes, not just people but materials things as well. When you buy something,

it is brand new. After a while it becomes old and eventually breaks down. When you buy a watch or a radio, for example, after a few years, you will have to take it to the repair shop. If it is beyond repair, you'll have to throw it away.

You should contemplate on impermanence all the time. Tell yourself that whatever you have in your possession will not last. Once you know this, you will be prepared to face the eventuality that things change from good to bad. You will not be emotionally affected. You'll feel as if nothing has happened because you knew in advance that this would happen. Everything around you, including your body, is not stable, but is always changing. You don't know when you will get sick. But if you are prepared to get sick, you will not be miserable. You'll just take some medicine or see a doctor. Whether you'll get well or not will not bother you. You'll tell yourself: that's the way it is. Your mind will not be affected by the illnesses of the body.

The second characteristic is *dukkha* or suffering. Whatever you have will eventually hurt you. For example, suppose you are single and think that having a boyfriend or girlfriend will make you happier. But that is not the case. Because after you get married, you will inevitably quarrel and get upset. Everything is like this. They will make you sad and miserable sooner or later. They don't always make you happy. There are two sides to a story — not only the good side, but also the bad side. The Buddha taught us to look at the other side of the story as well. When you know ahead of time what will happen, you will change your mind. You'll choose to remain single when you find that the misery outweighs the happiness.

The third characteristic is *anattā* or not-self. There's no self in anything. Everything is without a self, like this bouquet of flowers or this shack or your body. The Buddha says they are just the composition of the four elements: liquid, solid, gas and heat. In other words: earth, water, wind and fire. Your body comes from the food that you eat, which in turn comes from the four elements. They are all elements: carbon dioxide, oxygen, hydrogen and so forth. There is no self in the body. If you dissect it, you won't find a self in this body. It's the delusion of the mind that creates the perception that there is a self in this body. This body is "I." "I" am this body. This body is "myself." The Buddha says this is not the truth, it is a delusion. The truth is that there is no "self."

In order to see this truth, you have to meditate until your mind fully rests in peace, in full concentration. When that happens, the mind and the body will temporarily separate. The feeling that there is a body will disappear from the mind. During that time, there is just the mind by itself - the knowing is there, but there is nothing to know. Right now you have the body in your awareness. But when you meditate until the mind enters full concentration, it will be temporarily severed from the sense doors and their objects, from sight, sound, smell, taste and tactile objects, from the eyes, ears, nose, tongue and body.

You will then see that your existence is composed of two parts: the physical part that is the body, and the mental part that is the mind. The physical part is impermanent, while the mental part is permanent.

Eventually this body will break up, returning to where it came from. The water element will go back to the water element. The wind element will go back to the wind element. The fire element will go back to the fire element. The earth element will go back to the earth element. The mind will go on to a new existence propelled by the three cravings, namely craving for sensual pleasures, craving for being and craving for non-being.

But if the mind realizes that to be born again is painful and miserable, it will strive to cut off the three cravings to stop itself from taking birth again. By doing so, it does not annihilate itself because the mind is indestructible. It is one of the six basic elements of the universe called the knowing element. The other five elements are earth, water, wind, fire and space. All animate beings are made up of these six elements, while all inanimate objects are made up of just five elements, without the knowing element.

The culprit here is our delusion that prevents the mind from seeing the three characteristics of impermanence, *dukkha* or suffering, and *anattā* or not-self, causing it to cling or become attached to whatever it comes into contact with. Whatever we have, we cling to it and want it to last and stay with us forever. But nothing lasts forever. When it leaves us or changes, we become sad. When it's still with us, we are worried, wondering when it will leave us.

The Buddha therefore taught us to look at these three characteristics. Once we are able to see them we will let go of our attachment. Then whatever happens

will not cause us any pain. We will always be at ease, at peace with everything, regardless of what happens. This is the goal of Buddhism, which is to teach the mind to let go of everything, not to cling to anything, to know that nothing lasts forever, that everything is not really good for us and doesn't really make us happy. Things do not belong to us. They are not us. They have no self. Self is just delusion of the mind. When we see that, we will let go of everything. We will then live in peace. No matter what happens, we already know and have already let go. We won't care what happens. We can live without it. But we have to do these three stages of practice, namely: charity, morality and mental development.

Be charitable. Don't keep what you don't need. Keep only what you need for your existence, like the four basic requisites of life: food, shelter, clothing, and medicine. Anything more than that is considered a surplus. The more you have, the more problems, worry and mental stress you will have. Live simply; have as little as possible. You should not seek the happiness that arises from acquiring money and material things. You should instead seek the happiness that results from giving away your money and possessions because that's true happiness, without any anxiety or stress.

Live a moral life. Avoid doing anything that hurts other people and thus in return hurts yourself by making you worried and afraid.

Practise meditation. Control your mind to always stay calm and not to worry about anything by telling yourself that there is nothing to worry about because

The Path to Enlightenment

whatever is going to happen will happen. You cannot cling to anything. You cannot always have it your way. If you can do this at all time, you will be able to control your mind and emotions. This is basically the core of the Buddha's teaching.



Questions & Answers



Student: How long can we stay in the state of mental concentration or single-mindedness?

Tan Ajahn: You might have heard of some yogis or meditators who can remain in meditation for days, even seven days at a time, without getting out of the sitting position. It takes years of training before you can do that. But this is not the goal of Buddhism. You shouldn't remain in that state all the time, but should live a normal life and be capable of coping with life's trials and tribulations with insight, knowing that everything is impermanent, not conducive to happiness and not your possession. If you know this, you will not be afflicted by any mental stress, which is more important than sitting in mental absorption because after you come out of that state you can still be unhappy when you see things you don't like. You will still be emotionally unstable. The only thing that will make you emotionally stable is the knowledge of the three characteristics, which you must always keep close to you.

But you tend to forget it. As soon as you see something, you forget that it is impermanent. When you see something you like, you say, "I want to have that." You have to train your mind to be quicker than your

desire. When you want something, you should say, “No, it is not good for me.” If you could do this, it means you have insight. But if you say, “I want to have this. I want to become that. I want to go there,” it means you are still deluded. You still don’t have insight or wisdom. You have to contemplate on the three characteristics all the time. If the mind gets tired, you should rest it by concentrating on your breathing to stop you from thinking, to recharge your mental strength. After you have rested, you will feel refreshed and strong, ready to contemplate the three characteristics again until it becomes your second nature. Then you don’t have to contemplate anymore because when you want something you will say, “I shouldn’t have it. It’s not good for me.” You have become enlightened.

When you no longer want anything, you can live alone and be happy. All you need is the four requisites of food, clothing, shelter and medicine to take care of your body. You don’t need other things because you have something better inside yourself: calm and peace of mind, arising from insight and letting go of your attachment. If you are truly detached, you will feel liberated and will no longer be affected by what happens. You are not emotionally involved. You know what’s going on. You know that’s the way it is.

Student: What happens to you when you die?

Tan Ajahn: It depends on how much you have developed your mind. The higher states of development will give you a better birth. You could be born as a human being again and continue your development until becoming a Buddha. That’s what the Buddha did.

He spent many life cycles developing his mind until he reached the highest state of mental development. Once you reach that state, you will not be born again.

Student: Are you aware of your previous lives?

Tan Ajahn: Not through vision. Through meditation experience, you can see that the mind is different from the body. From there, you can deduce that your mind must have come from a previous life because the mind does not die with the body. But I could not see what I was in my previous lives, as a dog, a cat or a human being. Some meditators can recollect their past lives, but it is not the goal of Buddhism, whose aim is to achieve insight into the three characteristics of existence that will enable the mind to detach from everything.

Some meditators can acquire a sixth sense: the ability to read other people's minds, or see things that others can't see, or contact spirits, which are minds that have no physical body. Once the mind leaves the body, it's called a spirit. When it reaches a good state of existence or heaven, that mind is then called "angel." When it reaches a bad state of existence or hell, it is called a "devil." But this is not the goal of Buddhism. The Buddha warns us to stay clear of those things. If you happen to acquire them, you should be careful not to assume them to be your intended goal, which is really to rid yourself of all forms of attachment that are the causes of your worry, anxiety and stress, and to realize peace and contentment, which is another kind of happiness. It is not the happiness that arises from seeing, hearing, or getting. It's better because it is free of stress and sadness.

Student: What is the meaning of life?

Tan Ajahn: According to Buddhism, we are here to develop our mind to the highest state. Every time we are born as a human being, we should cultivate the three stages of practice: charity, morality and meditation. This is the purpose of life according to Buddhism because our goal is to reach enlightenment, so we no longer have to be reborn. Because every time you are born, you have to get old, get sick and die. It's not good. No one likes it. But we all have to go through it. It's like getting on a plane — you have to land somewhere. Once you are born, you have to get sick, get old and die, sooner or later. If you don't get on the plane, you don't have to land. If you didn't have birth, you wouldn't have to die. The mind doesn't die with the body. The mind is always there. Delusion makes us think that being born is good. We can do all sorts of things, like getting married. This is the upside of life. We forget that there's also the downside. We'll eventually get old, get sick and die.

The purpose of life is to be charitable, to abstain from hurting other people and to practise meditation. Instead of watching television, you should meditate. If you have some free time and don't know what to do with it, you should sit in meditation. Concentrate on your breathing and don't think about anything. When you can no longer sit and feel that you have to get up, you should do walking meditation. Find a space where you can walk for 10 to 20 steps. While walking back and forth you should contemplate the impermanence of your body. It will get old, get sick and die. You'll have to leave everything behind. Keep teaching yourself this way.

The truth will slowly sink into your consciousness and make you let go of your attachment to things that you rely on to make you happy. You will see that you're happier doing meditation and letting go of things.

This may be contradictory to what you are doing right now because you are currently studying, which is also good for you because you need to have an occupation. You have to maintain life and look after yourself. Once you have achieved that, don't forget your main goal of enlightenment. You must first take good care of your body because you will need it to help you achieve enlightenment. You have to study hard in order to graduate and get a good job that will provide you with the money to look after your body. Don't spend your money on other things because it does not get you closer to enlightenment. You should give your surplus money to charity to get you closer to enlightenment. It will make you kinder, nicer, less greedy and less selfish.

When you are greedy, you tend to neglect other people. You only think of yourself and don't care if you hurt other people. But if you are charitable, you will think of other people. You will be kind and helpful. Your mind will be calmer and happier. You'll want to do more meditation because it will make you calmer and happier. You'll see that this is more rewarding than having lots of money or being king, president or prime minister.

I hope you'll take what you have learnt today and apply it in your daily life. I'm sure that your life will be better. I myself went to college and graduated with a degree in civil engineering degree, but it didn't improve

my mind. My mind was still as greedy, angry and deluded as ever. It didn't eliminate my greed, hatred and delusion. To get rid of those, you have to practise charity, morality and meditation. After you have eliminated them, you will have peace of mind, happiness and contentment. You will know this is the real thing. This is what really matters to the mind. Money or fame doesn't satisfy the mind or make it happy, content, peaceful or enlightened.

Student: It does for a very short time.

Tan Ajahn: Briefly. Then you'll want more.

Student: How do you overcome fear?

Tan Ajahn: By teaching yourself the truth of the three characteristics. When you know that you will die one day, you will not be afraid. We are afraid because we want to live forever. We don't want to die. We cannot accept the truth. Once you see that life is like the rising and setting of the sun, you will not be afraid of dying as it is like the setting of the sun. You have to teach yourself all the time that one day you will die, using this as your meditation object. It will make your mind calm and peaceful.

That's why monks have to live in the forest in order to be close to life threatening situations that will spur us to let go of our attachment to our body. When we have truly let go, we will not be affected by whatever happens to the body. It's better to live without fear for one day than to live with fear for a hundred years because fear is very damaging to the mind. You can get rid of fear by accepting the truth through the practice of meditation. You will need a calm mind to reflect on this truth. If your

mind is not calm, you will be prevented by your aversion to contemplate on this truth because this is the delusion's protective mechanism. The delusion will always try to protect its dominance. The truth will liberate you from this delusion.

You must first calm your mind by concentrating on your breathing. Once you have achieved some calm, you can then contemplate on the three characteristics of existence, on the fact that you will die one day. You might be able to do this for a while. After a while the calm will disappear and the delusion will come back, causing you to have a feeling of aversion to the truth. You must then meditate to calm, your mind again. When the mind becomes calm you can then return to contemplating on impermanence again. Go back and forth like this until the truth sinks deeply into your mind, and you will find that accepting it is more beneficial than denying it. Denial of the truth will always cause you to be afraid. But once you have accepted it, you will never be afraid. That's all there is to it. The problem is in your mind. You can't change external things. Whether you think about it or not, you will die anyway. But by thinking about it and accepting it, you will get rid of your fear. But if you don't think about it and deny it instead, you will always be afraid.

Student: All kinds of fear or just the fear of death?

Tan Ajahn: All kinds of fear because they all come down to the fear of death.

Student: Do you appreciate beauty?

Tan Ajahn: I appreciate beauty just as I appreciate ugliness because they are two sides of the same coin. I see both the upside and the downside of life. Beauty is temporal. It will fade away and be replaced by ugliness. When you are young, you look handsome and beautiful. Forty years from now you'll be old and ugly. You have to see both sides of the story in order to have insight or wisdom.

Student: What about having an ego, selfishness?

Tan Ajahn: Ego is a delusion created by the mind. "I think I am, therefore I am." It's just a thought that we are deeply attached to. When you meditate until the mind stops thinking, then the "I" or "myself" disappears because it's just a thought. When there is no thought, there's no "I." All there is is just consciousness, or the mind, by itself. Right now you can only imagine it. You have to meditate to really see it. You have to get to the point where the mind totally stops thinking. It's like turning off the television. When you turn on the television, you see pictures on the screen and become emotionally involved in what you see. You laugh or cry at what you see. When you turn off the television, what happens? You see just a blank screen, and you're not emotionally involved. No emotions or thoughts appear in the mind when you meditate until the mind stops thinking. No self. It's like turning off the television. No pictures, no sound, nothing — totally blank, empty. This state remains very briefly for beginners. For an experienced meditator, it can last for many hours.

You have to use your good thoughts to destroy your bad thoughts. Good thoughts are called insight or wisdom, like thinking that everything is impermanent. Everything is changing. When the mind thinks that something is good and will give you happiness, you must say it is not so. Happiness is always accompanied by sadness. You can eliminate your bad thoughts, like reprogramming a computer. Your mind has been programmed to think that this is “I” or “myself.” You are now reprogramming your mind to think that it is not “me,” not “myself.” It’s just a knowing element or knowingness. First you have to empty your mind in order to see it and to see that the thoughts and emotions appearing in your mind are temporary. You are just mind and body. The body is the physical part, an instrument of the mind that is just a knowing element that knows and thinks. When you realize this, you will let go of your attachment to a self, to people and things you think are permanent and give you happiness. Instead of thinking of permanence, you will think of impermanence. Instead of thinking of happiness, you will think of unhappiness. Instead of thinking of “I,” “myself” or “mine,” you will think this is not “me,” not “myself,” or not “mine.” Reprogramming the mind will take time because old habits die hard.

Student: It could be very painful.

Tan Ajahn: Very painful because it’s like giving up drugs or things that you are attached to, such as giving up smoking. You tell yourself smoking is not good for you. But you cannot stop it. If you keep telling yourself all the time, maybe one day you’ll be able to do it. The

Buddha did it. He was a prince. He was rich. He had everything. But he could see that it was not true happiness because it could not stop him from worrying about getting old, getting sick and dying.

If you are really interested in meditation and want to learn more you can use the Internet and search for the Four Foundations of Mindfulness, the discourse in which the Buddha taught the monks how to develop the mind, how to meditate. He predicted that whoever follows his instructions will achieve enlightenment after seven days at the earliest or seven years at the latest. You can all realize this if you devote the time and effort to it. There are people who, after reading the discourse, become interested and decide to become monks in order to have all the time to practise what the Buddha taught.

If you want to do some intensive meditation, you should join a meditation retreat that usually lasts seven or fourteen days where you do nothing but meditation. I think it would be time well spent. It will lead you closer to enlightenment, to lasting peace, happiness and freedom from greed, hatred and delusion. I hope you all have a good time studying in Thailand and that you learn and benefit from your stay here.



03

Dhamma to Phra Farang

June 16, 2008

Tan Ajahn (*Speaking to the mother of a new monk*):

For someone, to give up the worldly life is not easy. It takes a lot of effort, special effort, so I think you should be glad. You will be like the Buddha's mother. There is nothing better in the world than Dhamma. Dhamma can help you from being affected by all forms of suffering. Nothing else in the world can help you, but will only make you suffer more. The more you have, the more suffering you will have, because of your attachment. For example you have attachment to your son, so when he had to leave, you became very unhappy. But if you have wisdom, then instead of being unhappy, you will be very happy because you know that he is doing something great, something that very few people in the world can do. It's greater than winning an Olympic gold medal, so you should really be proud of him. He hasn't really left you; you can still communicate and see each other. He will cause fewer problems for you because he will not be misbehaving. But if he was a layperson, he might get drunk, drive and be involved in an accident, and that would cause you more sorrow and pain than him living in the forest as a monk.

After a few years, he will be a teacher and be respected by many people. People will come and seek his advice. So I think that if you see things in the proper light, you will be happy. You should overcome your attachment. You have to understand that regardless of what you have, everything you own is a temporary possession. One day you will either leave it, or it will leave you, and if you are attached to it, when it leaves you, you will be very unhappy. But if you are not attached when it goes, it will not affect you. So, the Buddha tells us to always reflect on the impermanence of things and of life. Our life on this earth is temporary. We are only here for a certain period of time, and after that we will have to leave this earth or this world. So in order to live and depart happily, we must not cling to anything. We must not consider things as belonging to ourselves. Always remind ourselves that things are just temporary possessions, things that are loaned to you. They are not given to you; they don't belong to you. One day you will have to give them up. If you always think like this, you will not be unhappy with anything, because you will be ready and willing to let things go when they have to go. Okay?

The same thing can cause two different results: it can make you happy or it can make you sad. It all depends on your approach or attitude towards that particular thing. If you cling to it, you will be unhappy. If you are detached from it, you will always be happy regardless of what happens. Do you want to be unhappy or happy?

Laywoman (Female 1, F1): Urrr ...be happy.

Tan Ajahn: Then you must not cling. You must be ready to give up.

Laywoman (F1): But it's not easy.

Tan Ajahn: It's not easy, but it's not impossible. The Buddha had to give up all his possessions. He was a prince. He gave up his princely life to live as a monk, as a beggar in the forest. But he found true happiness. He was not happy when he was living in the palace. He was always worried and anxious about things around him and about his own self, his own body. He realised that he would have to get old, get sick and eventually die. He wasn't yet ready to face those things, but after he left the palace to practise meditation and develop wisdom, he eventually could face up to everything that would happen to him without any fear or sorrow. This is something that we all can do, but we just don't do it because we haven't been shown how great it is to be free from suffering. So we still cling and attach to our possessions, family, and friends without realising that we are actually causing suffering for ourselves unnecessarily. We are lucky to be born at a time when there are the teachings of the Buddha who taught us this particular thing, who taught us to live in such a way that we won't have to be unhappy at all. It is just up to us whether we can follow his instructions or not. If we can, we win. If we can't, we lose. So this is the essence of becoming a monk. (*Referring to her son*) He wants to win. Do you understand? Does anyone have anything to ask? Is there anything I can help you with?

Monk1: Do you think when teaching meditation to Westerners, it is proper to use (the verbal or mental recitation of) *Buddho* or to teach something different?

Tan Ajahn: I think you should let them decide what is suitable for them. I think most Westerners prefer *ānāpānasati* because it has been taught in the *Mahā Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta*. The Four Foundations of Mindfulness teaches mindfulness of breathing as a way to calm the mind, so I think it is generally used to teach Westerners. But there are many different meditation objects that can be used. It is up to the teacher depending on what he found to be effective or useful for him. He will then use that technique to teach other people. But the students who take up the teaching might have to improvise or adapt to a different technique if the technique that was taught is not suitable to them because there are 40 meditation objects that could be used for calming the mind. I think if you read in the texts, they are divided into three or four different categories. However, people in Thailand are generally very devoted and close to the Buddha. The Buddha is almost like God. For them, thinking of the Buddha will help them to calm down the mind very quickly because they rely on the Buddha to help them in times of stress or suffering. But many people in Thailand will usually start with chanting because sometimes they find that repeating the word *Buddho* is still not easy for them. The mind still drifts and goes thinking about different things. For them to chant suttas or verses first helps to slow the mind down, and after the mind slows down, they can just use the word *Buddho*. So how has your meditation been going?

Monk1: It's usually not... (The conversation was diverted to some other topics.)

Laywoman (F1): Ajahn, do you know Mr. Pompan who went to the same school as you?

Tan Ajahn: Yes, we were in Seventh-day Adventist School, a Christian school.

Laywoman (F1): So, you were Christian?

Tan Ajahn: No, no. We went there because they taught English, and my father wanted me to learn English. The school was run by the Seventh-day Adventist missionary and one of the requirements to be accepted into the school was to go to church every Sunday. So I learnt a lot about Christianity in the school, but they could never convert me. They asked me why, and I told them that I respected Jesus and loved his teachings, but somehow, for me to be convinced that he saved my life was something I could not see. I thought that I had to save myself rather than anybody else. When I read about Buddhism, I realised that this was the right religion for me because Buddhism teaches us to save ourselves. We have to save ourselves. We have to be our own refuge. *Attāhi attano nātho*. So, I started to study (Buddhist) books and meditate by myself, and I realised that this was a good way to go because it helped make my mind peaceful and more secure. Before, when I was about to go to university, I thought that after I graduated, I would be very secure and happy. But it didn't make any difference — before or after graduation — my mind was still the same, still very insecure like a roller coaster.

So, I realised that the education I had gone through was not good enough. So, I started looking for something else, like reading books, and I eventually came across books on Buddhism. I was in Thailand, living in a Buddhist country, but I had never read a Buddhist Dhamma book before or listened to a Dhamma talk because, to me, the religion in Thailand appeared to be very ritualistic. You pray, light incense and candles, and then pray for wealth or whatever you want. But those are only the superficial parts of Buddhism that most Thai people are exposed to. They never have the chance to get the teachings, so I never knew that Buddhism was the religion I should follow. It was only after I was given a book on Buddhism written in English, I think, by a monk in Sri Lanka. In Sri Lanka there were many English monks who translated some of the texts and distributed them for free. I was given a small one. After reading it, I felt that I had found the answer to my question. So, I wrote back and asked for more books to read, and eventually I got one on the Four Foundation of Mindfulness. So, I started practising following those instructions, sitting using *ānāpānasati*, being mindful of my movement, and investigating my body, the 32 parts or the ten stages of decomposition. And I found that the more I did it, the more my mind became calm and secure. I became less and less afraid of things because I realised that this is the truth, this is what will happen. The mind isn't afraid of the truth. In fact, the mind is helped by the truth which makes it strong and ready to face the eventuality. So, after practising like this for about a year, I decided to do more. The way to be able to do more and to do it all the time is to become a monk, so I became a monk.

Laywoman (F1): While you were studying in America?

Tan Ajahn: No, this was after my graduation. I was working, but I only worked for about six months. When I started doing meditation, I found that working and meditating did not go together. I was fortunate to have enough money to live very cheaply for about a year. I could live for about a year without having to work. But I had to eat only once a day, and I could not go out and spend money on other things. I didn't mind because I wanted to concentrate on my meditation. After doing it for about a year, my money ran out and I had to decide what to do next. If I wanted to meditate but did not want to become a monk, then I would have to go to work. But if I went to work, I would not have enough time to meditate. So, I was forced in a way to become a monk because I wasn't really ready or didn't really want to become a monk. I was still attached to my freedom. I thought, as a lay person, I could do many things, so I didn't want to be locked up in a monastery. But then I had no choice because I wanted to meditate, so I was forced to make my decision. After I had made that decision to become a monk, I felt a sense of relief. Before that, I was sort of torn between two directions — either to stay as a layperson or to become a monk. During that time, I was very unhappy, but once I made that decision, "Yes! I want to be a monk," it lifted a mountain off my chest. I felt very easy, light and happy. Once I became a monk, I just concentrated on my meditation. I looked for my teacher and found Luangta Mahā Boowa. I went to his monastery and was allowed to stay there. So, I spent about nine years there without going anywhere, locking

myself up in the monastery to practise. I think I came back to visit my parents only twice in nine years. They wanted to come and see me, but I told them not to come. It is just a waste of time. If they really wanted to communicate, they could just write letters. They lived in Pattaya and to come to Udon Thani was really not necessary. Luangta also didn't like the monks to have visitors, because it could cause the minds of the monks to lose their concentration. When you are concentrating and meditating and then you have visitors, you might start thinking about them. Even after they have left you still think about them, and you will find it hard to concentrate and calm your mind. Luangta tried to prevent the monks from contacting people. In Luangta's temple, we didn't have to do anything with the lay people. Only Luangta himself would deal with the people. The monks had the duty of going on alms round to collect food and cleaning up after the meal, and then we were supposed to go back to our kuṭī to practise meditation. It was very good because it helped you advance very quickly. Because you didn't lose your concentration, you could develop from one step to the next. So, I was very lucky to have found Luangta, to have a good teacher who provided a very good place for meditation. He kept all external work to a minimum, such as construction work and things like that. He tried to do it only when it was really necessary and to do it very quickly and briefly. He didn't want things to drag on. He wanted monks to spend more time in seclusion in meditation, rather than socialising, getting together to do things, to do this or that. Because when we got together, we tended to talk, and our minds started to go thinking about different things instead of calming

down, creating agitation for us. So, we were always told not to socialise. Sometime he would walk around the temple and check all the kuṭīs. If he saw two or three pairs of slippers at the same kuṭī, he knew that there were two or three monks there, and he would tell them not to do it. If they persisted, then he would have to ask them to leave the monastery. He wanted monks to stay separately when there was no reason to come together. We did not have morning or evening chanting there. If we wanted to chant, we could do it at our own kuṭī. But he didn't mind if we didn't chant as long as we meditated.

Laywoman (F1): And then you moved here?

Tan Ajahn: Yes, after about nine years. At that time my father became sick, and so I asked permission to visit and look after my father. He had cancer and lived for about six months after I came back. So after his funeral instead of going back to Luangta's monastery, I came and stayed here. I've been here now 24 years, and I have never gone anywhere. I have been invited to go everywhere, but I say no.

Laywoman (F1): But why?

Tan Ajahn: Even if it's an invitation for a meal, I don't go.

Laywoman (F1): How about if I were to invite you?

Tan Ajahn: The same — no.

Laywoman (F1): No exceptions?

Tan Ajahn: No.

Laywoman (F1): How many monks do you have here?

Tan Ajahn: Up here, we only have six. But at the temple below we have about 45. We are considered to be in the same temple, but there is a stark difference. Up here, we do not have electricity or running water. We have to rely on collecting the rain water and storing it in tanks. We have to use as little water as possible. But if you stay down below, you have running water and electricity. So you have lots of conveniences — you can have fans, air-conditioners, and refrigerators. But up here, you can't.

Laywoman (F1): Do you write books?

Tan Ajahn: I don't write books, but I give talks. They are recorded, transcribed and printed as books. I have translated one book into English.

Laywoman (F1): What's the name of the book?

Tan Ajahn: It is called *Sensual Pleasures are Painful*. They are not real pleasures because they are like an addiction to drugs. When you are addicted to something, you have to have it all the time, and when you cannot get it, you become very unhappy. Sensual pleasures are the same. When you are used to drinking coffee, but you cannot drink it when you want to, you will feel very unhappy. You have to keep on drinking it all the time to keep you happy. So, you become a slave to your coffee. This is what I mean by "sensual pleasures are painful." Anything that you find pleasurable to your senses,

to what you see, hear, smell, taste and touch, are sensual pleasures and are painful, because they are temporary and not permanent. You have to keep filling them up all the time. After you see something and are happy, the next day you want to see it again. You will want to hear more and more all the time. You have to rely on these things to make you happy, and when you come to stay in a place like this, you will not be able to do it. You will feel very lonely.

Laywoman (F1): How long have you been here?

Tan Ajahn: I've been here for over 24 years.

Laywoman (F1): *Bhante*, how do people in the city get help to learn Buddhism if the experienced monks stay secluded in the mountains? Whereas in the city, Christians are all very aggressive, and so there isn't any help for the laypeople.

Tan Ajahn: There are many monks who are able to teach and live in the city.

Laywoman (F1): But they don't really teach.

Tan Ajahn: Well some do, and some don't. It is up to the laypeople to seek their own teacher because many lay people don't want to go up to that level anyway. They are happy just to give *dāna* ...

Laywoman (F1): That's because they don't understand. They don't have the opportunity.

Tan Ajahn: Some do, and some know that they cannot do it. In Bangkok, we have many temples that

have desanā (a Dhamma talk) every holy day and many people go there. Some stay for meditation, and some do not. You see, people have different levels of mental development. The majority of the people in the city are lower in their mental development. Those who are on the higher levels usually leave the city and go to the forest temples, and occasionally you have meditation masters like Luangta (Mahā Boowa) who go to Bangkok and teach people. He had about 50 radio stations throughout the country that broadcast his teachings 24 hours a day. So there isn't a lack of teachings. I think there is a lack of resolve to follow the teachings.

Laywoman (F1): In the city, we find that there are many Buddhist sects. Even within one sectarian group such as Theravāda, there are also many different sub-sects, so some will not teach traditional Theravāda Buddhism. If we know about that, then what should we do?

Tan Ajahn: We should just leave them alone.

Laywoman (F1): So we let other people learn non-traditional teachings?

Tan Ajahn: You see, the world is so big, and we are so small and can only do so much within our capacity. So we just do what we can within our capacity. We cannot go and correct the whole world.

Laywoman (F1): Is it right that we go and tell them that it is not right?

Tan Ajahn: It depends on whether they want to listen to you or not. If they listen to you, you can tell them.

But if they do not want to listen, they may argue with you. They might not listen to you, and it will be a waste of time for you to tell them. To teach people you first have to see if they want to listen or not. If they don't want to listen to you, it is like talking to a deaf person. He can't hear you. You will just be wasting your time.

Laywoman (F1): As an example, in Indonesia there is a Dhammakaya sectarian group that comes over with their teachings to influence our *Theravāda* devotees and convert them to their side. We have a lay Buddhist organisation called '*Bandika*' to assist the *Saṅgha* because we have about 50 monks to cover the whole of Indonesia. The '*Bandika*' are lay people who have to undergo training to help other lay Buddhists in terms of formal Buddhist ceremonies such as weddings so that we can align them with the proper teachings. In addition, if there are sick or dying people, the '*Bandika*' can read the *parita* to them if there are no monks available. We have heard about the Dhammakaya and are concerned because it does not go according to the original teachings.

Tan Ajahn: It is alright to be concerned, but you should not be overly concerned because there are things that are beyond our abilities to influence or to stop. It is up to each individual to think for themselves and seek the truth for themselves. If they are not smart enough to do that, then no one can help them. They will just have to pay for their *kamma*. The Buddha separated people into categories: those that he could teach and those he couldn't. Those he couldn't help, he just left alone. He only taught those people he could help. But I think the important thing in our life is not to help other people.

I think we should help ourselves first. We should teach ourselves first before teaching other people.

Laywoman (F1): But shouldn't we propagate the Buddha Dhamma?

Tan Ajahn: Yes, but you are not propagating the Buddha Dhamma when you don't know his teachings. What you know is not his real teachings. What you know is only the shadow of his teachings, not the real teachings. This is because you have not found the real teachings in yourself yet. So you are still not so sure whether what you teach is right or not. If you have found the real teachings, you will know that the first thing to do is to teach yourself. The Buddha taught himself first, before he taught other people. Before he became a Buddha he had enough knowledge to be a teacher. He could go into the different stages of *jhāna*, but he knew that he still had not reached the highest stage of development and didn't want to waste his precious lifetime teaching other people. If he had spent all his life teaching other people, he would never have had enough time to teach himself to become enlightened or to become a Buddha. So I think your first priority, or for anyone who follows Buddhism, is not to teach other people, but to teach yourself first. You should become enlightened first. Then you will become a real teacher. Right now you are not a real teacher. You still don't know the truth. You only read the descriptions of the truth. You haven't found the truth in yourself yet. It is like you read the menu in a restaurant, and even though you haven't eaten the food yet you already start telling other people how good the food is, saying,

“This is good and this is what you should eat.” So you have to experience the truth first before you go about to teach other people.

Laywoman (F1): So we all have to enter the monkhood?

Tan Ajahn: No, you can practise in your house, at home, or anywhere. You can gain enlightenment anywhere. It is not the place, except that the mountains and forests are very conducive places. They help you gain enlightenment more easily and faster than staying at home. But there have been people who could gain enlightenment living as a layperson, such as the Buddha’s father. He became an *Arahant* seven days before he passed away. When he was sick in bed, the Buddha went to see him and taught him to relinquish his attachments. After listening to the Buddha’s teachings, he followed what the Buddha told him to do, and he became enlightened seven days before he died. So it is not the place, or whether you are ordained or not, that matters. What matters is your mind — whether you can control your mind, and teach it to let go of your kilesas, your greed, hatred and delusion. So some people can become enlightened in the city. There are many monks who stay in the forest and never gain enlightenment. So it is not the place or the person, but rather the ability to absorb the teachings and apply them to yourself.

Laywoman (F1): You mentioned before that meditation and work cannot go together, so how do we mix the two?

Tan Ajahn: You have to work less. If you have enough money, you should just give up your business. Let other people run it. Let your children do it while you merely take on an advisory role. If they encounter problems, they can come to see you. In this way, you will have time to meditate. You can stay at home to meditate and still be close to your family.

Laywoman (F1): But what about young people? How can they mix work with meditation?

Tan Ajahn: That depends on what they want. If they want money, if they want the worldly life, they have to work. But if they seek enlightenment, they don't have to work. They can become monks and live in the monastery, just like I did. After graduation, I only worked for six months and then onwards I never worked again. We all have a choice about what kind of life we want to live. But we don't want to know that we have a choice. Most people think that they have to do as other people do, such as our parents, starting a family and getting a job. We all do the same things. Very few people know they have a choice. Like the Buddha who knew that he had a choice, just as all his beloved knew they had a choice. Now you know: you too have the choice.

Laywoman (F1): I don't have a choice because...
[Laughter]

Tan Ajahn: Your son knows that he has the choice. Does anyone have any other questions to ask?

Monk2: Can you just say a few words about the practice? Sometimes I want to practise too much and sometimes not at all.

Tan Ajahn: Sometimes your mind is too slow so you have to push it, and sometimes it goes too fast and you have to pull it back. The Buddha said you have to stay in the middle path, just like the string of a lute. If you tighten it too much, it can break, but if you don't string it tight enough, you cannot play it to make a sound. So, you always have to watch your mind, to always be in equanimity. Try to be in the neutral position. Try to calm your mind, so it remains calm and mindful. Don't let your thoughts fool you sometimes. At times, you may think too much and want to do what your thoughts tell you to do. But you have to accept reality that you are not in that position to do that yet. You have to go step by step. So fundamentally, you have to maintain mindfulness and be aware of what you are thinking. Better still is to not let your mind think at all. If you want to think, bring it back to *Buddho*, or investigate the body by going through the 32 parts of the body. Try not to let your mind wander in discursive thinking, thinking about this or that and so forth. If you want to think, then think about the Dhamma, think about the 32 parts and repulsiveness of the body. Otherwise, let it be blank and not think about anything. That will be good. Concentrate on your breathing or what you are doing. Be mindful of the movement of your body.

Try to be strict with yourself. For instance, if you know you have to do a certain thing at a particular time, then do it. Suppose at this particular time you have to sit, then sit, and if you have to walk, then walk. Do not give in to excuses for not doing it because it will become a habit. You will then keep on excusing yourself and do something else instead. As soon as you move away

from your practice, you are regressing. You are going backward and not forward. Sometimes your kilesas tell you that you are doing *puññā* or making merit by helping other people, but it is not enough for your mind. Your mind does not need that kind of *puññā*. Your mind right now needs peace, *samādhi* and *paññā* (wisdom).

So, you should spend most of your time in these two particular areas: *samādhi* and *paññā*. You have to do both alternatively. First of all, you have to calm your mind. Once it becomes calm and rested, let it stay rested for as long as possible. After it withdraws from that rested state, bring the mind to think about impermanence and the 32 parts of the body. Keep on doing this again and again until it becomes second nature to your mind so that every time you look at the body you will not only look at the skin, but through it as well. This is to see other parts of the body that are hidden under the skin. The only way to be able to do this is to continually keep thinking about it all the time. When you are tired from the contemplation and the mind is becoming restless, you should stop thinking and return to *samādhi*. Concentrate your mind and rest your mind. When your thinking starts wandering to other subjects, you should know that you are not with the Dhamma, which means your mind needs to rest. So you should stop all your thinking and instead practise *samādhi*. Calm your mind and let it rest. After it has rested and is coming out of calm, you will be ready to be taught again, to think in the ways of Dhamma. This is what you have to do back and forth, back and forth, until you eventually understand the nature of the body. It's impermanent, repulsive and not beautiful. Until you have no desire for this body or

any other bodies. Then you will know that the problems with your body are over, and you won't have to worry about the body anymore.

You then have to move up to the next stage. You have to study feelings, such as painful feelings, to understand that they are natural and part of nature. They come and go like the rain and wind. You cannot force them to go away when they happen to be there. All you can do is to understand them for what they are and leave them alone. If you can do that, you will move higher and higher, but this has to be done alternately between *samādhi* and investigation (*paññā*). You cannot just do *samādhi* alone because you will not gain any insight or *vipassanā*. However, if you only do investigation, then your investigation will not turn into insight because your mind is agitated. You will think too much — not in accordance with the truth — but in accordance with your imagination. So, when you know that the mind starts to become agitated and to think outside the boundary of the mind, you should know that it is time to rest your mind. Therefore, you should go back and forth between *samādhi* and *paññā*. Okay, does that more or less answer your question?

Laywoman (F2): But in this world, in the lay life, those living a monastery life also have work to do. There needs to be a balance with the practice.

Tan Ajahn: Yes, there is work we all have to do together as part our duties. If there are things we have to do, we do it with mindfulness. Do it and concentrate on our work by not talking or chit-chatting. Just be aware

of what we are doing. In this way we can still maintain mindfulness and keep the mind calm without agitation. But sometimes it is not easy because when you start working with other people and see the way they do things, it may at times affect you. What they do may make you feel uneasy or unhappy. But if you have mindfulness, instead of correcting other people, you will turn around and correct yourself, telling yourself that you should leave them alone. What they do is not your duty or problem. However, if there are things that you have to tell them, then do it, but do it without any emotions. Do not expect people to believe you or do what you say. If you feel you have to tell them, then tell them nicely. Once you have told them, that should be it, regardless of whether they do it or not, which should be up to them. Instead, if you keep following them and checking on whether they do as you told them, you may get angry if they don't. This is because you have attachment to your thoughts. You want people to do what you say, and when they don't you get mad at them. So, it is you who is in the wrong, not them, for getting mad at them. Because when you get mad at them, you are the one who really suffers. You are the one who feels the pain and not the person whom you got mad with. We tend to forget to look at ourselves, at our mind. We tend to look at other people. In fact, we should look at both sides. That is, to not only look at the other person, but to also see our reactions towards that particular person, such as whether we are angry and mad, or whether we are happy, calm and peaceful. If we are calm and peaceful, that's alright. But when we start to get mad or worried, we are not taking care of ourselves or our mind. But it is not easy because the

nature of the mind is to look at other people, to look outside and try to correct everything. You see something you don't like, and you want to correct it. Trying to do so creates agitation and restlessness in yourself. When you cannot get what you want, you become very unhappy. So, it is not what you get outside or what you do outside that is important, but rather what you do with your mind that is important. The only way to make your mind happy is to leave everything alone. The world was like this before you came, is like this today, and will be like this after you leave, so don't worry about the world. It has always been like this. That's why we have so many Buddhas. We cannot change the world; we can only change ourselves. So do what we can do and leave things we cannot do alone, okay?

Laywoman (F2): In the early stages of practice when the mind sometimes gets complacent or faces difficulties, what are some ways to bring up energy to continue with the practice?

Tan Ajahn: Sometimes reflecting on death can help you. Life is short and to be lazy is to waste our time for we do not know when we are going to die, and we can only practise when we are alive. If you reflect on this, it might arouse energy. Or, think of our teacher, the Buddha, who struggled for enlightenment. We all have to struggle, for it is not easy. The Buddha had to struggle. Luangpu Chah, Luangpu Mun and everyone without exception have to struggle. So, we have to struggle too. If we think in this way, we may get energy. The Buddha said that when you are discouraged, think of your teacher. Think of the Buddha, think of all the noble

disciples. How they strove and put in the effort. When you think of them, you will have the energy to go forward. But if you really cannot go forward, just tell yourself that you will take a rest for a few hours and observe how things go later on because these conditions are impermanent. But do not leave it for too long. Sometimes listening to your teacher can help when you feel very discouraged and lose all your energy. You may get energized after listening to his talks or reading books about the life of the Buddha and some of his noble disciples. This may help you become energetic. If all else fails then just take a sabbatical, but not for too long, perhaps a day or so and see how you feel the next day. Then try to go from there. Our practice is like going on a roller coaster. Sometimes the mind is very energetic and sometimes it's not. Sometimes it is very easy to practise and sometimes very hard. One way to overcome this is to be consistent in your practise, to do your practise continuously regardless of whether you get results or not. Just do it. When it is time for you to sit, just sit. When it is time for you to walk, just walk. Don't do other things. Try to be consistent with your practice. At least, it will form a habit so that when the time comes for you to do certain things you will do them right away. It will be easier. The next time you have more energy, your practice will go easily and quickly. Instead, if you stop completely, it can form a new habit of stopping. When you want to start again, you will find it difficult to start. So, I think you have to maintain a certain level of practice. If you are used to walking or sitting for so many hours a day, keep doing it regardless of whether you like it or not. Just do it. Just like eating — you have to eat every day.

But some days you may not feel like eating, but you know that the result of not eating is more painful than eating. It is the same with the practice. The result of not practising is more painful than practising. Even though sitting may be painful, it will be better than not sitting.

Laywoman (F1): Do you provide short meditation courses for laypeople?

Tan Ajahn: I just do it like this. This is my meditation course, and you have to practise on your own. This is the way I teach. When people come to me, I just talk.

Laywoman (F1): They cannot stay here?

Tan Ajahn: They can stay here, but this monastery is not geared towards meditation. It is more for people who come here to chant and pray for their wishes.

Laywoman (F1): Oh! Really?

Tan Ajahn: It was built by the Supreme Patriarch who wanted it to be a meditation temple. However, they have this city temple ritual that comes along with it. The Supreme Patriarch himself was not raised under the forest tradition, so he didn't really know the forest tradition. He was raised under the city tradition. So, he sort of mixed both of them together. But at least he helps to support this area up here, and those who really want the forest tradition may come up here. Unfortunately, it is only for monks and not for lay people.

Laywoman (F1): What is the history of that mountain? (Referring to Khao Chi-Chan)

Tan Ajahn: That mountain used to be a quarry. They blasted off rock into stone for the construction of an American airbase some 30 or 40 years ago when they were having the war in Vietnam. It is called Utapao and is about 10 km away from here. The rock from this mountain quarry was used to build the air strip. After Wat Yan was built, the vibration from the blasts would rattle and crack the glass window every time we were having an Uposatha in the building, so the Supreme Patriarch asked if they could move to another mountain. The government helped allocate a new mountain to the concessioner, and so they moved to a new mountain. The mountain was left as it was until the Supreme Patriarch felt a Buddha statue should be engraved. Their first intention was to carve the statue using the wall of mountain rock. However, due to blasting on the rock before, there were too many cracks, and they were afraid that the nose or ears might just drop off during carving. So the king suggested sketching upon the mountain's surface.

Laywoman (F1): How long ago was that?

Tan Ajahn: I think that was done ten years ago. It just took about a year to do it.

Laywoman (F1): So how did they put the image on the wall?

Tan Ajahn: First they used a laser beam to project the image of the Buddha onto the wall. Then they had people climb onto the wall to mark the outline. They then put cement on the sketching with golden tiles on it.

The whole construction cost was about 100 million Baht. Their original intention was to do something like the Buddhas of Bamiyan in Afghanistan or the carved image in China. However, it was not possible due to the cracks in the rock. It has now become a tourist spot. People who come to Pattaya will come to Wat Yan and then visit the Buddha image followed by Nong Nooch Tropical Garden.

Laywoman (F1): Do you go down at all?

Tan Ajahn: I do in the morning for *piṇḍapāta* (alms round) and take my meal with the monks down there. We are not allowed to have food up here. The Supreme Patriarch did not want to have two separate temples. He wanted to have only one temple, so we have to go on our alms round and eat together. A bus takes us to the village for our alms round because it is about 5 km away from the main temple. There are not too many houses around the temple to support the monks, so we have to go to four different villages by transport and share the food in the *sālā*. After having our food, we help one another clean the *sālā* before returning to our living quarters. From here to the main temple is about 3.5 km. We walk down in the morning, and a vehicle takes us back.

Laywoman (F1): Mr Chandra was here before.

Tan Ajahn: Yes, I think he spent one Rains Retreat here, and his Chinese name is Ah Yao.

Laywoman (F1): I work with him in the *Bandika* organisation.

Tan Ajahn: Yes, he likes to go teaching, and I always tell him not to teach, but rather to teach himself first. But he wants to help other people.

Laywoman (F1): His health is not good, and he has a problem with his kidneys.

Tan Ajahn: I heard he prayed and *adhiṭṭhāna* (made a strong determination) after which he got well and had to become a monk to fulfil his *adhiṭṭhāna*, but only for one *vassa* (Rains Retreat) because his children are still young.

Question Monk1: I asked him why he wanted to disrobe, and he said that he still has *kilesas*.

Tan Ajahn: Still has attachment. You still have this notion that this is mine, this is my son, this is my wife, and this is my family. This is only temporary — it is not your real wife, not your real son. It is like a play, and we are the actors playing our roles. It is like a movie. You are in a movie; our life is like a movie. We are role playing. You play the role of mother, and he plays the role of son. After the movie ends, we all go our different ways. When you die or when he dies, all of you go different ways. He goes to a different place and plays a different role. He finds a new mother and father, and you find a new mother and father, a new husband and a new family. You have been going like this on and on and on. In the process, you cry, are unhappy, sad and suffer. The Buddha said that the amount of tears that we shed in our lives, if we were to collect all of them, is more than the amount of water in the ocean. So imagine, how many tears have you shed? How many lifetimes have you had

to shed that many tears? You will still go on like this if you don't follow the Buddha. Leave your family and go meditate.

Laywoman (F1): Tan Ajahn, I run a Buddhist Centre for people to come and learn.....

Tan Ajahn: Let other people do it. There are many people who can do it.

Laywoman (F1): No.

Tan Ajahn: There is only one person who can practise for yourself, but there are many people who can run the meditation centre. There is only one person who can meditate for you — that is yourself. You see, when you die somebody else will take over the meditation centre, so don't worry.

Laywoman (F1): But at the moment I cannot find anybody.

Tan Ajahn: Don't worry, if you have to close this one down, someone else will open a new one somewhere else.

Laywoman (F1): But this is to propagate and disseminate meditation.

Tan Ajahn: I know, but it is not efficient enough. It is not effective enough. You can only help people reach just to the same level as you, but if you become enlightened, you can help them much more, and it only takes a few years. Some people may just take two to three years.

Laywoman (F1): Some people may never get enlightened.

Tan Ajahn: If they don't, at least they have accumulated it for the next life. It is better than not accumulating anything at all. What you are accumulating right now by working on this meditation centre is very minuscule. You are only developing *dāna*. You haven't got to *sīla*, *samādhi* or *paññā*. So you are earning very few points, like collecting just a few frequent-flyer miles.

Laywoman (F1): Zero?

Tan Ajahn: Better than zero, but if you are happy with it, it is okay. I am not forcing you, but just telling you the options that you can have.

Laywoman (F1): But for many laypeople, Buddhism seems difficult.

Tan Ajahn: Difficult because they don't want to do it. If you really want to do something, you will really find it easy. Coming here for you is easy, isn't it? For me, to go to Indonesia is very difficult because I have to get a passport. Before I can get a passport, I have to get a form and get all the approvals and signatures from the senior monks. Then I would have to apply for the visa and buy a ticket. I would also have to find someone to go with me. So, it is very difficult for me. Also, I don't want to go. For me to stay here is much easier because I like staying here. So, the reason why it is difficult is because you don't like to do it. Whatever you like to do, you will find not difficult at all. So, what you have to do is to somehow convince yourself that practising the Dhamma

and practising meditation is very useful for you, very good for you. You will then get to like it, and you will find it to be easy.

But you have to convince yourself that this is the real thing, that this is the best thing for you. Going to different teachers and talking and listening to them can help because they can really advertise the virtues of practising mediation. They will tell you how good it is.

Laywoman (F1): But I've listened to so many Dhamma talks. ...

Tan Ajahn: Maybe not the right one yet. Like Angulimala, who listened to just one talk by the Buddha and was convinced. The Buddha told him, "You are going the wrong way, and you should come this way. You have been killing people, which is not the way to enlightenment."

Laywoman (F1): But that was the Buddha's style, and this style is difficult.

Tan Ajahn: (*Referring to her son*) But it is not difficult for him.

Laywoman (F1): I don't know...

Laywoman (F2): We, the Theravāda, are often being criticised by the Mahāyāna because we eat meat. What do you think?

Tan Ajahn: It is not what you eat that matters; it is how you get your food. If you get food by breaking the *sila*, that is wrong. If you kill by going fishing to get food

for yourself, that is wrong. But if have a fish in your tank that happens to die, what will you do with that fish? Will you throw it away, or will you cook it? It is not what you eat that makes you good or bad; it's how you get your food that makes you good or bad.

Laywoman (F2): But they say we are not practising compassion.

Tan Ajahn: Don't listen to them; listen to the Buddha. The Buddha didn't say that. He said that as a lay person, you have to keep the five precepts. That is good enough. Don't kill for food. If someone kills and sells it to you, it is okay as long as you didn't tell them to do it.

Laywoman (F2): So, say, I opened a restaurant and sold meat, would that be okay?

Tan Ajahn: If you buy dead meat, it is okay, but don't put the fish in tanks for the customers to choose.

Laywoman (F2): No!

Tan Ajahn: The Buddha said avoid making your livelihood with living things, such as by selling and buying live chickens and ducks. If you sell them, people usually kill them for food anyway, so don't make your living with living things or with things that can kill other beings, such as by selling poisons, weapons, guns, traps, fishing equipment, or by selling alcohol.

Laywoman (F2): But if you sell something like chicken sabbe and you just buy the meat every day, that is not doing bad *kamma*?

Tan Ajahn: No, as long as you don't tell the people who sell the chicken that tomorrow I want five chickens from you. You don't order in advance. You just go and buy them when it is already put on the shelf for sale. Because when you order from them, you are asking them to kill five chickens for you. See, there is a difference. If you happen to go late and there is no chicken left, then on that day you don't sell any chicken. You make a little less money, but you don't break any precepts.

Laywoman (F1): And *Bhante*, about global warming, people say that raising animal livestock will do more damage to the environment because animals require more water and more food than plants. So, they say we should all go vegetarian. Do we have to?

Tan Ajahn: It is a theory, but it is not practical. You cannot force everyone to become vegetarian. If you could force everyone to become vegetarian, you may as well force people to become nuns and monks. It is even better for the environment, right?

[Laughter]

Laywoman (F1): Right.

Tan Ajahn: So, it is all impractical. Don't listen to all these theories. They say what they think, and it can never happen. But we try to do our part. We try to impact global warming as little as possible on our part, such as by driving and travelling less. Stay at home more and meditate more.

Laywoman (F1): (*Referring to her son*) I cannot visit him then.

Tan Ajahn: Yeah, but you can write, chat and use the phone, which is good enough. You can listen to his voice. You can take a picture of him, put it inside the house, and talk to him while looking at his picture. It's the same.



04 | Twins

First of all, let me say hello, and welcome to Thailand and to this discussion about Buddhism. I will give a little talk and later on, if you have any questions that you would like to ask, please feel free to do so.

The first thing is to tell you something about Buddhism. When you think of Buddhism, study it, or find out something about it, you learn that you are really finding out about yourself because Buddhism teaches about ourselves: what we are, and who we are. It teaches something that we might not have thought about before, like the idea that we are twins but we do not know that we are twins because we cannot see the other half of ourselves. Our life is actually made up of two parts. The part we can see is the body, but the other part that we cannot see is the mind. The body is the physical part, and the mind is the spiritual or non-physical part. They are two separate entities; they are not together. They only come together at the time of conception. When the sperm and the egg meet, the mind

comes in; the spirit enters to take possession of that combination of sperm and egg. That is when you have conception, and from that point onwards the fetus starts to grow until it gets so big that it has to be ejected from the mother's body, which is when birth takes place. When there is birth, we only look at one half and see one half of ourselves, i.e. our body. We cannot see our mind, because our mind or spirit is like electromagnetic pulses, like the radio waves our cell phones use. You can see your phone, but you cannot see the radio waves that are being transmitted by the cell phones. When you use your cell phone to call somebody, you punch a number and send it out. What you send out are signals, something we cannot see with our eyes, but know it is there.

So too with our lives. We are made up of the mind and the body. The mind is the one who knows, feels and thinks. The body doesn't know, doesn't feel and doesn't think. The body is like a piece of material, like a cell phone. It doesn't think; it only performs certain functions, like breathing, maintaining itself and acting as a medium for the mind. Although the body has eyes to see, and has ears to listen, it is actually the mind that sees and hears. Without the mind, the body is like a corpse. When a person dies, it means that the mind and the body have separated. When there is no mind to take possession of the body, the body doesn't know anything and doesn't feel anything. You can then cut up the body in any way you like. You can burn it; you can bury it. The body would not know that it is being cut, burnt or buried. It is the mind who knows these things. As long as the mind is still with the body, when anything happens to the body, it is the mind that reacts, not the body. When you feel bad,

when you are afraid that something bad might happen to the body, it is not the body that is feeling bad — it is the mind. The mind doesn't know that it isn't the body due to delusion, due to the lack of proper knowledge. It takes the body as itself. Whenever anything happens to the body, the mind becomes adversely affected. It can feel very bad, sometimes to the point of suffering, because no one tells the mind that the body is not itself.

There is only one person in the world who was able to realize the truth of this by himself: that was the Buddha. That is what is called enlightenment, i.e. to be able to perceive the nature of the mind and to know that it is separate or different from the body. The body and the mind, like I said at the start of the talk, are twins. We are twins. We have the mind, and we have the body. The problem is not the body, because the body doesn't feel, or know anything. It is like a piece of wood. It doesn't feel or know anything. Whatever happens, it is not affected in any way. We can take this piece of wood, cut it up, burn it or do anything to it, and it doesn't really matter. But the person who possesses or owns this piece of wood will be affected. Here, the mind means the one who owns the body, who thinks the body is itself or its possession. When negative things happen to the body, things that the body will eventually experience one day, the mind will feel very uncomfortable and miserable. Right now you are young, your body is only growing, and it is in the process of developing, but eventually it will reach the peak of its development, probably around middle age, when you are forty. After that, the body will start to degenerate. Instead of being stronger, it will become weaker and weaker. It will be affected by all kinds of illnesses. And

it will get older and older, and eventually it will stop functioning. It will die. This is the nature of the body.

But the mind who takes this body as itself doesn't have the same characteristics as the body. The mind doesn't develop, nor does it degenerate. It doesn't get old, it doesn't get sick, and it doesn't die. But it has to leave the body when the body can no longer function, which is what we call "the separation of the mind and the body" at the time of death. Most people think when the body dies, everything dies with the body. But according to the Buddha, it is only the body that dies. The mind, who is the master of the body, the one who possesses the body, who uses the body to do all the things that the body does, doesn't die with the body. The mind just goes on, and looks for a new body. This is when we take rebirth. When the mind finds a suitable body, it takes possession of that body, and after a certain period of time, it will be born with that new body. But the body that the mind takes up can be of many different types: it can be a human being, or an animal, like the body of a cow, chicken, elephant, fish, or whatever. Fish, animals and humans are the same in this respect. They all have a body and a mind. Only the intelligence of the mind is different. To be born as a human being, the mind has to be more intelligent, has to have the ability to distinguish right from wrong, good from bad. In contrast, to be born as an animal, you don't need the ability to separate good from bad, right from wrong. That is why animals live differently from human beings. Human beings know that in order to live together, we have to respect each other's rights. We cannot hurt other people, for instance. Animals, however, do not have this ability to distinguish,

and they will do whatever they like, not caring if they hurt others. That is why some animals, when they are hungry, will eat other animals. But we humans know that we cannot just go kill somebody for food. So, we have this ability to distinguish. It means that, in our past lives, the mind has developed a certain amount of intelligence and has developed the ability to distinguish right from wrong, good from bad. And if the mind in this life keeps on learning about right and wrong, good and bad, and maintains it, then the mind will preserve its ability to be human and its status as a human being. When it dies and is separated from the body, the mind will have the opportunity to take up another human birth in the future. But if it doesn't maintain the distinction between good and bad, right and wrong — like some people who behave like animals, not respecting other people, hurting and killing them — then their mental status has degenerated. Their intelligence has been demoted or has degenerated to the level of an animal. So, in their coming lives they are more likely to take the form of an animal than that of a human being. So, this cycle goes on and on, from one life to the next.

But if we are born as a human being, and are lucky enough to encounter a Buddha or his teachings, we will know from his teachings that we are supposed to develop the mind. This is the only real development, the only lasting development. The development of other things like of our body, or material things like buildings and highways, are not lasting developments, because everything in this world is subject to the law of change, to the law of impermanence. Everything — no matter what humans have built, even the greatest empire in

human history — deteriorates and disappears after a certain length of time. The Roman Empire, for instance, lasted a certain period of time, and then degenerated until eventually disappearing from the surface of the earth.

So, any kind of development that has to do with material things is not lasting. It is like building a sand castle on the beach at low tide. When the tide comes in, the ocean will wash the castle away. So it is with time. Time will wash everything away. This planet is not infinite; it has its own age, and one day, this planet will dissolve according to the law of impermanence. But there is one thing that isn't subject to the law of impermanence, and it is the mind. The mind isn't subject to this law. The mind exists forever. The only problem is that the way it exists isn't good enough for us, because it exists under the influence of delusion, not knowing the truth about itself and about everything else that it has taken possession of. It doesn't understand or know the truth of the body; it doesn't understand or know the truth of itself. The mind doesn't know what makes it happy, or what makes it sad.

It was only the Buddha who first discovered this truth. He knew what makes the mind happy, and he knew what makes the mind unhappy. He knew the nature of the body. He knew that the body is not the mind, which is something that the mind doesn't know. That is why we need somebody like the Buddha to teach us, to tell us this truth. Once we have understood the truth and behave appropriately, our minds will always be happy and will never be sad. We will never have to worry or be afraid of

anything. Like, we are all afraid that one day something bad will happen to our body, or to the body of our loved ones, like our father, mother, brothers, sisters, and friends. That is because we have never thought about the truth of the body, that everybody has to get old, get sick and die eventually. And the time for it to happen varies from person to person. There is no fixed time or schedule for each body. Anybody can die at any time. The only fixed schedule that you can place on the body is aging. You know that at this age the body will be like this. At another age, it will be like that. But as far as getting sick or getting cured is concerned, no one knows when that is going to happen.

So the Buddha realized that this is the cause of unhappiness in the mind, and he tried to find out how to make the mind happy, even when the body is sick or dies. And he saw that the only way to do it is to treat the body as somebody else, not as yourself. He realized that the body is actually not the mind. The mind doesn't have to cling to the body, because when the mind clings to the body, it makes the mind unhappy. Like, when you hear that a person you don't know and have never met is sick or dies, your mind is not affected at all. But if it is someone you know, or someone that you have a certain affection for, with attachment or clinging to that person, when that person gets sick or dies, your mind is affected. Your mind becomes depressed, sad, and worried. So, after investigating the causes that make the mind unhappy, the Buddha realized that it is due to the mind's delusion or ignorance of the fact that the body doesn't belong to anybody. The body is actually part of nature, like the trees, the rain, the sun or the sky. It doesn't

belong to anybody, but due to the mind's delusion or ignorance, the mind claims this body to be its possession, like when it claims the body to be itself at the time of conception. Once the mind thinks that the body belongs to itself, whenever something bad happens to the body, the mind will be affected, becoming very unhappy and depressed. But when the mind realizes that the body is not itself, and you can let go of it, treating it like the body of somebody you don't know, then whatever happens to it, or will happen to it, will not make you unhappy.

So, this is where Buddhism comes in. It teaches you how to make the mind happy. In order for your mind to be happy, the mind has to accept the fact that nothing belongs to it. Everything belongs to nature. Like our body that comes from nature. The body comes from the food we eat, which comes from nature. It comes from the land, water and air. They combine and become different kinds of food, like the rice planted in the fields that needs water, soil, sun and rain. When these four elements combine, the rice grows and eventually bears seeds. Then we take the grains of rice, cook them and put them into our body, along with other kinds of food, which transforms into the different parts of our body. Our body starts to grow. Our hair grows longer. Our body gets bigger. Our bones get stronger. All this comes from the food we eat. The food that we eat comes from these four elements of water, fire, air and earth. These are what make up this body. When the body stops functioning, it reverts back to these four elements. If you are buried in the ground, all your fluids will eventually leave the body. The heat will leave the body. The air will leave the body. What is left is the earth part of the body, which will

eventually become part of the earth. This is something we have to teach our mind, to see clearly that this body is not ourselves. It is only made up of these four elements, and it is not permanent. It is not lasting. It will last for maybe 80 or 100 years, but will eventually dissolve.

If we keep teaching our mind like this, our mind will be equipped and be ready to face the reality, the truth of the body when it happens. Then we can live in peace and feel at ease all the time, regardless of whatever might happen to the body, because we already know that this body is not ourselves. This body is not the mind. This body can be anything, and still it will not affect our mind. Our minds will just feel at ease, comfortable and fearless at all times, because it is always ready to let whatever is going to happen to the body happens. It doesn't resist the truth of the body. When the time comes for the body to get sick, let it get sick. It doesn't mean that we do not do anything to the body. If we can still fix the body, if we can still take it to the hospital to get medicine, or to get some care, we should do it. But we know that eventually one day, we will not be able to fix this body. If the mind can learn this and teach itself to let go, then it will never have to worry about this body. It will never be afraid of whatever is going to happen to this body. But if it is not taught or told this truth, it will cling to this body, and whatever happens to the body will make the mind feel very bad and miserable. It will be afflicted with anxiety, worry and fear.

So, the whole story here is that the Buddha taught the liberation of the mind from mental suffering and mental pain. Anyone who can take his teachings and

apply them to his mind is not going to be subject to any mental pain, regardless of whatever might happen to the body. It will not affect the mind at all because the mind knows that everything is like that, and no one can prevent it from happening. No one can stop this from happening in this world. Everything will go according to whatever causes it to happen.

And as for the way to accomplish this, the Buddha gave us three steps of practice. First, we must let go of our possessions, of our things that we don't need, of things that we have more of than we can use. For instance, if you have more money than you can use, he said that you should not keep it; you should give it away to charity to help other people, because if you cling to that money, it will only cause you problems, mental problems. You have to worry about keeping it safe, and you also use it to your detriment. You will use it in the wrong way, like spending it on luxury goods, or spending it on things that will hurt your body and your mind, like alcohol, drugs, or entertainment. You might think that you enjoy these things, but in the long run, you end up being a servant, addicted to these things, and you will have to have them all the time. Whenever you cannot have the things that you used to have, your mind will become very sad and depressed. So, when you have extra money, don't use it on these things, because it is bad for you. Instead, if you give it to charity, it will make you feel a lot better. When you have helped someone, your mind feels very happy and contented. This is the first step that he taught us: practise charity, and live simply. Do not have many possessions, but just enough for your existence. You do not need to have a palace as a house. You don't

need to have designer clothes for your clothing. You can live simply, with just enough to take care of the body. If you can do this, it will cut down the pressure to look for money. Because if you spend a lot of money, you have to look for a lot of money to spend. Instead of being happy, you will be unhappy because you will have to work harder. And you will have more worry, because you don't know whether you will be able to find the money you want. But if you live simply — I use the word “cheaply” — then you don't have to spend so much money. You don't have to work so hard to get the money to spend. So, this is the first step of letting go of your attachment to things that you don't really need, things that don't make your mind happy, but that make your mind unhappy. So you have to be charitable; you have to get rid of your possessions.

The second step is to live a moral life. That is, you should maintain the five precepts, which means, first, you should abstain from killing other human beings or other living beings. Second, abstain from stealing, or taking possessions that don't belong to you. Third, abstain from sexual misconduct. Here in Buddhism you should only have sex with your married spouse: your wife or your husband. And you should be faithful to them and not have any extra-marital activity. Fourth, you should avoid speaking falsehoods. You should only speak the truth. Fifth, you should abstain from taking any substance that can cause your mind to be unstable or unmanageable, like taking alcohol or drugs. Because when you cannot manage or control your mind, you might not be able to keep the other four precepts. When you get drunk, you might speak falsehoods, you might commit adultery,

you might take somebody's possessions without permission, or you might kill somebody. But if you can maintain and control your mind like you can now, you are more likely to maintain the other four precepts. If you break any of these four precepts, it can only hurt you later on. Like, when you steal somebody else's possessions, you might be subject to suspicion. You might be caught and punished. It is better to avoid these activities in order to make your mind peaceful and happy.

The third step that the Buddha taught us to develop or practise is the practice of mental development, which consists of meditation for calm and meditation for insight, because this is what makes the mind truly happy. When you meditate and stop the mind from thinking for a while, you will find peace and happiness that you have never found before. Once you have found this happiness, you will realize that no other happiness in the world is comparable to this kind of happiness, and it will make you want to have more of this kind of happiness. You will then spend more time doing meditation. But this kind of happiness only happens while you meditate, when your mind stops thinking. After the mind comes out of this state of calm and peace and starts to think, if it doesn't have the proper knowledge, it will start to think about possessing or acquiring things again. It will think that the body belongs to itself. You still want to have this and that for the body. So, you have to teach the mind that this body is not permanent. This body will eventually die one day. This body doesn't belong to you, and is not you. The mind is not the body. This is how you should teach yourself, in order to be able to let go of your attachment or clinging to your body, to anybody else's body, to other

people, or to other properties or possessions. If you have any attachment or clinging to those things, it can only cause your mind to be miserable, depressed, and painful. This is what we call contemplation or meditation for insight. Insight means being able to grasp or know the nature of things that your mind is in contact with: they are all impermanent, don't belong to you, and will not be able to give you true happiness. This is what we have to constantly teach the mind, because once we can do this, the mind will eventually let go of all of its attachment.

When the mind can let go, it will always live in peace and happiness. It will not be afflicted with any worry, anxiety, fear, depression, or misery, because it doesn't care about whatever may happen. It knows it doesn't happen to the mind. It only happens to the things that the mind is attached to. But once the mind has let go of its attachment to those things, then whatever happens to those things will not affect the mind. This is what we call freedom from suffering, freedom from mental pain. This is the goal of Buddhist practice: to teach the mind to know the truth of the mind itself, and of everything that the mind comes into contact with. The mind has to let go of everything, not clinging to anything, because one day when this body stops functioning, the mind will just leave this world, leave this country, and go to a new world or a new body, and start all over again. It has been like this for countless of lives. The lives that we have taken and lost are more than we could count. And you will still be like this forever and ever, if you don't take up the teachings of the Buddha and teach the mind this truth. Once you have taught the mind, the mind will let go of

everything and will not take up a new body. There will be no more rebirth for the mind because the mind doesn't need a body to exist happily. Like the mind of the Buddha, which after his body broke down, doesn't seek a new body anymore. His mind is fully content and has the maximum level of happiness, so it doesn't need anything to make it happy anymore — unlike our minds. Our minds still need this and that to make them happy, which is why we go seeking things, or why we go to school. Going to school will give us the opportunity to work and to earn more money. If we don't go to school, our ability to make money will not be as great as someone who went to school. So, it all boils down to our desire, and our desire is caused by delusion. We don't know that whatever we look for or seek cannot give us real happiness. Besides not giving you happiness, those things also give you problems. They give you mental pain. Because whatever you have, you will become possessive of, worried about, or afraid to lose it. But you don't know if you can keep those things for as long as you like or not, because someday, somebody might steal them from you. And when that happens, you will feel very bad.

So, to recap the whole thing here, the teaching of the Buddha is to teach ourselves that we are twins: we are the mind and the body. And the more important of these two is the mind, not the body. The mind is lasting, while the body is not. So we should not spend too much time worrying about or taking care of the body. We should take care of our mind most of the time by following the three steps of practice that the Buddha taught us, which are to practise charity, to practise morality (maintaining the five precepts), and to practise meditation. If we can

Twins

do this, one day we will come to accomplish our goal, which is to live happily forever. It is like in the movies: when the story ends, it usually says that the characters both live happily ever after. And this is what we will get from following the teachings of the Buddha. So, this is what I have to say to you. If you have anything else you want to ask me, you are welcome to do so.



Questions & Answers



Student (Female, F): After one reaches the end of one's life, what is life after rebirth? You said that there comes a time when the mind is still happy, that the mind doesn't need a body anymore. What happens after that?

Tan Ajahn: The mind can exist with or without a body. The mind doesn't disappear; it's simply that it does not exist in this three dimensional world. It is in a separate sphere of existence, but it is always there. Like right now, we have the mind with us, but we don't know it. We think that it is our body that thinks and feels, but it is actually not this body that thinks and feels — it is the mind. And if the mind is fully happy and content, when the body stops functioning, then the mind doesn't have to look for a new body, that's all. This is what the Buddha called Nibbāna. It is a state of mind where the mind doesn't have to seek a new body, a new form of existence. All forms of existence are under the law of change, under the law of impermanence. When the mind has to go through this world, the mind will be afflicted with mental pain, because when the mind takes up a new body, it naturally becomes attached to it. And when it loses the body, it is very painful. So, when the mind doesn't take up a new body, it means it doesn't have to take up any more pain. Do you understand?

Student (Male, M): Some people are treated unfairly, such as in Tibet. Do you think a peaceful approach by relying on your past *kamma* is the right way to cope with such a situation?

Tan Ajahn: No, the right way to cope with such a situation is to do like the Buddha did: that is, do not take a new life, as I have explained to you. Because when you are born, regardless of which society you are born into, you are born into a society where greed, hatred and delusion fill the minds of each individual. This greed, hatred and delusion in the minds of each individual will be the cause of conflicts, the cause of problems. If everyone can live in peace and does not bother other people, then it is all right, but no one likes to do that. Everyone likes to hurt others, or to oppress them under their power, for instance. That is because the mind has not been taught to live properly. The mind is still under the delusion that having things or people under its command makes it feel good. So, this kind of thinking only causes struggle and wars in society. Buddhism offers a personal salvation, but not a salvation for everyone. It is something we have to seek for ourselves. This is because everyone has different ways of looking at things and we cannot convince everyone to think the same way as us. The Buddha never tried to teach everyone to be like him; he only taught people who thought like him.

These sorts of problems don't just exist in our time, they also existed in the past. If you study history, you know that there have always been problems, there have always been wars. It will always be like that because the mind of each individual has not been taught with the right knowledge.

Student (M): Did the Buddha reach the state of enlightenment within one human life?

Tan Ajahn: The Buddha's last human life was one in a long series of lives in which he developed his mind. He said it took countless lives before he eventually reached the pinnacle of this development, when he was able to penetrate the truth of the mind. No one knows that there is a mind. Everything is mind, but we do not know what the mind actually is. Like the scientists who think that the mind is part of the body, and that when the body dies, the mind also disappears with the body — but this is not so. You will experience it in your meditation: When your mind becomes very calm and quiet, sometimes it seems like the mind is detached from the body. The body will disappear from its consciousness, from its awareness, and then you know that there is this mind that is not part of the body.

Student (F): If our minds are reborn, how come we still have to learn everything all over again?

Tan Ajahn: We don't learn everything all over again. It is only the knowledge that we have never been taught. Like when you are born a different nationality, you have to learn the language, but what you don't learn is your liking and disliking. You have it with you, with your mind. If you like cigarettes, or if you like alcohol, you don't have to be taught. When you come across alcohol, you know that you would like it right away. But if you don't like alcohol or cigarettes, when you come across them, you don't like them. It is the same with other things, such as colours. When you see some colours you like them, and

when you see some other colours, you don't like them. This is not something that you learn from your parents. You don't get this liking and disliking from your parents. Your parents might like colours that you don't like. That is because your likes and dislikes don't come from the body; they come from the mind, which comes from previous lives. So whatever you have previously developed will be with you. If you like to be a good person, you will keep that liking. If you like to be a bad person, you will also keep that. Even in the same family, your brothers or sisters might not have the same kind of likes or dislikes because preferences are something you carry with you from previous lives.

Student (F): But why is it that when one practises Buddhism in one life, one does not continue studying it in the future lives?

Tan Ajahn: You might not know the name of Buddhism because languages change from one nationality to the next, but the essence of Buddhism remains, like the practice of charity that remains in your mind. The practice of morality remains in your mind, and the practice of meditation remains in your mind. If you have developed these three stages, when you take up the next life, you will just continue with these practices. That is why some people can practise meditation easily, and others cannot practise so easily. Some people can give to charity easily, and some people can maintain the precepts easily, so why can't others do it as easily? It is because of what you have done in your previous lives. But you forget who you were in your previous lives, unless you have practised meditation to a point where you are able to

recollect your past lives. You can then remember what you were in previous lives, whether you were Dane, Czech, Chinese, or whether you were a cow or chicken. Being able to recollect past lives is possible when you practise meditation.

Student (F): If someone is still trying to find out about Buddhism and has not accepted it, will he ever find *Nibbāna*, or will he just continue to be reborn eternally?

Tan Ajahn: Yes, he will find it because he is seeking the truth and there is only one truth. When he realizes it, he will become the Buddha himself. He will be like the Buddha who sought this truth on his own without a teacher. No teacher or religion could tell him about this truth, so he had to find it out for himself. This truth is the truth of the mind, the nature of the mind, and the nature of everything: That is, the mind thinks everybody has a personality, has an “I,” when, in fact, it doesn’t have an “I” and doesn’t have a personality. This is the truth that will set the mind free from all kinds of suffering. So, if you cannot develop the knowledge that you have learnt from Buddhism, maybe in your next few lives you might lose or forget this truth that you have heard because it has not yet sunk into your mind deep enough. Then you have to find out about the truth yourself, or perhaps you might run into the future Buddha. There is not only one Buddha. There were many Buddhas throughout all the ages. These were people who sought the truth, and when they found the truth, they taught it to other people. We call these people “Buddhas,” the ones who know, the ones who know the truth. There will be more Buddhas coming in the future, and who knows, one of you might be one of them.

If you cannot benefit from the teachings of the Buddhas, you might eventually have to find the truth yourself. But it might be a long time before you ever get to the truth, because if it is hard enough to learn the truth from someone else who already knows, imagine how hard it will be to find the truth yourself. It is like if you have someone to tell you how you should go, but you still can't get there. What if you have to find the direction yourself, how hard will that be? It is always considered fortunate or lucky to come across the teachings of the Buddha, as they will save us a lot of trial and error. We have a map; we have directions. All we have to do is to follow them. Our map and directions are the three steps of practice: charity, morality and meditation.

Student (F): Does Buddhism differentiate between women and men?

Tan Ajahn: The mind doesn't differentiate. Minds are the same. The minds of women or men are the same. But the liking or disliking of a person makes the difference between a woman and a man. If the mind likes to act like a woman, it becomes a woman. If the mind likes to act like a man, it becomes a man.

Student (M): When people are born and belong to a family, is this purely physical or is there any hierarchy in the mind/soul? Is there a family structure, like when you are reborn you always go to the same family? When your brother is reborn, does he go to the same family?

Tan Ajahn: Not necessarily. Sometimes it does, but sometimes it doesn't. There are many different factors involved. One of the factors is that when you feel very

close to your past family, they feel very close to you, and you did something similar in your past lives together, this might be the factor that makes you come together again in your future lives.

Student (M): Every human being is trying to satisfy this “I,” such as, “I want to get rich, I want to do something.” Even if you do something good, like practising charity to feel better, how does this kind of “I” bring you to freedom?

Tan Ajahn: It is the main obstacle to freedom. It is something you have to discover in your meditation. Because when you meditate the mind stops thinking, and you feel the disappearance of the “I,” and then you realize the “I” is only a concoction of the mind. The mind thinks. It is like the saying, “I think, therefore I am.” If you don’t think you are, then there won’t be “you.” But you never stop thinking. You only think, “I am, I am, me, me, me,” all the time. But when you meditate to the point when your mind stops thinking, even for a brief moment, you feel there is a different person in yourself. There is this person without an “I.” You will feel so much at ease and comfortable. Then you realize that this is probably your true self, the self without an “I.” This is kind of contradictory, because our language is always based on the “I,” but the mind is just an awareness, a knowing, a consciousness. But it is under delusion that it is an “I,” that it is a person.

Student (F): If I don’t wish to be selfish, and I don’t want to have an “I,” how can I still be part of the community? Should I not be around people?

Tan Ajahn: Your activity should be self-less. You should do things for other people, not for yourself.

You can be around people, but you don't do it for yourself. Don't use your "I" as the basis. Whatever you do, only do it for your body. Like, when you eat, eat only for your body, not for your mind. If you eat for your body, you don't have to choose the kind of food to eat, because the body can eat any kind of food. That is how monks are taught to live. When we eat, we are only supposed to feed the body, not the mind. We should forget what we like. If we like a particular type of food, we should resist eating it, because if we eat something we like, that means we eat for our minds, for the "I," for delusion. We are supposed to eat as if we are taking medicine. It doesn't have to be the kind of food that we enjoy. We can eat anything as long as it keeps the body healthy and maintains the body. So you can live in society, but instead of working for yourself, like earning a lot of money, you should think, "I just need enough money to maintain the body, and I will give the rest of the money back to society."

Student (M): Do you think it is possible to get rid of the "I"?

Tan Ajahn: Yes, the Buddha did, and so did many other people who followed his teachings. The "I" is only in your thoughts, but it is so strong that you cannot stop it. It has become such a strong part of your existence, and to keep it out of your existence is very difficult. It is like when you are standing in a queue and someone cuts in. If there is no "I," then you will simply stand there and allow him to cut into your lane. You will have no reaction whatsoever. But your mind may think that this is wrong, and you might tell the person, "Hey, you cannot do this!" and so forth.

Student (M): Why are there no female monks, or *bhikkhunīs*?

Tan Ajahn: This is because monks are supposed to live in the forest. The forest is a harsh and dangerous environment, but we need the quiet of the forest to develop meditation. We need to live simply. We have to cut off everything that the mind is attached to, because those things are hindrances to our development. For women to live like male monks, it is therefore very dangerous and hard to do. There are some female practitioners, but the tradition of ordaining female *bhikkhunīs*, according to the Buddha, has been disrupted, has been severed. So we cannot ordain them anymore. That doesn't stop females from practising like male monks. They can do it, but just without the uniform, that is all. They can still practise the three stages of development, just like monks do, but they have to do it on their own. They cannot live in the community like the monks.

Student (M): Who is going to teach them?

Tan Ajahn: The monks. Whoever has the knowledge of the Buddha's teachings will be their teacher.

Student (M): Indirectly?

Tan Ajahn: Directly and indirectly. I have many female Buddhists who come and ask my advice. Then they go back home and practise. Occasionally, they will go to a forest monastery, where there are accommodations for women to stay and practise. For women, it is safer to be in a monastery. It is very dangerous for them to be

living in the wild or forest by themselves. But this is what they did at the time of the Buddha. Most monks live in the wild, alone, by themselves because they want to eject this “I” from this body. When you live in a very dangerous place, in order to live in peace, you have to eject this mind from the body. The mind must relinquish the body. It must not consider the body as itself. Because if you cannot do this, you will not be able to stay for long. Because as soon as you come close to any form of danger, you feel like you want to go to a safer place.

Student (M): How do you practise morality and charity?

Tan Ajahn: To practise charity as a monk, we have to give up all of our possessions. We cannot take anything with us. All that we have with us now are the eight articles that are necessary for our existence: The first is a bowl that we use in the morning to collect food, then – three pieces of cloth as our robes, fifth – a belt, sixth – a razor, seventh – a water strainer. When we live in the forest, we have to get water from a stream, which might have mosquitoes or micro-animals in the water, so we have to strain the water since we don’t want to have them in our drinking water. The last thing that we need is a needle and thread to fix our robes. These are the eight articles that the Buddha allowed monks to have as possessions. Other than that, we should not have anything else. This is charity. We give up money, give up family, give up friends. We give up everything.

We maintain the second stage. The monks have 227 precepts or rules that they have to follow. They are like

regulations on how to behave, how to eat, how to walk, and how to stand. For example, monks cannot pee while standing. They have to sit down. For some reasons, in ancient India, it was considered rude to stand and pee. When we eat, we are supposed to sit down and eat. We cannot walk and eat at the same time, or stand up while eating. Everything that we eat has to be offered, has to be given by hand to us. We cannot just take anything we see and eat it. These are regulations to maintain the status of monks, to make people respectful of monks because of their higher standard of behaviour and conduct. This is the morality part.

The third part is meditation. This is where the monk goes to a forest because the forest is quiet and far away from all noise and distraction. If you live in the city, it will be very difficult to meditate. There is so much noise, and there are so many activities going on. You will find it very hard to meditate and concentrate. When you meditate, you need a mental object to focus on, to let the mind have something to hold on to. If you don't have a mental object, the mind will continue thinking about this and that, about this and that, all the time. And if the mind keeps on thinking, it will never stop, it will never become calm. So you need something that we call a meditation subject or meditation object. You can use your breathing as your meditation subject. Just focus your attention on your breathing. Close your eyes and watch your breathing. Make sure that you only think about your breathing and not about other things. If you persist in doing this, eventually all your thoughts will slowly disappear. Eventually you will get to a point where you stop thinking. Then you have achieved your meditation goal.

This is only a very small goal. What you want to do is to maintain the ability to think or not to think. You want to be able to control your thinking. First, you have to know how to stop it. Once you know how to stop it, then you can manipulate your thinking. You can let it think, or you can stop it. If you think about something unhappy, you can stop it right away, or you can direct it to give you true knowledge. Think about the truth that will free you from the delusion of “I”, “me”, “mine” and “myself.” And when you feel tired of thinking, come back and rest in your calm meditation again by concentrating on your breathing to stop your thinking. As you progress, the period when your mind stops thinking will become longer and longer. This can be used to recharge your mental energy, so that when you withdraw from that state of calm, you will have the energy to teach your mind more and more, until this knowledge becomes ever-present in the mind. You need this kind of knowledge to be able to eject your delusion because your delusion is working all the time. At every moment you always think of yourself. You always think of an “I,” all the time. So this knowledge of not “I,” not “myself” needs to be always present in order for the other wrong knowledge to be eliminated. This is a full-time job for a monk. He will spend all his free time doing this, in all postures. Sometimes after sitting for a long time he feels pain, and so he gets up and walks, but his mind is still doing the same thing. You should continuously teach the mind about the real truth: the truth of not “I,” not “myself,” until it becomes part of your being, and then you no longer consider anything to be yourself, or your possession. Then you can let go of everything in that way.

Student (M): When you said you have to leave everything, leaving your family and all your possessions when you become a monk, are you happier now? Are you finding the truth? Or do you just have to believe that it will happen someday.

Tan Ajahn: If you practise, the results will be apparent to you. It is like eating: when you are full, you know that you are full. When you eat enough food, you know you are happy. Happiness is something that you can feel inside yourself; it is not a belief. It is an experience.

Student (M): Have you experienced it already?

Tan Ajahn: Yes. In your lifetime, in this lifetime. We can experience the happiness of *Nibbāna* in this lifetime.

Student (M): Buddhism is not that widespread in Europe or North America. If a famous person publicly announces that he follows the teachings, he becomes easily recognizable. There are famous people, such as Richard Gere (a famous actor), who use their popularity to promote Buddhism in general, or for special cases such as Tibet. Do you appreciate that, or do you think that Buddhism should not be promoted and people should find the truth on their own?

Tan Ajahn: Well, I think people should come to Buddhism out of the sense that it is something good for them, rather than because some famous people believe or follow it. It is like buying something. When you buy something, you want to buy it because it is good for you, not because a movie star buys it. When you use it later, you might find that it is not good for you.

It is not important to Buddhism who follows it or not, because Buddhism doesn't gain anything from anybody. Buddhism only gives. Buddhism isn't afraid of disappearing from this earth, because it will disappear eventually. Buddhism is also subject to the law of change, to the law of impermanence. The present Buddha predicted that the current teachings will only last about 5000 years, and after that no one will be able to understand his teachings anymore. But there will be a new Buddha who will come and renew these teachings. So, it doesn't matter who follows Buddhism or not because Buddhism doesn't gain or lose anything; Buddhism is here just to help people.

After his enlightenment, the Buddha had a choice whether to teach or not. When he first thought about teaching, he was very discouraged because he knew that it was very difficult and very hard for people to understand and follow his teachings. He was so discouraged that he almost decided not to teach. Had he not taught, he would have been known as a "Silent Buddha." There are two kinds of Buddha. A person who becomes a Buddha and decides not to teach is known as a "Silent Buddha." A Buddha who, after becoming a Buddha, decides to help other people by teaching them becomes a known Buddha, like the Buddha who we know.

Had he decided not to teach, we would not know that there had been a Buddha in this world. But after he sat and thought for a while, he realized that people are not all the same. People are like students in a class: there are some bright students, and there are some dull students. There are "A" students and there are "C" students.

The Buddha classified people into four stages according to their knowledge. He compared them to four lotuses. When the lotus first grows, it grows from the bottom of a pond. After some time, it rises to the middle of the pond, and then, after some more time it rises to just under the surface of the water, and eventually it will finally rise above the surface of the water. These are the four levels of lotuses. The lotuses that have risen above the water level will blossom as soon as they receive a ray of sunlight the next day. This is compared to people who are very intelligent. These are like “A” students, to whom you can just say a few words and they will all understand what you are talking about. The next level of lotuses is the “B” category of students. You have to talk a lot more, illustrating with examples to make them understand. The third level is that of the “C” students. These will take a lot more explanation and teaching before they can understand the truth. The last are the “F” students who will never pass. These are like the lotuses that will never be fully grown, because they will become food for the fish and crabs. After the Buddha distinguished the differences in ability between the various groups of people, he became encouraged enough to decide to teach. When he first started teaching, he only took in the “A” students. He went to those people who had developed morality, meditation, and who had some degree of calm already. All he had to do was tell them to get rid of the “I.” As soon as these “A” students heard this, they became enlightened right away. Most of the first students that the Buddha taught became enlightened very quickly. Some of them were enlightened the first time they listened to him. They could understand the truth and became enlightened right away. After all these “A” students

had been enlightened, he went to the next group, the “B” students, and then later on he went to the “C” students. But he never went to the “F” students. The “F” students were those who would never believe the Buddha, so he didn’t teach them. Have I answered your question?

Student (M): Yes.

Student (F): You are saying that we should do charity, but you also said that we should not connect with the world. How can we do both?

Tan Ajahn: When you are still connected to the world, you do your charity part. You do it gradually. When you are still living in society, if you have something extra left, give it to other people, don’t keep it for yourself. As soon as you give more, you feel happier. The more you develop this practice of charity, the more you feel like you want to leave society, and then you will give everything away eventually.

Student (F): So, we are still living in society because we have not developed enough to leave?

Tan Ajahn: Yes, when you first start, you still have to live in society because you don’t have enough strength to leave right away. You do it gradually. You try to loosen your attachment to society. And then the more you develop, the more calm you gain, the more you will be independent of society because you can find happiness within yourself. The reason you have to live in society is because you still need society to fulfil your happiness. As soon as you can find the happiness within yourself, you will know that you no longer need society,

and you want more of the happiness that you can find within yourself. So that is when you decide to become a monk, to leave society to concentrate fully on the development of this happiness. While you still live in society, you still have responsibility for the society you live in, such as for your parents, friends, and everybody else. But when I said that you leave society, it doesn't mean that you sever all your ties. You don't cut off your relationships with your parents and friends. You just cut off your activities with them. You just want to be alone to develop this kind of happiness, but you occasionally might call them, or go see them, or they may occasionally come and see you, to visit and talk. The bond is still there. The relationship is still there. It is just the activities are not there anymore.

Student (F): You said that there is little difference between females and males in Buddhism. But we were told earlier that the men should sit in front, and the women at the back. Why is that?

Tan Ajahn: When I said there is no difference between male and female, it is the mind that has no difference. Whether it is a female or male mind, it is the same. Your mind and my mind are the same. They have the same greed, hatred and delusion. There is no difference. There is no distinguishing whether it is a female or male mind. But in society, there are still interactions between females and males, and there is still a need to distinguish between them. There is a separation between monks and the opposite sex because if they are not careful, they could be drawn back to their old ways of life. When a person becomes a monk, it doesn't mean that he has

suddenly cut off or eliminated his sexual desire. If he happens to be close to a female or the opposite sex, he can be aroused. To protect monks from this, in the Buddhist tradition women are supposed to not get too close to the monks. Like, when a woman gives something to a monk, the monk has to use a piece of cloth to receive it, instead of receiving it directly with his hands. This is because sometimes there might be an accident, and their hands might come into contact, and this might arouse feelings in the monk. So, to eliminate this problem, monks are asked to receive anything from females with a piece of cloth. It is only to protect the monks' celibacy, that is all.

So, have all the questions been answered? What do you think you are going to do with this knowledge? Are you going to take it up, and try it out? Do you think it is possible? Do you think it is the truth?

Student (M): Yes, I think so. We are sure to take it up and be better-behaved. Apart from that, maybe we need to try it, and see what we can achieve.

Tan Ajahn: Well, this is a good start anyway. This is like planting a seed of enlightenment in your mind. If you take care of that seed by nourishing it with nutrients, it might grow. It might make you be different from what you are today. You may be wiser, kinder, more selfless, and happier with yourself. If that happens, then I think this trip here is profitable. It is not a waste of time. So if there are no more questions, I think we can conclude this talk by paying respect to our teacher, the Buddha.



05

The Key to Success in Meditation

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The key to success in meditation is focus. You have to focus your mind in the present, in the here and now. You should not let your mind drift to other things. You should always be focused on whatever you are doing at that moment. If you are walking, just be focused on your walking. If you are eating, focus on your eating. If you are washing, bathing, sweeping or whatever you are doing, focus your attention on that particular action in real-time, right now. Do not do something and think about other things at the same time, such as when you are sweeping or washing, and you start thinking about what you will do tomorrow or what you did yesterday. This is not practising. The practice is that you have to be here and now. This is what we call the development of mindfulness.

In the *Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta*, the Four Foundations of Mindfulness, the Buddha laid out the way to focus your mind, to bring your mind to be watchful and focused on your physical activities. Be here and now. If you do, when you sit in meditation and want to focus your mind on

your breathing, it will not go anywhere else. If your mind can focus continuously on your breathing, your mind will come to peace very quickly. When you have this peace, you will experience a kind of happiness that you have never experienced before. You will find that this is real happiness, something that we all have been looking for, something that will stay with us and something that we can have any time we want once we are adept at the practice.

What you should do is to develop this ability to focus in your daily life, from the time you get up to the time you go to sleep. As soon as you get up, focus right away on your body by looking at the body and asking where is the body now? It is lying down. Next, what do you want to do with the body? It wants to get up. Focus on your body, whether you want to stand up, walk or go to the bathroom. Be with the body at every instance. This is to prevent your mind from running here and there. If your mind keeps on running here and there, you will never stop thinking and will never find peace. If you can focus your mind, your thinking will gradually come under your control. You can stop your thinking if your mindfulness and ability to focus are strong enough.

If you still feel that you cannot focus, there is another technique. You can use a mantra, like the word “Buddha.” Repeat *Buddho, Buddho* and watch whatever you are doing. Sometimes you are watching what you are doing, but at the same time your mind is still thinking about something else, so you should use the *Buddho* mantra to bring your mind back. Repeat *Buddho, Buddho, Buddho* mentally to prevent your mind from thinking about

other things. Should you need to think, you can do that as well, but you should stop doing other things. You should stop doing whatever you are doing. You should sit down or stand and think about your plan for today or tomorrow. As soon as you have thought through everything, you should go back to focusing your mind on whatever you are doing again, without thinking about other things. This is just the first step.

There are other steps. Do not get confused. When you get to another level of meditation, such as at the third step, in which you have to develop wisdom, you have to think, but that will be at a later point. Right now, before you can go to that level, you should have this focusing ability. You should be able to stop your mind from thinking about things that you do not have to think about. When you have to do your daily routine, whatever you need to do, you should focus. As soon as you have spare time, when you don't have to do anything, you should sit down, close your eyes and concentrate. Focus on your breathing and try to get your mind to drop into calm. This is called *samādhi*, when the mind drops into calm, into peace, and you stop thinking temporarily. You don't have to force it; the mind will just rest. You just enjoy that state of peace for as long as you can. Don't force it, or pull the mind out from that state. Let it stay in that state for as long as possible until it withdraws from that state, when you should continue focusing. Do these two things until you become very professional, which means you can get your mind to calm down anytime you want. As soon as you sit down, you can focus on your breathing and in a few minutes your mind can drop into calm. If you can do this, the next level is the development of insight or wisdom.

Insight means to perceive things as they are, not as how you think they are. For instance, the Buddha said that there is no self in the body, but we think there is a self in the body. We think that the body is “I,” “mine” or “myself.” This is delusional; it is not the correct truth. The truth is that the body is just a composition of the four elements: earth, water, fire, and wind. You get these four elements from the food that you eat. The food you eat, like fruits, vegetables, and grains, comes from the earth. They have to have earth, water, fire (heat), and air. They are the combination of these four elements, and when you ingest them into your body, they turn into 32 parts of the body. They become the hair of your head, hair of your body, skin, teeth, nails, and all the internal organs. This body is composed of the four elements. When this body stops functioning, these four elements disintegrate, going their separate ways. When this body dies, the first two things to leave are air (the wind element) and heat (the fire element). The body becomes cold. The air is the smell that comes out of the body. Later on, the water element comes out of the body. Eventually the body will just be left with the hard part, the earth element, such as the skeleton and the skin that is all dried up. And when the body is left long enough, the body will decompose and return back to the earth. This is the development of insight. You have to train your mind to think in this manner, in order to see that this body is not you.

You are the one who is investigating the body. The one who investigates and the one who is being investigated cannot be the same thing. You are the mind,

who is the one investigating the body. The body is not the mind. The body and the mind are like twins, which join together at the time of conception in the womb, when the sperm and egg combine to form a body. The mind that needs a new body comes along to take possession of that body. The mind is the spirit that died from a previous life. It is just like our mind. When we die, our mind will separate from this body and seek a new one. When there is conception in the womb, the mind will take possession of that particular new body. When you are born, the mind thinks that this mind is the body, and the body is the mind. This is *avijjā* or delusion, not knowing the truth of the mind and body that they are two separate things.

The mind is the controller of the body. The body is like a toy. The mind is like the owner of the toy, like the driver of a car. The car is the body, and the driver is the mind. The problem is that the mind does not know this. The mind thinks that the body is itself, so whatever happens to the body affects the mind negatively. The mind becomes sad and afraid. However, if you know that the body is not yourself, you can overcome this bad feeling. If you know something does not belong to you, you will not be affected by whatever happens to it. If you know that a car is not yours, whatever happens to the car will not affect you. If you think the car belongs to you and something happens to it, you will be affected because of your delusion, your ignorance, and not knowing the truth. This is what is called insight. We have to teach the mind the true story and have to keep reminding it at all time.

Whatever happens to the body, we should leave it alone. We should not worry about it, because if you study the course of the body, you'll know that the body will eventually get old, get sick and die. No matter how you feel about it, it will still happen. Even if you are afraid of getting old, getting sick and dying, sickness and death will happen anyway. If you know that it is not you, you will not be affected by whatever happens to the body. This is on the intellectual level. You have to raise it to another level, putting it to the test, subjecting the body to all sorts of hardship, like becoming a monk. For example, as a monk you are not allowed to eat three times a day. The body doesn't need to eat three times a day. The body is like a car: you can fill the tank up in one go. Similarly, you can eat just once and fill yourself up with enough food for the rest of the day. The reason you eat many times a day is because of your desire; you eat for enjoyment. You don't eat for your body. Eating for pleasure is what you should not do, as this is the way of addiction or attachment to your body. When your body does not respond to your desire, you become unhappy. So you should put your knowledge that the body is not you to the test. Treat it exactly as it is, as not yourself. You don't have to take too good care of the body, just look after it like you would do with a car. Be ready to give it up when the time comes. If you can give it up, you will not be affected by whatever happens to it.

So, first you have to teach your mind the truth, and then you have to test it to see if your mind can accept the truth. Sometimes a monk wants to test whether he can let go of the body or not, whether he can let the body die. He goes into a forest, or some place where there might

be some danger, and tests the mind to see whether it can still remain peaceful and calm. If it cannot remain at peace, it means the mind is still attached to the body, and he has to teach the mind at that particular time that being attached to the body creates unpleasant feelings of fear. By accepting that the body is not the mind, the mind is ready to let the body go. If he does that, he will become peaceful. This is the test that eventually we all have to take.

First, we have to teach the mind. This is on the theoretical level, like in a classroom. Once you gain knowledge you have to apply it in real life. If you pass the test, you will live forever and be happy without fear. Nowadays, people are afraid of three things. They are afraid of getting old, getting sick and dying. No matter how much they try, they can never stop this process. They try the wrong things. What they should do is to try to stop the mind from clinging to the body. Let the body be; let it go. Once you can let it be, then you have solved the problem. But we solve the problem the wrong way by trying to preserve the body. We try different ways not to age, get sick, or die. It has been like this for ages.

The Buddha found the right way. The problem is not the body. The problem is in the mind that is deluded. The mind takes something that doesn't belong to itself and thinks that it is itself. So, whatever happens to that thing, the mind suffers. This is the work that we do in Buddhist practice — not to correct the body, but to cure the mind that is sick through delusion. We need the practice of meditation and insight. If we don't do this, the mind does not have the strength to take and pass the

test. Now you know the truth, but you cannot let go of the body yet because the force of attachment is stronger than the force of detachment. What you need to do now is to develop the force of detachment by calming your mind. As your mind drops into calm, it temporarily detaches from the body and everything else. This is why we need to do meditation. In order to meditate you need to have the ability to focus. You have to be able to focus your mind, to stop your mind from thinking about this and that, from going here and there. If you continue thinking, when you sit in meditation you cannot focus your mind on your meditation object. Your mind will think about other things while you are trying to focus on your breathing. You will not be able to sit for hours, and you will not experience any peace or calm.

The first key to success in meditation is that you have to cultivate the ability to focus your mind. Secondly, you have to sit down and calm your mind until it becomes totally peaceful. Thirdly, you have to develop insight by teaching your mind the truth. The truth is that the mind is one thing and the body is another thing. If the mind clings to anything, it becomes agitated, depressed, and stressful because nothing in this world is permanent. If you want something to last forever, you will always be stressed because nothing lasts. Now you think something lasts a long time and you can get it, but the next day it could be gone. You must learn to detach. Don't cling to anything. Always remind yourself that everything is temporary. Everything that you have is temporary. Every experience that you are experiencing is temporary. If you are attached to it, when it disappears, you will be depressed. For example, if you have friends over to visit

The Key to Success in Meditation

you, you are happy, but when they leave, you are left alone and feel sad and lonely. If you can focus your mind, focus on your breathing, sitting in meditation and forgetting about everything else, your mind will drop into peace, and you will have real happiness. This is what you should do as a monk or a Buddhist.



06

Q & A with Monks and Laypeople

January 2012

Layman (M1): It is not always so easy for a layman to practise continuously, both because it is difficult to meditate as well as to fit into a routine. Sometimes it just feels like it is not the layman's way. It just feels like, "Ah!"

Tan Ajahn: It is just the same as in a sport: we have both professionals and amateurs. If you want to be a professional, you will have to take it up as your profession. You cannot have it both ways. You cannot be an amateur and expect to win the prize. The most you can do as a layperson is just to have a glimpse of what you should do, that's all. Because the time that you devote to your practice is very small, compared to the time you spend on other things. You see, as monks, we devote all our time to meditation, from the time we get up right up to the time we go to sleep. For you, it is difficult because you cannot focus when you start talking to other people. Your mind has already gone off. When those people go away, your mind still thinks about them. As for monks, we try not to socialise when we come together to do something;

we try not to talk to each other. We keep our focus on whatever we do, and once the job is completed, we disperse right away and go back to seclusion. That's the way of the professional.

Layman (M1): It is so difficult to cope with the feeling that the mind is meaningless, and this can get so exhausting.

Tan Ajahn: It is just like a drug addict. He knows that it is meaningless, but he cannot give it up. When he enjoys it, he forgets this feeling of meaninglessness, but once he stops taking the drug, it returns back to him. When you don't have the enjoyment, this feeling comes back. This is what we call *dukkha*, or suffering.

Layman (M1): So how do we deal with that?

Tan Ajahn: Try to stop yourself from enjoying it. That's all. Tell yourself that it is like taking drugs, and you have to "bite the bullet." It is not easy. For instance, you want to watch a movie and the Dhamma inside you tells you not to watch it. You have these two forces inside, but if you can somehow win, then that force that tries to drag you to watch the movie will stop. Then you will find peace. See, it is always a struggle against your desire, because it is the desire that drags or pulls you towards all this enjoyment. If you can focus your mind, you will have some ability to resist your desire. In addition, if you can sit in meditation, you will have more strength against your desire. So, you have to do both. You have to resist your desire, which means not to do what your desire wants you to do, and you also have to focus your mind

and sit in meditation. You have to do both. If you can, the forces that will bring you inside will be stronger and stronger. The forces that will bring you inner peace of mind will become stronger. You will then eventually get sick of the enjoyment that you used to enjoy; you will get tired of it. You will say it is meaningless and futile no matter how much you enjoy it. Once you have enjoyed something, it disappears with nothing left. Those things always leave you empty. This is not like the enjoyment you get from peace of mind, which is always within yourself. You can always have it, anytime you want.

Laywoman (F1): I would like to ask about working with *mettā* because I think I should really have some *mettā* in certain situations. I find it hard to meet people and situations that are difficult. I feel like I start to get judgemental, and I would like to exchange this judging attitude for *mettā*, but I think it is really hard.

Tan Ajahn: I think you should instead change your attitude towards things and other people. You should see them as things that you cannot expect anything from. Try not to expect anything from things or people. Just take them as they are. Don't expect anything, because when you expect, you become disappointed. You expect people to smile at you, but if they don't, you become disappointed. You expect people to be nice to you, but when they don't act nicely to you, you again become disappointed. So, don't expect anything from anybody. Just go through life expecting only what you can do for yourself. Don't expect anything from other people. Just do what you have to do, and then try to find the time to be by yourself to meditate. I think that is better.

Don't expect to get anything from anybody because whatever you get is not worth the time that you lose going after it. You should only go after your meditation. Okay? Understand? If you don't expect anything, then you won't feel bad. Even with the weather conditions, you cannot expect anything because you cannot tell the weather what you want. Take it as it is, as it comes. Take things as they come and don't expect anything.

Monk 1: Ajahn, when we experience sickness, such as painful feet causing us not to walk a lot, we go to see a doctor who prescribes medicine, but it doesn't seem to work. How far should we go to find a conventional cure, compared to trying to cure it through the practice of Dhamma? What is the balanced approach?

Tan Ajahn: The balance is different for each individual. It depends on how you feel. If you do not expect to heal or get well, then you can do whatever you want. If you don't expect anything, you can live with whatever it is at the moment and use whatever method that is available to fix it. If you can fix it, that's fine. If not, that's also fine. Then there is no problem. The problem is in the mind and not in the body. The mind has to be neutral and be able to take it either way. We are here to fix the mind and not the body, but we will fix the body as much as we can. The most important thing is to fix your mind at the same time. Your mind should always be neutral. You should not expect this or that. You should be able to go left or right, for better or worse. Then you'll have fixed the problem because the problem is in the mind.

Monk 2: I have one idea that is wrong and that is that the mind is produced by the brain. How can I overcome this idea or delusion? How can I work with it?

Tan Ajahn: Oh, just ignore it! It is just a theory, just like believing that the world is flat or round. It doesn't change reality anyway, right? You can believe that the world is flat, but that won't change the fact that it is round. You believe that the world is round, but that does not confirm the fact that it is round. It only helps you to have the right attitude, so that you can react properly. That's all. So, all you have to do is to react properly according to the truth. The truth is that the body is not yourself; the brain is not yourself. So, whatever happens to it, let it go because you are going to lose it one day. The solution is not to cling to it. Be ready to let it go. Treat it like you've borrowed it from someone else. It doesn't belong to you. If the owner comes and claims it, you will have to let it go. The point is to let go because if you can do so, you will not suffer. You will not be in pain — I mean, mental pain. If you cannot let go, you will always have mental suffering. So, don't worry about whether you are from the brain or not. That doesn't really matter. What matters is, can you let go of it or not? If you cannot let go, you will suffer. If you can, you will not suffer. One of the things that will help you to let go is to see the body as not "you." If you know that, you can let go easily. If you think that it is you and belongs to you, it will be hard for you to let go. If you cannot accept this truth, at least you should accept the fact that if you can let go, you will not suffer, because this is something you can experience in real time. For instance, when you get sick, if you cannot let go of your body, your mind will also suffer because the mind

doesn't want to let the body be sick. But if you say, "Well, I cannot stop it. If it is gonna get sick, it will be sick anyway. The only thing I can do is get some medicine or go to a doctor. That's all I can do. If the medicine can fix it, fine. If the doctor can fix it, also fine. If it can't or he can't, then I will just have to live with it. So what? I am not sick; it is the body that is sick. That's all. If I cannot use the body, fine, I will just sit down and not do anything. If I don't have any food to eat, that is also fine because I will eventually die. Maybe it is not time for me to die." You can accept that it is not yet your time to die; instead, it is the time for this body to die. If you can accept that truth, there will be no problem. No matter how good the doctor or medicine is, one day they will also not be able to fix the body anyway. One day the body will say, "Don't treat me; don't fix me. I cannot go on; I have to stop." You are the owner, so the mind that owns the body will just have to say, "Okay, if you want to stop then good-bye." That's all. What's wrong with that? Like the Buddha when he was about to die just went into *samādhi*. He just lay down, focused his mind, and left the body alone. It is like when you are going to sleep, you leave your body alone, right? Dying is like going to sleep. You leave this body, and when you wake up, you get a new body. That's all. That's what rebirth is about. You leave one body and go to the next body. In the process of going from the old to the new body, you go to heaven or hell. It is like when you are going to sleep, and you go through good or bad dreams. When you wake up, you come back from heaven or hell. So, this is what we do through for countless lifetimes, from one body to the next, from one dream to the next. That's all. There is nothing to be afraid of. It is

a natural process, and it happens whether you like it or not. If you do not want it, you will have to stop your mind from dreaming, from going to a new life. That's what the Buddha did. He stopped his mind by cutting off the desire in his mind. He had no desire, and when there is no desire, the mind doesn't generate anything, doesn't generate any thoughts, and doesn't have any force to drive it to go into a new body. So the key idea here is to let go of everything. Nothing belongs to you. If you cling to it, you will suffer. If you let go, you will be at ease and be peaceful.

Monk 3: What are the best external conditions for *samādhi* practice?

Tan Ajahn: Find a secluded area where there are no sights, sounds, smells and tastes to lure or tempt your mind. When you stay in the city, you get to hear all sorts of sounds that will stir up your emotions. You see things that will also stir your emotions. Once your mind is stirred up, it is very hard to calm down. So, you have to stay in the forest, if possible by yourself. Even if you stay in the forest and see people, the sight of it will stir up your emotions. So try to avoid sights, sounds, smells and tastes that can arouse your emotions. When you stay in the forest and look at the trees, you don't have any feelings toward them. Then you are left with only one problem to deal with — your thoughts. The mind will still want to think about this or that, which is why you have to focus your mind on whatever you do. If you cannot focus, you can either repeatedly chant a mantra, or you can chant the *paṭimokkha*. One of the techniques of focusing the mind is to memorise the *paṭimokkha*

or learn the chants. You may walk *jongkrom* and chant mentally. Keep chanting and chanting until you cannot think about other things. When you sit in meditation, your mind will then be ready to be calm because it has already been primed to stay put. When you direct the mind to focus on your breathing, it will stay with the breathing. The breathing will lead your mind to calm. So, the Buddha said that there are four things that you need to do in order to advance your meditation. First, you have to control your food intake; be moderate in eating. Don't eat too much; otherwise, you will become sleepy and lazy, and you will not want to practise. Second, you will have to stay in a secluded area by yourself. Third, you have to focus your mind all the time. Fourth, avoid socialising by staying away from places where things are going on. Seek seclusion. If you maintain these three or four things, you will have a better chance of achieving the real results.

Monk 4: Tan Ajahn, I kind of worry that if I go to a very secluded area, will I really be able to take it, or will I just go crazy or something?

Tan Ajahn: Try it. If you feel that after you go, you cannot do it, you can then come back. Okay? Don't pre-judge what you can do. You have to prove it to yourself. If you think that you are not benefiting from it, you can always retreat. You can always come back. Don't force yourself to do something that you cannot do yet. But you have to at least try, because if you don't, sometimes your defilements will lure you not to stay alone. The defilements don't want you to go and stay in seclusion to test yourself. But first you will need to prepare yourself.

You should have enough will power to do whatever is necessary. For instance, be able to focus all day long, to practise walking and sitting meditation all day long. If you think you can do that, then you should go. What will really make you feel confident is that you should, at least, be able to experience some calm. If you are able to do that, you will be very confident and will want to be alone more than being with other people, because you know the benefits. With people, you have one kind of benefit, but being alone gives another kind that is better. So try to get this result. Sit in meditation until the mind drops into calm, becoming one-pointed. If you can experience that result, you will be very confident. Okay?



07

Laypeople
from Singapore
April 28, 2013

The Buddha's teachings are the teachings that can help us live happily and without any suffering. Right now, we are not always happy. Sometimes we are happy, and sometimes we're not. This is because sometimes we create happiness and sometimes unhappiness. Our happiness arises from our own thinking. The way we think can make us happy or unhappy. If we think in the way of greed and desire, we'll be unhappy. If we think in the way of letting go and giving up, then we'll be happy. This is because the nature of the mind is that it will be happy when it doesn't have any desire. In the Four Noble Truths the Buddha said *dukkha* is the mental suffering that arises from desire, such as the desire to be something or somebody, to have this or to have that, to have happiness from seeing, hearing, touching, and the desire not to be this or that. When we have these desires, we will be unhappy. Like, when we want to go to a movie but cannot go for some reasons, we become unhappy. Or, when we want to do something but we cannot, we become unhappy. But if we don't have the desire to do anything, we will not be unhappy. We can sit at home, without doing anything.

So, we must control our desire, trying to eliminate or lessen it. The less desire we have, the more happiness we have because happiness doesn't rely on whether you have a lot of money or not. Having a lot of money doesn't guarantee that you can be happy. Because if you want more than what you have, even when you have ten thousand million dollars, if you want more, then you will still not be happy. But if you have only ten dollars, and you are happy with those ten dollars you have — you don't want more than that — then you can be happy. So it is not how much you have, but how much desire you have. The more desire you have, the more unhappy you become. The less desire you have, the happier you feel. That is why our duty and job is to curb and eliminate our desire. The Buddha gave us the way to curb and eliminate our desire by telling us to do charity, or *dāna*. *Dāna* means giving. Instead of wanting more money, you should want less money. If you think you already have more than you need, you should give the surplus to other people. Giving will lessen the desire for more money, and the more you give, the happier you will become. This is the first step. We must not be greedy. We must not want to have a lot of money because once you start wanting to have a lot of money, it can never stop. From one million dollars you want to have ten million, from ten million you want to have one hundred million, from one hundred million you want to have one thousand million, and so on and so forth. But so what? Does it make you any happier? And what will you do with one thousand million dollars? You cannot buy happiness with money. You can only find happiness by giving money away. When you do charity, you feel good, like today you come, bring some money to give to the temple, and you feel happy. So, the first step

is that you have to curb your greed for more money. Just have enough to take care of your body and life. If you have more than you need, you do not have to keep it unless you want to save it for future use. But if you have enough already, don't keep the excess; give it away. Because if you keep it, you want to get more, and when you have the desire to get more, you will not be happy. So, this is the reason why the Buddha taught us to do *dāna*. *Dāna* is a *Pāli* word that means giving or charity.

Once you can practise *dāna*, the next step for you is *sīla*. *Sīla* means keeping the precepts. If you can keep the precepts, you can curtail or eliminate your desire, especially the desire to do bad things, like the desire to kill, steal, commit adultery, lie, or to drink alcohol. Doing these things doesn't make you happy; it makes you more miserable and unhappy. So, you have to maintain the five precepts. This will lessen your desire, especially the desire to do evil things, like killing, stealing, committing adultery, lying, or drinking alcohol.

Once you can keep the precepts, your mind will be happier. Since you haven't done anything bad to other people, you know that nobody will come after you for revenge, or to punish you for the bad things you could have done. Your mind will be at ease and peaceful, not having to worry about the bad deeds you might have done.

Once you have a mind that is peaceful, you can then do the third step. This is to stop your desire completely by practising meditation. Meditation in Buddhism is divided into two levels: the first level is meditation for

calm and peace of mind and the second level is called meditation for insight or wisdom. The first step is to keep the mind from having any desire. If you can stop your thinking, you can stop your desire. And when you can stop your desire, your mind will become peaceful and happy. But you will only be peaceful and happy when you are in meditation.

Once you come out of meditation, you start to think about this and that and will start to have desire again. Then you have to move up to the second stage of meditation, the stage of wisdom or insight. You have to teach the mind that your desire is the problem and that the mind can be happy without having everything you desire. As soon as you start to desire something, your mind will become unhappy. When you are meditating and your mind has peace, your mind becomes happy because when the mind is peaceful, there is no desire.

Once the mind comes out of meditation and starts to think about this and that, it starts to have desire for this and that and the peace from your meditation disappears. If you want to maintain the peace you have gained from meditation, you must teach your mind not to have any desire. And the way to get rid of your desire is to tell your mind that whatever you want doesn't make you happier, it makes you more unhappy. Because when you have things, you become worried about them. You want them to be with you all the time and don't want to lose what you have. But as is the nature of things, everything comes and goes. Whatever you possess you will lose sooner or later. If you make one hundred million dollars, you will lose everything when you die.

You don't take any money with you. So, it is stupid to go after something that you will eventually lose. And at the same time you become unhappy, worried about losing what you have. But if you have nothing, there is nothing for you to lose, fear, or worry about.

The Buddha said we should not be possessive or have any have any possessions. Just have enough for your existence and enough to get by. It will make you happy. As soon as you have things or people as your possessions, you become unhappy because you worry about having to lose them one day, sooner or later. This is what we call insight. We have to understand that everything we have is not permanent. It's all impermanent. It's *anicca* (impermanent). It's *anattā* (not-self). It doesn't belong to you. Things are just temporary possessions. You can possess them for a certain period of time, but after a while they will leave you. Like, if you have a boyfriend or girlfriend, you might have a good relationship for a few days, weeks, months, or years, but then eventually you don't like each other anymore, and you decide that you don't want to stay together. Or, if you still have a good relationship and you still like him or her, but he or she doesn't like you anymore, then you become unhappy. But if you live alone, you don't have to be unhappy about losing the people you love. You can live alone if you can meditate. Because when we meditate for calm, we achieve peace of mind. You will have a kind of happiness that is a lot better than the happiness you can get from having a relationship with someone. So, it is better to meditate than to look for a boyfriend or girlfriend. This is insight or wisdom.

We must look at everything as not real happiness. There is a little happiness, but a lot of unhappiness. Because when you lose something you love, you become very unhappy. Sometimes you want to kill yourself by committing suicide. You don't want to live anymore because you have lost someone or something you love. But if you never have anything that you love, then you don't have to kill yourself; you don't have to commit suicide because you don't lose anything. You can live without needing anything.

This is what the Buddha did. He gave up his princely life and led a life like a beggar, living from day to day. Every day he took his bowl, went to the village, and collected food for that day. That is why he was so happy. You can be happy too if you follow the path of the Buddha by doing what he did.

First, you must give up your possessions by being generous. Second, you must keep the precepts. Starting out you keep the five precepts, then you move up to the eight precepts, and then you start to meditate. First, you meditate to calm your mind. To calm your mind, you have to control your thoughts. You must not let your mind think about this or that. To do this, you have to have something to concentrate on and focus on. You can use the name of the Buddha. In Thailand, we like to use the word *Buddho*. Just repeat *Buddho, Buddho, Buddho*. You don't have to say it out loud. Recite it all day long from the time you get up to the time you go to sleep. Whatever you do that doesn't require thinking, just keep reciting the word *Buddho*, whether you are showering, getting dressed, or eating. You don't have to think about

it too much. You just keep on repeating *Buddho, Buddho*. Your mind will become blank and empty, peaceful and calm. Then when you sit and meditate, your mind converges into one, becoming one. It lets go of everything temporarily, lets go of the body, lets go of the thoughts. You exist out in the space of the mind. That is the state of knowing, the state of nothingness. That is where you find real happiness, the happiness that truly belongs to you. You can have it all the time wherever you go. You can take it with you.

But if you rely on happiness that depends on other people, you will have to take them with you. And if they don't want to go with you, you will not get the happiness that you want from them. When you die, you may want your wife to die with you, but she won't go with you. So, don't rely on the happiness of other people, but rely on the happiness of your mind by making your mind stop its thinking with the recitation of *Buddho, Buddho* all the time.

Once you have this kind of happiness you can maintain it by developing insight. When you come out of meditation and the mind starts to want this or that, you should tell your mind to stop. Instead of getting more happiness, you will actually get less happiness. You will get more unhappiness by desiring this or that thing, this or that person. So, when you realise the truth you will stop having desire. When you have no more desire, you can live in peace all the time, be happy all the time, without needing anything to make you happy because you have the happiness within yourself that comes from following the path of the Buddha, cultivating *dāna, sīla*

and *bhāvanā*. *Dāna* means charity, *sīla* means keeping the precepts, and *bhāvanā* means meditation. *Samatha bhāvanā* means meditation for calm, and *vipassanā bhāvanā* means meditation for insight or wisdom.

Once you have developed these three qualities, you will be able to maintain peace of mind and happiness of mind all the time, wherever you are, whether you have a body or not, whether your body is sick or not, it really doesn't matter. You can always maintain this mental happiness. So if you want to get rid of unhappiness and have happiness all the time, you must try to follow the teachings of the Buddha, like the way you have today. You have come today to give *dāna*. If you can maintain the five precepts, then you are a step closer, and if you can meditate, you get another step closer to realising the happiness that the Buddha realized.

So, I leave you with this message and wish you well. I wish you peace and happiness. Thank you.

Devotees: *Sadhu, sadhu, sadhu!*

Questions & Answers



Laywoman: I am a person who is easily frustrated. How do I cope with this?

Tan Ajahn: It is because you have desire for things. You want things to be the way you want. You must learn to accept things as they are, not the way you want them to be. Because sometimes you cannot make things the way you want them to be. You have to accept them as they are.

Laywoman: I just want people to leave me alone.

Tan Ajahn: You cannot. If they won't leave you alone, let them do whatever they want to do so that you will not be unhappy. You can be happy while they do anything to you. Let them do whatever they want to do because you cannot stop them. They are like the rain; you cannot stop the rain. If the rain is going to fall, it has to rain. If you can get away, you get away. If you cannot get away, just let it be.

Laywoman: But I can't get away. A lot of the time I try to stay away, but they still come and disturb me.

Tan Ajahn: Then you just have to be with it. Once you can let go, nothing can do anything to you. You must

not wish for them not to disturb you; you must wish for them to disturb you. Then you will not be unhappy because you get what you want.

Laywoman: Does that mean when they come and disturb me, I can practise more?

Tan Ajahn: Right. This is your test. To test whether you can let go or not. You still cling to things, like when you don't want people to do something to you. This is already clinging.

Laywoman: Not that I want people not to do this or that, but for example, I naturally look fierce though personally I am a quiet person. But people will come to me and say, "You look fierce; you should smile." Why should I do what they ask me to do?

Tan Ajahn: Don't worry. Don't do it. You have to let them say what they want to say, and you just do what you want to do. You don't have to worry about what they say or what they do. And they don't have to worry about what you say or what you do, it is your business.

Laywoman: Sometimes it is difficult.

Tan Ajahn: Because you want people to think well of you. You must not wish that other people think well of you. Let them say what they want. They can take you, or they can leave you. You can live alone.

Laywoman: Sometimes even my family says so.

Tan Ajahn: So what can you do?

Laywoman: I cannot do anything.

Tan Ajahn: Unless you can do what they want you to do. If you cannot do that, you just have to ignore them.

Laywoman: I do my best to ignore them by not talking back, but it doesn't work.

Tan Ajahn: Because your mind wants to fight back. You have to beat the one inside, not the ones outside. Your enemy is not outside. Your enemy is inside. It is your desire to be accepted or to be left alone. You must get rid of this desire.

Laywoman: But getting rid of the desire doesn't mean that I allow people to bully me, right?

Tan Ajahn: You can get away from them if they try to bully you. Do something to stop them if you can. You don't have to be passive. Do something if you can. But if you cannot stop them, then you just have to accept that this is your *kamma*. The Buddha said that you should think like this when you are in a bad situation. He said that if people don't like you, it is better than them beating you. But if they beat you, consider that beating you is still better than them killing you. And if they kill you, it is good because we are all to die anyway. Sometimes people want to die, and they have to spend money buying poison. Okay? If you can think like this, then nothing can disturb you. Let other people do what they want to do.

Laywoman: Is meditating more the best way to calm down?

Tan Ajahn: Yes. Then you will have the strength to resist your desire.

Laywoman: I am aware of things that are happening. Sometimes I just cannot control my anger.

Tan Ajahn: Yes, you need to develop mindfulness. Repeat *Buddho* a lot, all day long. When you are angry just keep repeating *Buddho, Buddho, Buddho*. Then your anger will disappear. Don't think about the things that make you angry. Think *Buddho, Buddho, Buddho* and you will forget about the things that make you angry. Your anger will disappear. Stay away from things that can make you angry as much as possible, but if you cannot avoid them, then you just have to face them. Sometimes you just have to live with people since you cannot be alone all the time.

Laywoman: I want to be happy most of the time, so if I allow others to make me unhappy, I am actually the one who suffers.

Tan Ajahn: Because you have desire for them. You should not have any desire for anybody. Anger also arises from desire. You want to be accepted. If you are not accepted, you become angry. You want people to do something for you and when they don't do it for you, you get angry. If you don't have desire, you don't get angry.

Laywoman: My anger always comes when people say something that I think it is not true.

Tan Ajahn: Because you want them to say good things to you.

Laypeople from Singapore

Laywoman: I just don't want them to say anything about me.

Tan Ajahn: You must not think like that. You must think that they can say anything they want to say.



08

The Unsatisfactory Nature of Existence

May 11, 2013

Today is Saturday, the 11th of May, Buddhist calendar 2556. People who have faith and belief in the Buddhist religion have made up their minds to come to the temple to benefit themselves and others through wise wholesome actions such as giving, nurturing virtue, listening to the Dhamma, and meditating.

We have faith and belief in the teachings of the Buddha who taught that when our body passes away, we do not pass away with the body but return to be born again in accordance with our *kamma*. For our next life to be better than the previous one, we have to make merit, do good deeds, and avoid bad deeds. And if we do not desire to be born again, we ought to meditate and constantly develop *samatha* (calm) meditation and *vipassanā* (insight) meditation, and have faith in the Buddha who taught us to recollect and reflect on the certainty of impermanence of our body. If we constantly remind ourselves of death, we will not remain negligent or careless but will quickly put in effort to fully benefit ourselves and others without complacency.

If we do not recollect death constantly, we are being complacent. We will not remember that we will have to die and we will seek out worldly things such as food, money, or people as our valuable possessions, not knowing that whatever things in this world we are able to gather up are only temporary. When the time comes for the body to die, we cannot take these possessions with us. But what we can take with us is our merit, our wise wholesome actions such as giving, nurturing our virtue, meditating, and listening to and practising Dhamma.

Developing goodness, causing it to arise and be established within ourselves, is something that can be taken along with us. This is indeed very important, especially to our own mind, for it becomes our mind's refuge. Whatever valuable possessions, food, or money are not refuges for the mind. They cannot cause *sukha* (happiness), fulfilment, and contentment within the mind, and they cannot completely extinguish all kinds of *dukkha* (discontent and stress) within the heart. Our material possessions cannot protect our mind from disturbing conditions that enter and give rise to *dukkha* within it.

Thus, the Buddha taught us that we ought to continuously strive to make more wholesome merit, discard more unwholesome actions, and make our hearts more and more pure because these actions will truly benefit ourselves. They will not benefit the body, but will benefit the mind. The mind is "us" and is "ours." The body is not "us" and is not "ours." We should not be deluded into excessively seeking all kinds of things through the body,

for the body. Be content and just obtain what is necessary for our livelihood. Seeking food, housing, medicine, and clothing is enough. It is proper that we seek a refuge for the mind more through cultivating merit and goodness by giving, maintaining our virtue, practising Dhamma, sitting and walking meditation, developing mindfulness, developing *samādhi*, and developing wisdom. By undertaking these actions, we can have Dhamma and merit to oversee and maintain *sukha* in the mind all the time, and have no *dukkha* or agitation whatsoever.

This noble work to oversee and nurture our mind is very important to us. Do not be excessively concerned about caring and nurturing the body. No matter how much care the body receives, you still cannot prevent aging, sickness, pain, or death. However, with regards to caring for the mind, whatever progress we are able to make will bring a corresponding cessation of *dukkha*. This will build up happiness and contentment within our mind even more.

Overseeing and taking care of our mind are not empty of benefits, but instead bring results here in the present as well as in the future. As for taking care of the body, we just get present benefits while the body is still alive. But when the body dies, we are no longer able to take care of the body. Whatever benefits the body used to give will also cease. This is something that we ought to constantly remember.

The Buddha teaches us to contemplate that as a result of birth:

I am of the nature to age. I cannot escape from ageing.

I am of the nature to get sick and experience pain.
I cannot escape from sickness and pain.

I am of the nature to die. I cannot escape from death.

All that is mine, beloved and pleasing, will become
otherwise, will become separated from me.

This is something that is worthwhile for us to
remember constantly, many, many times a day.
Otherwise, this truth will not stay with us. We will then
not forget and be deluded into working on anything
that brings no benefit to ourselves and will instead take
on worthwhile activities, such as making merit, nurturing
our virtue, meditating, and listening to and practising
Dhamma.

If we do not reflect deeply, we may think that we
will not experience old age, sickness, pain, and death. We
will then go seeking fortune, status, fame, and pleasure
through the ears, nose, tongue, eyes, and body just like
our current lifestyle. We make very little effort to give,
keep the precepts, meditate, or listen to and practise
Dhamma. On the contrary, when it comes to seeking
fortune, status, fame, and pleasure through the ears, nose,
tongue, eyes, and body, we strive the whole day and night,
except when we are asleep. When we wake up, we are
off again to seek pleasure through the ears, nose, tongue,
eyes, and body. We open the refrigerator, looking for
snacks, looking for drinks, or go off to the kitchen to see
what else there is to eat. Once our stomach is full, we are
off again seeking pleasure through the ears, nose, eyes,

tongue, and body, seeking entertainment all night long in all sorts of places, looking for this person or that person, looking for this thing or that thing.

This is seeking that is of no use to our heart. It does not bring fulfilment and contentment, but leads only to more and more mental deprivation, hunger, and craving continuously. When we don't have anything to protect our mind, we will have loneliness, irritation, depression, and be easily agitated. This arouses *dukkha* in our mind and causes us harm. If we are only concerned with seeking fortune, status, fame, and pleasure through the ears, nose, tongue, eyes, and body, when the body cannot meet our needs, our mind will be stressed and tormented. For instance, when the physical body falls into sickness or becomes bed-ridden, it is not possible to seek pleasure through the eyes, ears, nose, tongue, and body. It is not possible to seek pleasure through fortune, status, and fame.

When that happens, we will be lonely and depressed. It may even lead to feeling like we want to kill ourselves because we do not know what we are still living for without the means to enjoy physical pleasure as we did before. That is because we do not know the means to find happiness within the mind. If we can find happiness within our mind, when anything happens to the body, we will not be agitated because we know the way to find happiness within our mind. Even if the body is sick, painful and bed-ridden or paralyzed, we can still find happiness within the heart. We can calm the mind, develop mindfulness, and practise the repetition of *Buddho, Buddho*. If we practise *Buddho* continuously

without thinking of this or that person, this or that issue, our mind will be clear, cool, and relaxed, leading to calm and stillness. There will then be bliss. This is happiness that does not need the body or fortune, status, and fame. This is nurturing our mind to have happiness that leads and delivers us away from *dukkha*. When we are calm, we are bound to be able to see the origin of *dukkha* and the origin of our perpetual death and rebirth, thus leading us into deeper levels of calm and reducing our *kilesas* (defilements), craving, and desire.

When the mind is calm, defilement and craving stop working; as a result, the stressed, agitated, and angry mind ceases and disappears completely as well. This is the contentment that will stop *dukkha*, but it is only temporary. The practice of mental calm through the repetition of *Buddho, Buddho* is not lasting, when the calm mental state becomes weak, the *kilesas* will have the power to rise up, distressing the mind. To overcome this, we will have to use wisdom to teach the mind to understand that *kilesas* are the origin of mental distress and torment that are not worth wanting.

If we do not wish to experience mental distress, but instead to have mental peace and calm forever, we should stop and resist desire, stop and resist greed, hatred and delusion. The method to stop and resist greed, hatred, and delusion is to teach our mind that whatever we desire through the *kilesas* and the resultant *sukha* that it brings to us is not comparable to the happiness that is already within our mind. The pleasure acquired through desire is little, arises only temporarily, and will be followed by discontentment. Craving will arise again

to regain the lost pleasure, and we will want it even more. It is like someone who already has a handful who then wants a whole sack. Having a sack, he craves and wants the whole store. Already having \$10,000, his greed wants \$100,000, and then a million. Already having a million, he wants 10 million, 100 million, without any end in sight. This goes on and on. Our mind is agitated, seeking all of this according to our desire.

If we want our mind to be calm, cool, and happy, and not agitated, we have to fight against desire and teach our mind not to desire. If we desire, *dukkha* will follow. Whatever happiness gained will be minimal because it is not permanent, and we cannot control it to provide happiness for us forever. Whatever *sukha* brought to us may within a day or night change and bring *dukkha* (unhappiness) instead. For example, when the relationship with our partner first starts, our partner is agreeable to us. Everything is delightful, and we are happy. But when our partner changes, whatever brought happiness before may become disagreeable and stressful for us. When our partner changes from being nice to being mean, from being truthful to being dishonest, our mind is no longer happy and only suffers. Additionally, it is not within our power to stop or change our partner. If our partner chooses to be bad, we will be depressed and in despair.

This is wisdom we use to teach our mind every time it desires anything, to teach the mind not to take things whenever it is not necessary. If we really need something, take it, such as our clothing. If it is torn and not possible to be worn, buy a replacement. But you should know

what is enough and sufficient; two or three sets is enough. The same goes for sandals and other goods. Do not want more than necessary; otherwise it is desire-driven. If you follow your desire, it will keep on increasing until it becomes too much and overloads your house. Owning too many things does not increase the happiness in our mind.

The worldly happiness that comes from possessing things is in general more or less the same as all other worldly happiness we have had before in that the happiness arises briefly before dying off. But it will cause craving and hunger to arise even more. The happiness that we experienced before disappears and needs to be sought and acquired continuously with no end in sight. But if we can give up desire, the mind will become calm, and the mind will have happiness, fulfilment, and contentment. Every time desire arises, this happiness, fulfilment, and contentment will disappear. If we want this happiness, fulfilment, and contentment to be with us again, we should stop new desires from arising.

If we can stop desire, it will be weakened, and its power reduced; craving and wanting will be lessened continuously until we don't want anything at all because we know that whatever we desire, we cannot have it because we don't follow the commands of desire. Just like when wanting to buy a new dress — we don't buy it. When wanting to buy a new bag — we don't buy it. When desiring a new pair of sandals — we don't buy it. That is because we already have enough. If we live like this, desire will not arise in the future, because whenever it arises, it's foiled and gets nowhere. So, then what's the point of desiring?

The Unsatisfactory Nature of Existence

This is the method that we can use to get rid of desire and the resulting *dukkha* that arises out of it until all desire is depleted. Then our mind will have only happiness (*sukha*) forever, every hour of the day. From then on, we will be able to share this technique of meditation with others, teaching and guiding them if they desire to learn. If they do not wish to know, teaching them would not be of any benefit. Instead, we teach those who are delighted to learn from us, people who have mental *dukkha* and want to extinguish it in their hearts. We teach them based on the techniques that we have successfully learnt and practised ourselves.

We teach the practitioners to renounce money, food, and all valuable possessions. They ought not to want, not to cling to, not to long for anything, and not to worry because it will cause the mind to be uncomfortable. Having only the four requisites to look after our body is enough. As for other things, there's no need to store them up. Take them out to be distributed and to help others. It's better to let others have happiness.

Then tell the practitioners to develop virtue and refrain from unwholesome actions. Unwholesome actions will bring *dukkha* and mental agitation. By avoiding unwholesome actions, the mind will settle down into happiness and calm with no agitation, worry, or anger. Then teach the practitioners to develop calm by repeating *Buddho, Buddho* right from the moment they wake up to the moment they fall asleep continuously throughout the day. Then their mind will be empty, cool, and relaxed. Whenever we are free, without any work, close our eyes and just repeat *Buddho, Buddho*, so our mind will enter calm and be happy.

This is happiness that surpasses all other kinds of happiness. We will realize that there is no happiness in the world that surpasses the happiness that comes from calming the mind. We can then give up desiring all other types of happiness and stop all of our cravings. This benefits us as well as others.

However, we should first gain the benefit for ourselves. Tame and train the mind to have happiness and relaxation. Train the mind to be without *dukkha* first. Once we have succeeded in training ourselves, we may help and teach others whenever they need it. If there is no need, refrain from teaching since it would only waste time and annoy the listeners. If they do not want to listen, they will be disinterested and feel cynical towards us. Don't insist on teaching. If someone truly wants it, teach gradually; otherwise, don't do it. It could be that someone can't be helped. We have a priceless teaching and if someone doesn't want it, what can we really do? This is to be complacent.

As for us, we should be mindful of death constantly, for if the doctors were to diagnose us with a fatal illness leaving us with no more than three months of life, what would we do? Would we still seek money, possessions, fortune, status, fame, or pleasure through the eyes, ears, nose, tongue, and body, or would we seek a refuge for our mind? Without a refuge for our mind, when the body is dying, our mind will be greatly painful and tormented. One who knows that death approaches and not much time remains will no longer have any desire to seek money, worldly possessions, or pleasure through the eyes, ears, nose, tongue, and body but will only desire a refuge and happiness for the mind.

We should continuously think like we may one day see a doctor and be diagnosed with a fatal illness with not much time left. Thinking like this, we will not waste time seeking things that are of no value to the mind, but will seek a true refuge. We will then be totally committed to making merit, maintaining our virtue wholeheartedly, practising meditation wholeheartedly, and listening and practising Dhamma wholeheartedly. For we know that doing this will be a refuge for the mind that can enable us to accept the death of our body.

This is something we ought to deeply contemplate. If we do not reflect and contemplate old age, sickness, pain, and death, we will forget and be distracted by all kinds of issues. Though we know that birth is followed by old age, sickness, and death, in our forgetfulness it is like we do not grow old, become sick, or die. We will then be forgetful and immersed in activities that do not benefit our mind or provide a refuge for our mind. When the time comes to face the reality of death, we will not have a refuge. We will not have enough time to build a refuge for our mind. Then we will end up living with mental pain and torment. We will be unable to eat or sleep; we won't know what we should do.

Thus we should recollect and reflect on the nature of old age, sickness, pain, and death continuously to benefit ourselves through merit making by giving, nurturing our virtue, meditating, and listening to and practising Dhamma. Do what you are doing today more and more regularly. Don't come just once or twice over a long interval because our practice is just like filling a barrel with water. If we fill the barrel with a cup just once

or twice over a long interval of time, the barrel will not be full. If we don't meditate regularly, but only once or twice, we cannot build up a refuge that will stay with our mind 100%. At best, what we get is only bits and pieces.

This is our responsibility. What is the purpose of our birth? We are born to establish a refuge for our mind. The mind does not go along with the dying body. The mind has to undergo perpetual rounds of death and rebirth because of not having a refuge. It has to look for a new body to be its refuge, but instead of having a refuge, we always end up in circumstances that create even more *dukkha* for ourselves. Because every time we are born, we have to grow old, experience pain, and die. Therefore, it is proper for us to persistently develop a refuge for our heart as much as possible.

Right now, we have this valuable opportunity to build our refuge, just as the Buddha and his noble disciples did before. If we can achieve enlightenment, we will be able to live with happiness in our hearts forever, and no suffering or stress will arise for the rest of our lives. After their enlightenment, the Buddha and his noble disciples were never agitated by any form of suffering. No more *dukkha* existed within the heart, regardless of whether the body was old, sick, or dead.

These experiences do not create any problems within the hearts of the Buddha or his noble disciples. This is because they have a refuge that protects their mind from suffering because of old age, suffering because of sickness and pain, and suffering because of dying. It does not matter whose body it is, be it our father's,

The Unsatisfactory Nature of Existence

mother's, children's, grandchildren's, husband's, wife's, close relatives' or friends'. There will be no issue or pain in the heart at all. It is our responsibility, having been born as a human, to build a refuge for ourselves. Without a refuge for our mind, we are bound to undergo perpetual death and rebirth forever. Revolving within *saṃsāra*, we have to suffer birth, old age, sickness, pain, and death without end.

If we are able to establish a refuge for our mind, we can stop this circle of existence. The mind need not seek other refuges because it already has an inner refuge with complete happiness, fulfilment, and contentment.

May all of us persevere to build a refuge during our valuable human life span and work to build up this refuge by consistently recollecting and reflecting on the nature of old age, sickness, pain, and death so that we don't become negligent but stay always vigilant.

Since our time is up, let me stop now. May the three refuges (of the Buddha, Dhamma, and *Śaṅgha*) and the accumulated merit and wisdom you have gained act as the causes and conditions to bring you happiness and prosperity, and to dispel all suffering and danger in the future.

Audience: Sadhu!



09

Q & A with an Australian Layperson

June 22, 2013

Tan Ajahn: How long have you been practising?

Layman: Six years.

Tan Ajahn: Did you come by yourself?

Layman: Yes, I did.

Tan Ajahn: Is there anything you would like to ask?

Layman: I am having blockages in my meditation, and I am not sure what to do.

Tan Ajahn: Most problems arise from a lack of mindfulness. Mindfulness is the key to successful meditation. Mindfulness is the factor that can reign in the mind and contain your thoughts. If you cannot contain your thoughts, you cannot achieve *samādhi*. And if you cannot achieve *samādhi*, you will not experience the bliss from a mind that is at ease and peaceful. So what you have to do at all times, from the time you get up to the time you fall asleep, is to develop mindfulness. Mindfulness can be developed in many different ways.

The Buddha gave us forty subjects of meditation that we can use to establish mindfulness. This is like to use the name of the Buddha. We mentally recite *Buddho, Buddho* at all times. This is just a ploy, a way of preventing the mind from thinking aimlessly.

Normally we like to think aimlessly at the same time when we brush our teeth, take a bath, or do something else. This is considered as having no mindfulness since the mind is not focused. The mind should be focused on only one subject at a time. If you are using the body as the basis of your mindfulness, you have to focus on the activities of the body. You have to watch whatever the body is doing all the time and not think about other things. When you are brushing your teeth, just watch this activity; don't brush your teeth and think about other things. Just think about the action that you are doing at the moment. This is maintaining mindfulness.

In order to bring the mind into *samādhi*, gaining calm and bliss, you need to have the mind focused on one object. The mind shouldn't go to the past or future. It should always be here and now, in the present. You can use your body as an object of mindfulness, or you can use some other objects such as a mantra, like the word "Buddha, Buddha," or a phrase if you like, such as "Hare Krishna." Some Thais like to use *Buddhaṃ saraṇaṃ gacchāmi, Dhammaṃ saraṇaṃ gacchāmi, Saṅghaṃ saraṇaṃ gacchāmi*. Just keep repeating that and do not think about anything. Your thinking will prevent you from achieving calm, and if you have no calm, your mind will be restless, agitated, and desirous. When you have desire, you will be uneasy and uncomfortable.

So, this is the main problem for most meditators. They lack mindfulness. You should try to develop mindfulness. The most efficient way to develop mindfulness is to be alone. If you live with other people, you will be distracted by their activities or their engagements. They might talk to you or ask questions, and your mind would have to think about those things instead of focusing on your object of mindfulness. But if you are alone, by yourself, like when you stay at the temple, you can have lots of time with no distractions to maintain mindfulness. When you have good mindfulness and sit in meditation, your mind will enter calm very easily, maybe in five or ten minutes if your mindfulness is continuous and you focus your mind on just one object. When you sit, you might use the breath as your object of establishing your mindfulness — you can just keep focusing on your breathing. As long as you don't think about other things, very soon your mind will become calm.

Layman: Tan Ajahn, how long should one develop a certain *kammaṭṭhāna* practice before trying a different *kammaṭṭhāna*? Or, how long should one devote to a particular *kammaṭṭhāna* before one realizes that the *kammaṭṭhāna* is not suitable?

Tan Ajahn: Normally, the *kammaṭṭhāna* is not the problem. The problem is with mindfulness. The *kammaṭṭhāna* is like medicine: You have to know what is wrong with your body, like when you have a headache, you look for pain-killers. If you have a stomach ache, you look for a different kind of medicine. So, each *kammaṭṭhāna* is specific to a particular problem.

For example, if you have sexual desire, you have to use the *asubha kammaṭṭhāna* (loathsomeness of the body). If you have hatred, you have to use *mettā* (goodwill). It depends on the problem that you have at any particular moment. This is just to bring your mind back to normalcy. When you get mad, you cannot do anything, so you want to get rid of that anger, and the only way to get rid of the anger is to forgive, have compassion, and look at people as your brothers and your friends, not as your enemies. If you can look at people as your loved ones, you can easily forgive and forget, and then you can come back to normalcy, stopping your anger. Once you are back to normalcy, you just use your personal *kammaṭṭhāna*, the one that you use at all times.

If you use your body, continue to focus on your body. You only use a different *kammaṭṭhāna* under different circumstances. If you are mad at someone, you have to forgive them. If you have sexual desire, you have look at the *asubha* aspects of the body to get rid of the sexual desire. So, other *kammaṭṭhāna* are only used when you have a problem. They are like medicines to cure particular illnesses. But when you have no problems, no illnesses, then you use your regular *kammaṭṭhāna*. If you use your body as your *kammaṭṭhāna*, keep watching your body at all times, whatever you do. If you use the *parikamma*, the mantra *Buddho*, then keep on repeating *Buddho, Buddho*. Basically, this is what you do. Or, when you sit, if you use *ānāpānasati*, focus on your breathing.

Layman: In this age, it seems a lot of people are suffering from fear, and there is a lot of fear in the world. Do you have any thoughts about how people can deal with this fear?

Tan Ajahn: Fear arises out of ignorance, the lack of right knowledge or truth. We are afraid to lose things and afraid to lose our body because we are ignorant of the truth of those things and our body. We don't see the impermanent nature of things or the body. We don't see that everything arises and ceases, with nothing remaining the same or remaining forever. We also don't know who we are. This is the real problem. Our delusion makes us think that the body is ourselves when, in fact, the body is just another vehicle, like a car that we use to take us from place to place. We are the driver, but the problem is we don't know that we are just the driver. Instead, we think we are the car. The driver doesn't die with the car. The mind doesn't die with the body. If you meditate, you will see. If you can enter total calm, you come to realise that there is this separate entity which is the mind. When you meditate and the mind becomes totally concentrated, you will temporarily let go of the body. The body will disappear from the mind's perception, leaving the mind by itself. Then you will know that this is the mind without the body.

Once you know this, you are no longer afraid of death, no longer afraid of losing anything. It's delusion that makes you think that you will lose everything when everything, in the first place, never belongs to you. Everything belongs to the earth. We have come and use

the body to acquire things, but when the body has to die, you lose everything. Life is just like going to the movies. While we are watching a movie, there will be this and that, but when it's over, we have got nothing. We leave the movie theatre with nothing. The earth is like a stage or movie screen. The mind just comes and uses the body as an instrument to experience this movie. Once the body that we used to experience the movie no longer exists, we have to leave the movie theatre, go to a different theatre, and get a new body.

So, the truth is that we are not the body, that everything we have here does not belong to us and is only a temporary possession. Once you have the right attitude, the right knowledge, then you can adjust your attitude accordingly. You don't own the sun, right? So you don't get mad when the sun sets. You don't feel bad about the sun setting because you know the sun doesn't belong to you. It is the same thing with the body and everything that you have here.

Your delusion makes you think that everything belongs to you, including your body, so when you lose it, you think that you are losing everything. You think that you disappear with the body, but that is not the case. Because when you meditate, you don't have to use the body. Once the mind has entered calm, it separates from the body, and it actually becomes a lot happier than when having a body. The body is really a burden that you have to carry. Like an automobile, it gives benefits, but it also comes with costs. You have to pay for it. You have to take care of it; you have to buy gas. You have to clean it; you have to fix it when it needs repairs.

Layman: Is it true that the heart is the greatest deceiver of all?

Tan Ajahn: The heart or the mind is the same thing. It is not the deceiver. It is delusion that is the deceiver. The heart is just the one that is being deceived. The heart has been given the wrong information. The heart has been told that the body is “I,” “mine,” and “myself,” that everything I have will be with “me” forever and will give “me” happiness. This is wrong information. The Buddha said everything in this world is temporary. It doesn’t belong to you permanently. One day you are going to lose all of it. So, there cannot be true happiness. Things are actually the cause of your suffering and fear.

Layman: Should one pay attention to any thoughts or voices that arise in the mind that tells us to do a wholesome action versus an unwholesome action? Should one simply note it, or should one actually act on that thought? For instance, when I hear a voice telling me to go to a room and that if I do not go to the room, a child might die. Should I just note the voice or should I act on those voices/thoughts? When do we act and when do we just note the thoughts?

Tan Ajahn: There are two levels of reactions that you can take regarding a particular event. You can look at the absolute matter — whatever it is, it doesn’t matter because you might save the life of the child today, but he might die a few days or a few years later anyway. So on an absolute sense, you don’t have to do anything. But on the conventional level, if you can help the child, do it. If you can prevent bad things from happening, do it. But don’t be happy. Don’t be deluded that he is

going to be safe forever. He is just going to be safe today for he might die tomorrow anyway. We are all going to die one day, sooner or later. So, if you want to be on the absolute plane of existence, you have to let go of everything. It does not matter. If you can do something, then do it. If you cannot, it does not matter.

Layman: Thank you for translating Luangta Mahā Boowa's talks. It made a tremendous impact in my life.

Tan Ajahn: I am very happy to hear that because I am not sure whether what I did benefited anybody. Because I think Luangta Mahā Boowa's teachings, especially the ones that I translated, are specifically for practitioners, usually monks. So, it might be a bit difficult for lay people to grasp or understand. This is very good. Just keep following his teachings.

What you need now is time to practise. Right now you don't have the ability to judge your thoughts as to whether they are right or wrong. You might be able to judge on a certain level, but on a deeper level, you still cannot judge. So, it is better not to worry about judging them. Right now, you should try to get *samādhi*. Once you have *samādhi*, you will get a better understanding about the truth, and then you can judge for yourself what you should or should not do. It has to come from your experience, from the mind that is at peace and calm. The mind that is peaceful and calm is rational. It does not have the emotional side involved so you can make a proper decision.



10

The Mind and Its Endless Rebirth

June 30, 2013

Today, we shall talk about the mind (*citta*) so that most of you will have a better understanding and knowledge of it. There are many of us here who still do not know what and where the mind is. The mind is that which knows, that which thinks, that which receives all kinds of sensations coming from the eyes, ears, nose, tongue, and body or that arise as emotions within the mind.

The mind has four properties: *vedanā* (feeling), *saññā* (memory), *sankhāra* (thinking and imaginations), and *viññāṇa* (consciousness). *Vedanā* is the feeling of pleasure (*sukha*), displeasure (*dukkha*) and neither pleasure nor displeasure. *Saññā* is memory, recognition, or labelling. For instance, on seeing an image, we recollect what this image is and whether we have seen it before. If we have seen it before, then we will say that it is this or that person, which is the responsibility of memory. *Sankhāra* is that which thinks and imagines what to do. Seeing an image of a snake, we must consider the next course of action. Are we going to move towards it or walk away? When we see the image of a snake and know that it is a snake, feelings will arise. Those are the feelings

of pleasure (*sukha*), displeasure (*dukkha*) or neither pleasure nor displeasure. Feeling here means liking or disliking. If there is liking, pleasure arises. If there is disliking, displeasure arises. However, if there is neither liking nor disliking, then neither pleasure nor displeasure will arise. This is *vedanā*.

That which receives images from the eyes for the mind to know is *viññāṇa* (consciousness). *Viññāṇa* receives images, sounds, smells, tastes, and tactile sensations and delivers them to *saññā* (memory). *Saññā* receives and knows, then seeks out information on whether we have seen the image before or heard that sound before, whether the image is good or bad or the sound is good or bad, or whether we like or dislike it. Once this information is known, then *vedanā* or feelings will arise. If the image is good and desirable, then pleasure will arise. However, if the image is disliked, then displeasure will arise. This is because of the arising of pleasurable (*sukha*) or stressful (*dukkha*) feelings. *Sankhāra* will arise in the form of thinking and imagination. If we like it, then we will go and seek it. If we dislike it, then we will retreat and walk away. If possible, *sankhāra* will send its instructions. If we have a body, the body will receive orders from *sankhāra* such as, “Back Off! It is best to back off; there is a snake.” Then we will correspondingly walk away. On the other hand, if we see a sweet dessert or a gold bar, we will walk towards it and pick it up. This is a mind with four properties, or *nāma khandhas* (derivatives or functions of the mind) which are namely *vedanā*, *saññā*, *sankhāra*, and *viññāṇa* and function according to their responsibilities.

The mind itself is that which receives and knows the functions of the respective *khandhas* in their area of responsibilities. It is the mind which responds with greed, hatred, and delusion. If wisdom is missing, then whenever we see anything delightful, we will crave it, or whenever we see anything we dislike, we will be angry. However, if wisdom is present, then we know that everything is transient, painful, and dissatisfactory and is of the nature that it cannot stay with us forever. We are not able to order or force it to always stay with us like this or like that. A mind that has correct view, called *sammādiṭṭhi*, stays in equanimity (*upekkhā*) and will not be greedy, angry or deluded. It does not crave to have, to possess, to be, nor does it crave not to have or not to be. The mind is equanimous and steady. These are the mind and issues related to the mind.

Moreover, there are people who wish to know where the mind is located. The mind is located in the supramundane world. The body is located in the world of elements. The supramundane world and the world of elements are mutually exclusive and located separately. If a comparison were to be made, the mind would be like the people in mission control who control and manipulate a spacecraft. The body would be the spacecraft that is sent to investigate a planet or a moon. This spacecraft would have to depend upon the instructions from mission control to perform its functions. When the spacecraft reaches the end of its lifespan or is damaged and ruined, only the spacecraft is damaged.

The people who control and manipulate the spacecraft remain above and beyond the world, dwelling

in another place. They are not subjected to the loss or damage of the spacecraft. This is like the mind that stays in the supramundane world, dwelling in another world. The body that receives its instructions from the mind stays in this world, the world of elements. The world that our body is dwelling in presently is called the world of elements. Because this world has four elements — earth, water, wind, and fire, our body is able to develop and grow by means of these four elements, i.e. earth, water, wind, and fire.

Earth is food, such as rice and vegetables. Rice and vegetables need earth, water, wind, and sunlight in order to grow. And when they are consumed by the body, they will in turn build up the various parts of the body such as hair of the head, hair of the body, nails, teeth, skin, flesh, sinew, and bones. These are the parts of the body that receive the inputs of earth, water, wind, and fire from the consumption of food. Food comes from the air that we breathe, the water we drink, and the heat from sunlight. Together, they produce the body. Having the body, we need to continually supply it with the four elements. Then the body will progressively grow until it reaches full maturity. Once it is fully mature, the body will gradually decline, age, decay, and ultimately expire. For when the body stops working, the four elements, earth, water, wind, and fire will break away and separate.

When a person dies, breath (wind) exits but does not enter anymore. Wind is discharged and gives out a bad smell. Water oozes out and heat (fire) fades away. The body is then cool and no longer warm like a body that is still alive. If it is left for a long time, the body will wither, dry up, decay, and ultimately disintegrate into

the earth. This is the body that dwells in the world of elements. But the mind that dwells in the supramundane world is not affected by whatever happens to the body.

When the body has stopped working, communication and concern between mind and body is cut off. The mind that still has craving will seek out a new body. These are matters concerning the mind and the body. As for the mind itself, there are many different levels based on the merit and demerit it has done before:

A mind with **merit** (good, skilful qualities and actions) ranges in value from 0 to +100.

A mind with **demerit** (bad, harmful, evil, unskilful qualities and actions) ranges from 0 to -100.

If we make *merit*, the mind will increase its value continuously starting from 0, 10, 20, 30 until it reaches 100. At 100, it is considered to have reached *Nibbāna*, becoming an *Arahant* (the 4th and ultimate state of enlightenment). At 90, the mind is an *Anāgāmi* (the 3rd stage). At 80 it is *Sakadāgāmi* (the 2nd stage). At 70, it is *Sotāpanna* (the 1st stage). The merit of those at the level of 70 to 100 does not regress and will not fall below 70. If we are a *Sotāpanna* already, we will continue to be a *Sotāpanna* and will not drop to the level of *brahmas*, heavenly angels, or human beings. At these levels, there is no longer regression, but only continuous progression by means of meditation practice and *vipassanā* (insight) meditation. Meditation means both *samatha* (calm) meditation and *vipassanā* (insight) meditation. Both are necessary for us to reach the levels of merit from 70 up to 100.

A mind that possess generosity, virtue, and *samatha* meditation but that does not develop insight meditation, without a heartfelt realization of Dhamma for oneself, without seeing the Four Noble Truths, without seeing *anicca* (impermanent), *dukkha* (stress) and *anattā* (not-self), will progress to 60 but will be less than 70 or perhaps will at most be 69. Levels 60 to 50 are for those who are generous, maintain their virtue, and practise *samatha* meditation. Level 60 is that of the formless (***arūpa***) brahmas. Level 50 is that of the form (***rūpa***) brahmas, for those who have attained to meditative form absorption (***rūpa jhāna***) levels one to four. Those who have succeeded in attaining meditative formless absorption (***arūpa jhāna***) one to four will attain to the formless *brahmas* realms. Merit that is of the level less than 70, such as 60 or 50 will regress downwards until one day it is all gone. From 60 it will drop down to 50; from 50 it will go down continuously until reaching zero. Those dwelling below level 50 are heavenly angels. Between 50 down to 0 is the level of heavenly angels in different heavenly realms such as the *tusita* realm. These are the minds of those heavenly angels from 0 up to 50. Minds with a value of 0 have neither merit nor demerit and will be human beings, with the bodies of human beings.

If our minds are at a level lower than zero, they will become animals. Even further down, we will become *asuras* (demons). Further down than that are the ***pretas*** (hungry ghosts); until the lowest level which is hell. Minds can be stuck with negative values due to previously making more demerit than merit. Conversely, minds can be stuck in the positive range because of

making more merit than demerit. When we die, our merit and demerit will be computed and finalized. If the resulting computation is positive, then we will go on to be angels, *brahmas*, or noble ones (*āriyas*). If the resulting computation is negative, we will become animals, demons, hungry ghosts, or hell beings. But this merit and demerit will decrease until one day they are depleted. For instance, those stuck in the negative levels are like Devadatta who acquired his evil *kamma* by hurting the Buddha three times. Demerit acquired in this manner has the heaviest penalty at the level of -100. However, once he has completely received the results of his *kamma*, he will be human again. He can then return to cultivate generosity, virtue, and meditation, causing positive worth to arise within his mind until reaching the level of +100, when he becomes enlightened as a Buddha.

This is the pathway of Devadatta's mind, which the Buddha Gotama foresaw and predicted. Once Devadatta died, he had to fall to hell to receive the results of his *kamma*. Because of the evil he had committed, he would have to stay in the *avīci* hell. After completely receiving the results of his *kamma* and coming out to return as a human, he will return to cultivate generosity, virtue, and meditation, causing positive value to arise within his mind until finally reaching the level of +100, attaining enlightenment as a *Pacceka* (silent) Buddha but not as a *Sammāsam* (perfectly enlightened) Buddha or a *Sāvaka* (disciple) *Arahant*. The difference is that, as a *Pacceka* Buddha, he will not teach Dhamma to others.

These are matters concerning the mind that all of us are doubtful. This mind does not die. It only moves up

or down in accordance with the strength of its merit and demerit from 0 to +100 or from 0 to -100. It is all based on the actions we have done each and every day. If our actions are harmful and demeritorious, such as killing, stealing, undertaking sexual misconduct, lying or cheating, taking intoxicants, or all kinds of corrupting and degrading activities like gambling, late-night entertainment, and socializing with lazy and bad people, then we accumulate demerit, accumulate bad *kamma* that is negative. Thus the negative value falls continuously from -10, -20, and all the way to -100. All of this depends on the intentions of those creating the demerit and the reasons underlying their actions. Sometimes the evil and unskilful action is done without knowing that it is bad, thinking that doing so is not demeritorious, such as those who kill animals as their livelihood — killing pigs, chickens, cows, and water buffaloes and then selling them. Or, fishermen who catch fish to sell, or those in businesses related to killing animals and selling the meat of animals, taking the meat of the slaughtered animals for sale. People in these trades may think that doing so is not demeritorious but is a necessity because it is a means of a livelihood. If we act in this way, we will be reborn as an animal after death.

Demeritorious actions can be done through fear of deprivation, fear of death, or fear of being harmed by others. If we harm others first by killing, we will become demons. Demeritorious actions are sometimes motivated by greed; our craving for fame and wealth propels us to seek methods and ways to become famous and rich. We may even cheat, lie, kill, or commit sexual

misconduct just for the sake of obtaining whatever we crave. These actions done with greed will lead us to become hungry ghosts. Again if the actions are done with hatred, vengefulness, or animosity in return for injury received, then acting in this way, we will fall into hell.

We commit evil such as killing others because they have offended our dignity and we become angry, agitated, and vengeful until we cannot and will not forgive them, so much so that the only way out for us is to kill them, and this will only cause us to fall into hell. This is the personal possession of the mind that dwells in degradation (ruin). That is a mind which is negative, starting from less than 0 and decreasing until reaching -100. On the other hand, a mind that dwells in happiness and skilfulness stays in a good state due to having been generous, having maintained its virtue, and having meditated. The mind will then have merit of positive worth, starting from 0 going up to +100. If the accumulated merit is above +70, there will be no regression and there will only be progress until reaching +100 and remaining at +100 hence forth. In the same way, the mind of the Buddha that dwells in the supramundane world is just like all of us. The only difference is that his mind remains at the level +100.

As for ourselves, we should examine ourselves to see whether we are in negative or positive territory. Measuring that, in most cases, depends on whether we feel like we have more happiness or unhappiness. If it is the case that there is more unhappiness than happiness, that implies we reside in negativity. Vice versa, if there is more happiness than unhappiness, that shows

the mind is more positive than negative. Another way of measuring is by evaluating whether we have good dreams when we are asleep. If our dreams are good, it means our mind is positive, in the level of positivity. Alternatively, if our dreams are bad, then the mind is in the level of negativity. These are matters concerning the minds of all of us, including those who have passed away and those who are still alive. Minds such as these always exist and do not pass away with the body. Minds of our grandparents, great grandparents, parents, *Kruba Ajahns*, the Buddhas and all of the *Arahants* of the past and present still exist. This is true for every single one of them. The only difference is whether their minds dwell on a positive or negative level. If it dwells at 0, our mind is reborn as a human being. If it dwells on a level less than 0, it is reborn as an animal, demon, hungry-ghost, or hell being. These are matters concerning the mind that all of us are uncertain.

Hopefully, after listening to the talk today, all of you will have a better understanding. We should then know what we should do to protect and build up the value of our mind to be positive, to be beneficial. For the happiness we experience corresponds to the positive level of the mind. When there is more happiness than unhappiness, our stress (*dukkha*) will be less and less. If we have +70, happiness (*sukha*) will then be +70 and unhappiness (*dukkha*) will only be -30. If the level is +80, then happiness will be +80 and suffering will only be -20. Again, if the level is +100, then happiness will be +100 and unhappiness will be 0. This is the mind of a Buddha or an *Arahant*. They have 100% happiness and no unhappiness at all.

The mind of an *Anāgāmī* has 90% happiness and 10% unhappiness. A *Sakadāgāmī* has 80% happiness and 20% unhappiness. A *Sotāpanna* has 70% happiness and 30% unhappiness. A formless *brahma* has 60% happiness and 40% unhappiness. A form *brahma* has 50% happiness and 50% unhappiness. That's the way it is — falling and descending down in this way until it reaches the level of human beings. Humans do not have inherent happiness or unhappiness since their stored positive and negative merit is depleted, and so we have to scramble around seeking happiness. If ignorance underlies our world-view, we will seek happiness through methods that will build up demerit and bad *kamma*. People who create demerit and bad *kamma* are also seeking happiness, such as those whose livelihood depends upon killing animals. They seek happiness by working to support their own body and then use the remaining money to buy happiness through the eyes, ears, nose, tongue, and body — buying sweet desserts to eat, buying soft drinks to drink, watching movies, and going out to all sorts of places. This is to seek happiness. Because as humans, happiness is not inherent within ourselves and so we end up being ignorant and fooling ourselves into creating demerit to get happiness. When the time comes to die, the mind will fall into negativity. Dwelling on a level less than 0, the mind will have to be reborn as an animal. As for those who are fearful and protective of themselves, they create demerit by hurting others who come to harm them. These people will fall even lower into negativity.

By doing wrong out of craving, desiring to be prosperous and rich, wanting sensual pleasures

immensely, people will become hungry ghosts. Again, by creating demerit out of spitefulness, hatred, and vengefulness, people go to hell. These are issues related to us as human beings existing right here and now. Humans have a choice of which path to take — the path of positivity or the path of negativity. Animals have no choice as to which path to take. An animal has to create demerit and bad *kamma* in order to be able to support its life and continue to live, except for those animals that need not bite or eat others such as those animals that feed on vegetables, leaves, and other such food. These animals do not create much bad *kamma* as compared to lions and tigers that eat other animals for food. These are matters concerning the minds of all of us, which are deathless. The minds of our ancestors who have passed away also do not die; only the body dies. As to where the mind is, it depends on the value or worth of the mind: Is it in a state of negativity or positivity? If it is positive, then it will dwell with bliss and happiness as a heavenly angel, *brahma*, or noble one. If it is negative, then it may be an animal, hungry ghost, demon, or hell being.

In this way, the mind moves up and down in accordance with actions it has undertaken as a human. When it dwells in other realms, it does not create much merit or demerit because other realms are places where we receive the results of our good and bad actions. Falling into hell is just like being caught and imprisoned in a jail or cage, and as such the mind will not be able to do more evil. It will thus remain in prison until the end of its jail term and punishment. Once the punishment is completed, it will be reborn again as a human. This human existence is what creates merit and demerit. It is

the causal realm, a realm that concocts the causes to arise while other realms are places where we receive the results. Those making much merit, will upon dying receive the result as heavenly angels, *brahmas*, or noble ones (*āriyas*). Conversely, people who do evil (who act unskillfully) will become animals, demons, hungry ghosts, or end up in hell based on the gravity of the demerit or merit done before.

The mind just moves up and down endlessly until it acquires merit at a level where it will not regress. Once it has merit at the level of +70 or above, it will never regress. There will be fewer future rebirths. An example is at the level of +70, we will at most return as a human seven times before attaining enlightenment as an *Arahant*. If we do not return as a human, we can also proceed with our practice, creating merit further in higher realms, because those who already have merit at +70 can do without a physical body. They can continue to practise in the heavenly or *brahma* worlds until finally reaching the level of an *Arahant*. At the stage of an *Arahant*, the level of *Nibbāna*, +100, the mind will never be dragged down again. The mind will dwell at +100 forever, without ever coming to an end. This is the mind of the Buddhas and all of the *Arahants*. With regard to this, some may wonder whether such minds can communicate with others. The answer is yes, communication is possible. Take Luangpu Mun — when he entered *samādhi*, his mind entered the supramundane world. His mind closed off the door to the world of elements and shut off the eyes, ears, nose, tongue, and body, and proceeded into the supramundane world to know the *kamma* of whatever was in that world. If those in the supramundane world

have any issues to discuss, they can communicate as well. For instance the mind of the Buddha could communicate with his mother who passed away seven days after giving birth to him. After she died, her mind was in a positive state and was reborn as a heavenly angel. After the Buddha's enlightenment, he could use his brilliant mind to find his mother. Since communication was possible, he could teach her until she became a *Sotāpanna*. After becoming a *Sotāpanna*, the Buddha's mother could practise on her own without a teacher. A *Sotāpanna* is like one who has a map that will enable one to walk the path until reaching enlightenment by oneself. Those who have entered the stream leading to *Nibbāna* are called *Sotāpanna*. Comparing this to driving, it is like they have already merged onto the highway. Since they are already on the highway, they will eventually reach the destination by themselves. This highway does not split and has road signs all along the way pointing out how to get to the destination.

This is direct communication between minds. However, the mind has to be in *samādhi*, which is a state of calm. Those who are able to enter *samādhi* and have acquired this special ability will be able to communicate with all kinds of spiritual beings. Luangpu Mun mentioned that Buddhas and *Arahants* came to present Dhamma to him frequently. Even the current Buddha, Gotama had heavenly angels come listen to his Dhamma teaching every night. The Buddha taught laypeople in the afternoon, monks and novices in the evening and heavenly angels late at night. Luangpu Mun had heavenly angels coming to listen to his Dhamma talks frequently in the same

manner as well. But this had to be done only when Luangpu Mun had entered *samādhi*. This is similar to us communicating through the Internet nowadays. To do so, we have to first log onto the Internet for communication to be possible. Sitting here right now we cannot communicate. We need to switch on the equipment and get online in order for communication to be possible.

Those who have brilliant, powerful minds are able to read the mental responses of others. Whatever we might be thinking as we sit here, someone else could know what we are thinking about. Our thoughts and emotions are just like radio waves. Whoever tunes the receiver to the right frequency will be able to detect the mental waves of our thinking, knowing what we are currently thinking about. At times, heavenly angels can know our thinking and may seek out the thing that we want for us. If we have merit and have been a benefactor to the heavenly angels before, or if we have had close bonds to them in the past, then the heavenly angels will make it happen. The angels may not be able to find it by themselves, so they might enter the dream of another person to suggest he or she acquire it to ease so and so's restlessness. The dreamer wakes up in the morning and has a strong urge to quickly look for that person. Having found him or her in a restless state, the dreamer can help immediately. These matters are called divine and supernatural. They appear to be deep and amazing to those who don't study and practise, but to those who have studied and practised, such events will not seem so deep or amazing.

However, such knowledge is not significant compared to building up merit to reach the level of +100. Such knowledge and matters are not able to influence merit to or demerit. The arising of merit and demerit is dependent on the actions of our body, speech, and mind. However, experiential knowledge sometimes includes those who are able to know their past lives and screen their previous existences. What were we in the previous life or the lives before that? In this way, they can trace one life after another continuously. This is because the mind has the power and ability to dig and sort out memories that are buried deep within. But even then, this ability to recall past lives will not cause the mind to have more merit. It is not possible to become an *Arahant* using this ability, nor a *Sotāpanna* or any other noble attainments. The same is true of using the ability to read the minds of others. These abilities are just the means to an end. That's all. For instance, contacting the Buddhas and *Arahants* to receive the Dhamma can help by teaching us and pointing out the proper techniques to train our minds to reach *Nibbāna*. However, contact with the Buddhas and *Arahants* will not lead us to *Nibbāna* automatically. We still need to put their teachings into practice. That is, we ought to practise generosity, maintain our virtue, and develop calm and insight meditation as mentioned before.

Therefore, whether we meet the Buddha or not is not significant. What is important is for us to know how we practise. Once we know this, whether we meet up with them or not is no longer an issue. But if we have not heard the Dhamma and can meet them, it would be truly beneficial and helpful. For example, when Buddhism

no longer exists in the world, entering *samādhi* to allow the Buddhas and *Arahants* to teach us would be a blessing indeed. Then we will be the only ones in the world taught by the Buddhas and *Arahants* because during that period there won't be anyone else who will be able to teach. Just like it was for the latest Buddha who did not have anyone to teach him; even though he was able to enter *samādhi*, there wasn't anyone that came to teach and point the way out to him. Alternatively, it could be that he chose not to send his mind out to know external phenomena. Maybe, that's why no one came to teach him. It is like when we switch off our mobile phone and whatever message others send is not able to reach us. We have to switch the phone on if we want to receive messages.

When we enter *samādhi*, there are two possible options — We can choose to open our mental faculties to receive the mental frequencies of others or we can switch off our telepathic ability. In order for us to enter *samādhi* for the sake of full and complete calm, we have to shut everything out and not acknowledge anything at all. This is because we have to build up the mind's strength, to build up the basic foundation of the mind. This has to be *samādhi* that does not go out to know all kinds of external phenomena or issues. If it is the *samādhi* that goes out to know all kinds of phenomena, the mind will receive this information and be weakened by it, causing it to lack the strength and power of equanimity that is necessary to fight against all kinds of desire, which causes us to commit demerit and leads us through this round of perpetual death and rebirth.

Those who want to reach *Nibbāna* have to destroy desire so the mind can be empty of it completely. To be able to cause desire to be utterly gone, we need to have the type of *samādhi* that closes the mind's doors, that does not receive any phenomena whatsoever. Not going on a tour of hell, not going on a tour of heaven, and not contacting the heavenly angels, but instead, we should stay within *samādhi* that is merely aware, equanimity without any thinking or imagination, without receiving and knowing various phenomena and issues. *Samādhi* like this should go hand-in-hand with the mind for it to proceed to the level of wisdom, the level of insight, to be able to fight against desire, to destroy desire of all kinds so that it may be completely gone. If we have the kind of *samādhi* that opens to receive and know all sorts of phenomena, our minds will not have enough strength. When we come out of *samādhi*, we will be too weak and not calm and clear enough to fight against our desires.

This is similar to sleeping. If people dream while sleeping, they will not be refreshed and strong when they wake up. However, those who sleep deeply without dreaming will be refreshed upon awakening and have the power to tackle all the issues that come their way. Those of us who need to build up the foundation of the mind, build up the power of the mind, should enter into the *samādhi* that does not acknowledge outside phenomena. For acknowledging all kinds of phenomena will hinder the development of wisdom. Coming out of that type of *samādhi*, we will not have the power to investigate the Four Noble Truths, *anicca* (impermanence), *dukkha* (stress) and *anattā* (not-self). If we have not seen the Four Noble Truths, *anicca*, *dukkha*, and *anattā*,

we will not be able to stop desire. Therefore, those who are not yet free from *dukkha* should be careful and circumspect. Do not be attached to *samādhi* that receives too many kinds of phenomena. We may perhaps choose to be open to such knowledge only sometimes according to a predetermined schedule, say once a week. This is because receiving such knowledge every day would waste a lot of time. We wouldn't have the power to practise to the highest level, to the level of *vipassanā* (insight).

These are matters concerning the mind that is deathless. Our minds right now still dwell in the supramundane world. When the body expires, merit and demerit will enter into the balance sheet, fight over the mind for it to go up or down. If our goodness has more strength, it will pull us up to become heavenly angels, *brahmas*, or noble, enlightened ones. If our unskilful qualities have more strength, demerit will drag us down to become animals, demons, hungry ghosts, or hell beings. Thus going in this way, we receive the consequences of our good and bad actions until either one of these is finished, or if both merit and demerit is equally balanced, then we will return as humans, building up merit and demerit all over again.

If we are reborn in an era when Buddhism is still in existence, then there will be people who will remind and teach us to do good and avoid evil. For instance, all Buddhas teach us to do good, give up anything unskilful, and stop desire. If we believe the teachings, we will then practise accordingly and will be able to build up our mind's positivity until reaching +100. Once it reaches +100, there is no need to return and be

reborn again. There is no need to return to this round of perpetual birth and death. Already at +70, there is no need to return as a human again. Future births may be in the heavenly or *brahma* realms until ultimately becoming an *Arahant*.

If there is no Buddhist religion, then there will be no one to teach people to make merit, give up demerit, and stop desire. People will then continue to make demerit and not make merit. They will act according to their desire, just like people these days who neither believe in Buddhism nor come to the temple. People who do not come to the temple will mostly dislike doing good and instead like to act unskillfully and delight in actions that follow the commands of all sorts of desires. Having done wrong by following desires of all sorts, the mind upon dying will become negative and will have to be reborn as an animal, hungry ghost, demon, or fall into a hell.

Therefore, our life is considered to be very special because we have people to frequently remind us to do good, to give up evil, and to stop desire. If we are able to do that, then when we die our mind is likely to be more positive than negative. Which level of goodness we have reached more or less depends on to what degree we make merit, give up demerit, and stop desire. If we are able to completely end desire, we will reach the full +100 mark, attaining total *Nibbāna*. These are matters concerning the minds of all of us, and it is our responsibility as to whether we are interested in building up positivity or negativity within our minds. It is dependent upon three aspects of our own actions, namely to do good, to give

The Mind and its Endless Rebirth

up evil, and to stop all kinds of desire. If we can do that until reaching the full marks, +100, *Nibbāna* will be the natural result. If we are not able to do that, hell might be the resultant consequence. There is absolutely no one else who can deliver us to *Nibbāna* or send us to hell. It all lies within ourselves as to whether we are able to do good, give up evil and stop desire. That's all there is to it.

May you take up this teaching regarding the mind, which is deathless, which dwells in the supramundane world, to contemplate and practise for the highest bliss and happiness.



Questions & Answers



Tan Ajahn: Does anyone wish to ask any questions concerning areas that are unclear to you?

Layman (Male1, M1): Luangpor (Venerable Father), is selling weapons demeritorious?

Tan Ajahn: It's not demeritorious, but it does encourage others to commit demerit.

Layman (M1): What about selling animal traps?

Tan Ajahn: Yes, all of that is not right livelihood. It is best not to do it. We are Buddhists and it is not proper for us to encourage others to commit demerit or do bad *kamma*. They may turn on us. After selling weapons to them, they may be dissatisfied with them and return to shoot us down in anger.

Layman (M1): What about knives and tools sold in the shop?

Tan Ajahn: If the items are not used to kill others, then there is no problem. But if they were used to kill, we can't really help or prevent it because to kill a person, even a rock could do the job.

Layman (M1): Is selling animals like cows demeritorious?

Tan Ajahn: Not demeritorious, but only wrong livelihood. That's all. For it to be demeritorious, there has to be killing of animals, stealing, sexual misconduct, and lying or cheating. These are called demeritorious actions.

Layman (M1): Is selling animal meat such as beef, chicken, or fish demeritorious?

Tan Ajahn: If it is not killed by us, then it is not wrong. But if we instruct someone to kill, then it is. For instance, suppose we give an order to the stall selling live chickens that we want three live chickens slaughtered tomorrow since we sell rice with chicken. Placing an order in advance for the chickens is a demerit. However, if instead we choose to go to the market and buy meat that is already slaughtered, it is not a demerit. Demerit arises from instructing others to kill or doing it ourselves.

Layman (M1): Doesn't this show that it is improper to sell weapons, tools, beef, and other meats in the shop?

Tan Ajahn: Some items are not weapons meant for killing people, and those can be sold. If they can be used to bring benefits, then you can sell them... [Speaking to other members of the audience leaving] Make merit continuously so that your mind becomes positive and do not commit evil so as not to fall into negativity.

Layman (Master of Ceremony, MC): Today, we have two or three questions (from Tan Ajahn Suchart's Facebook page).

Tan Ajahn: Ok. Please proceed.

Layman (MC): We have a question from Khun Daeng. If one has thoughts that are demeritorious, how should one restrain or turn them around into meritorious thoughts.

Tan Ajahn: Well, see those thoughts as disgusting and revolting. Once we see them like that, we will stop that thinking. However, if we do not yet see them as disgusting and revolting, we will not be able to stop them. For example, with the thought of killing another person, we reflect that we might be put into jail or be killed by that person instead. If fear arises with the thought of punishment resulting from murder, we will be afraid and not do anything. Stopping will then be possible.

Layman (MC): The next question comes from Khun Tim. Do *saññā* (memory), *sankhāra* (thinking), *viññāṇa* (consciousness), and *vedanā* (feelings) only exist when we are alive?

Tan Ajahn: As long as the mind is there, these will also exist. As was explained in the Dhamma talk earlier on, *vedanā*, *saññā*, *sankhāra*, and *viññāṇa* are properties of the mind, and arise out of the mind. If the mind exists, these also exist. For the Buddha to communicate with us, he has to use *saññā* and *sankhāra*; he has to use thinking and imagination to contact us. Therefore, if the mind exists, *vedanā*, *saññā*, *sankhāra*, and *viññāṇa* also exist.

The only difference is whether they are in operation or not. That's all. For instance, when we enter *samādhi*, they will stop operating temporarily. It is like a car that has accessories like air-conditioning or a radio. Their operation is dependent on whether or not we use them. If the driver stops driving and shuts down the electronics and engine, then everything will shut down temporarily. When the driver returns to drive the engine, the air-conditioning and radio will again start operating. It all depends on the driver, or the mind, whether these things are used or not. We think that we can solve certain problems, but there is no end to the problems that can be solved. It is just a question of whether to do it or not. If we are to sit and enter *samādhi* and be still without thinking and imagining, then *saññā* and *sankhāra* will also stop working. Once we come out of *samādhi*, we will gradually start thinking and imagining and so *saññā*, *sankhāra*, *viññāṇa*, and *vedanā* will also be working anew.

Layman (MC): Our next question is from Khun Anchalar. After sitting in meditation for one hour, staying with the breath and repeating the mantra *Buddho* with mindfulness of any feelings that arise, why was there no sudden change of awareness into stillness as taught by Phra Ajahn? As I came out of this meditation, I felt a little tired and mentally drained. Was it my poor health that caused these symptoms of tiredness?

Tan Ajahn: When we do not experience calmness and peace in sitting meditation, we will feel tired after coming out of it. This is because there is a battle between Dhamma and the *kilesas* (defilement), which leaves us

feeling drained. However, if our mind is calm after sitting because Dhamma gained victory, then our tiredness will disappear. A mind steeped in calmness has strength and will not feel tired. Sometimes, after meditation practice, we may feel sore all over the body because of not having any calmness. Stress and painful feelings arise out of the battle between Dhamma and the *kilesas*. Whenever Dhamma has more strength, it is because mindfulness has enough strength to stop the volitions of the *kilesa* and desire. When desire stops and accepts defeat, then everything will drop into calmness and become still without any rebellion at all. Thus, not much mental strength is used. Coming out of such meditation, we will not feel sore or fatigued, even if we continue sitting longer. This is not true when we are not calm. It depends on whether the mind is calm or not. If the mind is calm already, then there will not be any feelings of strain, fatigue, or tiredness, and instead, we will be greatly rejuvenated. On the other hand, if we do not still our minds during meditation, fighting back and forth, enduring stress and pain, we will feel drained after the sitting. This is just like playing tug-of-war. If both sides pull with equal strength and do not relent, then neither side is victorious or defeated. But both sides will be thoroughly worn out. However, if Dhamma is victorious, there will instantly be stillness and lightness. The rope will not be taut if either end is let go. The same goes with the mind. If the *kilesas* are willing to be defeated, then tension will melt away. Stress and discontentment within the mind will disappear completely. The mind will be cool, comfortable, and light as if it is floating in the clouds. There will be only lightness and comfort. No matter how long we sit, feelings of strain or pain do

not arise. This is the result that comes when the mind is calm, without which we would feel tired coming out of meditation because the battle between Dhamma and the *kilesas* had not reached a resolution. Understand? Any more questions?

Layman (MC): No more.

Tan Ajahn: Whoever has questions may post them on the Internet, on Facebook. But you will need to be patient and wait for the answer. The person who asks on your behalf will key in the answer to Facebook. This is suitable for people who live far away and are not able to come themselves. If the questions come through email, there may not be time to answer because writing a reply takes up too much time. It is not as easy as speaking, which only takes a few moments. One minute of speaking will take up to five minutes to write. In addition, if the written reply is not clear, then one needs to ask further questions. Going back and forth in this way may take a long time and become difficult. The best way to ask questions is to come here in person. However, you may instead try to solve the problem by thinking it out first rather than asking others endlessly whenever problems arise.

We have mindfulness and wisdom just like others, so why not use it? Try using our mindfulness and wisdom first until we come to a dead end before seeking the opportunity to ask others. Do not automatically rush to ask others whenever we run into problems. Instead, try to use our own mindfulness and wisdom to investigate and see how it turns out. The more we use wisdom, the cleverer and more capable we become. If we keep on

asking others, then ignorance will continually increase. Wisdom will not arise within us because we do not use it. Therefore, unless it is truly necessary, do not ask anyone. If we ask a question, we should also be able to answer it ourselves. The question comes from us and the answer also lies in our heart. For all questions, be it about meditation practice or our life, I can say that all problems arise out of our desires. Discontentment and unhappiness only arises out of our mind. If we want to extinguish our discontentment and unhappiness, then we should stop our own desire. Ask ourselves, “Right now, what am I discontented with? With my husband? With my wife?” Isn’t it because of wanting him or her to be in a certain way, we don’t have ease and happiness in our mind? If we want mental ease and happiness, then let it go. Do not want him or her to be like this or like that. Whatever way he or she is, let it go as his or her problem. We shall be stress-free and will not have any problem with him or her.

This is the heart of solving 100% of our problems, all of which arise from our very own mind, our own desires. For once desire arises, the mind is immediately agitated and unhappy. If we can stop desire, mental irritation and unhappiness will disappear. The fact is that we should see *anicca* (impermanence), *dukkha* (stress-discontent) and *anattā* (not-self). We should see our wife or husband as ownerless, as *anattā*, because we cannot control him or her as they do not belong to us. We may sometimes be able to get him or her to do our bidding, to do this or that, but it is not always possible. Sometimes, he or she will do it, sometimes he or she won’t. If we really want ease and comfort of mind,

then we should accept others' wishes. If he or she does not do as we requested, then let the matter rest then and there. If we decide not to give out any commands or express any of our wishes, that would be much better. Whatever we want to do, we just do it by ourselves. Delight in whatever is available to us. We can then be confident that there won't be any problems. He or she may smile at us, scold us, be displeased with us, or whatever it may be. Just let him or her go, and see it as a matter concerning him or herself. Almost all problems arise out of our own desires. To elaborate, if we want to stop and resolve the problem, we should see that he or she is *anattā*, *anicca*, and *dukkha*. If we do not bother others, we will have mental ease and comfort and will not be distressed or frustrated by them.

Therefore, whatever problems come our way, try using wisdom to solve the problem. We are the ones that cause the problems to arise, so why should we not be able to resolve the problem ourselves. We create our issues, so why not solve them ourselves. Problems are born out of our own desire. The method to solve the problem is just to stop our own desire. Problems will then be gone completely.

It is to this that the Buddha became enlightened, which is called **the Four Noble Truths**. Discontentment (*dukkha*) in the mind is the problem — a discomforted and unhappy mind. The Buddha proclaimed that it is born out of three types of desire: *kamma taṇhā*, craving for visual objects, sounds, aromas, flavors, and sex; *bhava taṇhā* is the craving to have and become, desire for it to be like this or like that; *vibhava taṇhā* is the

desire not to have or not to become. Not wanting it to be like this, and instead, wanting it to be like that. This is called *vibhava taṇhā*. If we have desire such as this within our mind, discontentment and stress will arise. For example, we do not want to grow old, be in pain, or die. These desires are all *vibhava taṇhā*. However, if we accept the truth that we will have to experience pain, old age, and death, and they cannot be prevented, we will stop this desire and not be troubled by pain, old age, and death. We have to see *anicca*, *dukkha*, and *anattā* — especially *anattā*. We should see that we cannot prohibit our husband or wife from doing as they will, nor can we command him or her to act as we wish. Demanding that the body not age, feel pain, or die is impossible.

If we do not want to grow old, feel pain, or die, then refrain from wanting to be born. That's it. For us not to be born, we should stop desiring because it is desire that propels us to birth. If we still have desire for sex or visual objects, sounds, aromas, flavours, and tactile sensations, then when we do not have eyes, ears, nose, tongue, and body, we will seek out new eyes, ears, nose, tongue and body as replacements. Nowadays, people who are blind can seek out new eyes so that they can see. If people have no desire, then they just let it be. It is not necessary to have a replacement, not necessary to see. If we have desire and are blind, and artificial eyes or eyes donated by others become available, we will want them implanted immediately. If there aren't any to be found, once this body passes away, we will seek out a new body and return to be born once more.

Instead, if we were willing to wait, accept and live through the consequences of our *kamma* until they pass away, then when our mind is at a higher level, we will return as a human afresh. If we dwelled in negativity, we would first have to exhaust the resulting punishments. If we dwelled in positivity, we would first have to receive the rewards and only after that would we return to birth again. If there is no more desire, then there is no need to be born again. If there is no birth, there will be no pain, old age, or death, and no need to have problems of all kinds that all of us experience. We have problems of all kinds because we have a body. If there is no body, there are no problems such as old age, pain, death, and separation from one another.

The Buddha taught that there is no suffering and discontent for one who has no birth. Whoever has the desire for birth within them will still have the potential to suffer. If we do not want suffering, we should act according to the teachings of the Buddha. Make merit, give up demerit, and successfully stop desire. If we can do that, then we will not forever be in the round of perpetual death and rebirth.

Layman (M2): Should a *Sotāpanna* enter into *samādhi* and investigate just like the other levels of noble ones?

Tan Ajahn: Well, desire has ten factors altogether. A *Sotāpanna* is able to stop three factors of delusion that cause desire. The first is *sakkāya-ditṭhi*, delusion which sees that the five *khandhas* of body, feeling, memory, thinking, and sensory consciousness as “myself,”

as belonging to “me.” In truth, they do not. The body is merely a puppet that we acquire from our father and mother. Feeling, memory, thinking, and sense consciousness are conditions of the mind that arise and cease in line with various conditions and supporting factors. If there are causes that create it, it will arise. If there are causes that condition it to stop, it will stop. It is not us, and does not belong to us. If we can give up *sakkaya-dit̥ṭhi*, we can become a *Sotāpanna*, for we will be able to remove our desire to not experience old age, pain, and death. We will be able to see that we cannot wish the body to be otherwise. Wishing it not to be old, feel pain, or die is not possible.

A *Sotāpanna* will thus accept old age, pain, and death and therefore will not be afraid of old age, pain, and death. Not fearing pain and death, a *sotāpanna* will not create demerit and will not be involved with any ritual to repel bad luck so as to safeguard their life or disperse away pain and illness. When we are about to die or are in pain and sickness, we make merit to repel difficulties. It is too troublesome to make merit at nine or ten temples so as to avert death, sickness, and pain, and making merit like this is futile. If we have to die while working, we will still die. If we have to fall sick and be in pain, we will still have to experience sickness and pain.

Layman (M2): An *Anāgāmī* has to contemplate the body all the time, but does a *Sotāpanna* need to do the same everyday as well?

Tan Ajahn: Yes, they both contemplate the body, but there is a difference. A *Sotāpanna* will contemplate

aging, pain, and death as something natural. They contemplate that it is just a body, not us, or belonging to us, just like the bodies of other people. We need not be too troubled if it becomes old, feels pain, or dies. It is not a matter that concerns us. We are the mind, which senses and knows impartially without attachment.

Layman (M2): Then if we contemplate like this continuously everyday...

Tan Ajahn: We should be able to let the body go first. Once we are willing to let the body go, we should try staying alone in the forest, staying in places that put us in situations that border on life and death. Encountering a snake or tiger, will our mind still be stable and calm? If our mind lets the body go, then we will be stable and calm. But if we are tense and panicky, it shows that our mind has not yet let go of the body. If we can let go of the body, there will not be any doubt about the truth of the Buddha, Dhamma, and *Saṅgha*. It is the teachings of the Buddha that we use to extinguish the *kilesas*, which enable us to become a *Sotāpanna*. The teachings thus become real, and there will no longer be any doubt about the Buddha, Dhamma, and *Saṅgha*. Furthermore, we will not participate in any rituals that repel bad luck so as to extend our life or make merit when we fall into sickness or pain to make it go away. These are just a waste of time because a *Sotāpanna* is willing to accept old age, pain, and death. Even after conducting rituals and making merit, we will still have to be old, feel pain, and die. So, it is just a total waste of time. As such, we will not have anything to do with rituals, and this is called *Sīlabbata-parāmāsa*.

We are not attached to any rituals or superstitions because all these activities cannot prevent difficulties or extend our life. It is just not possible.

Layman (M2): Would Ajahn clarify the various aspects of the third precept (abstaining from sexual misconduct)? For example, should we only have (sexual) relationships after marriage, or does engaging in (sexual) services break this precept.

Tan Ajahn: Misconduct here refers to the generally held views or customs of society. As they say so, so shall it be. There are people who have four wives and yet this does not go against their social customs. Do you understand? In a society that upholds having only one wife then having two wives would be conventionally and socially wrong.

Layman (M2): After reaching 18 years of age in Thailand we are considered legally free from parental supervision. Would sexual relationships be acceptable?

Tan Ajahn: Well, it depends on the social norms. This precept enables us to live at ease in a society where all sorts of views and opinions prevail. Old social customs require us to seek parental arrangement and approval before marriage. Seeking marriage by ourselves breaks social norms then, doesn't it? It depends on the society we live in. People in the old days would discuss and make arrangements beforehand to set up the marriage ritual. Compare this to society nowadays — we need no approval or anything and can just marry anyone we fancy. The important thing is to stay together

and be sincere with each other. If we are insincere, we may die. Do you understand?

Layman (M2): What about the Buddha's standard for applying the 3rd precept?

Tan Ajahn: The Buddha takes the middle way depending on the situation and the causes and conditions of each society. Whatever the social norms, we have to act accordingly. Since the Buddha teaches us to understand social standards, we who live in society should know the customs and what is proper. If we want to live in that society, we need to act according to its social codes and norms.

Layman (M2): These days it is widely held that "eating fruit only after it is ripe" (i.e. having a sexual relationship only after marriage) is too rigid and strict.

Tan Ajahn: This shows that the social norms and customs of the people have gone down. Desires have gone up greatly. Humbleness and restraint have gone down. We are impatient to wait for the fruits to ripen, so we eat it plain and unripe. Instead of eating sticky rice with sweet mangoes, we eat sticky rice with plain mangoes.

Layman (M2): What about people not in a relationship who use sexual services? Do they break the 3rd precepts?

Tan Ajahn: What do you think?

Layman (M2): Well, if I do not force the other partner, and both people are agreeable, I think it would not break the 3rd precept.

Tan Ajahn: If you say it is not wrong, then it is not wrong as it pertains to you.

Layman (M2): What does Tan Ajahn think? A *Sotāpanna* should be pure with regards to this precept in every detail, so at times when contemplating this, I am not able to reconcile and figure a way out, for me living as a lay person...

Tan Ajahn: We would not be different from animals by using such services. Do you understand? A dog just goes after whatever it fancies without any concern for ownership. If we wish to be like a dog, we can use sexual services — just call and make an appointment. But if we wish to be human, there will be marriage and staying together as a couple. This is the way of humans. If we wish to be animals, then just go to the bar or pub, pay and pick up anyone and go to the hotel. This is similar to dogs in heat. Have you ever seen them? Dogs in heat are many. Whoever they fancy, the stronger ones will compete and fight to have sexual intercourse with it. Weaker dogs can only follow and stand there looking longingly with saliva drooping from their mouths.

Laywoman (Female1, F1): Tan Ajahn, I have a question. Some people say that there is no need to make merit and to just proceed straight to practising meditation. But then there is a monk who said that we should first practise making merit by giving up possessions before we can eventually let go of the body.

Tan Ajahn: By “making merit” you mean giving to charity, making donations and giving up possessions, right? Making merit has several stages. Maintaining our precepts is merit; practising meditation is also merit. Giving is also merit. Which aspects of merit are you referring to?

Laywoman (F1): By “making merit” here, I mean giving (*dāna*). First we give and then once we can give up our possessions, we can then let go of the body.

Tan Ajahn: Yes, if we cannot even give up something which is easy, then how can we give up something that is difficult? Do you love your body more than your money and possessions, or your money and possessions more than your body?

Laywoman (F1): How do you know how much to give up before you are ready to undertake the next practice?

Tan Ajahn: Well, take the example of the Buddha who left his palace. You can also leave your home and stay in the temple. That’s all there is to it. This shows that you have truly given up and renounced; you are totally broke with only enough money for food and requisites to support your daily existence. Doing this is giving up and truly making merit. What you are doing now (as a layperson) is just the initial practice, a little bit here and there. Say, you have 100 baht, you give up 10 baht first, keeping 90 baht. But truly to do it sincerely, you should give away the entire 100 baht. Do you understand? Coming to practise meditation, we will gain good results.

Maintaining the precepts will be easy and our virtue will be pure. This is because once we do not need assets or possessions, we need not make demerit. People create demerit because of wanting to have assets and possessions.

Laywoman (F2): Ajahn, may I ask a question related to meditation? When I sit in meditation, sometimes a certain experience occurs. While reciting *Buddho* continuously, unexpectedly there was a “woop” and everything disappeared even though I was not sleepy. It was 30 minutes later that I regained self-awareness. Repeating *Buddho* the second time...“woop” — everything disappeared again. Then self-awareness returned.

Tan Ajahn: By disappearing, what was it like? When it disappeared did you have self-awareness?

Laywoman (F3): No self-awareness.

Tan Ajahn: If there was no self-awareness, then that was falling asleep.

Laywoman (F3): Oh! But I wasn’t sleepy.

Tan Ajahn: Well, you weren’t sleepy because you were already asleep... There is no need to be sleepy, for at times when the mind has nothing to do, it just falls asleep easily. If the mind enters *samādhi*, there should be self-awareness all the time, just like there is self-awareness as we are talking right now... Know that right now, our mind is not thinking, concocting, or imagining. We are cool and relaxed with happiness. In this way, it is called calm and bliss. Otherwise, if it goes

“woop,” it will be like it was for you. This shows that you went beyond calmness and fell asleep.

Laywoman (F3): But if I am just unaware of myself...

Tan Ajahn: That is definitely falling asleep.

Laywoman (F3): There are times during sitting meditation when I see white light that is narrow and wide.

Tan Ajahn: This can arise; just do not pay attention and return back to continue with your meditation subject. Phenomena such as these can arise during the phase when the mind is entering calm, including feelings of ecstasy, the flowing of tears, and the appearance of brilliant light. We should not take any interest in phenomena like these. We should just continue with meditating *Buddho*. Keep going with it, until the mind enters *appanā samādhī* (a non-dual, unified mental state), and becomes calm and peaceful where thinking and imagining, colour, light, or whatever there is completely disappears leaving only *ekaggatārammana* (oneness). We are the knower, just that which knows. It is only in this way that you can you truly call it calm.

However, if we take an interest in light, colour, images (*nimitta*), or all sorts of other issues, we have lost the way. We have stopped meditating; we have gone on tour. In meditation, we do not need to see heaven, hell, or spiritual beings. There is no need for the supernatural or miracles. We only need stillness. Calmness and stillness can be the supporting means to kill off

and fight against the *kilesas*. Calmness may not kill *kilesas* on its own, but it does weaken the *kilesas*, enabling us to use wisdom to teach the mind to stop and kill off the *kilesas*.

Therefore, while sitting in meditation, do not take an interest in whatever arises or is seen. It is not important. These are results that may arise. Some may see it, while others may not; it is not the same for everyone. The only experience common to everyone is when the mind becomes calm, it will then be still and contented, cool and relaxed, and will stay in equanimity — just that which knows. Stay in this state and just let it be until the mind comes out of its own accord. Do not want to use it to contemplate and think in the path of wisdom. Sitting is for the sake of achieving physical and mental calmness, and if using it immediately the mind will not be sufficiently rejuvenated and will have yet to charge up its battery. Having stillness is like charging a battery: it builds up coolness, builds up contentment for the mind. With greater coolness and contentment, the mind will have greater strength to fight against desire. Coming out of *samādhi*, we will gradually be agitated and will think of wanting this or that and we will suffer. But if our mindfulness can keep up with what's happening and use wisdom to teach the mind to not want it, we will not suffer. There is no end to this continuous wanting. Wanting this one time will be followed by more wanting. By teaching ourselves in this way, wanting will come to an end.

Laywoman (F3): Phra Ajahn, I truly want to practise the path, and whenever I have free time I sit in meditation.

Right now, I am still working. After work, I return to my practice. Going in this way regularly, I am able to get the results mentioned before.

Tan Ajahn: Good. Before one can get the result of *samādhi*, we must first develop *sati* throughout the day for it is mindfulness that causes *samādhi* to arise. If we choose to develop mindfulness only during sitting meditation, then it will not be enough. The strength will not be enough. We should develop mindfulness as an inherent part of our daily life. Upon waking up, we should restrain our thinking. Do not think of this or that, which is not necessary. Stay with *Buddho* or stay with guarding and watching over our body in whatever it is doing.

Laywoman (F3): Sometimes *Buddho* slips off, and I am aware that thinking arises, but I stop and return back to *Buddho*, thereby stopping thinking.

Tan Ajahn: Yes, yes... thinking does not stop, then use *Buddho* to stop it. Just keep repeating *Buddho*.

Laywoman (F3): Truly *Buddho* is much easier...

Tan Ajahn: Yes, yes. Stop thinking and let the mind stay with the here and now, so it knows equanimity, knows what we are presently doing. However, while working we can use thinking if it is necessary. Thinking about the work that we are involved in, like thinking about the accounting sheet, is okay. If we keep repeating *Buddho*, we may not be able to work on the accounting sheet.

Laywoman (F3): Working like this, we will not be able to fully meditate and reach up to +70 and above....

Tan Ajahn: You can choose to work or you can instead ordain, so that you will have the time. Whatever manner you are ordained is acceptable. Ordaining and staying at home are also acceptable. Taking up the eight precepts, staying at home alone, giving up your job is also considered an ordained practitioner. Depending on the temple, it is often best to stay in a temple if it is peaceful and quiet. That is better than staying at home, but that is not a certainty nowadays. It is difficult to tell which is better — your home or the temple. This is because of many causes and supporting factors. Staying in a temple with a good meditation teacher is the best. The teacher will teach and remind us frequently. By staying alone, we may end up on the wrong path and without anyone to turn to when confronted with obstacles. It is good if you can walk this path. This is the best and right decision. Nothing in this world is better than to be able to meditate 100%.

Laywoman (F3): (Related her stay with Luangpu Jit in Hat Yai...)

Tan Ajahn: Well, this is good. Keep on with your practice. We have to seek out a place of practice for ourselves. When there isn't a suitable place then practise in your home. If you can stay alone, it can also lead to peace and calm. Practise in your home for a start.

Laywoman (F3): Another thing I wish to mention is that this period of meditation practice resulted in me being slow while working.

Tan Ajahn: Slow... well the practice is going against the grain, just like a ship that hasn't pulled up its anchor.

Being generous is like pulling up the anchor. Give up seeking money and using money — enough is enough. By not using money, there is no need to look for money. Not seeking money, we will have time to fully devote to meditation. If we have to use money, then we will still have to work for it. If we have accumulated sufficient savings, we also need not seek money. We will then have time to meditate, to stay in seclusion, and to stay alone. For meditation to be good, we should stay alone in places far away from sights, sounds, smells, and tastes. Well, there seems to be quite a few people here planning to quit their jobs...

Audience: Ajahn is encouraging us to be ordained...
[Laughter in the audience]

Tan Ajahn: Some of them have already been ordained as *Mae Chee* (white-robe nuns). Through my acquaintance, there are already three. Women have a few more difficulties, but it is not beyond their ability. There are women who can gain enlightenment: Khun Mae Kaew, the disciple of Luangpu Mun; another one is Kor Khao Suan Luang in Ratchaburi. You are your own refuge (*attāhi attana nātho*). It depends on our own diligence and interest in practising correctly. No one can do it for us. We have to do it ourselves. We have to build it up.

Being ordained as a monk but not practising meditation is the same as someone not ordaining at all. Some gain popularity as a monk through the wrong ways and practise no meditation. Today, our *Saṅgha* has lost its way. The vast majority does not go into the forest but delights in going to shops and department stores.

Nowadays it seems the laypeople have more interest in meditation than monks. Monks are more interested in “*Boon-Bang-Sangh-Suat*” (merit-funeral-offering-chanting). Do you know what that is? “*Boon*” is merit making. Wherever there is merit making, these people go in droves. “*Sangh*” is *Saṅghadāna* (offerings to the monks). “*Bang*” is *Paṃsukūla* (funeral services). Once the service is over, envelopes stuffed with money are then given. All these activities mentioned include the distribution of envelopes stuffed with money. These monks do not want the path (*magga*), fruition (*phala*) and *Nibbāna*. But laypeople are more interested in the practice, studying and knowing the path of meditation.

Matters such as these are individual responsibilities. This is not to criticize anyone. Whoever wishes to, go ahead to “*Boon-Bang-Sangh-Suat*” as you like. Whoever delights in meditation, go ahead as well. This is merely to consider the present state of Buddhism. Therefore, we should choose to look at those who are good examples. Do not take any interest in those who are bad examples. If we cannot find anyone who is still alive to be a good example, it is better to look up to those exemplary monks who are already dead. It’s better to look up to the Buddha and all of his enlightened disciples. Study their biographies and take them as a guide on the path of our practice. The Buddha said that if we cannot find anyone better or equal to us, then it is better to stay alone. Do not associate with people more foolish than us, with people whose morals are lower than ours. They will influence and drag us down. They will not pull us higher up for sure because they have no idea what higher up is. But if we associate with people who

are more capable and smarter than us, they will pull us higher up.

Kalayanamitta, having a mentor or an admirable friend, is very important with regards to the practice. If we lack the wisdom to motivate ourselves, we should have a mentor. The best mentor or friend is a *Kruba Ajahn* (a meditation teacher) who has practised correctly. The practice of meditation is complex with many obstacles and traps. Without the help of a mentor who has gone through it, almost everyone will be caught in a trap. Those making merit will be stuck in merit making. Those observing and maintaining the precepts will be stuck on the level of keeping precepts. Those sitting in *samādhi* (tranquillity meditation only) will be stuck and trapped in *samādhi*. Every step of the way, there are traps for us to get caught and stuck in. We should be vigilant and circumspect to check whether we are stuck or not. Some people choose just to make merit and are not keen to do other forms of practice. Hearing any news of merit making, they go in droves. They join any activities for a birthday, funeral, *kathina*, or temple fundraising, but they are unwilling to bother about keeping the precepts.

On the other hand, those who keep the precepts are afraid to do anything at all out of fear of causing harm. Breathing in, they fear killing viruses in the air. When taking medicine, they again fear killing viruses. We should make judgements based on cause and effect in whatever we do. Those who sit in *samādhi* will be stuck in *samādhi* and not come out to walk the path of wisdom because in *samādhi* there is bliss and happiness. Once out of *samādhi*,

the mind will be agitated and disturbed, and we will return back to *samādhi* again. When it is time to use wisdom after coming out of *samādhi*, we do not do so because we are unable to use it. If we are able to use wisdom, then look at this desire. The mind is disturbed because of this desire. Seek out and face this desire right here; release and successfully stop it, and then this disturbance and agitation will disappear. This is called using wisdom. At times, however, we may get stuck using wisdom and be unwilling to return to *samādhi*. Doing so, we may sometimes solve our problem, but when we are unable to do so, we may end up thinking and speculating endlessly. If thinking proliferates without end and the problem cannot be solved, it is only proper to stop. Enter *samādhi* first, charge up the mind's battery, and sharpen the knife for it is blunt. Enter *samādhi*, rest the mind, and sharpen the knife. Upon coming out, review the previous problem, and we will be able to solve it.

There are many details like this, lots of them. People who do not practise will not know and will not understand. We should listen to Dhamma regularly. If we listen only once, we may forget. Listening to higher teachings that are beyond us, we will not understand. Listening to teachings at our level, we might forget. Therefore, we should listen frequently. Listening to Dhamma and practice go together as a pair. In the past, when I stayed with *Luangta Mahā Boowa*, there was not much business with the laypeople. He would gather all the monks every four or five days for instruction. As he got older, with poorer health and more laypeople gathering, the days between his instructions became further apart. It went from four-five days to a week or ten days at times.

When he was not feeling well, it would be one to two weeks. Towards the end, it was only seeing that there was enough Dhamma talks recorded on tape that he felt some ease of mind. He needed not be too concerned because we could rely on listening to the tape recorder.

Nowadays, because we do not stay with a *Kruba Ajahn*, we have to rely on Dhamma on CD's or in books. This is better than nothing, but it is not comparable to listening to live Dhamma delivered fresh and hot directly. Whatever problems we have can be resolved then and there. If there isn't "live" Dhamma available, we can still do the best of our abilities, which is better than not doing anything at all.

If we have practised to *Sotāpanna*, then at least we will not regress. But if we stop practising, we may regress. *Samādhi* that we have achieved before may not be possible again after we stop. Therefore, we should be careful. Do not be negligent. Do not think that having gained *samādhi* once, we do not have to continue practising. Once we stop, it may not be possible to get back again. As such, we should persevere to maintain whatever we have attained and continue to progress in our meditation. Do not let our meditation practice regress and go downhill: we should only add more practises continuously. If increasing our practice is not possible, then at least we should maintain it. This is just like the accelerator pedal used in driving a car. If the pedal is depressed at the same level, then the speed of the car will continue as before. If we relax the pedal, the car will slow down. If we want to speed up, we must depress the pedal even more. Meditation is the same as stepping on the pedal. Meditation is what causes the results to arise.

Layman (M3): During meditation, I reflected on the causes leading me to anger and why I reacted in the way I did. I also investigated the good and bad consequences of being angry. For instance, I became angry after being caught in a traffic jam. I reflected on it and realized that the bad consequences were more than the good. I was then able to stop my anger during the traffic jam. There is another matter that is more significant to me that involves working with my subordinate. I was angry and so investigated in a similar way, but it didn't go away. Even now, I am still angry.

Tan Ajahn: It is because your attachment to it is great. Whatever the situation, when your attachment is strong, resolving it will be difficult. Whenever our attachment is weak, resolving it will be easy. Whether our attachment is strong or weak is dependent on how strongly we like it, how strongly we love it. If we like or love it strongly, then cutting it off will be difficult. On the other hand, if we like or love it less, then cutting it off will be easy.

Layman (M3): That means, in cases like this, we can reduce it by cutting it off part by part.

Tan Ajahn: Well, you should observe and see that everything is impermanent and will ultimately end. No matter how much you love it, the day will come when all of us have to be separated. If we see that we will have to be separated and will not be able to prevent it, we will be able to stop our attachment. The fact is we don't see that we will have to be separated. We think that we will be together on and on forever. If we see that we may

be separated today or tomorrow, then by thinking in this way, letting go will be possible and easier. We ought to see *anicca*, *dukkha*, and *anattā*. All the answers to our questions lie in seeing *anicca*, *dukkha*, and *anattā*. Only then will we be able to let go.

Layman (M4): A woman went through an abortion several decades ago because of difficulties in her livelihood. Is that demeritious?

Tan Ajahn: Was it her intention to have an abortion? If it was, then it was demeritious.

Layman (M4): It was related to difficulties in her livelihood.

Tan Ajahn: Was it? Was it because of those difficulties that caused her to seek an abortion, or was it due to an accident such as falling while walking? If an abortion is unintentional, then it is not demeritious.

Layman (M4): Can it be resolved?

Tan Ajahn: There is no way to resolve this. We can only wait to receive the consequences of this demerit.

Layman (M4): Is there no way to correct it?

Tan Ajahn: Yes, there is a way. Make lots and lots of merit, so that when we die, good merit outweighs the bad merit, and we need not receive the consequences of the demerit. But then again, if we return to be born as a human, we may end up in the womb of that being whom we have aborted before. We are the one who aborted that being's birth and we may or may not be born

to that person because we might end up being aborted ourselves.

Layman (M4): There was a monk who saw an image of a child at a door, and he understood that as the spirit of his aborted son (from before he was ordained) awaiting rebirth.

Tan Ajahn: This is not definitive, and could just be their personal speculations and agitations. Whether that being is born or not has nothing to do with us. If it takes birth, it is its own responsibility. If it doesn't, that is also its own responsibility. Regardless of whether you know or not, that's just the way it is. There is nothing significant about it in anyway. The significant thing is whether our mind is tormented or not. Is our mind in fear of receiving the consequences of the bad *kamma*? We can resolve this by correcting this fear, this tormented and unsettled feeling concerning the impending bad consequences by simply accepting them. Then we will not feel tormented. It is best to correct it right here. Do not correct other people. Whether he is going to take rebirth or not is not a matter concerning us. Our concern is whether our mind is unsettled or not. If we train ourselves to accept the consequences of bad *kamma*, we will not experience *dukkha*. Another way is to take this unsettled and tormented feeling to teach ourselves not to do wrong in the future. Whatever benefit we get from committing demerit is not worthwhile at all. If we conceive a child but lack the wisdom to care for it, then give the baby away. It is much better than just killing him.

Layman (MC): For those who had an abortion, is meditation the best way to keep the results of the bad *kamma* furthest away from us?

Tan Ajahn: If we do not return to take birth again, we will not receive the resultant *kamma*. For instance, Angulimala, a disciple of the Buddha, killed 999 people before attaining enlightenment and only needed to receive the resultant *kamma* in that one life. After death, he was not reborn. He need not fall into hell for killing 999 people. Once he became an *Arahant*, his merit had the power to pull him up to the level of *Nibbāna*. His demerit lacked the power to fight back. The power of *Nibbāna* is very strong.

Layman (MC): If those who have done wrong, especially those who had an abortion, continue to feel deep remorse and brood over it, the resultant *kamma* will not go away. Isn't that right, Phra Ajahn?

Tan Ajahn: *Kamma* will remain as *kamma* itself; whether it goes away or not is a matter pertaining to itself. But it is us who increase our suffering and discontentment to no benefit at all. Dwelling and thinking on this issue, we end up creating new *kamma* within our own mind. We create new suffering because we are unable to let it go. Instead, relent through reason and accept it for what it is. If we confront and accept it by thinking, "This is my wrong-doing for lacking mindfulness and wisdom and solving the problem in a way that led to even more ruin and loss. I should take this incident as a lesson so that in future I shall not repeat it." In this way, it is better. The suffering and pain

involved is more than the happiness. Whatever benefit we get is not worth it. This then reduces the suffering and does not let it pile up even more. What is left is just the resultant *kamma* from getting an abortion. Perhaps in the next life we may be born to a mother whom we have aborted in the previous life. We are thus not born and will have to wait for the next round. That is the way it is.

Layman (MC): In that case, shouldn't we meditate to accept the impending consequences...

Tan Ajahn: Well, why not aspire to not be born again? Or make sure you get to *Nibbāna* or achieve *Sotāpanna*. Before I thought that as a *Sotāpanna* we had to return as a human, but after further consideration I think a *Sotāpanna* can still continue practising without a human birth. Those who have a strong interest in Dhamma can continue practising just like the *Anāgāmi* who practises on the *brahma* plane. Therefore I don't think there is a need to return as a human. Does "not more than seven lives" (as mentioned in the *tipiṭaka*) refer to births as angels and *brahmas* for the next seven lives, or to seven lives as a human? I am not sure. But my assessment is that there is no need to return as a human, because the mind can meditate without a body for suffering lies within the mind, not the body. But having said that, a *Sotāpanna* may still return as a human being because sensual and sexual desire still exists. Yes, a *Sotāpanna* may return as a human for seven lives for the sake of sexual pleasure. But then sexual pleasure is also possible as an angel. It is the same. There is no need

to use the physical body for sexual pleasure. A spiritual body with eyes, ears, nose, and tongue can also fulfil it as well. Having examined this for some time, I don't think there is a need to be a human again. For angels can also have sex with their spiritual eyes, ears, nose, and tongue. For instance, we dream while asleep. Having a good dream is just like experiencing sensual pleasure via spiritual eyes, ears, nose, and tongue. We do not use the physical eyes, ears, nose, tongue, and body; we only use the mind. This topic is brought up just for curiosity's sake. Investigating certain aspects of the Dhamma is dependent on the mindfulness and wisdom of each individual.

Layman (MC): Angels (*devatās*) in general seek pleasure during their lifetime, but Ajahn mentioned that there are angels who devote themselves to listening and practising Dhamma. What types of angel renounce sensual pleasures?

Tan Ajahn: Well, those angels who liked going to the temple when they were human. Instead of going overseas during a three-day holiday, they chose to come to the temple. Groups of angels like this have strong enthusiasm for the Dhamma. Whenever they hear news of monks who can communicate with angels, they will gather to listen to the Dhamma.

Layman (MC): If that's the case, angels who enjoy sensual pleasure but do not meditate are those who only make merit as humans and did not think of practising Dhamma.

Tan Ajahn: Yes, they make merit and maintain their virtue. They do not make demerit — only merit — but do not want to meditate or come to the temple for meditation practice or to study the Dhamma sincerely and truthfully, and are only contented with merit making and maintaining virtue. Whenever there is free time, they go out for fun. Those who are keen on Dhamma will instead come to the temple and study Dhamma, but may not yet be practising, for they have yet to know the benefit of meditation. Instead, they take an interest in listening to Dhamma talks to increase their knowledge. Having listened to the Dhamma, they will eventually begin practising meditation. With wisdom gained from listening to Dhamma as our foundation, then if we are fortunate enough, we will be like the mother of the Buddha who became a *Sotāpanna* after the Buddha came to teach her even though she was an angel.

Layman (MC): *Phra Ajahn*, those who have attained to *Sotāpanna* should be able to practise by themselves without the need of a guide, right?

Tan Ajahn: Yes, they have seen the Noble Truths already. They know that *dukkha* of all kinds arises out of our own desire, but they may not know the path (*magga*) and must discover it by themselves. For instance, a *Sotāpanna* is still vulnerable to sexual desire, but may initially not know the way to stop it. Later on, they will know by themselves through trial and error and come to use the contemplation of *anicca*, *dukkha*, *anattā*, or *asubha* (loathsomeness of the body). Seeing beautiful and charming woman will turn on a male's sexual desire. If they want to stop it, they will have to seek ways to

do so. The way to stop it is to see the ugly side of it. Knowing for themselves, by trial and error, little by little, they will eventually find methods to progress. For they know that the essence of it, the desire, lies in the mind. The technique to extinguish this desire is to see *anicca*, *dukkha*, *anattā*, and *asubha*. Seeing *anicca* is the same as seeing *asubha*, isn't it? The body is *anicca*, isn't it? Right now the body is beautiful, but tomorrow it may be a corpse. If we can see both sides of the same coin, then extinguishing desire will be possible. Extinguishing sexual desire is possible.

A *Sotāpanna* has escaped already and can proceed by himself. The only variable is whether he can reach the final attainment earlier or later, which is dependent on his abilities. If his wisdom is sharp, he will progress fast, but if his wisdom is blunt, progress will be slow. Some people are attached and involved in other kinds of activities such as *Phra Ananda*, who from what we know was already a *Sotāpanna* but was stuck taking care of the Buddha for 20 years. There was no time for him to meditate, to develop *asubha* (loathsomeness) or other practices. But once the Buddha had let go of his *khandhas* and attained final *Nibbāna*, it took Ananda just three months to attain enlightenment. This is because he had the time to practise; there was no need for other work.

This applies to all of us as well. We work outside, wasting our time and missing a valuable opportunity. However, if we choose to work inside and not to work outside, attainment is perhaps possible within seven years just as the Buddha proclaimed. It all lies with us to practise more or less. If we don't practise, then surely

it is not possible. The cause is just our practice. We do not practise but instead seek money and get involved in other activities, caring for our father, mother, elder and younger siblings, etc... Some people consider this the result of *kamma* to be stuck with our father and mother for they are the ones who raised us. Forsake them not! We ought to care of them such as when they have lost their mental and physical faculties and are not able to help themselves. How can we forsake them, can't we?

Similarly, *Phra Ananda* was also stuck taking care of the Buddha. If we go along making merit in line with our circumstances, we will still not be spiritually bankrupt. Even though we have to stay taking care of our father and mother, we still can be generous, maintain our precepts, and meditate as well. It is not that we have to take care of our parents 24 hours a day. Whenever there is free time, we can still meditate. The only thing is that we will not be able to achieve as much as we might do without responsibilities. That's just the way it is.

Layman (MC): Is it possible for a monk who has attained to *Sotāpanna* to later disrobe to be a lay person?

Tan Ajahn: Speaking from a theoretical perspective, it is possible because a *Sotāpanna* still has sexual desires. A *Sotāpanna* can have a wife, but a monk cannot. A monk who wants a wife should disrobe.

Layman (MC): Regarding those who die in youth or old age — does their passing have anything to do with demerit?

Tan Ajahn: Demerit in some aspects leads us to have shorter or longer life-spans. People who have shorter life span may have created bad *kamma*, but demerit is not the only cause of a shorter life. Carelessness, inattentiveness, drinking alcohol, and being intoxicated by drugs can be the causes of road accidents, and are not a result of past demerit but rather bad *kamma* created in the present moment. All of these are the result of not being careful and circumspect. Even mindless thrill-seeking people can cause us to die earlier such as teenagers who race one another on motorcycles. This may not be demerit of the past but demerit of the present moment for lacking circumspection and mindfulness.

However, in some cases we may be circumspect and careful and yet still die, like falling down while walking and breaking our head. Occurrences such as these are not caused by demerit but are just accidents or unforeseen circumstances beyond our control. Death can be the result of many possible causes. It can be due to bad *kamma*, carelessness, or unforeseen circumstances beyond our control. It is not important that we should know why, but it is enough to know in general that creating demerit can result in a shorter life-span. That does not necessarily mean that, by not creating demerit, our life will be long. It is still possible for our life to be short, for if this world is to be destroyed today, everyone will have to die. Isn't it like this? Suppose today is the last day of this world: All will die — people who created merit as well as those who created demerit. Death is something that has many possible causes.

Layman (MC): With regards to developing the loathsomeness (*asubha*) practice, should we just observe it as *asubha*? I have some doubts about this practice. Suppose we are to observe a person and see the intestine, rectum, etc, but I still have many doubts regarding the various aspects of it. If we see it just like that, is it real or not? Should we initially use our imagination before we can truly see it? I observed one lady and stared at her backside. My eyes got fixated, and I imagined her backside. No matter how long I stared at it, I still did not see an image but had a feeling that started from her backside and went further inside, including the rectum, faeces, and intestine. I do not know what to make of it.

Tan Ajahn: Well if it can ease our emotions and sexual urges, we can use it.

Layman (MC): So it is not necessary to see an image?

Tan Ajahn: It's not necessary; it depends on the individual. Some people are suited to practise seeing images and by doing so continuously the image will eventually be buried in their heart. In the past, there were no pictures so people had to see it at the cemetery. Use the images that we have seen at the cemetery to remind ourselves when we see someone with a beautiful face to reflect on what she will be like when she passes away. Furthermore, when we see a young lady we can also imagine her aging, with white hair, a bent spine, and wrinkled skin. Remind ourselves that in the future she will be like that.

Whatever techniques that can extinguish our emotions are acceptable. In general, sexual desire is aroused by just looking at the front side. Well! Why not look at the backside too? We only see and think about the front. Try thinking of her unattractive backside (buttocks)....and feet also. Only looking at the face but not the foot, not seeing what is inside (the body) is delusion. If we can remember some loathsome images, this will greatly help extinguish sexual desire. For this to be effective, we should train ourselves beforehand, just like memorizing the multiplication tables or ABC's in elementary school. If we do not practise until we memorize it, when the time comes to use it, we will be unable to do so. Practice is something vital and must be buried within the heart. When the time to extinguish sexual desire comes, this practice will come in handy. But there are times when our sexual desire is aroused, and no matter how hard we recollect, loathsomeness just doesn't come up. We cannot see it at all.

Layman (MC): Shouldn't we use memory and imagination to practise (*asubha*)?

Tan Ajahn: Memory is just like memorising the multiplication tables. Similar to chanting, we had to chant repeatedly, and eventually when we have memorised it it will "flow out" anytime.

Layman (MC): So there is no need to see an image; just the feeling is okay?

Tan Ajahn: Yes, whichever way is okay. However, in most cases, the image is seen with our eyes closed.

For instance, right now you think of your father, and you see something of your father, but it is not a vivid image. We still know how our father or mother looks, and it is similar with *asubha* practice as well. We need not see a vivid image like the way we see with our naked eyes. For internal eyes, it does not have to be an image. It can also be a memory that arouses various feelings to arise.

Layman (MC): Because sometimes those who listen to Tan Ajahn's teaching about the *asubha* practice are uncertain as to whether the image should be distinct or just a general idea and feeling.

Tan Ajahn: Both are possible. Sometimes while sitting in meditation we may see the image distinctly, just like watching a movie, or it can also happen in our dreams while asleep. It is possible and similar in both cases. In our waking state, we may or may not see these images. We may recollect a skeleton and see it there and then, right through the skin and flesh. If not that, we may also 'see' it through our recollection, not in the form of an image, but by reminding ourselves to "see a heap of bones right underneath the skin and flesh." The problem is we do not think about the things that we don't like, but instead think about those things that we like. Those things that we don't like, we ignore completely. This causes sexual desire to arise. However, if we reflect and think about things that we dislike, that are unattractive, sexual desire will cease.

Question M5: Currently, I am watching a TV series about ghosts. I like it very much. A person named Ah Dee can see and communicate with ghosts. Is it real?

Tan Ajahn: You should ask him; I'm not him... [Laughter] Does he speak the truth? I don't know. The Buddha said don't believe what people say 100%. Listen with the ears and leave it at the ears. Examine whether his claim can be verified and tested. If we cannot verify and test it, then don't believe it 100% because it may allow us to be cheated.

The Buddha himself said that we shouldn't merely believe but must prove and verify it. This teaching of the Buddha points out that we should not believe except when we can test and verify by ourselves. It is the same as receiving medicine from the doctor. Have faith in the doctor's good intention and integrity that this medicine can treat our illness. But we do not truly know if it works until we take the medicine as prescribed to verify it. We should believe in this manner. If we cannot verify it yet, then we should wait and see. [With regards to the TV program] Wait until we can see the ghost ourselves, then we can suppose that perhaps he can see it too. If he can see it, so can I. If I can see it, maybe he can too.

Layman (MC): If we can see the ghost but become deluded, is it possible we may lose that ability?

Tan Ajahn: Seeing things like that gives no benefit in eradicating the *kilesas*. That's just it, but it may lead us into delusion. This ability that we talk about is common people's knowledge and is outside the scope of Buddhism. By turning it into a profession, it can be used as a livelihood. By appearing on a TV program, we can get paid, can't we? This kind of special ability can be used as a livelihood, but it cannot be used to extinguish the *kilesas* and lead

us to the path and fruition (*magga* and *phala*) right up to *Nibbāna*. All these abilities are not helpful for those who want to seek deliverance from the round of perpetual death and rebirth.

Therefore, when we see such phenomena in meditation, do not take any interest. Otherwise, we may be fooled by the *kilesas* and be led away into a trap. Thus we end up not meditating, not investigating with wisdom, not seeing *asubha*, *anicca*, *dukkha*, and *anattā*. After only seeing a pretty and charming woman, a monk just disrobed, didn't he? An example of this happened not too long ago. This is definitely because of not contemplating loathsomeness (*asubha*). Had he been contemplating *asubha*, he would not have been deluded and lost his way. Enough for now.... the time is up. Come again next time.

Audience: *Sadhu!*



11

Asian University
students

July 31, 2013

Tan Ajahn: Hello, how are you? How many of you are here? 12 people? There were about 20 of you last year. What were you told about this class? Are you expecting anything?

Student: Yes, we are 12 people. We were told we could learn how to meditate.

Tan Ajahn: Have you done any meditation before? Do you know why we meditate?

Student: To find balance.

Tan Ajahn: It is to make you feel good. It is a different way of feeling good. We normally feel good by doing something or having something. But this is the opposite. We feel good by not doing anything, and it is better. Why is that so? Because you don't have to rely on anything to make you feel good. Normally we need something to make us feel good, right? We need to do something or be somewhere, see something, hear something, or eat

something in order to make us feel good. That kind of pleasant feeling is temporary and can also cause you to be depressed or stressed when you cannot get what you want. Then when you want to do something but cannot do it, you don't feel good. Instead of feeling good, you feel bad. We can always use this other way of feeling good because you don't have to rely on anything. You just need to rely on yourself.

What you need is the ability to concentrate. If you know how to concentrate your mind, focusing your mind on one particular object, not letting your mind think of other things, then your mind will feel good because your mind will be at ease and be peaceful. But this is not easy because we are not used to concentrating or focusing. Our minds are generally scattered and keep thinking about everything. Even while you are sitting here, you could be thinking about something else already. So if you cannot focus or concentrate your mind, your mind will not become peaceful. This is why we have to develop this ability to concentrate before we can meditate successfully. If you sit, in meditation without preparing yourself beforehand and without having previously developed concentration, you will not see any results because when you sit, your mind will be thinking about this and that, going here, and going there. Your mind will not come to rest; your mind will not be still. The goal of meditation is to calm your mind, to stop your mind from thinking. If your mind stops thinking, you can experience a different kind of good feeling that is much better than any other kind of good feeling that you have ever experienced before. But in order to achieve this, you must first develop the ability to concentrate.

This is something that requires a lot of effort, because it is something that you have to practise all the time. As soon as you wake up and you start to be aware of your surroundings, you have to start concentrating. Don't let your mind wander and think about everything, going here and there and everywhere. You should control your mind by concentrating or focusing on one object.

There are several objects you can use as your object of concentration. You can use a word, called a mantra. In Buddhism we use the name of the Buddha, reciting the name of the Buddha - *Buddho, Buddho*, mentally. As soon as we open our eyes, before we get up from the bed, we start reciting *Buddho, Buddho*. As we get up and walk to the bathroom, we continue reciting the word *Buddho, Buddho*. This is a way of developing your ability to concentrate, to restrain your mind from thinking here, there, and everywhere. The mind that is wandering and scattered does not bring peace, happiness, or pleasant feelings. But a mind that is still, stable, concentrated, and focused brings you peace and pleasant feelings. So, that is what you need to do if you want to meditate and achieve results. You first must develop your ability to concentrate by using an object to anchor your mind, focusing your mind on that object.

You can use other things, such as your body, if you don't like to recite a word. You can use your body and your bodily movement. You should watch every movement of your body from the time you open your eyes, get up from your bed, stand up, walk to the toilet, wash, bath, clean, brush your teeth, comb your hair, get dressed, have food, drink, and in whatever you do, you should always

focus your mind on your bodily movement. This is a way of controlling your thoughts and not allowing your thoughts to think about various things.

If you have something important to think about, then you can take your thoughts as the object of your concentration. For example, if you have to plan your day, you might think, “What day is today? What do I have to do today? Who do I have to meet?” You can think that way. While you are thinking, you should not think of other things; you should stand or sit still and use your thoughts as your point of focus. Try to do just one thing at a time. In this modern age, we are taught to do many things at a time because we think this is good, and we can achieve more by multi-tasking. But it is not good for the mind because it can cause a lot of restlessness, agitation, and negative feelings. So, if you want to have positive feelings, you have to reverse the process. Instead of multi-tasking, you should do one thing at a time. Your mind and body should be together at all times. Keep your mind with your body. Normally, you tend to do two things at the same time: The body might be eating, while the mind is thinking about something else. The mind isn’t stable this way because the mind has to keep going back and forth between what you’re doing and what you’re thinking. Then you cannot help yourself when your mind thinks in a way that makes you feel bad or sad because you are not used to focusing your mind to stop it from thinking. Our good and bad feelings usually arise from our own thinking. When we think about something we like, we feel good. When we think about something we don’t like or enjoy, we feel bad. So, if you can control your thoughts, you can control your feelings.

Your mind is at its best when it doesn't think of anything and is still. It gives you the best kinds of feelings: peace, easiness, light-heartedness, and contentment. So you should try to bring the mind to peace and stop it from thinking. The mind has two main functions and can do two major things: it can think and also know at the same time, or it can just know without having to think, like when it sees things and just knows that you are seeing those particular things without having to think about them. But normally, we keep thinking about everything that we see or hear. When we see or hear something, we think about it, causing us to have feelings about that sight or sound. When the things we see or hear give us unpleasant feelings, we try to get rid of those things. However, sometimes we cannot get rid of them. That is the wrong way of getting rid of unpleasant feelings. The right way of getting rid of them is not to get rid of the things that you don't like, but to stop thinking about the things that you don't like. When you can stop thinking, those things won't mean anything to you. They cannot affect you. They cannot cause bad feelings. This is because bad feelings don't arise from the things that you see, but rather from the thoughts that you have about the things that you see. Two people can have the same thing but have different feelings about it. One person can look at that thing and feel good, while the other looks and feels bad. It is the same object, but the feelings generated by two different persons are opposite. One person looks at it positively and feels good, while another person looks at it negatively and feels bad. So, it is your thoughts about the things that you see or hear that make you feel good or feel bad. If you cannot train your mind to look at things

and think positively, the least you should do is to stop thinking about the things you see. Just see without thinking and without judging them as good or bad. If you evaluate them, you will cause either good or bad feelings. If you say that something is good, then you will have good feelings. If you say it is bad, then you will have bad feelings.

So, there are two steps in meditation. The first step is to stop our mind from thinking by controlling our thoughts. Then, once we have achieved that, the second step is to teach our mind to think positively. Once we can think positively, everything that we see or hear will give us pleasant feelings. But before you can teach your mind to think positively, you must first stop your mind from thinking. We have to be able to control our thoughts. Our thoughts are like a car: if you're driving and want to make a U-turn, you first have to stop your car before you can make the turn. If you have gone in the wrong direction but want to go to the right direction, you must first stop your car, turn it around, and then direct it in the direction you want to go. Most of the time our thoughts go the wrong way. We think in ways that create unpleasant feelings. So, first you must stop these thoughts by focusing your mind on one particular object, like a mantra, such as the name of the Buddha, or your body, watching every movement of your body without letting your mind think about other things. Once you can control your mind like this, when you sit in meditation your mind will be at rest, still, at ease, happy, and contented. It won't need or want anything, and so you can then teach your mind to think positively and correctly about the things you come into contact with.

All the things that come into contact with the mind have to come through the body and its five sense entrances. The entrances for the mind to know things are our eyes, ears, nose, tongue, and body. This is how the mind gets to know things. It needs the body to receive information. What we see through the eyes, we call sights or images. What we hear through the ears, we call sounds. Sights, sounds, smells, tastes, and tactile objects — these things in and of themselves have no value. They are neither good nor bad; it is the mind who gives them value. If we like something, we give it a positive value. If we don't like something, we give it a negative value. Giving things value then creates good and bad feelings. So, what we want to do is to teach the mind not to give them any value; just see things for what they are. The pictures you see are just pictures. The sounds you hear are not good or bad, but the mind has been programmed to segregate and discriminate due to our habits. The mind didn't arise with the body. Our mind came a long time ago before our body. The body is just a temporary possession of the mind. The mind uses the body as a medium or instrument to collect the senses, like sight, sound, smell, and taste, and then find good and bad feelings through these sights, sounds, smells, tastes, and tactile objects. This is the way we live. We go between good and bad feelings because we see and hear different things. When we see things we like, we have pleasant feelings. When we see things that we don't like, we have unpleasant feelings. But we can train the mind to become neutral, without giving value to the senses. Just see; just observe; just be aware. And when we can train the mind to do that, then the mind will remain

calm, peaceful, at ease, contented, and have pleasant feelings all the time, regardless of what the mind sees or hears.

So the ultimate goal of Buddhist meditation is to train the mind to be neutral and to see things as they are, not how we think they are. Right now, when we see things we generate thoughts about the things that we see. We say they are good, bad, or neither good nor bad. Whatever we decide is good, we want to have and keep. We want it to stay with us for a long time. Whatever is bad, we want to get rid of and want to go away as soon as possible. But things don't go according to our desires. We cannot tell things to go or stay. They come and go due to causes. When there are causes for them to come, they will come. When the causes that caused them to go, they go too. Everything in this world is like this. They come and go, and you cannot always control them. You cannot always get them to do what you want. So the problem is not with the things that we come to contact with; the problem is with our mind that does not know the way to properly deal with the things that we see and hear, and that does not know the way to remain contented and maintain good feelings. So, what we have to do to make the mind have pleasant feelings all the time is to teach the mind to be neutral, to stop giving value to things that we see or hear. And if we meditate a lot, the mind will get into that neutral position. The more we meditate, the stronger the neutral position will become, so that eventually when we see things we will see them in a neutral way, as neither good nor bad. There will be no like or dislike. We can take things as they are. They can come, or they can go, and it doesn't

matter because the mind doesn't need anything. Once the mind becomes neutral, the mind is complete in and of itself. The mind has everything that it needs: just peace and contentment. And you can only do this by meditating, stopping your mind from thinking, controlling your thoughts, and not giving things that you see, hear, or touch any value.

So, basically what you have to do first is to develop your ability to focus or concentrate. This is something you have to do all day long, from the time you get up to the time you go to sleep. And when you have time to sit down and meditate, you need to find a quiet environment, such as a place like this where there are no sounds, sights, smells, or tastes to distract you when you sit down and focus your mind on a particular object. If you use your body as your object of concentration as you go about your daily activities, when you sit you have to switch your focus to your breathing. This is because when you sit down, your body becomes still. It is not moving, so you switch your object of concentration to your breathing by focusing your attention at the tip of the nose where the air makes contact as it comes in and goes out. Just focus on that point and do not allow your mind to think about other things. If you can persist in focusing on your breathing, your mind will eventually drop into calm. It will become still, peaceful, at ease, happy, and contented. Then once you are in that state, you want to stay there as long as possible. Normally, when you first do it, the mind won't remain in that state for long because your ability to concentrate is not strong enough. It may just stay for a few seconds, or maybe a minute or so, after which it will withdraw. But once you have

experienced this state of mind, you will become attracted to it.

You will know that this is the real kind of happiness that doesn't require other things, other people, or even your own body. Even when your body becomes sick, you still can have this kind of pleasant feeling. You can still meditate. For instance, when you get sick and have to remain in bed, you can still meditate and enjoy good feelings. This is because the mind and the body are two separate entities. When the body gets sick, it doesn't mean that the mind has to get sick with the body. They are like two different people, but we normally tend to couple the mind to the body. When the body feels bad, the mind feels bad along with the body. The reason why the mind feels bad is because the mind cannot use the body to make itself feel good. But if you can meditate and calm your mind to have good feelings, then you don't need the body. Whatever happens to the body becomes irrelevant. The body can be strong or weak, it can get sick or die, and the mind won't be bothered. It doesn't matter to the mind. The mind doesn't die with the body; the mind is eternal. The body is temporary. That is why you keep changing the body all the time without knowing it. The body that we have now is just another body; just like the bodies that we have had before in our previous lives. When we lose this body, we go find a new one. It is like changing your clothes: When you can no longer use a set of clothes, you throw it away, and get a new one to put on your body. The mind is also like that. The mind has been changing the body for a long time, many years, countless of years, because the mind has no beginning and has no end.

This is something that you will only find out if you come into contact with the teachings of the Buddha. It was the Buddha who first achieved the ability to know the nature of his mind, and to know how to make his mind happy and feel good without having to rely on the body. Once he achieved this, he no longer had to get a new body. Since his last body dissolved, he doesn't take up a new body anymore. His mind can continue being happy and feeling good without needing a body as a medium. Having a body has side effects: It might bring you good feelings, but it might also bring you bad ones. The body has to get old, it has to get sick, and it has to die. When the body does this, it can make the mind very unhappy. But if you don't need the body to make you happy, to make you feel good, then whatever happens to the body will not affect your mind. The body can get old, get sick, and die, and you can still feel happy, still feel good. So, this is what we do here to train the mind so, it can be independent. We do not have to rely on the body or other things to make it happy. We all can do it; whether you are male or female, whether you are a monk or not, you can do it. What you need is the time to do it. The problem is lay people don't have the time to meditate because they have to do other things instead. They have to work to make a living. Once they have enough money they want to have good feelings by spending money, so they never have time to meditate. When you don't meditate, your mind needs to rely on other things to make you happy. But the things that you rely on are not permanent; they are not stable. They keep changing. They come and go. When they leave, you have problems because you have to look for new things to replace them.

And you have to keep replacing them all the time because everything is temporary. So, that is not a good way to have pleasant feelings because you cannot have them all the time that way. When you lose things, instead of having pleasant feelings, you have unpleasant feelings. When you have to look for new things to make you feel good, that also makes you feel bad because it is stressful to acquire things, to get things. It is like working. Nobody likes to work, right? Because when you work you normally don't feel good. But you know you have to work because you want to get money so that you can use money to make you feel good. But by meditating, you don't need to work; you don't need to have money. Once you know how to meditate, you can feel good all the time.

That is why people become monks. They can meditate all the time. As monks, we are well supported by lay people. They think this is a noble way of seeking good feelings, and they are willing to support. People are willing to support monks because monks live in a way that doesn't hurt other people. Monks set a good example showing how we can live together in peace without causing any injury or harm to others. As monks, we maintain the precepts like abstaining from killing, stealing, sexual activity, lying, and taking alcohol or drugs. When lay people see monks behaving like this, the monks become their role models, and so they support the monks. Therefore, the monks don't have to make a living; they don't have to work. All we have to do is take our begging bowl in the morning, go into a village, and people will put food into our bowl. Once we have the food, we come back and share the food among all the monks. We only eat once a day. Simplicity. Monks live a simple life and

eat just once a day, putting all the food that we get into our one bowl. We use the bowl as the dish to eat our food, so we don't have to use a lot of dishes, spoons, and things like that. We can eat with our hands — we don't need to have spoons — and we only eat once a day. The place we stay normally is in the forest, just like this. We don't need electricity; we don't need running water. We can collect water from the rain and use it. This is the way the Buddha used to live during his time. Live simply and rely as little as possible on other things. And then we can use all our time to meditate, to control our thoughts, and to teach our minds to think in a positive way.

Once you can stop your mind, you will become peaceful, at ease, and contented. The next step is to teach your mind to stop seeking and acquiring things. Everything that you acquire can become a burden on your mind. Once you acquire something, you have to protect it and look after it. The things that you have will one day leave you, or you will leave them. This is because everything is temporary, not permanent. Your body is temporary. For instance, you can make millions of dollars, becoming a millionaire, but one day your body will die. The money will go to someone else. Your mind cannot take anything with it when you die. But if you don't have anything when you die, you don't lose anything, and you don't feel bad when you leave. When you leave, you don't have to worry about your possessions and wealth, because you don't have to have them. If you can meditate, your mind will always be happy and contented. It doesn't need to have anything. You have to teach your mind that everything is temporary in order to protect your mind from being deluded. We generally don't want to think about the

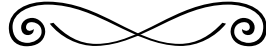
temporary nature of things. We keep thinking that everything will be permanent, everything will be long lasting. But everything, in truth, is temporary. There is no such thing as living together happily forever. You get married and maybe you are happy for two weeks or six months, but after that you might want to separate already. This is the nature of things, the nature of the body, and the nature of the mind. Everything is changing all the time. So you have to be aware of the nature of things: They are temporary. They are constantly changing, and you cannot control them. If you know this nature of things, you don't want to have them. Because when you have them, they can only cause you pain, suffering, and sadness. But if you know how to meditate, keeping your mind calm and contented, you can stop your mind from seeking out and acquiring things. You can live without having to have anything. So, this is basically what we monks do and what we teach people if they want to have good feelings, without having to rely on anything. They can create good feelings for themselves by focusing the mind on one object and preventing it from thinking. Once you can do that, you can always generate good feelings. And when the mind wants something, you have to tell the mind not to get it because the happiness is only temporary. If you want to drink a beer, just tell the mind that this is only temporary happiness and will become an addiction. Once you are addicted, you have to keep drinking all the time. And when you want to drink but cannot have it, you become sad, and have bad feelings. But if you don't drink, then you don't have to drink, and you don't have to chase after it. So, you don't have any bad feelings when you cannot get what you want.

This is basically what we do as monks. We develop our skill in concentrating. We need to live alone, because when we live alone we don't have distractions. When we live with people and have to do things, then those people and things will distract our mind away from concentration. So, as monks, we are encouraged to live alone in the forest. We only go out to the village once a day to collect food. After we finish our meal, we go into our dwelling, our *kuṭī*, our house in the forest, and stay there, sitting and walking, and doing whatever routine that we have to do. We have routines, like we have to sweep the leaves off the path, and clean the buildings. That is all we have to do, while at the same time we continue to focus our mind on the activities we are doing, and prevent it from thinking about other things. Because if we cannot control our mind from thinking, when we start thinking about our friends, our family, and all the activities that we used to do, our mind will become agitated. The mind will want to go back and do those activities, and when it cannot do what it wants to do, it will experience negative emotions. That is why some monks cannot remain as monks for long because they cannot control their thoughts. When they start thinking about their family, their friends, and all the fun they used to have, they get the desire to go back. When they cannot stop their thinking, they will feel unhappy staying alone in the forest, and so they have to give up and go back and live as a lay person. They go back and do the activities that they used to do. Then they go back and meet their old bad feelings, because they cannot always get good feelings. Sometimes you get good feelings; sometimes you get bad feelings. When you get bad feelings, sometimes you feel like you want to kill yourself because

you cannot stand it. That is the problem. But if we can persist in controlling our thoughts and keep our minds calm and contented, then we can remain as monks and continue to generate pleasant feelings all the time. It is a personal struggle. You have to fight against your desire. Your desire is to go back to your normal way of life, to rely on other things to make you feel good. As monks, we are supposed to learn ways of generating good feelings, not by relying on other things, but by relying on our ability to concentrate the mind on one object, by relying on the ability to control our thoughts, and by relying on our ability to think positively. If we can do this, we can live as monks forever.

So, do you have anything you would like to ask?

Questions & Answers



Student (Female, F): How long have you been a monk?

Tan Ajahn: I have been a monk since 1975. Close to 40 years, much older than you are, long before you were born. You were somewhere else.

Student (F): There are people who are not successful when they decide to go back to a normal life after becoming a monk. Can they come back again?

Tan Ajahn: Yes, it depends on how they think. Sometimes, they think they are not yet strong enough. Maybe, someday they will come back again, maybe when they have really bad feelings then they might come back. We have had people who became monks, disrobed, and after a few years they came back again. And sometimes, they stay for a few more years before they go back again. So, it depends on one's ability to control the mind.

Student (F): Can woman also become the female equivalent of a monk, like a nun?

Tan Ajahn: The tradition of female ordination has been disconnected. There are several traditions now in

Buddhism. In our tradition, we used to have women as female monks or *bhikkhunīs*, or what we call nuns; but once there were no longer women who were interested in ordaining, that tradition was automatically terminated, and it cannot be reconnected. This is according to the Buddha's commands. For a woman, to live like a monk can be quite difficult because monks live in the wild, in the forest. And for a woman, to live in the wild alone can be dangerous. Because women are objects of sexual desire, they could be harmed by people, by men who want to have sex with them. If they live together, they have distractions, and cannot achieve the goal easily. In order to achieve the goal easily, you need to live alone, eliminating all distractions to aid concentration. So, the Buddha wasn't very happy when women asked for ordination at first, but he reluctantly allowed them to be ordained, but under several conditions. One of the conditions was that once the lineage of female ordination died out, it could not be restarted. It is the same with male ordination: if there are no longer monks, if there are no longer people interested in becoming monks, then eventually the lineage will be terminated. He also set other conditions for women, such as when they were ordained, they had to rely on the male monks as their teachers. They could not live alone. They had to live in a monastery where there were male monks to supervise them, because males could at least prevent other people from coming and attacking women in the monastery.

Student (Male, M): What is the difference between the coloured robe and other robes such as the white one?

Tan Ajahn: Since women can no longer take full ordination as *bhikkunīs*, they become what we call *Mae Chee* (white-robe nuns), who are similar to monks but instead of observing the rules of conduct, they only observe the major rules. Any fully ordained practitioner, whether male or female, must follow the major rules of conduct along with the minor rules of conduct. The minor rules of conduct are to keep us well behaved and to live together in a harmonious manner. But white-robe nuns only keep the major rules, which are the ten precepts. They don't have to keep other minor rules. According to our tradition, they live in the monastery with the monks, but in a separate section, and rely on the monks as their teacher, which is similar to being ordained as a female monk or *bhikkunī*, except that it is not exactly the same way as the Buddha prescribed.

Student (F): Do you think it is possible to quiet the mind without living a monk's life? And do you always have to be alone?

Tan Ajahn: Yes, if you can live alone and have the time to control your thoughts. Because if you have other people or other things to take care of, your mind cannot become peaceful. Besides living alone, you also have to give up all entertainment, like watching television and listening to music because these are all distractions. You must have nothing at all, just yourself — alone. You cannot sit in meditation in a bar, because the distractions are too strong. You need a quiet environment like this. But if you have a room, alone by yourself, and nothing can distract your concentration, then it is okay; you can meditate.

Student (F): Do you think it is possible to have a quiet mind when living a normal (lay) life?

Tan Ajahn: Practically, it is not possible. If you live as a lay person, you only meditate as a past time, like a hobby. You do it when you have spare time. Instead of watching television, you sit in meditation, which takes a lot more will power, because you normally are more attracted to watching television than sitting in meditation. But if you have the understanding that meditating is better for you than watching television, or going to a party, or going to a movie, or going shopping, then you might be able to meditate more. You have the same amount of time. Each day you have 24 hours, right? It just depends on how you use this time. You can use the time for entertainment, or you can use it for meditation — but not for both. You can use it half for entertainment and half for meditation, but these two activities generally go in opposite directions. So you will be seesawing back and forth. When you meditate, you want to stop your mind. When you go for entertainment, you use your mind. Like driving: When you have entertainment, you are increasing the speed of your car, whereas when you meditate you are applying the brakes, trying to stop your mind. So, they go in opposite directions; you probably won't get anything, either way.

Student (M): Why do monks cut their hair?

Tan Ajahn: I guess it is a way to live simply. You don't have to worry about combing it, shampooing it, or things like that. Secondly, the Buddha wants us to abandon our attachment to the body, to the beauty of the

body. We use the body as the basis of our personality, but it is not, because the body changes, and eventually becomes old, sick, and ugly. We had better get used to it being ugly now, so we don't have to worry about it later on.

Student (F): I saw monks go out in the morning with their begging bowls and saying something to people. Are they allowed to do that?

Tan Ajahn: Monks are allowed to go out to collect food in the morning. They give blessings after people give them food. They give a brief chant, a blessing. Normally we don't have to give a blessing; we just collect the food, and we keep on walking until we finish with our route, and then we come back to the monastery.

Student (M): I would like to comment on the Buddha's teaching about our everyday life. I have considered that both the good things and the bad things come as a package in our lives. These are the things that give meaning to life. If we try our best to meditate, to free ourselves from all these things, then we will get rid all of these good things and bad things together.

Tan Ajahn: That is right, because what you are attached to is an illusion, but you don't know that. Everything that we do here is an illusion; it is a dream, but we think it is real. The Buddha is an awakened person, awakened from his dreams, awakened from his illusions. Everything that we do here — what we are — is a dream, because one day all of what we are will disappear. So, it is like we are living in a dream. By immersing ourselves

in this dream, we become sad or happy. When things go right we become happy, and when things go wrong we become sad. But when we know that it is just a dream, we don't have to be happy or sad.

Student (M): Even though it is a good dream?

Tan Ajahn: Yes, because it is just temporary. It happens, and then it disappears. No matter how good a dream is or how good the feeling is, it is only temporary, and it will eventually be replaced by a bad feeling. Your mind will feel bad when it cannot maintain the good feeling. But if the mind can detach itself, let go, and just be an observer, it will know that it is just a dream. Then the mind won't have good or bad feelings; it will have peaceful feelings, which are another form of good feelings. They are better than the good and bad feelings that we get from the things that we see or hear. This is what we want: that different kind of good feelings, the good feelings that we have without needing all these things that we have now, because everything that we have now is only temporary. Our life is temporary. Every activity that we do here is only temporary. Everything will disappear. Look at the people in history: those people who came and left, we are just like them. We come, and we will go like them. So, life is an illusion; it is not real, but we don't have the wisdom to realise this. We need someone like a Buddha. The name of the Buddha means an Awakened One. He is awakened from the dream. We are not awakened; we are still in the dream. We are immersed in these dreams.

Student (M): When we are not a monk, how should we live our life?

Tan Ajahn: Be easy-going. Take things as they come, good or bad. Accept them as they come. Don't be attached to the good or the bad. Just know that they are only temporary. Be ready to leave everything behind, and be ready to let everything leave you — then you won't feel bad. The reason why we feel bad is because we want things as we want them to be. But we cannot manage them, we cannot control them, because everything comes and goes. This is the fact that we don't want to accept. So, we have to reprogram our minds to look at everything as temporary. Everything comes and goes. So, don't expect too much of anything. Just enjoy things when they are here. Once they are gone, good bye then. But you cannot do this because this life is like being addicted to drugs. Once you have it, you are going to crave it all the time.

Student (M): How many monks live here?

Tan Ajahn: We have about ten monks up here. Their huts are scattered and separated from one another in the forest to create the illusion of being alone, of not seeing each other. We only come together when we have to sweep the path and when we have afternoon drinks. Monks are allowed to have afternoon drinks like tea, coffee, or refreshments, and we have one meal a day in the morning, which is all we have. The rest of the time, if we are thirsty, we just drink water. If we are hungry, we just have to wait for the next day. But you won't be hungry if you meditate. Most of your hunger comes from your mind, not from your body. Your body has too much food already, enough food to last you another week. We can go without food for another week. Your body won't die, I can guarantee you. It is your mind that keeps

grasping for food. But when you meditate, this desire for food will disappear. When your mind becomes calm and peaceful, it is contented. It doesn't have desire for any food, any entertainment, or anything. It is complete in itself, fully satisfied. The only way to satisfy your mind is to calm your mind. Other ways will never satisfy your mind. You can have ten million dollars, and you still won't be satisfied. You can have ten husbands or wives, and you still won't be satisfied. Look at the Hollywood movie stars who keep changing their wives or husbands because they are never satisfied, because it is not the real, true way to make yourself satisfied. The only way to be satisfied is to calm your mind, to stop your mind from thinking.

Student (M): In Europe or the USA, there are different branches of Buddhism. Are they all the same?

Tan Ajahn: Yes, they are the same. It is just a matter of interpreting the Buddha's teachings. They branched off usually due to some of the rules governing the monastic life. Some monks said they should not keep one rule, so they decided to omit it, and then they had to set up a new tradition. We have two major traditions left after the Buddha's death. One group of monks went up to the north, to Tibet, China, and Japan, and they call themselves *Mahāyāna*. *Mahā* means big or great. *Yanā* means vehicle. They call themselves the big vehicle. While the other tradition came down to the south, to Sri Lanka, Burma, and Thailand and is called the smaller vehicle. The difference is that *Mahāyāna* stresses developing the Buddha's qualities, while the smaller vehicle stresses the disciple's qualities and achieving enlightenment as a disciple, not as a Buddha.

There are two different ways of becoming enlightened. Becoming enlightened by becoming a Buddha means that you have no teacher. You have to rely on your own ability to see the truth, to see that you are living in a dream. If you can do this by yourself, you call yourself a Buddha. But once a Buddha has arisen in the world, and he teaches you the way to see things, you may use his teaching to develop the ability to see; then you become a Noble Disciple. This is the second way of becoming enlightened. So, the great vehicle teaches people to become a Buddha by themselves, so they don't rely too much on the Buddha's teachings now. While in the smaller vehicle, we rely on the Buddha's teachings as our primary source of information. So, we have to be very strict with every word of his teaching. We have tried to preserve them since the time that he was alive up until now. But we have no conflict with each other. In Buddhism, we let things be. If you want to be that way, it is okay, no problem. You go your way, we go our way. The test of our way is the results that we achieve. You can be enlightened here and now, or you can wait another 500 million years before you can become a Buddha, because that is how long it takes to become a Buddha. But you can become a Noble Disciple within 7 years if you follow the teachings of the Buddha. And once you become enlightened it is the same, whether you are a Buddha or a Noble Disciple, you achieve the same result. It is like studying on your own or going to college. You go to college for four years, and then you get your degree, right? If you study by yourself, it may take ten years, or twenty years, but eventually you will also get your degree. You just teach yourself.

So do you want to try to meditate for five or ten minutes? Do you know how to sit cross-legged? If you don't know, just sit in any posture that is comfortable. Keep your back straight and don't worry about your body once you start meditating. The reason why you have to sit straight is because it will prevent you from falling asleep. If you slouch, you can go to sleep very easily. When you sit, try to concentrate on your breathing, and try to prevent your mind from thinking about other things. Just watch your breathing, in and out, at the tip of the nose. Close your eyes and keep your focus on that point, and you will experience some calm. Maybe not that much...

[Ten minutes is up.] This is just a sample. If you enjoy it, you should try to do it more. When you are alone in your room, when you have nothing else to do, try to meditate instead. You will find another way of having good feelings without needing anything or anybody to make you feel good. Is there anything else that you want to know?

If you have nothing else, then this will be the end of our meeting. Before we go, I would like to show you how to pay respect to the Buddha. It is a tradition that when we come and go, we give respect to our teacher, the Buddha. [All pay respect three times].

Tan Ajahn: The reason why we pay respect three times is to pay respect to the Buddha, to his teachings, and to his Noble Disciples, who act as teachers after the Buddha has passed away. It is the Noble Disciples who continue the teaching of the Buddha. I hope you enjoy your time here.



12

Laypeople from Malaysia

August 10, 2013

My Dhamma talks are usually about looking after or taking care of things that you can take care of and abandoning things that you cannot look after or take care of. If you look after things that you cannot look after, you will be disappointed, sad, and sorry. If you look after things that you can look after, then you will be fulfilled, satisfied, and happy. There are things that you can look after, and there are things that you cannot look after. The things that you cannot look after, or keep as long as you want, are your wealth, your status, your fame, and your happiness that you acquire through your body. These things are all temporary. They do not last forever. You can have wealth; you can also lose wealth. You can have status; you can also lose status. You can have fame, and you also can lose fame. You can have happiness through your body; you can also lose it. The Buddha said you should not go after these things or look after them because they are not permanent. They are not stable; they are all subject to change. They come and go, arise and cease. If you go after these things, when they disappear, you will become very unhappy, very sad.

But there is one thing that you can look after and keep with you all the time and that is your mind, your heart, or your spirit. These are all the same thing. I refer to the thing that is different from your body. We use different terminology to refer to this non-physical aspect of ourselves. Sometimes we call it the mind, sometimes the heart. Some religions call it the spirit or the soul. This is the same thing as far as I am concerned. It is the thing that we belong to. We come from this thing. This thing, the mind, will always be with us, all the time, regardless of whatever may happen to all the other things. Your wealth can come and go. Your status can come and go. Your fame can come and go. Your happiness through your body can come and go, but your spirit never comes and goes. Your mind never comes and goes; it is always here with you. So, if you look after your mind and make it happy, then you always have this happiness with you all the time. It does not leave you. It stays with the mind all the time. The problem is that we are not looking after the mind. We are not generating or creating happiness of the mind because we go after other kinds of happiness. We go after wealth, status, fame, and happiness through our indulgence of our contact with sights, sounds, smells, tastes, and tactile objects. We've never had the real kind of happiness because we've never generated it, never created it. We go after the false kind of happiness, the temporary kind of happiness. We do not go after the permanent kind of happiness.

Only the Buddha had the wisdom to see this truth, to realize the real and false kinds of happiness. When he realized it, he abandoned the false kind of happiness and went after the real kind of happiness. He left all his wealth,

fame, and status behind, as well as the happiness that he could have through the body. He gave it all up. He became a monk and went into seclusion, lived in the forest away from all the false kinds of happiness and tried to create, develop, and maintain the real kind of happiness. The real kind of happiness arises within the mind that is peaceful and calm, the mind that is free from delusion, the mind that is free from greed, hatred, and delusion, the mind that is free from desire. The three kinds of desire that agitate the mind are: sensual desire, the desire for sights, sounds, smells, tastes, and tactile objects, and the desire to be and desire not to be, such as the desire to be rich, to be famous, or to have high status. These are the desires that we have to get rid of, eliminate, and abandon, in order to bring the mind to peace and calm, to be happy. This is the work that we must do if we want to have the real kind of happiness. We must abandon our false kinds of happiness. We should stop looking for wealth, status, fame, and happiness through our body. We should go look after the real kind of happiness.

In order to find this real kind of happiness, we have to live alone in seclusion. Because when we live together, we tend to interact, and our interactions generally can create a lot of friction. When we have friction, we do not have peace of mind — we have bad feelings. We have to force ourselves to live in seclusion, to be far away from everything. Everything that we live with is all false; it cannot give us the real kind of happiness. Such as living with people — We might feel happy, but at the same time, we will also feel bad or sad when people change or when people disappear from us. When we have to go live alone,

it is very difficult because we are doing something against our desire that we have been accustomed to. So, when we go live alone, we tend not to be able to do it for long. We might be able to stay in the monastery for three days, five days, or seven days. After that, we feel like we want to go back to our fame, our wealth, our status, and to our old kind of happiness. We could not establish or develop the real kind of happiness yet, but if somehow we can develop this real kind of happiness even just for a few minutes or seconds, it can change our attitude towards life. We will see the real kind of happiness, and we will know that it is much better than the false kind of happiness.

This real kind of happiness does not have to rely on things to make us happy. We do not have to have wealth; we do not have to have status. We do not have to have fame, and we do not even have to have the body to make us happy. This is the pure kind of happiness, the happiness of the mind. We know that this will be the kind of happiness that will be with us all the time.

Our mind does not disappear like all the other things. Our mind is permanent. The problem with our mind right now is that it does not have the permanent kind of happiness. It keeps generating the wrong kind of happiness by relying on wealth, status, fame, and the body to create this kind of happiness. When we lose wealth, when we lose status, when we lose the fame, when we lose the body, then we cannot generate this kind of happiness. This will then generate unhappiness. Even just thinking about losing them can already generate bad feelings and sadness. When you think of losing someone you love, how do you feel? But can you stop this from

happening? Can you stop losing the one you love? You cannot. It is the nature of things; they are beyond our control. So, if we are smart enough, we should abandon them instead of looking after them or going after them. We should go after the real kind of happiness, the kind of happiness that never leaves us, the kind of happiness that will be with us all the time, the happiness that arises from peace of mind, from the mind that is peaceful and calm. In order to have this peaceful mind, we have to go and live alone, away from all the things that we used to have or used to like. If we live near what we used to have and used to like, we will be sucked back to them. That is why, in the monastery, we live in an environment that does not have this false kind of happiness. In the forest monastery, a real, strict forest monastery, they will try to prevent all these things from coming to the monastery, prevent all the kinds of happiness that we are accustomed to, like sights, sounds, smells, tastes, and tactile objects, wealth, fame, and status. These are things that will be obstacles to the development of our peace of mind. So, we must not have them around or be near them, which is why the Buddha had to leave the palace and live in the forest where he could develop peace of mind. The way to develop peace of mind is be able to control your thoughts because your thoughts make your mind agitated, preventing your mind from becoming calm and peaceful. You have to find a method, a way of stopping your thoughts.

The Buddha said that there are several kinds of methods that we can use to stop our thinking, or to prevent our thoughts from thinking of things that will stir up the mind by creating various kinds of desires. If we can

prevent the mind from thinking about things that can create desire, the mind will not become agitated, and the mind will become peaceful and calm. The Buddha said that you have to focus your mind, or your thoughts, on one particular object, and not to let it go thinking about other things. This object you choose to use as your object of focus or concentration can vary depending on the various situations you are in. Normally, you can focus your mind on your body, like watching every movement of your body. Whatever your body is doing, you must couple your mind to the body. Only be aware of your body and its activities, and don't think about other things. This is one way of preventing your mind from going to think about other things. Like when you get up, when you open your eyes, you must tell yourself that I have to keep watching the body when it gets up from the bed, stands up, and starts doing whatever it has to do, such as going to the bathroom, washing, cleaning, dressing, and doing anything that the body is supposed to do. Your mind should be watching the body at all times and not be thinking about other things. Do not think about what happened yesterday. Do not think about what will happen tomorrow. If you still have to think because you have some obligation or duty, you should just think about those things. Like when you get up, you can think of what you have to do today. Once you know what you have to do, then you prepare yourself to do what you have to do. While you prepare yourself, you should stop thinking about the things that you have to do because it is not yet the time for you to do it. Right now the time is for you to prepare yourself, like taking a shower, brushing your teeth, getting dressed, or having breakfast.

Whatever you do, keep your mind with that activity. This is one method that prevents your mind from thinking about all kinds of things unnecessarily. We tend to do one thing and think about other things at the same time. We can be washing or taking a shower and thinking about yesterday, last night, or tomorrow. If you do this, it means you are not controlling your thoughts; you are not stopping your thoughts. You should stop your thoughts because this kind of thinking does not bring any peace of mind. You should just be watchful or observe, be aware of what you are doing, but you should not think. Just be aware; just know what you are doing.

If you cannot control your thoughts while you are doing these activities, there is another way. You can use mental recitation by thinking of a word, like the name of the Buddha. You can mentally recite the name of the Buddha. In Thailand we call the Buddha, *Buddho*. We can recite *Buddho, Buddho*, starting from the time we get up. When we wake up we start reciting *Buddho, Buddho*. While we go prepare ourselves for whatever activity we have to do that day, like taking a shower, we just keep reciting, *Buddho, Buddho*. Brushing your teeth, you recite *Buddho, Buddho*. Eating, you recite *Buddho, Buddho*. If you live with other people, do not talk. When you talk, you start thinking about everything else. Your mind will not be focused. When your mind cannot be focused, your mind cannot become peaceful or still.

This is only preparation for calming your mind. In order to make your mind fully calm or peaceful or still, you have to sit down and not do any activity. You have to sit down and close your eyes. You can sit anywhere

you like; you can sit crossed-legged on the floor, but if you cannot do it, you can sit on a chair. If you want to sit for a long time, sitting cross-legged on the floor will be the most ideal position. When you first start, if you cannot do this, then you might have to find a position in which you can sit comfortably, and then focus your mind on one particular object. When you sit you can either continue with your mental recitation, *Buddho, Buddho*, or you can switch and use your breathing as your object of observation. You can keep observing your breathing. When you are breathing in, just be aware that you are breathing in. When you breathe out, just be aware that you are breathing out. Do not force your breathing. Let your breathing be natural, just like before you sat down. Before you sat, you never paid attention to your breathing. You left your breathing alone. When you sit and observe your breathing, you should leave it alone, just the way you did before. Just be aware. You want to use your breathing as a point of focus to prevent your mind from going and thinking about other things. If your concentration is not strong enough, and you cannot watch your breathing and stop your thoughts from thinking about other things, then you might have to use the mental recitation instead. The mental recitation can vary. If you do not like the word *Buddho*, you can use the word *Dhammo*. If you do not like the word *Dhammo*, you can use the word *Saṅgho*. You can use all three of them, *Buddho, Dhammo, Saṅgho*. Some people use *Buddhaṃ saraṇaṃ gacchāmi, Dhammaṃ saraṇaṃ gacchāmi, or Saṅghaṃ saraṇaṃ gacchāmi*. These can also be used. There are many different methods. You just have to find one that you like that can keep you concentrated and prevent you from thinking about other things.

If you can persist in your concentration, your mind will become calm. Sometimes, it can become calm very quickly, like falling into a well and becoming peaceful and still. Sometimes, it will become calm and peaceful gradually, slowly, step by step. It doesn't matter. It is not your problem to worry about how the mind becomes calm. Your responsibility is to keep on concentrating on one object, preventing your mind from thinking about other things. Keep focusing; keep concentrating on one object, until the mind becomes peaceful and calm, and when that happens, you can stop your concentration. You do not have to focus your attention anymore because your mind has become peaceful, and it is not thinking about anything. If you arrive at that condition, you should just remain in that state for as long as possible. Do not force your mind to go and think about something else. If you do that, you will lose your calm, peace, and happiness that arise from this state of mind. You want to keep the mind peaceful, calm, and still for as long as possible. When your mind has rested long enough and it wants to get out of this state, it will stop and start to think. If you want to go back to that state, you have to start focusing your mind again. Focus your mind on one particular object again, and do not follow your thoughts.

When you start thinking, you will start to have desire. Once you have desire, you will lose this peacefulness. When you follow what your desire wants you to do, you will go into the wrong kind of happiness. When you come out of meditation and you are thinking about food, you might want to eat. When you are thinking about beverages, you want to drink. When you are thinking about television or your phone, you will start checking

your phone, calling your friends. You will go back to your old ways, your old kind of happiness. If you want to maintain this peace of mind that you have developed through your meditation, then you must resist this desire. You must continue with your focusing, observing your meditation object. You have to continue with your mental recitation, or continue observing your body. You can do things — do whatever you have to do, but do only things that are absolutely necessary, like maintaining your body by eating. You have to control your eating — you should eat for your body; don't eat for your desire. If you eat for your body, you should eat only once a day, which is enough for your body. You can eat all you want, but only eat once a day, like filling up the tank of your car. You fill up the car once; you do not have to fill it up three or four times. You fill it up full, and once you have it full, you do not need to fill it again until it becomes empty. It is the same with the body: once you eat until the body becomes full, then you do not have to eat for another 24 hours. This is one way of trying to curb or control your desire. Normally, we do not just eat for the body alone; we also eat for our desire. Sometimes the body has enough food already, but our desire still wants more, so we keep eating more. This will become an addiction that is hard to stop. People become overweight, and they cannot get rid of the weight because they cannot stop eating. They do not have the mental strength to resist their desire.

If you can develop this ability to concentrate on one object, you can then control your desire. You will be able not to think about food or about things you want to eat or drink. The development of this concentrating ability

is very important. In *Pāli* we call it *sati*, which is translated as mindfulness. This is what you have to do if you want to succeed in your meditation. If you want to succeed in overcoming your desire, you have to have mindfulness. Mindfulness must be developed at all times during your waking hours, from the time you get up to the time you go to sleep. In order to be able to develop this mindfulness, you have to be alone, and have no other work to do, like being a monk or being a nun. If you still have to work, you will not be able to maintain or develop your mindfulness because you have to get involved with people and your work, and this requires a lot of thinking. When you think you cannot stop your thoughts, you cannot control your thoughts. The day's events will drag your thoughts along, from the time you get up to the time you go to sleep. You will never have the time or ability to develop mindfulness. When you come and sit in meditation, you will not find any peace of mind because you cannot concentrate on your mental object. You cannot focus your mind on your breathing; you cannot recite *Buddho, Buddho*. Your mind will think about work, about people you have engaged with. In order to be successful in the path of the Buddha, you have to be a monk or live like a monk. You should not have any work to do. Also, you should live alone, maybe in your apartment or house. You should just maintain your mindfulness, and continue controlling your thoughts and your desire. For example, eat once a day, and for the rest of the day, you do not have anything but water. Do not drink, because when you drink, you generally want to have the desire to drink for the taste of the beverage. If you want to drink for your body, you should just drink plain water; do not drink beverages. It will make you become addicted, like

coffee, tea, or other kinds of beverages. If you want to get rid of your sensual desire, the desire for tastes and smells, then you should only drink water. That is what the body really needs. It does not need the taste and the smell. It is your desire that needs these things. If you want to have that peace of mind, you have to eliminate your desire. In order to eliminate your desire, you must not do what your desire wants you to do. After you have resisted your desire for a while, your desire will disappear. It is like people who give up alcohol or smoking. They have to resist the desire to smoke or to drink. After they have resisted for a while, then this desire disappears. It does not come back anymore. It is the same with other kinds of desire.

In order to be able to resist your desire, you must have a peaceful mind. When you have a peaceful mind, you have contentment; you have happiness. You have a sense of fullness and fulfilment. You do not feel that you are hungry or that you need something. When desire arises, you can resist this desire very easily. If you do not have peace of mind, when desire arises you will find it very difficult, very hard to resist your desire. That is why the Buddha said that we must first develop peace of mind or *samādhi*. In order to develop *samādhi*, we have to have *sati* or mindfulness. We must first control our thoughts. If we can control our thoughts, when we sit in meditation we can get the mind to stop thinking completely, and become completely still, peaceful, and happy. Once we have this peacefulness and happiness, when we come out of meditation we can use them to fight our desire. When desire arises we should use *paññā* or wisdom, which the Buddha taught us to use, in order to

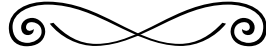
permanently get rid of our desire and to teach the mind that whatever we desire gives only temporary happiness, which will become an addiction. Instead of letting you become free, you will become a slave to your desire. If you follow your desire, doing what your desire wants you to do, you will have to keep on doing it. Like when you desire to have a cigarette — once you take the cigarette, a few hours later you will have another desire to have another cigarette. As long as you keep doing what your desire wants you to do, your desire will keep on coming back. If you want to get rid of your desire, then you must not do what your desire wants you to do. If you know that whatever you want to do will not bring you happiness anyway, then you can stop your desire or stop what your desire wants you to do because you do not want to become sad or unhappy later when you lose the things that you love or lose the things that you like to do. So, this is what we call insight or wisdom, *paññā* or *vipassanā*. This comes after you have peaceful and calm mind, which you can use to fight your desire with wisdom and insight, contemplating that whatever you desire is temporary. You cannot keep it with you or control it. It will come and go anytime it likes. When it comes you can be happy, but when it goes, it can make you sad. If you do not want to be sad, then you should not go after it; you should leave it alone. You should come back to your real happiness, that is, to your peace of mind. Once you stop your desire, you will get your peace of mind back. When you go after your desire, you will lose your peace of mind. So, this is what we have to do if you want to have the real happiness, the true kind of happiness, the lasting kind of happiness. We must practise meditation. We must give up our old

kinds of happiness. Give up our money because we use our money to buy things to make us happy. When we do not have money, we will not be able to do so. Instead of being happy, we will be sad. So, we must not rely on wealth, status, fame, or our body to acquire happiness, because it is only a temporary kind of happiness. We must rely on our mind to bring us the real kind of happiness by practicing meditation, by developing mindfulness, calm, and wisdom or insight. If we have mindfulness, calm, and insight or wisdom, we will be able to generate and maintain the real kind of happiness all the time, which is what the Buddha did. This is what he taught us to do if we want to have the real kind of happiness, if we want to stay away from the false kind of happiness and stay away from the sadness that comes with the false kind of happiness. We must do what the Buddha did — it is the only way.

This is the message that I bring to you today.

Devotees: *Sādhu sādhu sādhu!*

Questions & Answers



Tan Ajahn: If you have any questions you would like to ask, you can ask.

Layman (Male 1, M1): What if you love someone's mind but not their body, such as love for your family members. It is pure. Isn't it natural to be upset when you lose them?

It seems that it is very apathetic, in the sense that it helps you to develop mindfulness and calmness, and to get happiness, but it is all for your self-benefit.

Tan Ajahn: Yes, it is because what you love is something that is not permanent. It is because you love something that you will lose someday. When you lose it, you become sad naturally. If you do not love the thing and you lose it, you will not become sad, right? So, your problem is your love. You should love in such a way that will not make you become sad. You can do that also by preparing yourself for its disappearance. You have to remind yourself all the time that they will leave you; they will disappear from you one day. But, as long as they are still with you, you can love them. This is love without delusion. Love with wisdom. Love by knowing

that one day you will have to lose that love. If you know ahead of time, you will not feel sad when they leave you.

The Buddha said we must reflect on separation all the time. Our life always ends up with separation. If you are prepared for this eventuality, you will not be sad. The problem is that we are not preparing ourselves for this eventuality. We deny this eventuality; we do not want to think about this eventuality. When this eventuality happens, we cannot accept it. If we prepare ourselves, we tell ourselves every day that our contacts and all our engagements here are only temporary. Like coming here today is only temporary. When you leave, you will not feel sad, right? It is because you do not expect to stay here all the time. You do not expect to be with me all the time. So, when you go, you are happy to go. It is a matter of the attitude towards things. Right now we have the wrong attitude towards things. We look at things and want them to be permanent, but they are not. When they leave you, you become sad. If you switch your attitude and look at everything as temporary, then you will not feel sad when things leave you, or when you leave them. It's simple; it's a change of attitude, a change of perception. We have the wrong perception, one that is ignorance-based, not wisdom-based, so we have to teach ourselves the truth.

The truth is that everything is impermanent. Everything is not under our control; we cannot control things. They can leave or come anytime. We do not know when they are going to leave us. It could be today, it could be tomorrow, it could be ten years from now, but we have to know ahead of time. When we know ahead of time,

then we can get ready for this. When it happens, we will not be caught off guard. We are usually caught off-guard because we never prepare ourselves for such things. When it happens you will ask why. Why do you ask “why” when it happens? People keep asking why. Why ask why? There is no why. There is no answer. That is the truth. Why ask why? Because you want things to be different. That is why you ask why. But if you know that this is how things are going to happen, then you do not have to ask why. Do you ask why the sun comes up in the morning, or why it sets in the evening? You do not ask because you accept it. You should accept everything like you accept the sun and the rain. They are the same things. You cannot control them. They are natural occurrences. Your body is like this. It is born, gets sick, gets old, and dies. When it will die, you do not know. When it will get sick, you do not know. You can expect, though, that it will get sick and that it will die one day. Your body is not you; your body is just a possession, that is all, just like your clothing, but we do not know this. We look at our body as ourselves. We do not know our real self. Our real self is the mind, the spirit. We have to discover our spirit first.

The only way to discover our mind or our spirit is to meditate. When your mind becomes calm and your mind lets go of everything else, then you can see the mind by itself. You will know that this is me, this is myself, this is my real self. When you know that the body is not yourself, you can then be ready for whatever happens to your body because you know that you are not losing yourself. Right now, you think if you lose your body, you lose yourself also. You place yourself in the body, not in the mind. You should place yourself in

the mind. That is where it belongs, where it comes from. You place yourself in the body, so when your body leaves you, you feel sad. This is the benefit you will get from meditating and developing mindfulness. Sit in meditation to calm your mind and to teach your mind the truth that everything is not you; they do not belong to you. They are just temporary possessions. The only thing that belongs to you is your mind. The only way to have happiness is to have peace of mind, and in order to have peace of mind you have to give up everything, abandon everything. Do not rely on anything to make you happy. Right now you depend on everything to make you happy. When everything that you rely on disappears, you become sad. Instead of learning your lesson, you keep replacing the things that you have lost. You go back to the same old problem again. You replace the things that you have lost, and the things that you've replaced disappear again, and then you become sad again. This is what we keep repeating all the time. For example, we repeatedly change the body. When this body disappears, we come back and get a new body, get reborn again. We do the same thing again, relying on the body for our happiness. When you lose this body, you become sad, and then you go and look for a new body. You will then be born again with a new body. You go through this process countless of times. You keep on doing this if you do not follow what the Buddha did or taught you to do. If you do what the Buddha did, or what he teaches you to do, you will stop this vicious cycle. You will not have to become sad every time you lose your body. The Buddha said that there is no sadness for those who are not born. As long as you are born, you will become sad because when you are born, your body will get sick, get old, and die.

When it does, you become sad. If you do not want to become sad, you should not have a body. You do not need to have a body. It is your delusion, because you have not found the Buddha. You have not heard the Buddha's teachings. When you have found the Buddha and heard the Buddha's teachings, you do not need to have anything to make you happy permanently. All you have to do is to give up your desire.

Laywoman (Female 1, F1): When we make an *adhiṭṭhāna* (determination), we are told that it is good that we *adhiṭṭhāna* for something that we can complete so that when we have completed it, our *adhiṭṭhāna pāramī* increases. Recently after I calmed down my mind and after sitting in meditation, I tried to make a determination to see the Dhamma in this very lifetime. I find that this is too ambitious for me. What will happen if we do not achieve this determination in this lifetime, and what is Ajahn's view on how to make a strong determination to see Dhamma in this lifetime?

Tan Ajahn: You can have two levels of determination: first, your ultimate determination, and second, your current determination. Your ultimate determination is to become enlightened, but right now in your current situation, you do not yet have the ability to obtain that ultimate goal, so you should seek an immediate goal that you can achieve easily, like for instance to become a nun, give up your status, give up your wealth, and give up your bodily physical happiness. You should first do something that you can achieve right now, and then go on from there. Like the Buddha said, if you have not yet maintained the five precepts in your daily life, see if you can first maintain

them every day. Keep the five precepts every day. Once you could keep the five precepts every day, then on the observance day, once a week, you keep the eight precepts. You have to go step-by-step; you cannot just jump from first grade to university. You have to go from first grade to second grade to third grade and so forth. Keep going step-by-step, but know that your ultimate goal is to graduate from university. But you do not attend university when you are in kindergarten; you have to go step-by-step. Start from where you are, from what you can do, and then keep on increasing your determination higher and higher. So you need two goals: your ultimate goal and your immediate goal. Right now, you have to ask yourself what is your immediate goal and can you achieve it or not? First, you go after that goal and after you achieve that goal, you will become encouraged. You will have the feeling that you can achieve something, so you move on to the next goal. It is like an athlete: He starts at local competitions before he moves up to national, and then international competitions. You have to go step-by-step according to your current ability. It is useless to aim for the highest goal when you know you do not have the ability to achieve it. You will become discouraged and give up your determination. That is what can happen to a lot of people. They start thinking about the ultimate goal and think that they cannot do it because it is too much for them. It is like when you are in kindergarten and think of going to university, and you say you cannot do it. But if you keep going from one grade to the next, you will eventually arrive at your ultimate goal.

Layman (M1): Is it necessary to make an *adhittāna* after sitting in meditation?

Tan Ajahn: You don't have to. Every day in your daily actions you have already make many *adhittāna* without doing it officially. Like when you eat, you have to have determination. You do not have to say, "I am going to eat," before you eat, right? So you do not have to have this formal determination as long as you know what you have to do and do it. Keep doing it. Don't give up. First you have to define your goal and define the path towards that goal. Then you just have to move towards that goal. Whether you get there quickly or slowly depends on how much you do. If you do a lot, you will definitely get there more quickly. If you do less, you will get there more slowly. The Buddha said different people achieve the goal differently. At the end of the *Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta*, he said that if you practise according to the way he teaches, you can either achieve the goal in seven years, seven months, or seven days. He did not say that everybody can finish in seven years. Some people can do it in seven months, some people in seven days. We all have different abilities, different determinations, and different diligence — how hard-working we are. If we are hard-working, we naturally will get there more quickly than those who are less hard-working.

Laywoman (F2): After I meditate and have reached a peaceful state, I will take a rest. But after that, all peacefulness is gone. How do you know when you have arrived at a peaceful state of mind, and what happens when you are in a peaceful state?

Tan Ajahn: When you are peaceful, you generally do not think about anything. When you start thinking about this and that, you will lose your peacefulness.

So, you have to maintain your mindfulness, continue controlling your thoughts, and try not to think about people or things.

Laywoman (F2): For how long should we do this?

Tan Ajahn: All the time, from the time you get up until the time you go to sleep.

Laywoman (F2): It feels so unnatural not to think of anything. We can try to achieve that when we do not have anything to do, but after we achieve that, it is natural that we come back again.

Tan Ajahn: You have to maintain it. You do not come back. You have to see that when you come back, you come back to sadness and unhappiness. That is what you have to do until it becomes natural. Once it becomes natural, you do not feel like forcing yourself anymore. When you first do it, you have to force yourself, like teaching a dog a new trick, or teaching yourself to use a different hand. If you used to use your right hand, but you have an accident and you cannot use your right, you have to force yourself to use your left hand. When you first do it, you feel that it is very unnatural. But after you do it for a while, you will feel natural.

Layman (M2): Right now when I sit, I watch my breathing. After a while, the mind does not want to focus on the breathing anymore, and at that time, I allow awareness to flow. When it opens up, it becomes very peaceful. Sometimes, I try to maintain it, but when I start to see more thoughts arising or start to get drowsy, I go back to the breathing. So, is this okay?

Tan Ajahn: That is the correct way. As long as your mind does not think, you do not need to focus. But when your mind starts thinking, you have to refocus again. The purpose of focusing is to prevent your mind from thinking. When your mind does not think, your mind becomes empty and peaceful, and you do not need to focus. Actually, if your mind becomes really peaceful then this focusing will disappear automatically. It is like eating: When you are full, you stop eating automatically. You do not have to force yourself to eat. You might not get to that point yet, to the point when the focusing and your thoughts disappear completely and your mind becomes still, peaceful, and at ease.

Layman (M2): So I don't have to do anything special?

Tan Ajahn: Yes, as long as the mind does not go and think of other things. If the mind remains peaceful, calm, and not thinking about anything, then you do not have to.

Layman (M2): Sometimes there are thoughts arising, but the mind is aware.

Tan Ajahn: Yes, do not go after the thoughts. If the thoughts start coming in, you should focus on your breathing. That means your mind has not yet become perfectly still. When the mind becomes perfectly still, all thoughts will disappear. There will be just knowing.

Layman (M2): When I am just aware of these thoughts, not getting sucked into the thoughts, is this okay?

Tan Ajahn: That is okay also. If you are not sucked into the thoughts, or towards the sounds that you hear, or the feelings of your body, and if you are not disturbed by the pain of your body, then it is okay. If your mind does not feel disturbed by these things, then your mind is in neutral mode. You want to get your mind to become neutral, to have no likes or dislikes.

Laywoman (F3): I have difficulty deciding how much work I should do. I have a son and still have obligations. The mind has this habit about thinking about our future.

Tan Ajahn: Just have enough for the basics, the four requisites of life: food, shelter, clothing, and medicine. No vacations, no lotteries — just the basics. If you think about the future, then think about death. That is the ultimate future. The Buddha said you should reflect on death all the time. This will dispel all your delusion. Everybody will die, so you do not have to worry about them too much. Just to be alive in the present is enough. Do not worry about the future.

Laywoman (F3): So we do not need to have any plans?

Tan Ajahn: Not too many. Just have enough food to eat, and have a place to stay. Do not worry about education, status, or wealth, or anything like that. Just worry about the four requisites. That is all you have to worry about.

Laywoman (F3): For me, I have a lot of attachment.

Tan Ajahn: Think of death. Think of death. Everybody will die. When you think of death, you can let go of your attachment. Just keep thinking that we are all going to die.

Laywoman (F3): But it is very difficult to let go.

Tan Ajahn: Well, if you keep thinking about death, you will find it easier. But you have to do it a lot. Right now, death is not real to you yet. But if you keep thinking and thinking, and one day when you see someone die, this thinking will come back to you, and it will become real to you. But you should try to think about it, so when it happens you do not become sad or go mad because you are prepared for the truth.

Laywoman (F3): What about determination? Sometimes, the mind thinks that a determination is correct, but the defilements always overwrite this. How do we make a stronger determination?

Tan Ajahn: Well, it just means that you have to make a stronger determination. You have to punish yourself every time you fail. Like if you fail to fulfil your determination, you should give \$10,000 to charity or stop eating for a day. Punish yourself.



13

Lady from Hong Kong

August 11, 2013

Tan Ajahn: Do you speak Thai?

Hong Kong Lady (HK Lady): No.

Tan Ajahn: What can I do for you? I have a Dhamma book in English you can take with you. Do you have any questions you want to ask?

HK Lady: I can't think of anything off the top of my head, but I really feel very happy being here, coming here.

Tan Ajahn: Ok, just keep that feeling; maintain that feeling.

[Laughter]

HK Lady: Oh! That is a blessing. Thank you. That is very good advice.

Tan Ajahn: But you must realise that this feeling is not permanent yet. When you go to see some other things, this feeling will disappear, so you have to keep coming back a lot.

HK Lady: Yes, I was just thinking that if I come back, I don't know whether my friend will be able to take me here.

Tan Ajahn: Oh, you can find a similar situation somewhere else. You see, what actually makes you happy is the quiet environment, the natural environment. So, go find a park or forest somewhere, sit, and be alone, and then you can be happy. Or, you can go to the Facebook page and look at the photographs. At least, you know what it is like to be happy without having anything. It is a different kind of happiness, the happiness that arises from peace of mind.

HK Lady: And I don't have to think of anything.

Tan Ajahn: No. You forget about your problems for a while.

HK Lady: Yes, that's the problem (i.e. it's just for a little while).

Tan Ajahn: The problem is that you cannot forget them forever. Try to meditate, and you can have this good feeling. Sit down, close your eyes, and focus your attention on your breathing to prevent your mind from thinking about your problems. Don't think about anything, and you can then maintain these good feelings. You see, your thinking makes you feel bad or good, and you cannot control your thinking yet. Sometimes, you think in the way that makes you feel bad, so it is better not to think. The way not to think is to meditate, to sit down, and focus your attention on your breathing. Don't think about anything; just watch your breathing.

Then you will forget about everything and will become peaceful and happy.

HK Lady: But it is hard to get rid of your thinking.

Tan Ajahn: Yes, you have to do a lot of practice. It takes practice to make it perfect. Keep doing it. While you are not sitting in meditation, you can control your thoughts by focusing on your actions, activities, and body. Whatever your body is doing, just keep watching your bodily activities. Don't think about anything so that you can maintain peace of mind. Or, you can use a mantra, reciting a word. We use the word that is the name of the Buddha. Just mentally recite *Buddho, Buddho*, while you are doing anything to prevent your mind from thinking about other things. You can also have peace of mind in this way. You have to do it, okay? Once you have experienced the result, you will keep doing it for the rest of your life. Okay?

[Speaking in Thai to a group of Thai lay people:] Just listening to Dhamma talks is not enough; you have to put it into practice. Only after practising will the results arise. If you only listen and do not practise, the results will not arise. On the other hand, if you meditate without listening to Dhamma talks, you may practise wrongly. So, there have to be both listening and practising in order to get results. Once you have listened to what I have said, then you have to do what I say. Once you have done it, you will have the good result.

[Again speaking to the lady from Hong Kong:] Just practise what I told you, and you will get the good result. Are you here on vacation or a business trip?

HK Lady: No, I am here to take some rest, trying not to think about work, and trying not to think about anything.

Tan Ajahn: Good, that's a good way. You have found the right way to make yourself happy by stopping your thinking.

HK Lady: I think I think too much.

Tan Ajahn: If you think in the right way, you can still think and be happy, like if you think that everything is temporary and nothing will last. Everything you have, you will lose it all. If you think in this way, you can also be happy because you prepare yourself for the eventuality. When the day comes when you have to leave this world, you don't take anything with you, right?

HK Lady: When it comes to work and many other things, sometimes we have to try. If we don't try, we don't have a goal or a process to walk towards the goal, and then things don't work out. Then we have to think.

Tan Ajahn: You also have to think of the consequences of your goal. What do you get if you achieve the goal? You might get a lot of money, but what will you do if you lose all of it? Everything that you gain will be lost one day. So, you forget this truth, this reality. You think you can keep acquiring and acquiring and acquiring things to make you happy, but you forget how you will feel when you have to lose these things. See, if you look at it another way, you may see it differently. You might think, "Maybe I shouldn't have to get so much. Maybe I should have enough to live on day to day because

I don't know when I will die anyway. I may die tomorrow." This is also planning, you see?

HK Lady: I never think about money in my life, but I think of things to do...

Tan Ajahn: Yes, but one day you will not be able to do anything anyway. So, what will you do then? When that day comes, what will you do? Why don't you do something that doesn't require your body, like sitting in meditation? Then you don't have to worry about whether your body is available or not. You can always meditate, with or without your body. See, this is more important. If you do anything based on your body, you have to realise that one day your body will not be able to do what you want it to do. Then what are you gonna do? But if you know how to meditate, you don't have to use the body. The body can get sick in bed, and you can still meditate and have good feelings. You don't see this other side of life; you see just the side of the body. You only see that *I have this body, so I want to do this and that*. You never stop to think that one day, the body is gonna get sick, and you will not be able to do what you want to do.

HK Lady: I often think too much and when different thoughts cross together, it all gets very busy.

Tan Ajahn: You have to think rationally based on the truth and reality, not on your imaginations, so you always have to think that your body is going to get older, sicken, and die. What are you going to do when these things happen?

HK Lady: When the body gets to the stage that it degenerates, it becomes weak and will die one day — but all these come naturally.

Tan Ajahn: Yeah, but how will you feel when it happens? Can you accept it? Can you be happy when it happens? That's the problem, you see. So, you have to test yourself to find out. You should live like a sick person for a day. For a single day, just don't do anything. See if you can do it. Stay at home one day and don't do anything. Pretend that you are sick, that you are paralysed and cannot do anything. You have to test yourself. You may say, "Oh! I can do it." But you have never tested yourself, so you have to pretend that today you are sick and old. You have to stay in the house all day long without doing anything. Nobody comes to see you; they leave you alone.

HK Lady: So I have to learn, learn how to prepare for the end.

Tan Ajahn: Yeah, okay? This is also planning, you see. It is planning based on reality, based on the truth, based on what's going to happen. People don't want to plan this way. But everyone has to face it, from the top (of society) to the bottom. From the richest man in the world to the poorest man in the world, we all have to face this reality.

HK Lady: While I still have the energy to do things, I can still act for the good of other people.

Tan Ajahn: But one day you will not be able to do it. You have to think of that day. Right now you can do anything you want; it doesn't matter. Do it for yourself,

Lady from Hong Kong

do it for other people and do whatever you want. But the problem is not today; the problem is tomorrow. When you cannot do it, will you still be happy like today? So, that's the problem. This is what you have to do to solve this problem.



14

Laypeople from Singapore

August 26, 2013

Giving blessings in Buddhism is not chanting. Anybody can chant — a parrot can chant; a monkey can chant. Chants don't have anything special in them, but it is our delusion to think that they are special. What is useful or beneficial to us is wisdom and knowledge. If you listen to monks' chanting and do not know what they are chanting about, it is just a waste of time. You might think that there is some kind of magical power, but this is your delusion making you think that way. In fact, it does not help you at all. It does not give you anything worthwhile. All that is useful or beneficial to you is knowledge, especially the knowledge discovered by the Buddha. It is the truth about yourself. Right now, you don't know who you are. You think you are the body, but actually your body is not you. Your body is a temporary possession, like an automobile. You are the driver of the automobile. You are the mind, the one who controls the body, and the one who tells the body what to do. You come here by telling the body that you want to come here and telling the body to get up, get into the car,

and come here. This is the fundamental truth about ourselves that we don't know. We would never know if we never came across the Buddha.

If we never met the Buddha or his teachings, we would never know who we really are, and when we don't know who we really are, we lose our direction. Instead of taking care of our real self, we take care of things that are not our self. No matter how well you take care of or look after the things that you think are yourself, you will lose them anyway, like your body. No matter how well you take care of it, one day it is going to get old, get sick, and die. It is a waste of time to spend all your energy and resources looking after your body. You should spend all your energy and resources looking after your mind because your mind is your true self. Right now, your mind hasn't been looked after, so your mind is always in a state of suffering, stress, unhappiness, sadness, worry, and anxiety. You worry about everything, but you never worry about yourself. What you should worry about is yourself, but the problem is you do not know who that is. You think the body is yourself, so you become engaged in looking after your body, which is something that you cannot preserve. No matter how well you look after your body, your body will eventually dissolve. That is the nature of the body. This is what we should know and try to convince ourselves of as being the truth. Right now, we have been surrounded or controlled by delusion and ignorance to the point where we take the thing that is not real as the truth and don't believe in the real truth. When the Buddha said that the body is not yourself, you do not believe it. For a long time, you have been so convinced that your body is yourself. No matter what the Buddha

said, you will still not be able to do what he told you to do, which is to abandon your body, to let your body go. Look after your body like you are looking after a dog or a pet. Don't think that it is you. Give it food, shelter, clothing, and medicine, but don't expect it to live forever. Come and take care of your mind. Teach your mind to be strong, to be able to let go of your body. Don't rely on your body for your happiness.

Right now, you rely on your body for your happiness, so if you lose your body, you feel that you no longer have any happiness. But in fact, if you can let go of your body, you will find a much better happiness, one that is much better than using your body. This is what the Buddha wants us to do — to take care of our true self, which is the mind, by teaching the mind to let go of everything. Let go of your body, let go of other people's bodies, let go of your possessions and your wealth. You don't need them. They are more harmful than beneficial. If you can do this, you will find another kind of happiness that is much better than the happiness you are experiencing now. The happiness that you are experiencing now is a temporary happiness. You go to a movie and enjoy yourself, but when you get out of the movie you lose that enjoyment, and so you have to go for more movies. You go to a party and enjoy it, but when you come home you lose that enjoyment, and then you have to go for more parties. This is the kind of happiness that you are experiencing, which never satisfies you, which is not fulfilling. You have to have more of it. One day when your body can no longer do what you want it to do, what will you do? You'll become depressed. You'll have to stay home, like old people who cannot go outside to enjoy

what they used to enjoy. This is the problem with the happiness that you have. One day you will no longer be able to enjoy this happiness, and what will you do? You will live in depression, like so many people do. You live alone; you become lonely; you become sad. But if you can do what the Buddha teaches you to do, you will not have to experience that. You can find another kind of happiness that is much better than the happiness that you have right now, which is happiness of mind.

In order to have this happiness, you have to have time to create it. You have to have time to be alone, sit quietly, still your thoughts, and still your mind. When you achieve this, you will find another kind of happiness that is called peace of mind, which is true happiness because you can have it all the time. You don't have to have your body to get this kind of happiness. You don't have to have money. Right now, you have to have a good body, a strong and healthy body, and you also need to have money. In order to get money, you have to work hard. Working is not good, because nobody likes to work. But we all have to work because we know if we don't work, we won't have money, and if we don't have money, we won't have happiness. This is the happiness that we are experiencing that is very precarious. This is because you don't know when you will not be able to make money anymore. You don't know when you are going to run out of money. And when you run out of money, you don't know how to cope. You cannot stay at home, sit still, and be happy. This is what the Buddha wanted us to learn how to do — to be able to stay at home, sit still, and be happy. We can be happy without having to do anything if we can control our thoughts and desires.

Our desire needs our thinking. You have to think before you can have desire. You have to think of someone or some place before you want to see that person or go to that place. If you don't think about that person or place, you don't have any desire for that person or place.

The key to our ability to be able to sit still, to enjoy being alone, without doing anything, is to stop thinking. If we can stop thinking, we can stop our desire. If we can stop our desire, we will find peace and happiness. Our desire is the one that is the problem. When we have desire, we cannot stay put. We cannot keep still. We have to get what we want. If you want a cup of coffee, you cannot say no to yourself. When you say no, you feel bad. But if you never think of having a cup of coffee, then you don't have to get a cup of coffee. This is what we have to do — to control our thinking, to not let our mind think in the way of desire. Can you do that?

The way to control our thinking is to meditate. We have to find something for the mind to do in order for it to forget about everything else. Venerable *Ācariya* Mun taught his disciples to recite the name of the *Buddha*, *Buddho*, *Buddho*, *Buddho*. If you can recite the name of the Buddha all day long, you will not be able to think of getting a cup of coffee, getting a bowl of noodles, going to the movies, going shopping, going to see your friend, or doing this and that. You can stay at home and have happiness. The problem is that you cannot control your thoughts. When you get up, you start thinking, "Who am I going to see today? What am I going to do today?" Your desire has already led you. You never control your desire. What you should do is as soon as you get up, when you

become aware of yourself, repeat the name of the *Buddha*, *Buddho*, *Buddho*, *Buddho*. Then you will not be able to think about what you want to do today, where you want to go, or who you want to see. Then you can stay at home and be happy.

Laywoman: Tan Ajahn, what about the desire to go to temples to meet teachers? Is that also a desire that obstructs our development of stillness?

Tan Ajahn: It depends on where you are. If you are a beginner, are not meditating, and don't know how to meditate yet, then you have to go to a temple to ask for instructions. But once you already know the instructions, you must prevent yourself from going to the temple. You must find a quiet place. Now you have to learn to meditate, to control your thinking. Except that when you have questions or encounter some obstacles in your practice you will have to seek advice again, so you can go to the temple at that point. Don't go to the temple simply because you believe that going to the temple is good for you without knowing what is good for you. Going to the temple is good for beginners, for people who do not know what to do yet, like you coming here today. Once you know what to do, you must do what you are supposed to do instead of going to the temple.

If you want to go to the temple but do not do what you are supposed to do, you are being misguided. You are not doing what you are supposed to do. It is like children who do not want to go to school, so they say, "We want to go to the temple." It is an excuse for not doing what they are supposed to do.

Once you know what to do, you should do what you are supposed to do, and only go to the temple or wherever you have to go for a particular reason or purpose, and not go just because that you have been taught to believe that going to the temple is good for you.

Laywoman: Some of my friends go to the temple almost every day to offer *dāna* to Ajahns. Is this also a desire that obstructs stillness?

Tan Ajahn: Yes, this is good if you are on the level of charity. You want to give, to share your money and wealth with other people. That is good, but you have to move up the ladder. It is like going to school. The Buddha taught three levels of practice. The first level is charity, or giving *dāna*. The second level is *sīla*, or keeping the precepts. The third level is meditation. I am talking about the advanced level. I am not talking about the beginner or intermediate stages. I am talking about the advanced stage. Generally, you don't hear about this advanced stage. You have only been taught to give *dāna*, to do charity, which is good, but it is not good enough. There are steps towards higher practice.

It is like going to school. You cannot go straight to college or university; you must go through kindergarten, elementary, secondary, and high school before you can enter university. You come here, which is like a university, and what you hear is like what you learn in university that might contradict what you have been taught before. What you have been taught was to learn to spell A, B, C and how to add up 1, 2, and 3. You have not learnt how to apply it to something deeper and higher.

This is just my way of teaching. Charity and *sīla*, or keeping the precepts, are very common and easy to understand. What is hard and very difficult to understand and not many people can explain to you clearly is the practice of meditation, the purpose of meditation, what you can expect from it, and what you are supposed to get from your meditation. You will not hear this very often.

Most monks will teach you to give away your money, especially to give it to the monks themselves. Sometimes you give them too much money, spoiling them, and you encourage them to disrobe. They get too much money, so they want to spend it. That is why the Buddha did not want monks to receive money. Some people asked the Buddha for exemptions because some monks may have special needs such as for medicine or something that might need money. The Buddha said that it is okay to give money, but not to give it to the monk directly, and instead give it to a lay person who assists the monk. If the monk needs something, let the lay person provide it for the monk. The things that the monk needs will be within the bounds of the four requisites, which are food, shelter, clothing, and medicine, and not luxury items, or things that are not necessary for the practice of meditation or for the maintaining of life. Nowadays, this understanding has been lost. Many people give money to monks, and then the monks think that they can use it for anything they want. If they want to buy a new phone, they will buy a new phone. If they want a video camera, they will buy a video camera. If they want to go to Singapore, they will go to Singapore. This is not supporting the life of a monk. You should support a monk to go live in the forest and practise meditation. Support monks like Venerable *Ācariya* Mun, who never went to shopping

mall, who never went collect money from lay people. He always lived in the forest. He let people come and see him; he did not go and see people. Nowadays, it is the other way around. You have monks going all over the world, seeing lay people, teaching lay people, and getting money from them. What results do you get? Do you get enlightened from these practices? You don't get enlightened. You forget your real goal. Your real goal is enlightenment, to realize your true self, who you really are.

If you realize who you truly are, you will liberate yourself from the bondages of suffering. Right now, you are under the bondage of the cycle of birth and death. You don't know that. You think that after you die, everything is over, but that is not the case. The truth is that after the body breaks down, your mind goes to another body, goes to another cycle of birth, aging, sickness, and death, like what you are going through now. This cycle might already be your ten billionth cycle of birth, aging, sickness, and death. You want to stop this cycle. Who wants to get old? Who wants to get sick? Who wants to die? When you get old, get sick, and die, how do you feel? Do you feel happy? Do you feel good? But you keep coming back, doing the same thing all over again for countless of times. Are you going to continue to do this until you come and meet the Buddha or his teachings? When you meet Buddhism, it will teach you to stop the cycle of birth, aging, sickness, and death by doing the three steps of practice. First, do charity, or *dāna*. Don't be stingy; don't be attached to your money or your possessions. They do you more harm than good when you don't know how to use them. Possessing money is only good for maintaining your life. If you use money or possessions for your

happiness, you are actually buying suffering, because when you spend money to buy happiness, you have to work hard to get more money. When you work, you have to suffer. When you spend money to buy happiness, it becomes an addiction. You have to spend more money to buy more happiness. And when you are not able to do this, you become like a drug addict who cannot buy drugs to satisfy his desire, his habit. So what does he do? He will go commit crimes, stealing and killing to get money so he can buy more drugs. This is the harm in using money to buy happiness. We should not use money for this purpose. We should use money only to support our existence, so we will have the time to move up to the second and third levels of the practice, which is to keep the precepts and to meditate.

When you do not have to spend a lot of money, you don't have to work too much. You might work just once a week and will have enough money to pay for your food for the whole month already. Then you have the time to go to the temple and meditate or stay at home and meditate, to find real happiness. The purpose of giving money away is to cut off the bridge of your desire to use money to buy happiness. Your money is like a bridge that allows you to get the kind of happiness that is harmful to you. You have to keep filling it up again and again. You have to keep doing it again and again. So, you want to stop doing this. Stop using money to buy happiness. Instead of using money to buy happiness, give this money away, helping those who are in need. You don't have to give it only to the temple. You can give it to hospitals, schools, or charity, so long as you don't use the money in a way that can harm yourself. If you don't want to spend it, you can keep it for future use.

You might not know what will happen in the future, so you may want to have some in reserve in case you cannot work or cannot get any more money, so that you can rely on the money you have saved to help you in times of need. This is the purpose of money.

The Buddha wants us to free ourselves from the work of making money. He wants us to have the time to make happiness without using money. This happiness is sitting in meditation, controlling your thoughts, and reciting the name of the Buddha. If you can persist in reciting the name of the Buddha, without thinking about other things, your mind will drop into calm. Once it becomes calm, you will find fulfilment, bliss, happiness, and contentment. You don't want to have anything; you don't feel like you need anything. You are full and complete in yourself. This is where we want to go. This is the real kind of happiness. Once you know how to create it, you can keep on creating it all the time. You don't need to have money to create it. You don't need to have a healthy, strong body to create it. You can do this even when you are sick or handicapped. This is what you should try to strive for. Seek time to meditate.

In order to meditate successfully, you have to control your thinking all the time. From the time you get up to the time you go to sleep, keep mentally reciting the name of the Buddha. No matter what you do, wherever you are, keep reciting the name of the Buddha. You only stop reciting when you have to use your thinking at work, like when you have to do accounting work. Then you have to stop your reciting of *Buddho* and concentrate on your accounting work, such as adding, subtracting, or whatever you have to do that requires thinking. So, you

can stop the reciting temporarily. Once you finish what you have to do, what you have to think about, don't let your mind think about going to a movie, buying a new bag, a new dress, a new pair of shoes, going to Japan, or going to Korea. Bring it back to reciting, *Buddho, Buddho, Buddho*. In that way, you don't have to spend any money. If you think of going to Japan or going to Korea, you are going to spend a lot of money. Then you won't have enough money and will have to work harder, and you won't have time to meditate. If you don't meditate, you will never stop this cycle of birth, aging, and death. This is what you have to do if you want to release yourself from the round of suffering, the round of birth, aging, sickness, and death. Nobody can do it for you. You have to do it yourself.

So, I hope you understand the three steps of practice that the Buddha prescribed for you. You have to give in order to cut off your dependence on money. If you have too much money, give it away; don't keep it. You will be tempted to use it in the wrong way. Once you give, you will find it easy to keep the precepts because when you give, you have *mettā* (loving-kindness). You think of the welfare of other people. When you think of the welfare of other people, you don't want to hurt them, so you will find keeping the precepts very easy. The reason people cannot keep the precepts is because of the desire to make money, to do things for themselves, and to get happiness for themselves. They don't care how others might be hurt by their actions. If you are helping others, you will be very considerate of other people in whatever you do, considering whether they are affected by your actions. So, you will be very mindful that no matter what you do, you will not hurt them. You will not kill; you will not steal;

you will not cheat; you will not lie; and you will not drink or get drunk. Once you can maintain the precepts, it will be easy for you to meditate. Your mind will be peaceful and calm. If you cannot keep the precepts, your mind can be affected by worry because you might have done something wrong, feel bad, or are worried that you might have to pay for what you have done. If you have not done anything wrong, your mind will not be affected by worry or anxiety. You can meditate easily; you can control your thinking. You can recite the name of the Buddha all day long. Once you have recited the name of the Buddha continuously, the next thing is to find time to sit down, which you will have time to do if you do not have to work a lot to make money. You will have time to sit down and meditate. When you sit down and meditate, your mind will enter into calm very easily. Once you have experienced the peace you have acquired through your mediation, you will become satisfied. You will know this is the true happiness. You will know that no one can take this happiness away from you. Then you will want to maintain it, so you will spend more time meditating. Eventually, you will become the master of your mind. You will be able to control your desires. You will be able to eliminate all kinds of stress and sadness from your mind. This is how the Buddha did it. This is what he told us to do. If we follow his instructions, we will achieve the same result.

This is the message I give to you.



15

Western Monks from Wat Marpjan

January 6, 2014

Tan Ajahn: “Have you found *sati* yet?”

Audience member: “I find it, but I lose it a lot.”

Tan Ajahn: When Tan Ajahn Mun was practicing in the forest of Chiang Mai, the hill tribe villager went to see him, and when they saw Tan Ajahn Mun who was doing walking meditation, the hill tribe villager asked, “What are you looking for?” Tan Ajahn Mun answered, “I am looking for *Buddho*.” The hill tribe villager asked, “Can I help you?” Tan Ajahn Mun replied, “Sure.” “How do I do it?” the hill tribe villager asked. “Just repeat *Buddho, Buddho*,” Tan Ajahn answered.

That is one form of developing mindfulness. But generally in the *Satipāṭṭhana Sutta*, the *Sutta* stresses the body as the point of focus. Watch your body at all times and bring your mind to be close to your body, in order to prevent your mind from wandering to various places. For some people, it may be difficult to do, so reciting the word *Buddho*, which is a mantra, can be easier. It is also easier said than done. Usually, you can

only recite for a few moments, not even a few minutes, and then your mind starts to go thinking about some other things. If you cannot bring your mind back to the present, to the here and now, when you sit in meditation you will not achieve any results. Because your mind keeps wandering, going back and forth, going to the future, going to the past, going over there, thinking about something, about this or that thing, you have to bring it to the body, just be aware and observe the body. Do not think about anything.

Thinking is only good when you are on the second level of practice. We call it the practice for insight. When you are on that level, then you have to think in order to see the real nature of things. But first, you need to stop your mind from wandering and thinking aimlessly. If you don't, you will not be able to direct your mind to think in the way of insight. That is the reason why we have to develop *samādhi* first. We have to develop mindfulness first to be able to stop your thinking. When you can stop, then you can direct it to the way of developing insight or wisdom, like thinking about the *Ti-lakkhaṇa* (the three characteristics of nature), like thinking about impermanence. Everything that exists in this world is impermanent. If we can see the impermanent nature of things, then we can let go of things, because if we cling to them, they will only bring us sadness. The goal is to be able to see *Ti-lakkhaṇa* in everything, so that we can relinquish and let go. When we don't cling to them, we don't have desire for them to be like this or that. When we don't have any desire, we will not have *dukkha* (suffering, discontentment, unhappiness).

Dukkha arises from our desire. Desire is the second of the Four Noble Truths and is called *Samudaya*. *Samudaya* is *kāma-taṇhā*, *bhava-taṇhā*, and *vibhava-taṇhā*, your desire for things, and your desire for them to be this way or that way, or not to be this way or that way. You can't have desire for anything because when you do, you will only have suffering, because you cannot change them; you cannot change things. Everything is *anattā*. *Anattā* means nature. It is beyond your control. It is like the weather: you cannot tell the weather to be warm and hot, or cold. You have to accept it for what it is. So that's the ultimate goal — to be able to remain unperturbed, undisturbed by events, whether they are arising or ceasing, because there is nothing else you can do to stop them from happening. If you have desire for reality to be otherwise, you will only be sad and unhappy.

The whole practice is this way; you have to go step by step. First, you have to develop mindfulness, because without mindfulness you cannot have *samādhi*. Without *samādhi*, you will not have the strength to investigate the true nature of things. In order to develop mindfulness efficiently, you need to be alone; you have to seek seclusion. If you are surrounded by things or events, your mind will be distracted. You will not be able to maintain your mindfulness on any one object. When you are distracted, your mind starts to generate more thoughts. When you have thoughts, you have desire. If you are not careful, you might be dragged to do whatever your desire asks you to do. Instead of calming your mind, you agitate your mind, causing more unpleasantness and unhappiness, which will generate more desire to get rid of that unhappiness. The way we get rid of our unhappiness

is by doing what our desire tells us to do, but that will only create more desire afterwards. So, we're going the wrong way. People in this world are going the wrong way. When they are not happy, they go out and do something to satisfy their desire, but when they come back home, that desire remains and comes back, and then they have to go out again. So, the only way to manage or control your desire is to calm your mind, to stop your mind from thinking about things, because when you don't think about things you won't have any desire.

Developing mindfulness is the most important part of the practice, the starting point of any successful meditation practice. The Buddha compared developing mindfulness to the footprint of the elephant. It is the biggest footprint of all the animals in the forests. You cannot progress or advance without developing mindfulness. You should seek seclusion as much as possible. Try to lay down the extra-curricular work that you don't have to do. But sometimes it is difficult when you live in the community. When you live with your teacher you have responsibilities, so sometimes you have to seek permission to go and stay in a quiet monastery where there are just only one or two monks. Normally, in the first five *vassas* (rains retreat), you are required to live with your teacher to learn from him first, because basically you still haven't got the feel of being a monk, the feel of how to do the practice. If you go and live alone by yourself then your old tendencies will be the ones that direct you to do things that are not proper or beneficial. The Buddha set up this rule, that as a new monk you have to live with your teacher for at least five years. That is what Luangta Mahā Boowa required. Any monk who

went to stay with him usually knew that they had to stay put for five years and couldn't go anywhere except in case of an emergency, like if your parents got sick or died, or if you got sick and you had to get treatment. But you were not allowed to go and seek seclusion yet, since you were not strong enough yet to go. It would be more harmful than beneficial. It would be like letting a small child go alone without having a chaperone. New monks are like new-born children. They haven't yet got the feel of the practice or how to behave properly as a monk, and what they do will be more harmful than beneficial to them. So, that's what I try to stress here when monks come here to stay with me, "Please stay here for five years. Don't go anywhere. If you wish to go, don't come back." I don't want monks to come in and out like ping-pong balls. You want to be stable; you want to fix your mind, settle your mind. Once you settle your mind, you won't be subjected to your desire to go here and there. If you don't, when you come here, you will stay here for a while and will become restless, and you want to go somewhere else. When you go somewhere else, you stay there for a while, then you will become restless again, and then you will want to go somewhere else. So the problem is not where you stay; it's that your mind is restless, that you have not controlled that restlessness yet. This is basically why the five-year rule applies: to get rid of your restlessness. Once you have no restlessness, you can practise anywhere that is quiet, any forest monastery that is quiet enough. Except if it is a big monastery that has a lot of work to do, you might want to ask permission to go away occasionally.

When Luangta Mahā Boowa stayed with Luangpu Mun, he would ask permission to go and practise alone. But he was never too far away from Luangpu Mun because he had to be close enough in case he had any problems or any questions, so that he could come and ask for advice. He said that sometimes if he had problems, then after *piṇḍapāta* he would walk, which might take about two or three hours, to get to where Luangpu Mun stayed. He would wait for Luangpu Mun to come back in the afternoon, and then went to pay respect to Luangpu Mun and asked about what he wanted to know. When he got the answer, then he would walk back. He used his walking back and forth as walking meditation.

You must never be alone without a teacher for too long, because you can be misled by your own misunderstanding because the *kilesas* are very deceptive. Only your teacher knows this; you don't know, so you need his advice. When you have problems, you tell him, or when you have a certain opinion, you tell him, and your teacher can determine whether you have the right opinion or not. Having a teacher to guide and direct you in your practice is the most precious things, the most important thing in your practice.

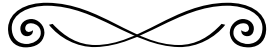
Luangta said that listening to the *desanā* (Dhamma talks) is the most important part of your practice. The second most important thing is the practice itself. If you practise without the right directions, you can go astray. You can go in the wrong direction. So, either you have a living teacher, or if not, then you will have to rely on the scriptures, or the written teachings of the teachers, the Ajahns who have passed away already. This path is

very tricky; it has many pitfalls and traps. Only those who have already gone through will know the traps and pitfalls.

Basically your practice is developing mindfulness and *samādhi*. When you have *samādhi*, try to direct your mind to investigate the *Ti-lakkhaṇa* (impermanence, discontentment, and not-self) in everything, in order to let go of your desire for them, to let go of your attachment.



Questions & Answers



Laywoman (Female 1, F1): Is ambition always driven by desire, or can it come from a place that is good and that leads to good?

Tan Ajahn: The only ambition that is good is to become a monk. [Laughter] That is the only right ambition. That is what the Buddha did. The rest is just delusional; it is not real. If you go after the things in this world, then you are going after bubbles. They are not real because they are impermanent. They only exist for a certain period of time before they disappear, like fame, fortune, and happiness that you gain from things or people — they are temporary. They are never fulfilling. You have to keep getting more and more, meaning you have to work hard all the time to get this kind of happiness. The other kind of happiness that I told you about is meditation. When your mind settles down, becoming peaceful and calm, you will find real fulfilment where you have no desire for anything. It is yours all the time, because it is within yourself. Everything else outside yourself comes and goes, so if you have any desire for anything in this world, be it fortune or fame or anything, you are just going after bubbles. A Thai proverb says that you are going after your own shadow. It is always one

step ahead of you. So the real thing is inside. The only way to get to the real thing is to meditate, to develop mindfulness, to bring your mind to stop thinking. When your mind stops thinking, you will find this peace of mind that you have never experienced before. All you need is just one shot at it. If you have seen it just once, you will be sold; you will be won over. So try to develop mindfulness; try to bring your mind to peace, to settle down, to become peaceful. Then you will realize this is the real kind of happiness that you can have without relying on anything, not even your body. You can have this happiness if you are sick. In bed, you can still meditate, and you can still get your mind to become calm. Or if your body becomes paralyzed or you get old, and you cannot do anything with your body, you can still have this happiness. But for other types of happiness you need your body, a strong healthy body. Then when your body is no longer strong and healthy, you cannot find that kind of happiness anymore. So, if you want to have any ambition, then have this one ambition: to become a nun or to become a monk to practise meditation. I think these gentlemen (monks) have come the right way. You are going the wrong way. [Laughter] Have you studied any Buddhist books at all?

Laywoman (F1): A little, not too much. I am just starting to become interested.

Tan Ajahn: You're not interested to know what your brother is doing right here?

Laywoman (F1): I am. I'm just starting to become really interested.

Tan Ajahn: Well, I think the fact that your brother has become a monk can be helpful to you because it can generate curiosity in yourself. Once you have this curiosity, you will start to study. When you study, you will discover something totally new or different that you have not heard before. So, you are fortunate to have a brother who is a monk. That is why, in Thailand, the family is always happy if a male family member becomes a monk, because it will then encourage other family members to follow suit, or at least to come to the temple to see the monk, just like what you are doing. So the next step is to study; try to get some books to study.

Monk 1: Ajahn, what do you think about the importance of studying *Nakdham*? (Formal Dhamma courses with examinations just like at university)

Tan Ajahn: Not important at all. I never studied it. I studied the scriptures, but you don't have to study formally and take the examinations of that sort. You study to know the path. That's all you need to know. Once you have a teacher, you have already *Nakdham*. Every time he talks, you learn from him. I think it is much more direct than reading the scriptures. The scriptures are pretty broad. Reading them is not like learning from a teacher who is very direct, who goes right to the point where you are right now. For you to go and study the scriptures, I think you are going backward. You are not going forward. This kind of study never happened in the time of the Buddha. They didn't have the separation of *pariyatti* (study) and practice; it was always combined. It has always been the tradition that the teacher gives a talk, and the students listen to it and take whatever the teacher

tells them to absorb into their system and try to follow what the teacher tells them. You don't need to study anything if you have a teacher, unless you want to have a wider view of the teachings for the sake of teaching others. Maybe then you might want to read more. Otherwise, if it is for your own practice, there is not much for you to know. There is a lot more to do than to know. You already know what you have to do. All you need to do is to do it. Not to know more, because this knowledge is useless to your mind. It cannot get rid of your suffering, cannot get rid of your desire. It's only the practice that will be able to do that.

Monk 2: Ajahn, when we want to achieve the happiness that one experiences from meditation, how far should we push ourselves physically? For example, if we become paralyzed before we reach the goal, would it be more degenerating for the practice?

Tan Ajahn: You have to strike the right balance between your body and your mind. Luangta Mahā Boowa liked to do a lot of fasting, but he knew that he could fast only to a certain point before hurting the body. So, you have to know what the right balance is. You have to maintain and take care of your body, so that it maintains its normal functions, so it won't be a hindrance or be a problem to your practice. But you also have to use physical severity in order to push ahead, by fasting for example. Between fasting and not fasting, if you fast and it is conducive to your practice, it will be very helpful. It will move your practice a lot more quickly than not fasting. Because when you are not fasting, you take things easy. You are not hungry, so you tend to look for

the pillow. But when you are fasting, you are not eating and are hungry, so you have to somehow manage your hunger, because 90% of your hunger comes from your mind. So, it forces you to meditate. Once you meditate and your mind becomes calm, then 90% of your hunger disappears, and you can live with the hunger of the body, which is only 10%. It forces you to meditate a lot, to walk *jongkrom* (walking meditation), to develop mindfulness. But if you are not fasting, then you don't have this severity. You have no problem to manage, so you just take things easy. You just lie down, go have some more coffee, or talk to some other monks.

Monk 3: Do you have any other advice on how to practise in a busy monastery while learning Thai language, learning the monastic etiquette, helping out around the monastery, etc. How should we keep integrity in the practice at the same time, such as what minimum amount of time should we spend meditating per day?

Tan Ajahn: The maximum time is that whenever you have free time on your own, then try to either walk or sit. If you have to do any chores or to work with other people, try to maintain mindfulness, try to focus on whatever you do. Don't converse; don't talk with other people; don't let your mind go astray from the work that you are doing at the present. Try to do it, and then when you complete the work, try to go back to your seclusion. You have to strike a balance between communal and personal responsibility. You don't want to feel that you are selfish. When you have to work with other people, you have to do it, except if you have some special privilege or exception like I had when I was staying with Luangta

Mahā Boowa. He gave me some special privileges. When there was construction work like building a *kuṭī*, I tried to go and help, but Luangta would chase me away. He said, “You are just wasting your time here. You are not doing any help here. Get away!” So it depends on the teacher. Sometimes, he can see what you should do more, but if there is no teacher to direct, then you just have to follow the general rules of the monastery, doing whatever is proper. You have to do that in order to live in harmony.

Luangta Mahā Boowa went to seek advice when he stayed with Luangpu Mun, and Luangpu Mun told him, “You have studied a lot of scriptures. You have the third level of *Pali* already, but this knowledge that you have learnt is not beneficial to your mind at all because it cannot get rid of your desire. So what you need to do now is to forget everything that you have learnt. Leave it alone for a while. Right now, try to clear your mind. Make your mind blank by developing *samādhi*. Once you have *samādhi* and you want to develop insight, then this knowledge that you have studied will come in handy. It will be useful to your investigation for the development of insight.” But if you have a teacher who tells you how to develop insight, then you don’t need to go and study the different levels of *Pāli*. It is better to try to develop mindfulness and calm as much as possible. This is the real thing; other things are not real.

Get your mind to be calm and contented. Even though it may only be for a few moments at a time, at least you have a recourse, you have a refuge to go to whenever your mind becomes restless or agitated, and

you can always go to that calm to save you from restlessness and worry. But your restlessness and worry will not disappear if you don't have insight. You need insight to completely get rid of your anxiety, worry, restlessness, agitation, and *dukkha*. All of these arise from your own desires, and your desires arise from your delusion, from not seeing that everything is just bubbles. You think they are real. You are playing with bubbles, and you expect those bubbles to last forever. So right now, try to seek seclusion; try to find time to meditate to develop your mindfulness, and get your mind to become calm and reach the *appanā* point where the mind becomes totally detached from everything. All that you will have is just awareness, knowingness, neutrality of mind without emotions or desires, peace, and contentment. Once you have this, then you have the strength to withstand the attack of your desire. And you will have the leeway to use it to develop the insight to get rid of your desire permanently. If you have no *samādhi* and no contentment, then when your desires arise, it is like a house on fire, and you will become totally uncontrollable.

Try to seek seclusion; be alone in your *kuṭī*, in your place of practice as much as possible. Try to bring your mind to the body, or to *Buddho* (mental repetition of a mantra). If you like to investigate, think in terms of *anicca, dukkha, anattā* (impermanence, stress, not-self), or *asubha* (the loathsome aspects of the body). You can calm the mind that way. Go through the 32 parts of the body. First memorize the names: hair of the head, hair of the body, nail, teeth, skin, etc. When you go through all 32 names, the next step is to visualize each part to see it clearly, to see what it looks like. This can also calm

your mind. Get your mind away from thinking about going here and there, going to see this and that. It is very important especially for monks to always investigate the *asubha* (loathsomeness) aspect of the body, especially the body that you have become attracted to. Your body is not so important, but the body that you are attracted to is. When you see a body and you become attracted, and you have desire to have any sexual activity, then you must use this *asubha* perception to get rid of your desire. Once you see the *asubha* aspect of the body, then your desire will disappear. But if you haven't first developed this in your mind, then when you have this attraction, you will have no recourse; you will not have anything to help you get rid of your desire. So, that's why the *Upajjhāya* has to teach you at least the first five parts of the body on the very day of your ordination. It is an indicator that this is what you always have to do when you become a monk. You always have to investigate the *asubha* nature of the body. If you do this, then you will have protection against your sexual desire.

Monk 4: When I was a pakow (eight-precept candidate for ordination) in Australia a couple of years ago, I spent a *vassa* (rains retreat) with a monk from Sri Lanka. He was really a kind monk and also inspiring with about 15 *vassas*. I could see that he put in a lot of effort into the practice and got a lot of benefits. He liked to practise in the seclusion of the forest. He followed the *suttas* a lot, but he started to rely on the Thai Ajahns after he met up with Luang Por Liem and some of the western disciples of Luang Por Chah. What advice would you give to a monk who does not have a teacher but relies on the *suttas* a lot?

Tan Ajahn: He has to keep on pushing himself. He has nobody else to push him, so he has to push himself. He has to look at where he is now and whether he has gone far enough yet. If he hasn't, he has to set up a goal and move towards it. If he does not have a goal, then he might get stuck where he is. That is one of the benefits of staying with a teacher. Sometimes you get lazy, and he will push you. But if you are all alone, sometimes you don't know, so you have to observe yourself a lot more. He should investigate his practice to see whether he is staying in the same place or if he is moving forward. He needs *virīya* and *adhitthāna* (effort and determination). He has to set up the resolve to do more.



16

Asian University Students

July 17, 2014

Let me first say hello to all of you. It is good to see you. It is good to have a chance to talk to you and to tell you something that you might not know. Is there any particular thing that you wish to know about Buddhism? Would you like to ask anything? Perhaps, I will just keep talking, and maybe later you might have something to ask.

Let me start with the Lord Buddha. The Lord Buddha was a prince, born in northern India about 2,500 years ago. When he was 29 years old, he decided to become a monk after realizing that he was going to get old, get sick, and die eventually. This was a state that he did not want to experience if he somehow didn't have to. Because he heard that there were monks who had tried to find a way to eliminate aging, sickness, and death, he thought that, by being a monk, he would discover a way so that he would not have to get sick, get old, and die. That is what led him to leave the palace life and to live like a beggar.

A monk lives on the charity of other people. He takes his begging bowl into the village in the morning to receive alms food and then retreats back into the forest where it is quiet and peaceful. The goal is to find peace of mind to overcome the suffering or the stress that one has to experience when one gets old, gets sick, or dies. So the goal of being a monk is to find peace of mind. To have peace of mind one has to be detached from worldly pleasures, like the pleasures of the flesh from seeing, hearing, eating, drinking, and having fun with entertainment, because if one still wants to experience this kind of happiness or pleasure, one cannot have peace of mind.

In order to have peace of mind, one has to relinquish the pleasures of the senses by living alone in the forest, and establishing mindfulness to control the mind, to keep the mind from thinking about this or that. You want to clear the mind, making it empty and blank, because an empty mind brings peace of mind. Peace of mind brings happiness. It is a different kind of happiness than the happiness of the senses. The happiness of the senses is only temporary, like when you see, hear, drink, or eat something, you find pleasure and happiness, but it lasts only briefly. After that, the happiness disappears, and later on, you want to eat more, drink more, and see more, so it is never fulfilling. It is only a brief form of happiness that needs to be replenished again and again. When you cannot replenish it, you become unhappy. When you want to see, to hear, or to eat something and you cannot do so, you become unhappy. The body cannot sustain this kind of happiness forever. Eventually, the body will become old, sick, and will die. Then you cannot experience this kind of happiness; you can only experience unhappiness.

But the happiness that you gain from emptying your mind and clearing your mind is the kind of happiness that lasts, that stays with you, and that you don't need to use the body as a means to make you happy. You can be happy just from your own mental ability. If you can develop mindfulness to prevent your mind from thinking about things that you want to see, do, drink, and eat, then you don't need to have these kinds of happiness. You can have happiness by just having an empty mind. This is what the Buddha discovered when he became a monk. True happiness is within yourself. True happiness is inside yourself, in the mind. True happiness arises when you have peace of mind. Peace of mind arises when you have no thoughts, when you can stop thinking. But you can't just stop thinking by ordering it to stop. You have to have a meditation technique or what we call "mindfulness." You have to keep your mind focused on one object, on one thing, and then you can prevent your mind from thinking about other things.

In Thailand, people like to use the mantra of the name of the Buddha. We keep repeating the name of the Buddha mentally. We maintain this mental recitation, repeating this mantra mentally during our waking hours, from the time we get up to the time we go to sleep, in whatever we do, we keep on reciting this mantra, *Buddha, Buddha, Buddha*. As you open your eyes, get up, go to the bathroom, take a shower, brush your teeth, get dressed, have a meal, or do whatever you have to do, if you can keep on reciting this mantra, then your mind cannot think about other things. If you need to think, just think of the things immediately important to you, like what you are doing right now. What you have to do now.

Be in the present. Prevent your mind from thinking about the past, the future, or unnecessary things.

If you can maintain this state of mindfulness and your concentration on the mantra, when you sit in meditation you can make your mind calm and peaceful. If you cannot control your thinking, then when you sit in meditation, your mind will think about this and that, your mind will not become calm and peaceful, and you will not be successful in your meditation. You will not experience the kind of happiness that arises from having peace of mind, unless you somehow manage to focus on your mantra, or some other objects. If you don't like using a mantra when you sit, you can use your breathing as the object of your concentration instead. Just focus on your breathing; be aware of your breathing. For instance, when you are breathing in, you know that you are breathing in. When you are breathing out, just know that you are breathing out. If you can keep your attention on your breathing and do not think about any other things, your mind can converge and become calm and peaceful.

So, the goal of Buddhism is to have peace of mind. Because once you have peace of mind, you are contented and happy. You don't want anything; you don't need anything. You don't have to work; you don't have to go here and there looking for happiness, because in fact that is not real happiness. That is more like a lot of work. The act of looking for happiness is itself work since you have to pursue it. So if you have to pursue something, it is not happiness. Real happiness doesn't need to be pursued. All you need to do is to be still. If you can keep your mind still, you will have happiness. The thing that

makes your mind still is mindfulness. Mindfulness means focusing your attention on one thing, like your body. You can watch your body from the time you get up to the time you go to sleep. Couple your mind to the body; link the mind to the body, not letting the mind go anywhere else. Keep it with the body all the time. Whatever the body is doing, just watch and be aware. Don't think about other things when you are doing something, like when you are eating, don't think about what you will do tomorrow or where you went yesterday. Just be with the body, with the action that the body is doing at the moment. This is what is meant by having mindfulness. Concentrate on watching your body, preventing your mind from thinking about this or that. If your mind keeps on thinking, your mind will become irritated, agitated, and you will not be happy. But if your mind doesn't think, it will become still, and you will be happy. So, this is what we have to do if you want to have peace of mind, if you want to have real happiness, the kind of happiness that we don't have to use anything to achieve. It is not like the kind of happiness that you are experiencing now that requires a strong, healthy body with good eyes and ears in order to see and hear things. Whenever your body is not well, you will not be able to achieve the kind of happiness that you want. With meditation though, you don't need to use the body. You can be blind, deaf, or dumb, not hearing anything, and you can still meditate. Even though you can't see anything, you can still meditate. You can still make the mind calm, peaceful, and happy. So, this is another kind of happiness that we can have if we know how to get it.

To be able to meditate, the Buddha said we must first relinquish the kind of happiness that we are used to,

i.e. the happiness through the body. We have to stop going outside, seeing things, hearing things, going to the movies, going out to parties, or anything of that sort. We have to stop, and stay at home if we can. Stay alone in your room and meditate. You have to keep on meditating again and again, until you achieve the result. So, it is not easy, because normally the mind wants to go outside to go see things, to hear things, to go eat and drink, and to have fun. But this kind of happiness can be tiring, and it can be hard to achieve because it takes a lot of resources to obtain. You need a strong body, and you need money in order to see what you want to see, hear what you want hear, eat or drink what you want to eat or drink. Money doesn't come easily; you have to work. So, this is the kind of happiness that you are going after, which can be quite stressful sometimes when you have to work to get money. And when you get the money, you will spend it very quickly. In just a few days, you will spend the money that took the whole month to earn, and then you have to go back and work again. And then next time when you get money, you again spend it in just a few days, so this is what you keep on doing again and again. When there is an interruption to this process, like if you cannot acquire money, then you may be in trouble. Or if you have the money, but your body cannot do what you want to do, like when your body gets sick or gets old, then you can no longer enjoy this kind of happiness. But if you can develop mindfulness, maintaining your focus with your attention on one object, then you can sit in meditation and have peace of mind. When you have peace of mind, you have happiness. So, this is what the Buddha chose to do instead of living in the palace and having happiness through the body. He wanted to have happiness

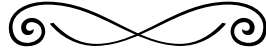
directly through the mind, by living alone and controlling the mind, developing mindfulness to stop the mind from thinking, so it could become peaceful, calm, and happy.

This is something you might not have heard about before, or you might have heard about it before, but you might not have tried it yet. But if one day, for some reasons, you get tired of your way of life, now you know that there is an alternative way of finding happiness, a kind of happiness that you don't have to pursue. All you have to do is to stop your mind from pursuing. When you pursue something, your mind becomes restless, agitated, and unhappy. The mind can only be happy when it stops pursuing, stops going after this or that. Just become still. So, maybe this is something you want to try one day. Stop your mind from going after things, going after all sorts of activities that you think can make you happy, but can only give you temporary happiness. Once you have experienced something, it is gone. If you want it again, you have to do it again. And if you have to do it again and again, it becomes boring, and you get sick of it. So, you look for something different to do. So, this is what the Buddha said — life is boring. Life is not satisfactory if it is the kind of life in which you have to use the body to have happiness. So, he tried to find the other kind of happiness. He became a monk, and he put all his efforts into developing peace of mind by staying alone. Because if you stay with other people, you will have interactions with them, and when you have interactions, your mind has to think, and it cannot become still or peaceful. So, this is basically the goal of Buddhism: to develop a different kind of happiness, the kind of happiness in which you don't have to rely on

your body or any financial resources. You can be broke and still be happy. You can be alone and still be happy. If you can make your mind peaceful and calm, you don't need to have a partner to live with. You can live alone and be happy. So, this is basically what I wanted to tell you. If there is anything you want to ask, you are welcome to do so.



Questions & Answers



Student (Female, F): What is the monks' daily routine like?

Tan Ajahn: Generally, our main undertaking is to maintain mindfulness all the time, from the time we get up to the time we go to sleep. So, whatever we do, we have to maintain mindfulness with that activity. We get up in the morning at 4 o'clock; we sit and meditate until about 6 o'clock in the morning, and then it is the time to go to the village to collect food. We have a begging bowl which we take with us as we walk through the street to the village. People who want to give food will come out and give food, putting it into the bowl. After we have collected food from the village, we come back to the monastery, gather in the dining hall, and share the food that we have collected.

We put the food in the bowl, and use the bowl as our dish. We put all the food that we want to eat in the bowl, and we eat the food. While we are doing all these activities, we maintain total silence. We don't talk unnecessarily. If we need to talk, we will talk only about what is necessary, but mainly we try to maintain mindfulness, just being aware of what we are doing.

While we eat, we just concentrate on eating. We don't talk to each other when we eat. When we finish eating, we wash our own bowl, clean the dining hall, and then we go back to our living quarters where we continue with our mindfulness practice and meditation.

Normally, after eating, we cannot sit in meditation because we would become sleepy and fall asleep. So, we normally do walking meditation instead. We can do meditation sitting down, standing up, or while walking. Meditation means to focus your mind on one object to prevent your mind from thinking about other things in order to make your mind peaceful and calm. You have to empty your mind of thoughts, so you need a mantra, or you could focus on your body. For instance, if you are doing walking meditation, you can concentrate on the walking movement of the body. When you use your left foot, you say "left"; when you use your right foot, you say "right." We keep on walking left-right, left-right. The walking path may be about ten meters long, and when you walk to the end of the path, you turn around and walk back. You keep on repeating mentally left-right, left-right to prevent yourself from thinking about this or that. You keep on walking until you feel tired, and then you can sit. When you sit, you can use your breathing as your object of focus. Just focus on your breathing at the tip of the nose where the air touches, where it goes in and comes out. Just focus on that point to prevent yourself from thinking about other things. If you can maintain continuous mindfulness, you can achieve calm very quickly, maybe in five or ten minutes. Your mind will become still and not think about anything, becoming peaceful and happy. Sometimes, we can remain in that

state for a long time, like 30 minutes, 40 minutes, or one hour, depending on how strong your mindfulness is. The stronger your mindfulness is, the longer your mind will remain in that state of peace. Once it comes out, if you feel tired of sitting, then you get up and walk again, and repeat the same thing. This is what we normally do after we finish eating.

If we feel tired, we might take a nap after our meal. As a monk, we only eat once a day in the morning at about 8 o'clock after we come back from our alms round. We have food around 8 o'clock, and after we finish our food we meditate until about 12 o'clock, and maybe have an hour of rest. We get up at about 1 o'clock and continue on with our walking and sitting meditation until about 3 o'clock or 4 o'clock, when we have to sweep the grounds, clean up the place where we live, and have an afternoon drink. We are allowed to have fruit juices, coffee, or tea in the afternoon after we finish our chores of sweeping the floor and cleaning the building where we live. Then we go back, take a shower, and continue with our meditation until about 10 o'clock. We go to sleep for about four or five hours until about 3 am, and we get up and do meditation again. This is what we do. Our goal is to empty our minds of all sorts of thinking and find happiness within ourselves.

Student (F): How long have you been a monk? How did you become a monk, and where did you learn meditation?

Tan Ajahn: Almost 40 years ago. I became a monk in 1975. I learned meditation by reading a book. Someone

gave me a book about Buddhism in English. Before that, I lived in Thailand, but I didn't know much about Buddhism because I was sent to a Christian missionary school, called "Seventh-day Adventist." So I didn't know much about Buddhism except for the traditions that we do, such as giving food to the monks or going to the temple to pray to the Buddha. I never really studied the teachings of the Buddha.

After I graduated from college I wanted to learn more about things that I had never learned about before, and religion was one of the things that I wanted to learn more about. I knew about Christianity, having studied it for many years in school because I went to a missionary school, but I didn't know about Buddhism. So when someone gave me a book on Buddhism, I read it and discovered the way to meditate. So I started meditating in the way I just told you, by developing mindfulness, keeping my mind in the present, in the here and now, not in the past and not in the future, just being here with the body. Whatever I did, I kept watching my body, and when I had time I just sat down, closed my eyes, and watched my breathing. So, when I did that I found some peace of mind, and I liked it. So, I decided to become a monk, because when I became a monk I didn't have to work, I didn't have to worry about looking for a place to stay, or food to eat. Everything is provided. I have so much time to meditate following the routine from the time I get up to the time I go to sleep. I don't have to do any other thing. I just have to develop my mindfulness and meditation, either by sitting or walking meditation. And when you have the time to do it, you can develop quite a lot of peace of mind. You don't have to

worry about anything. Because when your mind is peaceful, you don't need anything; you don't want anything. The reason why we worry is because we still want this and that, and we are not sure whether we can have it all the time. But if we don't want anything, we don't have to worry about anything. If you have peace of mind, you can endure all kinds of events. Whatever happens doesn't matter to you, and your mind can go through it peacefully. Like if you have to get old, it's no problem. If you have to get sick, it's no problem. If you have to die, it's no problem, because the mind doesn't need the body to make the mind happy. The mind can be happy without the body. If you still need the body to have happiness, when something happens to your body you become nervous, unhappy, anxious, and worried. But if you don't need to use the body, it doesn't matter what happens to it; you can always be happy because you can always keep your mind peaceful and calm.

Student (F): Is there a traditional ceremony where you decide to become a monk?

Tan Ajahn: Yes, when one becomes a monk, he has to go through what we call an ordination process. Like we have this gentleman here from the United States who is interested in becoming a monk, so he stays here and lives like a monk, but without putting on a robe yet for a certain period of time to see if he is ready for the monkhood. He does everything in the same way as the monks do, to try it out. After a few months, if he thinks he is ready, we will have an ordination ceremony, in which he has to go to the shrine with at least ten monks to witness his ordination process. It is just a matter of

saying a few words that he has the intention to become a monk and asking permission to do so. And if all the monks who assemble in the shrine accept him, then he becomes a monk. By becoming a monk, he accepts that he has to behave in certain ways. We have 227 monastic rules. The main rules are only four. A monk must not break the four cardinal rules of a monk, which are, first — not to have sex, second — not to kill, third — not to steal, and fourth — not to lie. These are the four cardinal rules that a monk cannot break. Once he breaks any of them, he is no longer a monk. The other rules are more about etiquette, the proper way of behaving when doing something, like when he is eating he has to eat quietly, without talking or chatting.

Student (F): Can monks keep in contact with relatives and family? Are they allowed to talk to their family?

Tan Ajahn: Yes, the family can come at certain periods of time, usually around the meal time when they come and offer food to the monks. But they can also come at other times, sometimes in the afternoon when the monks can come out and meet their families.

Yes, they are allowed to talk to the family, but the family should not bring problems to the monk, telling him that they have problems at home with this or that person. Rather it is more to visit, to find out how each other is doing, or to find out whether the monk needs anything.

Once you become a monk, if you decide you want to disrobe, you are allowed to do so. This is not a permanent thing. You can become a monk for three

months, and if you are not happy, you can disrobe. And after you disrobe, if you want to become a monk again, you can do it again. The only time that you cannot become a monk is when, as a monk, you broke any of the four cardinal rules. Then you cannot become a monk again; otherwise, you can disrobe, and then later on, if you want to become a monk again, you can come back. But monks are prohibited from being alone with a woman. You cannot talk alone with a woman. If a woman comes to the monastery, she has to bring a male companion, a friend to accompany her. Even the mother or sister cannot come to see the monk alone. They have to have another person, preferably a male companion, to prevent the monk from breaking the cardinal rules.

When you become a monk, you have to contemplate the repulsive aspects of the body. The body is both beautiful and loathsome. It depends on how you look at it. If you look outside it can be beautiful, but if you look inside, under the skin, it can be quite repulsive. So, this is what the Buddha taught monks to do. Once one becomes a monk, he has to contemplate the repulsive aspects of the body, to look inside the body, dissecting it to see the inner organs: the heart, lungs, intestines, stomach, and liver. If he can maintain this contemplation, he can subdue his sexual desire. If he looks at the beautiful aspects of the body, sexual desire will arise, and if it is not curbed or stopped, it will force the monk to break the rules. So, this is something that a monk has to do once he is ordained, constantly contemplating the repulsive aspects of the body, dissecting the body, looking at the body when it gets old, when it gets sick, or when it dies in order to subdue sexual desire. Because if you cannot subdue sexual

desire, when it arises you will become very irritated and agitated, and eventually you will not be able to remain as a monk because you will feel very unhappy. It is the same for the opposite sex, because we also have women who have been ordained and become nuns, but they put on a white-robe. We have the same goal, the same objective, and the same practice. So, as a woman, if you become a nun, then you have to contemplate the repulsive aspects of the male body.

Student (F): Do monks and nuns live together?

Tan Ajahn: No, we live separately. We live in the same monastery, but we have two sections, and we cannot mingle with each other. If, for some reasons, we have to make contact, we have to do it in a communal manner, with two or three people together, and not alone. It is because women have to live near men. During the time of the Buddha, there were all kinds of bandits, or people who could hurt women if they lived alone. So, women who are ordained have to live close to the monks for protection. But when we have to meet, we have to do it in a group, not individually.

Student (F): Are monks allowed to read books?

Tan Ajahn: Usually books on Buddhism, but not novels or history books. You are not prohibited from reading them, but you are recommended not to read them, because reading them can make your mind restless. If you learn something about the outside world, it makes you want to go outside. What you want to do is to bring your mind inside, so you don't want to know about the world, like reading the newspapers to find out what is

happening now in the world. Because reading or hearing things can affect your mind and prevent it from becoming peaceful. So when we read, usually we read about the teachings of the Buddha.

Or, instead of reading, we contemplate on the truth that life is temporary. Having been born, everybody gets old, gets sick, and dies. This is what we keep teaching and telling ourselves. So, when we see that life is temporary, we can relinquish it. If you don't think of this, you may forget that you will get old, get sick, and die, so you will have this delusion and think that you will live forever. When you have this delusion, you want to fight against the truth. You don't want to become old, you don't want to get sick, and you don't want to die. When you do this, your mind becomes agitated, nervous, miserable, and unhappy. But if you are constantly teaching yourself that life is temporary, that the body will get sick, get old, and die, and if you know that you cannot resist this truth, you can accept this truth and become peaceful so that when you get old, you don't get agitated, nervous, or troubled. You can accept old age, sickness, and death. And you can live peacefully and die peacefully. You can get old peacefully, get sick peacefully, and die peacefully. When you are peaceful, you are happy. This is something we have to constantly contemplate, during the time we meditate, when we calm the mind and think about the truth. We keep thinking that life is impermanent, that everything is not under our control. We cannot control our body. We cannot tell the body to stop aging; we cannot tell the body to remain at the age of 25. The body keeps on going. It is a process that we cannot stop, but we can prevent our mind from becoming miserable with the

changing state of the body if the mind accepts the truth about the nature of the body. And the mind will only accept the truth if we keep telling it the truth. Keep repeatedly telling the mind that you are going to get sick, you are going to get old, and you are going to die. Just keep repeating it, all the time, and the mind will slowly accept this truth, and will not reject it. Once the mind stops rejecting it, the mind becomes peaceful and happy. We can become happy when we get old. We can become happy when we get sick. We can become happy when we die. So, this is the goal, to maintain peace of mind at all times. If you can maintain peace of mind at all times, you can maintain happiness at all times, and you won't need anything to make you happy. All you need is the ability to control your mind, to teach your mind.

So is anyone interested in becoming a monk? Not yet?

What we normally do after giving a talk is to sit in meditation for about ten minutes. This will give us an opportunity to experience the meditation technique I just told you about. If you like, you can sit in any position, cross-legged, or however you want. Just focus on your breathing if you like, or you can recite a mantra, like *Buddha, Buddha, Buddha*. The goal is to prevent your mind from thinking. If your mind starts to think, come back to your breathing, or come back to your mantra recitation. Don't think. Come back to your mantra. Come back to your breathing. You will experience some peace of mind even though it is just for ten minutes.



17

Laypeople from California

May 27, 2014

The group of devotees includes an internist (a doctor of internal medicine) who is also a surgeon, and an obstetrics & gynaecology doctor from California, the United States of America, his wife and friends.

Tan Ajahn: What do you want to know?

Layman (Doctor, Dr): When I contemplate during meditation, I would like to understand the no-self aspect of it. When a thought arises, there is a self arising, and when the thought ceases, the arising (of the thought) ceases too. As there cannot be two thoughts arising at the same time, one thought must be completed before a second thought arises. Therefore, there must be one thought arising and ceasing, and then another thought arising and ceasing. There is a gap between one thought and the next that lasts for a fraction of a second. During that fraction of a second, is there a no-self?

Tan Ajahn: The way to prove whether there is a self or no-self is in your daily life. When you see your wife

and she scolds you, if you get mad, then there is a self. If you do not get mad, there is no-self. That is what you have to be more concerned with, not so much as when you are alone. When you are alone, there is no problem. Problems only arise when you meet other people. When you meet other people and get angry, then there is a self. That means you have fallen into delusion. If you have wisdom, you will say, "There is no-self. Who is being scolded? Who is going to get angry?" There is only the knower, right? This is what you have to remind yourself of all the time, especially when you are involved with things or people, because that is when delusion starts to arise. If somebody takes this iPad away from you, you will get angry because you think that this is "my" iPad. How can this iPad belong to you, when there is no-self? When you are alone, you can think that there is no-self, but it is not practical. You have to apply it in your life because that is where the problem exists. The problem exists not when you are alone, but when you are with people and with things. So, this is what you want to apply. When you are alone, you just want to remind yourself or train your reactions so that from now on, "I am not going to react, whatever happens, because there is no "me." There is only someone who knows. There is the knower, but there is no person who knows; it is just knowing. There is an action, but there is no actor. There is a feeling, but there is no feeler." You have to neutralize yourself in this way, and the only way to do that naturally is to have *upekkhā* (equanimity). *Upekkhā* arises when you meditate and drop into *appaṇā samādhi*. When you come out of *samādhi*, you still have the *upekkhā* left, and you want to maintain that *upekkhā* by using wisdom

(*vipassanā*) to remind yourself that there is no-self, there is no “me.” There is just knowing. So just know whatever happens. The mind just knows; it doesn’t react. As soon as you react, especially if you react emotionally, it means that you have started to have self again. When you see something you don’t like, it means you are reacting. When you hear something you like, it means you are reacting. If you just see and hear and do not react, then there is no self. So, the problem is the reaction. When you come into contact with people and things, you should not react, but just be aware. That is the test of your wisdom, whether you have the wisdom to guide your mind.

This is clinging, this is “I,” this is “mine,” this is “myself” — you have to get rid of all these. There is no “I”; there is no “me.” There is only knowing. If you can maintain this understanding, you will be free from all forms of mental suffering, with no *dukkha* (suffering, discontentment) at all.

Layman (Dr): When I have pain, I suppress it and tell myself there is no pain.

Tan Ajahn: There is pain, but no one feels the pain. It is just someone watching the pain, being aware of the pain. If your mind has *upekkhā*, the mind will not be painful. But when you come out of *upekkhā*, your mind will become painful, because the delusion will start to mislead you to think that you are the one who is experiencing the pain.

Laywoman: *Arahants* also have these *khandhas*, right?

Tan Ajahn: Yes, they still know the pain. They still get sick, get stomach aches, and headaches, but their minds don't react to the pain. With ordinary people, when the body gets sick, the mind reacts strongly, and the mind suffers more than the body.

[Speaking to the layman (Doctor)] It is like when you were sick, you didn't use any pain killers, right? Because you knew that it was only the body that was sick. If your mind is not afraid of the pain, there is no need to take any pain killers.

Layman (Dr): Is there a something called the 'path-moment'?

Tan Ajahn: It is the moment when you can extinguish mental suffering. For instance, when your mind becomes very sad because you have lost something, and when you have the wisdom to see that this is normal, that there is nothing you can do to prevent it, and when you realize this and let go of the attachment, your mind flips from being sad to being peaceful. That is the path-moment and the fruit-moment. They happen at the same time, when the mind flips from *dukkha* to *nirodha* (cessation of *dukkha*).

To reach the first stage of *Sotāpanna*, you have to expose yourself to danger, place yourself in a situation where you are very stressed because you are afraid that you are going to die. Suddenly, you realize that this is not your body, and if the body is going to die to just let it happen. When you let go of the body, your mind flips from being stressful to *nirodha*. During the time when

your mind flips, you shouldn't be unconscious; you should be fully aware.

Layman (Dr): When I experienced pain, and when I let it go, the pain disappeared.

Tan Ajahn: That was the path-moment and the fruit-moment. The path-moment is when you investigate the pain or the body, and when you truly let it go, then your mind will flip over (from *dukkha* to *nirodha*).

Laywoman: Does the pain just disappear, without you realizing it, and does it happen automatically?

Tan Ajahn: The nature of pain itself is also impermanent. What you want to have it disappear is not the physical pain, but the mental pain. This is the mental pain that arises from your desire for the physical pain to disappear. When you see that you cannot control the physical pain, and you do not have the desire for it to disappear, you give up that desire. When you give up that desire, the mental pain disappears. When you realize that the majority of your pain is not physical, but mental, from then onwards you will not be afraid of any physical pain. It is because you know that it is very small and minute compared to the mental pain, which you can control.

The majority of our pain is in the mind. That's why the Buddha and the *Arahants* can pass away peacefully. They don't have to go to hospitals. They don't have to have any medicine. They just use their mental strength.

Laywoman: Do they know that they are going to pass away?

Tan Ajahn: Yes. They watch the body like a physician. You, yourself, are better than the doctor who treats you, because you are the closest (to your body). The doctor doesn't know how you feel, or how much strength you have left, but you do. Every minute, you know how much strength you have left from your ability to breathe. As it becomes harder for you to breathe, you know that you are losing the strength to live. When you can no longer breathe, you know that it is the end of life.

Laywoman: When we were born, did we bring a pre-determined amount of time to live or do we leave it to *kamma*? And when we decided to die, is there also an 'I'?

Tan Ajahn: It depends on how much time you have to spend paying your *karmic* debts. So when you die, you will have to go either to the good *kamma* realm or bad *kamma* realm. It depends on which one has more influence. If your bad *kamma* is stronger than your good *kamma*, you go the *apāya* realm, like becoming an animal or staying in hell for a while, until that *kamma* dissipates. When the good *kamma* and the bad *kamma* are equal, they cannot bring you to heaven or to hell, and then you look for a human body.

It is limited by the extent of your *kamma*. If you do a lot of good *kamma*, you will spend a lot of time in heaven. If you give a lot of *dāna*, such as giving a lot of food, helping a lot of people, and keeping the five precepts, when you die you will go to heaven and stay there for a long time.

If you want to shorten your time in *samsāra*, you have to develop wisdom. You have to be able to let go of the body and of pain. And then you have to let go of your sexual desire. You have to contemplate on *asubha*, the unattractive parts of the body, until you no longer want to have a human body. When you don't have this desire, you don't need a new body, so when you die, you don't have to come back and be born as a human being again. Then you will become an *Anāgāmi* and be born in the *brahma* realm. And if you can destroy all the delusion of the mind, then you can become an *Arahant*, and your mind will become *Nibbāna*. That is where you will remain for the rest of time.

Laywoman: What if we die before we complete the path?

Tan Ajahn: It depends on how far you have practised. If you are a *Sotāpanna*, you have a maximum of seven human lives left. It could be less, depending on how much you have practised. If you practise until the *Anāgāmi* stage, you no longer have to take a human birth.

Laywoman: So does that mean that those attainments take away any bad *kamma*?

Tan Ajahn: Yes. Once you become a *Sotāpanna* you can stop your mind from going to the *apāya* realms. You don't have to pay any of your bad *karmic* debts anymore, except the *kamma* that comes when you are born as a human being. This you will still have to pay. When you are born, you might have bad *kamma* come after you.

Layman (Dr): What is the reason that the *Sotāpanna* does not have to pay bad kammic debts anymore? Is it because they have removed the *sakkāya-ditṭhi* (self-identity view)?

Tan Ajahn: Yes. It is because they have let go of the desire to live, because they know that birth is suffering. There is aging, sickness, and death accompanying birth, so they don't want to come back. But since they cannot yet destroy their sexual desire, they still want to come back and have a body to fulfil that desire. But once they see the body as unattractive and unwholesome, they can destroy that desire. When they don't have that sexual desire, they don't need to have a body anymore, so they won't come back.

Layman (Dr): What is the *eka-bhiñña Sotāpanna*, a *Sotāpanna* who enters *Nibbāna* in one life? If someone stays in a peaceful state of mind with no anger, can one be this type of *Sotāpanna*?

Tan Ajahn: I have not paid much attention to the different aspects of the *Sotāpanna*, because it doesn't matter. What matters is trying to get rid of your desire, because the first obstacle is the desire to live. The desire to have no pain — you have to get rid of that. After that, you have to get rid of your desire for sex. Once you have done that, you don't need a body anymore. You can do it in seven days or you can do it in seven lives, it is all up to you. Some people still like to have sex, so they stop practising *asubha*. A *Sotāpanna* might still have a family, still have a wife or husband, and still enjoy sex with his or her partner. But once they get sick of the cycle,

like when they lose their loved ones, when their wives die, then they know that this is suffering. It is better to live without a wife. So next time you have sexual desire, instead of getting a new wife, try to contemplate *asubha* to get rid of your desire. Because if you get a new wife, maybe after a while she will leave you again, so it is better to get rid of this sexual desire. If you can get rid of about half of it, you will only have one life left to live, and you will become a *Sakadāgāmī*. A *Sakadāgāmī* has less sexual desire, maybe about fifty percent less intense, than a *Sotāpanna*.

Layman (Dr): Have you gone to the *upācāra samādhi* level, or is it necessary to have that level of *samādhi* in order to enter the path?

Tan Ajahn: You have to have an *upekkhā* mind to be able to contemplate the true nature of things. Your mind has to be rational.

Layman (Dr): Will the level of *khaṇika samādhi* (momentary concentration) be sufficient to enter the path?

Tan Ajahn: *Khaṇika samādhi* is like wiping a glass window for one second. You can't wipe the window clean, so you don't see clearly. But if you have enough time to wipe the window clean, then you can see what is on the other side of the window clearly. You need to have a clear mind, to see things clearly as they are.

Layman (Dr): In that case, if you contemplate the pain, can we just let go of the pain?

Tan Ajahn: You cannot let go of the pain, because you don't see it clearly as not belonging to the body, as not belonging to you. When you have *upekkhā*, you can see it clearly.

Layman (Dr): Does that mean if you see the pain, you will see it disappear?

Tan Ajahn: That means you have *upekkhā*. When you can let go of the pain that means you have *upekkhā*. If you cannot do that, that means you don't have it. So it is not so important to measure how much you have, but rather measure how much you can achieve. That is better. You look at some people and see that they never sit in *samādhi*, and you wonder how they became a *Sotāpanna*? It's because their mind already has *samādhi* without them knowing that they have it.

Letting go is like seeing somebody in pain. When you see somebody feeling pain, do you feel the pain? No. In the same way, you look at the body as if it belongs to someone else. You feel the pain, but you don't react to it.

It is like most of the teachers or Ajahns who usually don't go to the hospital. They know that their time has come. They accept the reality. They don't want to resist or fight reality. It just makes you suffer longer, unless you can fix the body, go back to normal, and continue doing something good, then do it. Like when you get sick, if you have medicine to cure the illness, then take it. But if you know that no matter how much you do, the medicine is not going to make anything better and is just extending your suffering, it is pointless to treat the body. It is better to let it go.

But killing the body is also wrong, like in the Western world. You can tell them to stop treatment, but you cannot ask them to inject poison into the body. You can ask them not to do anymore treatment and leave the body to its nature.

Layman (Dr): When a person is in a vegetative state, and his life is supported by a life-support machine that maintains his life artificially, should he be taken off the machine, even though you know that as long as the machine is attached to the body, he will still be alive? As a physician when someone asks me for advice, I tell them to maintain life support, knowing that there is still life as long as the machine is not turned off.

Tan Ajahn: You don't kill that person, you just stop the treatment. That is all. If you tell the hospital that you don't have money to pay, what would they do? They will just take off the life-support machine to stop treatment.

Life that is supported by a machine is not a natural life anymore. Pulling the plug of the machine only means that you are stopping treatment; you are not stopping the person from breathing.

Layman (Dr): I had an experience where there was a patient who had a heart attack, and we used the machine to help him. After using the machine for quite a while, when everyone was starting to give up, he started to recover, and later on I saw him going to the clinic. What caused that?

Tan Ajahn: It doesn't matter whether he lives or not. Always look at the end result. Why bother to know

what caused him to live or what caused him to die? It doesn't matter. Just look at the end result — that is all that matters. You can use all kind of explanations that his good *kamma* helped him or a good doctor helped him, but it doesn't matter.

Layman (Dr): What do you think is the right thing to do: to pull the plug or to maintain life-support?

Tan Ajahn: It depends on the situation. If everyone wants to maintain it, leave it there, and if everyone wants to pull the plug, then pull the plug. The result is the same. He just lies there anyway. He cannot do anything anymore. If you can afford it, you can maintain the machine. But if you turn it off, it doesn't mean that you are committing any sin. You don't kill the person by pulling the plug, you just stop treatment. That's all.

That is what happened to Venerable Father Chah. Venerable *Ācariya* Mahā Boowa was the person who told them that it was time to pull the plug, because they were just prolonging his suffering. That is all. If you have to inject poison into a person's body, then that is a sin. That is killing. There is intention.

Any other questions?

Laywoman: How can we stop our anger? For example, when someone scolds you without any reason, then you scold him or her back straight away.

Tan Ajahn: You first have to figure out the cause of the anger. Basically the cause of anger arises from your desire. You want something, and when you don't get

what you want, you become angry. But if you don't want anything, you usually don't get angry. So you should try to stop your desire.

You don't want him or her to scold you: that is your desire. So you have to change your attitude, like from now on you are willing to let people scold you. And when people scold you, you are happy because you get what you wanted. The Buddha said that in this life, there are always two sides to everything. If there is praise, there is also blame and criticism. You cannot just take one. You cannot just take praise; you also have to take criticism, because they come together.

Layman: My friend just started studying Buddhism. He said that he cares a lot about people all the time. Sometimes, he feels stressed over them, whether it is an old girlfriend or a good friend, he is always stressed over them. He feels that he has compassion for them, and that compassion makes him stressed.

Tan Ajahn: No, it is not compassion. It is a desire to possess them. He doesn't want that person to belong to someone else. If that person starts to talk to someone, or other people, he becomes suspicious, wondering whether that person is leaving him. Does she no longer like me? It is attachment and possessiveness, not compassion. True love should be giving. If the other person is happy talking to other people, you should be happy for her. But that is not what he feels — he wants to possess her, he wants her to only talk to him, and nobody else. This is what causes him to get stressed. So, he has to let go. Treat her as someone that he has

never met before. Don't be possessive. Don't be sad, because when he feels sad he becomes attached. When he is attached, he becomes protective, and he doesn't want that person to do anything that he doesn't want her to do. So, if she does something he doesn't want her to do, he becomes unhappy.

We have the tendency that when we like something, we want to keep it for ourselves. We don't want to share it with other people. We have to see other people as people just like ourselves. They have their own will, their own feelings and thinking. They can change anytime. Today they might like you, but tomorrow they might get sick of you. What will you do when they get sick of you? They don't want to talk to you anymore, but you still want them to talk to you. Then you become stressed because you don't get what you want. So, the problem always comes back to our three desires: the desire for sensual things, the desire to be, and the desire not to be. Those are all the problems that make us stressed. When you have no desire, you don't have any stress. We take things as they are. When you have a boyfriend or a girlfriend just accept them as he or she is. Maybe today he is nice to you, but maybe tomorrow he is no longer nice to you. Just take whatever comes. You cannot expect them to be nice to you all the time, because everything changes, right? The person's feelings change. Their feelings towards you change. The person thinks that he might like you, but after he gets to know you, he might not like you anymore. If you don't want to have any stress, then don't have any desire. Just take people as they are. It is like the wind: You don't expect it to come; you don't demand it. Let the wind come; let the wind go. Let

everybody come and go in your life. If you want, you can learn to live alone, so you will not be affected by the coming and going of others.

Laywoman: When we live in the world, we always contact other human beings. So does staying alone take away the problem?

Tan Ajahn: When you have *samādhi*, you will feel like you are living alone even though you are living with other people.

Laywoman: To have *samādhi*, you always have to go to *jhāna*, right?

Tan Ajahn: Yes, but only when you are in sitting meditation. When you come out of *jhāna*, you can use *vipassanā* to maintain the calm in your mind. *Vipassanā* is to teach you not to cling and not to desire things. Let everything be. Don't try to manage, manipulate, or possess them, because you cannot do so. Because sooner or later, you will lose whatever you have. If you have something, be ready to lose it, so you will have no stress.

Layman (Dr): The path-moment occurs when you are in *samādhi*?

Tan Ajahn: No, the path-moment is when you are in a critical situation, like when you are in great fear and somehow you can eliminate that fear, or when you are really angry and suddenly you can flip your mind and eliminate your anger. So you need a situation to create the path-moment. When you live in peaceful conditions, there is nothing to stir up the path-moment. You have to

be in a crisis mode. There is a saying in Thai that goes, “If there is no *dukkha*, there is no *vipassanā*.” You need to have *dukkha*, and once you have *dukkha*, you need *vipassanā* to deal with the *dukkha*. But if you don’t have *vipassanā* beforehand, when you have *dukkha*, you cannot deal with it properly. That is why you have to practise *vipassanā* first. When you practise, you are not yet using the *vipassanā*, you are only preparing yourself. You have to wait for the crisis to happen. For instance, one day your wife says that she is going to leave you, and no longer wants to stay with you — you will see how you will react. If you say, “Okay, if you want to go, it’s no problem,” then you have *vipassanā*, because you see that everything is *anicca* and *anattā*. So, you need something to occur to have this path-moment.

Like the Venerable *Ācariya Aññākoṇḍañña* — when he listened to the Buddha giving the discourse on the Four Noble Truths, he was constantly worried about getting sick, getting old, and dying. But when the Buddha said that the body is *anicca*, he suddenly realized that he had to let go of the body. Once he let go, he became peaceful, no longer worrying about getting sick, getting old, or dying.

This is *sanditṭhiko* (to be seen and realised by oneself). You know inside yourself whether you have attained it or not. If you have attained it, you’ll live a worriless life. You will not worry about the body. You won’t have to stock medicine or build up all kinds of protection, because no matter what you do, you cannot stop the body from dying. You just live a simple life, a natural life, like an animal’s life in the forest. The difference between

an animal and a *Sotāpanna* is that a *Sotāpanna* has no fear of death, but the animal does.

They have the same mind, but at different levels. The animal looks for happiness by maintaining its life, so they don't have time to worry about getting sick, getting old, or dying. They don't have the knowledge about sickness, old age, and death. They don't have that wisdom, unlike human beings. A human being has the ability to look into his future and see that he is going to get sick, get old, and die, because he sees the examples of other people that he can apply to himself. But the animal doesn't have that ability.

Layman (Dr): Is it because of that knowledge that a *Sotāpanna* will no longer take birth as an animal?

Tan Ajahn: It's because a *Sotāpanna* doesn't live like an animal anymore. He doesn't kill to protect his body, like animals do. Animals kill to maintain their lives. But if a *Sotāpanna* goes to war and sees an enemy coming with a gun, he will just give up. He will not pull the trigger and shoot the enemy because he knows it is useless.

Laywoman: Is it the same when we get mosquito bites?

Tan Ajahn: Yes, you let go. It is like *dāna*, giving your blood, like going to the Red Cross to donate blood.

Someone asked Venerable Grandfather Dun, from Surin in the Northeast of Thailand, whether an *Arahant* dreams. The Venerable's answer was that dreams are

created by *sankhāra*. The *Arahant* — even the Buddha — still has *sankhāra*. The only difference between your *sankhāra* and an *Arahant's sankhāra* is that there is no desire in the *Arahant's sankhāra*; it is pure. Our *sankhāra* are tinted by greed, hatred, and delusion.

Laywoman: So, do the *Arahants* have thoughts like us, or do the *Arahants* have no thoughts?

Tan Ajahn: The Buddha used his thoughts to teach us, right? Before he spoke, he had to think, “What am I going to talk about today?” It is all *sankhāra*, but it is pure *sankhāra*. This is *sankhāra* driven by Dhamma, not by *avijjā*. Dhamma *paccaya sankhāra*, not *avijjā paccaya sankhāra*. So for an *Arahant*, the *sankhāra* doesn't have desire.

When Venerable *Ācariya Mahā Boowa* taught Dhamma, it was pure Dhamma. For us ordinary beings, when we teach Dhamma, we have our defilements accompanying our teachings. So our teaching is not pure. When people listen to our teachings, they don't believe us.

When Venerable *Ācariya Mahā Boowa* shed tears during one of his talks, they were not tears of suffering, but tears of joy, tears of appreciating the intensity of the benefits that he gained from the Dhamma. But if he wanted to stop them, he could stop anytime, but he just wanted to illustrate the immensity of the Dhamma that can affect the mind. They were not tears of suffering, but tears of joy, tears of appreciation. Sometimes, when you appreciate something you can burst into tears, such as when someone does something really

good for you. Anytime an *Arahant* wants to stop, he can. That was the only time that he let it go freely, without controlling it.

Laywoman: Is it the same as the tears from a mother who witnesses her child achieving some results?

Tan Ajahn: It is the same feeling of appreciation. They are still tears of joy, not tears of suffering. When people don't understand, they start to doubt and question, "How can an *Arahant* cry? How come he cannot control his emotions?" It is not emotion; it is at a different level.

Layman (Dr): Is it because an *Arahant* has the experience of the knowing nature of the *citta*?

Tan Ajahn: Yes.

Laywoman: If an *Arahant* has abandoned everything, but still cannot get rid of his habits, why is that so?

Tan Ajahn: They can give up their habits if they want to, but it doesn't matter anymore because they have no desire. An *Arahant* does things without having attachment. He can take it or leave it. For instance, if someone gives me a bottle of Coke and I drink it, it doesn't mean that I am attached to Coke. Even though in the past I might have been attached to drinking Coke, and drank it all the time, now I can stop anytime. Whether I want to drink it or not doesn't matter anymore. So, an *Arahant* is like that. He can take anything. He can smoke a cigarette, but he is not affected by whether he is going to have another cigarette or not. But a person who is addicted to cigarettes has to keep smoking.

Like Venerable *Ācariya* Mahā Boowa who chewed betel nut. For most people, if they chew betel nut, they become addicted. They have to chew it all the time. But he could take it or leave it. For example, when he went to England, before he boarded the plane, some devotees offered him betel nut, but Venerable *Ācariya* said, “I am not going to take it with me, but I am going to have my last bite here.” It was just to show his appreciation for the people who had offered it. But he could stop, no problem. Once he boarded, he didn’t have betel nut anymore, and during the time he was in England he didn’t have any betel nut. So, it was not an addiction. It was not driven by desire. He could smoke cigarettes or chew betel nut — whatever people are normally addicted to — but as an *Arahant*, he could do it just the same, but without being addicted to it. He could stop it anytime.

Layman (Dr): When you translated the *desanā* series, did you translate it immediately or after some time? There are some differences between the tape and book version.

Tan Ajahn: A few days after the talk. When he gave the talk, someone would record it on the cassette. I took the cassette, listened to it, and translated it sentence by sentence. I listened to the Thai talk, shut off the recorder, and then translated it into English by recording it into another cassette. The book version has been edited to improve the English.

Layman (Dr): The translation is good. We can understand it.

Tan Ajahn: It is enough to get the message across. The reason why I did this translation was that because when Venerable *Ācariya* Mahā Boowa gave a talk, it usually lasted for 45 minutes, and then he gave time for Venerable *Ācariya* Paññāvaḍḍho to explain it to the Westerners, and he only explained for about ten minutes. So it was a recap of the talk, not the details of the talk. But I thought that if I translated it and recorded it into the cassette, then the people who wanted to listen to the whole talk could do so.

Layman (Dr): It is a great service, especially to English-speaking Buddhists. I have downloaded it from the website. When I read the *Sutta Piṭaka*, I could never understand it, but the translation is more detailed and practical.

Tan Ajahn: Yes, because what you have in the texts has been translated through the ages, so some meaning might have been lost in the translation.

Layman (Dr): What is the *pabhassara citta* (bright mind)? Is it a knowing *citta*?

Tan Ajahn: *Pabhassara citta* is not the pure *citta*; it is the *avijjā citta*, still under the influence of *avijjā*. You have to know that it can be a trap, because most people when they practise to this level think they have come to the pure *citta*, but in fact they have not. It is still an *avijjā citta*.

Layman (Dr): Where is the point of this *pabhassara citta*? Is it close to the pure *citta*?

Tan Ajahn: *Pabhassara citta* is the point of *Anāgāmi*. He has to pass through the body first. Like you coming here has to involve the *nāma khandhas* in your mind. It is the *nāma khandhas* that have created this *pabhassara* (brightness), so you then have to use *vipassanā* to see that this brightness is still *aniccam*, *dukkham*, and *anattā*. Don't become attached to it.

Layman (Dr): That is what Venerable *Ācariya Mahā Boowa* told *Mae Chee Kaew*. We met a *mae chee* at Venerable Father Ganha's temple, and the Venerable Father said that she was an *Arahant*.

Tan Ajahn: The Buddha said you have to apply the *Kālāma Sutta* to anything anyone said. You have to prove the statement to your satisfaction before you can accept it as true. When someone says he is something, we just say, "Okay," but we don't have to believe or deny what he says. We have to wait and prove it. There is a saying, "Distance measures horse; time measures people." It means that if you want to know how good a person is, you have to take time to look at that person.

Laywoman: Yes, even a husband and wife take time to know each other.

Tan Ajahn: Yes, everything takes time to be evaluated.

Layman (Dr): When did you stay with Venerable *Ācariya Mahā Boowa*?

Tan Ajahn: It was 30 years ago. After that, I never went back.

Laywoman: How could *Mae Chee* Kaew communicate with other beings?

Tan Ajahn: She had a special ability. When her mind became calm, she could contact the deceased.

Laywoman: When I was meditating, sometimes I see faces coming towards me. I thought they were just creations of my mind, so I just let it go.

Tan Ajahn: Yes, that's right. Most of the time, it is like that. If it is something else, if they are real, you can communicate with them. You can talk with them, like you are talking to me. You can prove it later on.

Laywoman: So, the language doesn't matter?

Tan Ajahn: Mental language is the same; it is universal. But when you have to express it in words, you have to use the language you are accustomed to.

Laywoman: So, if they come for help, I tell them about the five precepts, and also about the Buddha, Dhamma, and *Saṅgha*?

Tan Ajahn: You just tell them whatever you know. But actually they have to be able to talk to you, and you should ask, "Who are you? Where do you come from? How can I help you?" so you know who you are talking to.

Laywoman: Venerable *Ācariya* Mahā Boowa said that we should not be in that state, right?

Tan Ajahn: When you meditate you don't want to get into that; you want to go into *appaṇā*. If you go there, you are wasting your time.

Laywoman: And you get addicted to it.

Tan Ajahn: Yes, and you think that you are great because you have supernatural powers.

Layman (Dr): Are those beings what the Buddha called *sattānaṃ sambhavesin* (beings yet to take birth)?

Tan Ajahn: *Sambhavesin* and *devatā* are all on the same wavelength. When the Buddha gave talks to the *devatā*, he had to be on that wavelength.

Laywoman: Can we share merit with such beings?

Tan Ajahn: It depends on what caused them to be in that position. If it is due to delusion, you can give them wisdom, so that they can free themselves. But if it is greed or hatred, you have to convince them to give up their greed and hatred.

There's a story Venerable Ajahn Mun told about the spirits of two sisters that hovered around an unfinished pagoda. Venerable Ajahn Mun asked them, "What are you doing here?" and they said that when they were alive, they contributed money for the construction of the pagoda, but they died before its completion and were still attached and worried about it, so they still hovered around the pagoda. Venerable Ajahn Mun said, "Once you are done with your good deeds, you should forget about them. There is nothing you can do anymore.

You should go and enjoy the merit you have made.” Once they understood, they gave up their attachment to the pagoda and became *devatā*.

Layman (Dr): Venerable Ajahn Mun also talked about a wife from a previous life that was following him around.

Tan Ajahn: This is secondary information that we should not be too concerned with. We should be more concerned about the primary information, the Four Noble Truths. This is what we should always be more concerned with.

Laywoman: When we let go, the *dukkha* lessens as we understand not to cling to things.

Tan Ajahn: In order to let go, you have to see *aniccam*, *dukkham*, and *anattā*, because you see the truth. When you let go, your *taṇhā* becomes less and less, until eventually you have no more *taṇhā* left.

Layman (Dr): Is the breakthrough to *paṭiccasamuppāda* (dependent co-arising) at the point of feeling?

Tan Ajahn: If you are not affected by feeling, then you have *upekkhā*, and won't have any *taṇhā*. So you need to develop *upekkhā*. *Upekkhā* can be achieved through *samādhi* and *paññā*. *Samādhi* gives you temporary *upekkhā*. With temporary *upekkhā*, if you want to maintain it and to make it permanent, you have to use *paññā* (wisdom). That is why you need to have *samādhi* and *paññā* in order to eliminate your *taṇhā*. Because when you have *upekkhā*, you are not affected by your feelings,

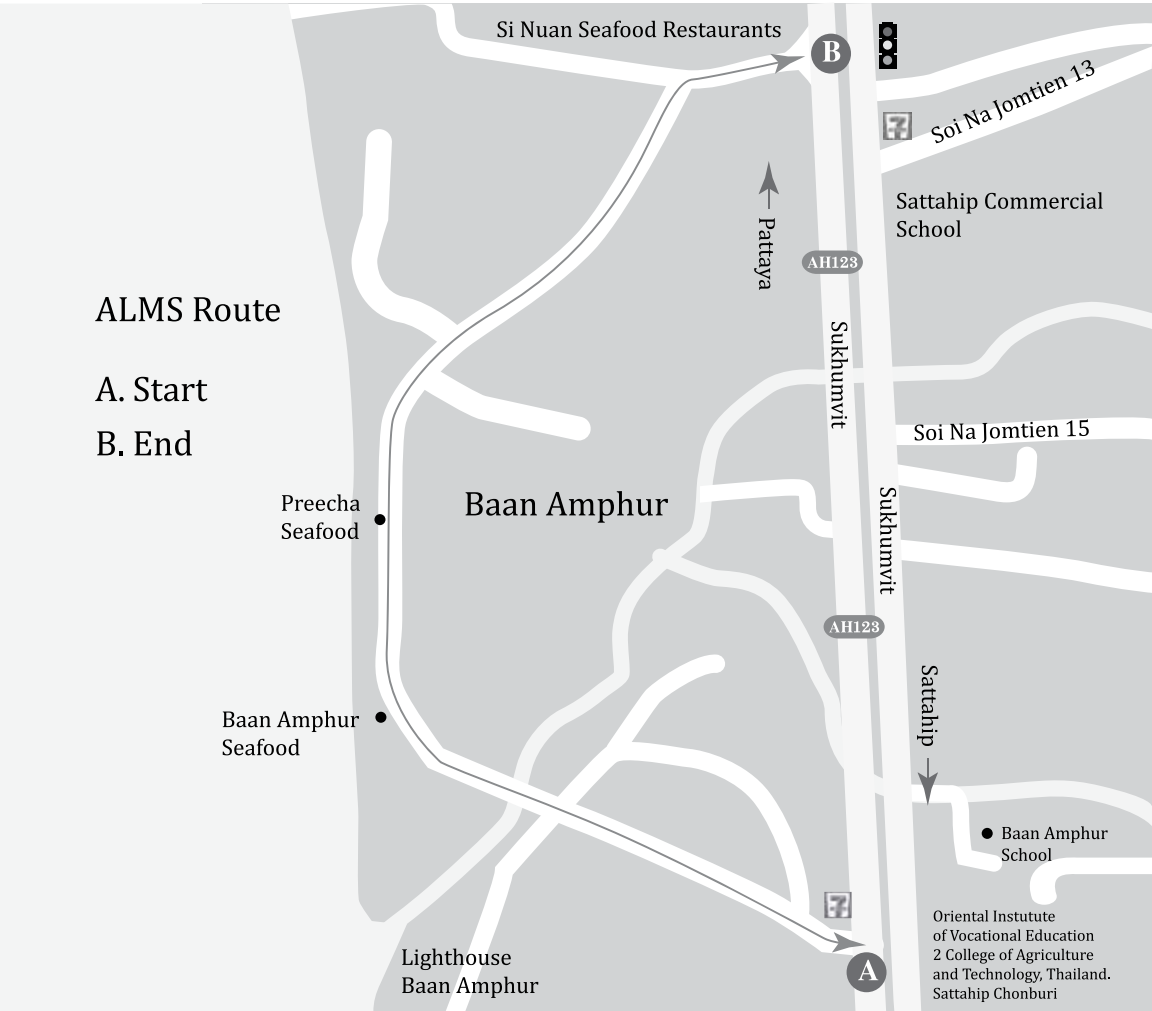
either good or bad. When you do not have good or bad feelings, you don't have the desire to get rid of them. There is no desire.

Layman (Dr): You don't have to go to the fourth *jhāna* to become an *Arahant*, do you?

Tan Ajahn: If you haven't gotten to the fourth *jhāna* yet, you must get there. Like the Buddha, he already had it when he was a young boy. You need it, because *sīla* and *samādhi* support the development of *paññā*. Otherwise, your *paññā* will be *cintamaya-paññā*, just academic or theoretical knowledge. If you have no *upekkhā*, you cannot stop your *taṇhā*. It is the same at every level. This is the development of *paññā* with the support of *jhāna*.







Addendum

Daily Life Schedule of Phra Ajahn Suchart Abhijāto

- 5:54 a.m. – 6:40 a.m. (approximate time) Walking with other monks from Wat Yan for alms around Baan Amphur

- 8:00 a.m. – 10:00 a.m. At the Sālā (dining hall) at Wat Yan. - Morning meal and conversation with visitors afterwards. On every Buddhist Holy Day, Saturday, and Sunday, Phra Ajahn Suchart gives a 30-minute Dhamma talk (around 8:00 a.m.) at the Sālā (dining hall).

- 2:00 p.m. to 4:00 p.m. At Chuladham Sālā on Chi-On Mountain – Giving a Dhamma talk on every Holy Day, Saturday, Sunday, and Buddhist Holiday while other weekdays will be Dhamma conversation with visitors.

****Please do not visit Phra Ajahn outside of the scheduled time.****

****When ladies plan to visit Phra Ajahn or to attend a Dhamma talk, please refrain from wearing short pants or short skirt around the temple or the meditation retreat.****

****Phra Ajahn Suchart does not accept any out- of-temple events or functions.****

Phra Ajahn Suchart Abhijāto Websites

www.kammatthana.com

www.PhraSuchart.com

www.facebook.com/PhraAjarnSuchart

Glossary

The following is a list of *Pāli* and Thai words as used in the text together with a brief translation and comment when necessary.

Adhiṭṭhāna: Determination; resolution. One of the ten perfections.

Ajahn: (Thai). Teacher; mentor. Equivalent to the *Pāli* ācariya.

Akusālā: Bad, demerit, unskilful.

Anāgāmī: Non-returner. Someone who has reached the third stage of the path, the stage before Arahant. A person who has abandoned the five lower fetters that bind the mind to the cycle of rebirth, and who after death will appear in one of the Brahma worlds called the **Pure Abodes**, there to attain ***Nibbāna***, never again to return to this world.

Anattā: Not-self; the truth that all phenomena are devoid of anything that can be identified as “self.” This means that none of the physical and mental components of personality (the five *khandhas*) make up an entity, either individual or collective, nor can a self-entity be found anywhere within the heart (*citta*). Therefore, what is experienced as being an abiding self is no more than a phantom personality born of ignorance and delusion — inherently transient, unstable, and bound up with suffering.

Ānāpānasati: Mindfulness of breathing in and out. One of the best known forms of meditation practice.

Anicca: Impermanence, transience, instability.

Appanā: Full-absorption *samādhi*. In *appanā samādhi* the *citta* completely “converges” to the very base of *samādhi*. Perceptions of body and mind totally disappear from awareness at that time, leaving only the essential “knowing nature” of the *citta* alone on its own. Clear, bright, and expansive, the *citta* simply “knows.” There is no object, no duality, just “knowing.” The previous sense of dividedness is replaced by a wholly unified mental state, and a feeling of pure and harmonious being that is so wondrous as to be indescribable. This is the advanced stage of *samādhi*.

Arahant: One who is worthy, one who reached the ultimate state of *Nibbāna*.

Āriya: Noble.

Arūpa: Formless.

Asurakāya: The population of Asuras. The Asuras are in the realm below the human realm, and they consist of warlike beings, constantly at war with the gods.

Asubha: Unattractiveness, loathsomeness, foulness. The Buddha recommends contemplation of this aspect of the body as an antidote to lust and complacency.

Bhante: Venerable

Bhava: Becoming. States of being that develop first

in the mind and can then be experienced as internal worlds and/or as worlds on an external level. There are three levels of becoming: on the sensual level, the level of form, and the level of formlessness.

Bhikkhu: A Buddhist monk; a male member of the Buddhist *Saṅgha* who has gone forth into homelessness and received the higher ordination. In *Theravāda* countries today, *bhikkhus* form the nucleus of the Buddhist community. Living entirely off donations of food and other basic requisites, their monastic lifestyle is based on the principles of poverty, celibacy, virtue, and meditation.

Bodhi: Awakening; enlightenment; transcendent wisdom. *Bodhi* is equated with perfection of insight into the Four Noble Truths and the realization of *Nibbāna*, the cessation of all suffering.

Brahma (brahmasā): Celestial beings who inhabit the first three realms of the Fine Material World. Beings reborn into those sublime realms are said to have some experience with the meditative absorptions (*jhāna*). Consequently, *brahmas* have extremely refined bodies composed of pure light and experience extremely refined degrees of mental pleasure. When the good *kamma* that sent them to those realms is finally exhausted, these beings pass away and are reborn again somewhere else, in a realm of existence suitable to their remaining *kamma*.

Buddho: Supremely enlightened. A traditional epithet for the *Buddha*, *Buddho* is a preparatory meditation-word (*parikamma*) that is repeated mentally while reflecting on the Buddha's special qualities. In its simplest form, one focuses attention exclusively on the

repetition of “*Buddho*,” continuously thinking the word “*Buddho*” while in meditation. One should simply be aware of each repetition of “*Buddho, Buddho, Buddho*” to the exclusion of all else. Once it becomes continuous, this simple repetition will produce results of peace and calm in the heart.

Citta: That underlying essence of mind which manifests as feeling, memory, thought, and consciousness. In its pure state it is indefinable and beyond *samsāra*.

Dāna: Giving, making gifts.

Demerit: Bad, unskillful, corrupt.

Desanā: The teachings of Dhamma; Dhamma talks.

Deva; Devatā: An angel-like being of the *Deva*-realms, which are immediately above the human realm.

Dhamma [Skt. dharma]: (1) Event; a phenomenon in and of itself; (2) mental quality; (3) doctrine, teaching; (4) *nibbāna*. Also, principles of behaviour that human beings ought to follow so as to fit in with the right natural order of things; qualities of mind they should develop so as to realize the inherent quality of the mind in and of itself. By extension, “Dhamma” (usu. capitalized) is used also to denote any doctrine that teaches such things. Thus the Dhamma of the Buddha denotes both his teachings and the direct experience of *Nibbāna*, the quality at which those teachings are aimed.

Dukkha: Stress; suffering; pain; distress; discontent.

Ekagattārammana; Ekaggataarom: Singleness of preoccupation; "one-pointedness." In meditation, the mental quality that allows one's attention to remain collected and focused on the chosen meditation object. *Ekagattārammana* reaches full maturity upon the development of the fourth level of *jhāna*.

Jhāna: Various states of meditative absorption, including the four *rūpa* and the four *arūpa-jhānas*.

Kamma: Lit: "action." But in Buddhism, action of the body, speech or mind, which has a moral content of good, bad or neutral. Such action brings back a corresponding result.

kaṭhina: A ceremony, held in the fourth month of the rainy season, in which a Saṅgha of *bhikkhus* receives a gift of cloth from lay people, bestows it on one of their members, and then makes it into a robe before dawn of the following day.

khandha: A heap, but usually referring to the five *khandhas*, these being, the body, feeling, memory, thought/imagination, and consciousness.

kilesa: Defilement — *lobha* (passion), *dosa* (aversion), and *moha* (delusion) in their various forms, which include such things as greed, malevolence, anger, rancour, hypocrisy, arrogance, envy, miserliness, dishonesty, boastfulness, obstinacy, violence, pride, conceit, intoxication, and complacency.

Kruba: Phra or *Bhikkhu*, (Isan) north eastern Thai form of address for a junior monk.

Kuṭī: Monk's residence. Normally it is a small hut for practising monks in the forest.

Luangpii: Central Thai word for a junior monk.

Luangpor: Central Thai word for Venerable Father.

Luangpu: Central Thai word for Venerable Father.

Luangta: Venerable Grandfather

Merit: Good, virtuous, skilful.

Nak Dham: Formal Buddhist studies in Thailand with different levels similar to a bachelor degree, master degree, and doctorate degree from a university.

Nibbāna: The ultimate goal of Buddhist training. Lit: "Extinguished."

Nimitta: A sign. In meditation practice, a mental image, which is usually visual.

Pacceka Buddha: Private Buddha. One who, like a Buddha, has gained Awakening without the benefit of a teacher, but who lacks the requisite store of *pāramīs* to teach others the practice that leads to Awakening. On attaining the goal, a *Pacceka* Buddha lives a solitary life.

Pāli: The canon of texts (see *Tiṭṭaka*) preserved by the *Theravāda* school and, by extension, the language in which those texts are composed.

Parikamma: Preparatory practice; Preparatory meditation.

Pariyatti: Theoretical understanding of Dhamma obtained through reading, study, and learning.

Phra: (Thai). Venerable. Used as a prefix to the name of a monk (*bhikkhu*).

Piṇḍapāta: Walking on the alms round.

Preta: (Peta in Pāli); The dead, the departed, a hungry ghost.

Rūpa: Form, shape, the body.

Sādhu: (exclamation) "It is well"; an expression showing appreciation or agreement.

Sakkāya-diṭṭhi: Self-identification view. The view that mistakenly identifies any of the *khandha* as "self"; the first of the ten fetters (*saṃyojana*). Abandonment of *sakkāya-diṭṭhi* is one of the hallmarks of stream-entry.

Sakadāgāmī: Once Returner. The second of the four stages culminating in becoming an Arahant. A person who has abandoned the first three of the fetters that bind the mind to the cycle of rebirth has weakened the fetters of sensual passion and resistance, and who after death is destined to be reborn in this world only once more.

Sālā: A meeting hall.

Samādhi: Absorption concentration, which has many levels and kinds.

Samṣāra: Transmigration; the round of death and rebirth.

Saṅgha: A group of at least four Bhikkhus, the order of Bhikkhus.

Saññā: Memory.

Sankhāra: Formation, compound, fashioning, fabrication — the forces and factors that fashion things (physical or mental), the process of fashioning, and the fashioned things that result. *Sankhāra* can refer to anything formed or fashioned by conditions, or, more specifically, (as one of the five *khandhas*) thought-formations within the mind.

Satipaṭṭhāna: The practice and method of developing mindfulness.

Sīla: Morality, moral behaviour.

Sīlabbata-parāmāsa: usually translated as attachment to rules and rituals, but many who practise the way of Buddhism are not satisfied with this and feel that it concerns morality more than rules and rituals.

Sotāpanna: Stream-enter; stream winner. A person who has abandoned the first three of the fetters that bind the mind to the cycle of rebirth and has thus entered the "stream" flowing inexorably to *Nibbāna*, ensuring that one will be reborn at most only seven more times, and only into human or higher realms.

Sukha: Pleasure; ease; satisfaction. In meditation, a mental quality that reaches full maturity upon the development of the third level of *jhāna*.

Supramundane: Transcendental; beyond this physical world.

***Sutta* [*sutta*; *Skt. sutra*]**: Literally, "thread"; a discourse or sermon by the Buddha or his contemporary disciples. After the Buddha's death the *suttas* were passed down in the *Pali* language according to a well-established oral tradition, and were finally committed to written form in Sri Lanka around 100 BCE. More than 10,000 *suttas* are collected in the *Sutta Piṭaka*, one of the principal bodies of scriptural literature in *Theravāda* Buddhism. The *Pali Suttas* are widely regarded as the earliest record of the Buddha's teachings.

Taṇhā: Craving — for sensuality, for becoming, or for not-becoming.

Than, Tan: (Thai). Reverend, venerable.

Theravāda: The "Doctrine of the Elders" — the only one of the early schools of Buddhism to have survived into the present; currently the dominant form of Buddhism in Thailand, Sri Lanka, and Burma.

Ti-lakkhaṇa: Three characteristics inherent in all conditioned phenomena — inconstant, stressful, and not-self.

***Tipiṭaka* [*Skt. tripiṭaka*]**: The Buddhist (*Pāli*) Canon. Literally, "three baskets," in reference to the three principal divisions of the Canon: the *Vinaya Piṭaka* (disciplinary rules); *Sutta Piṭaka* (discourses); and *Abhidhamma Piṭaka* (abstract philosophical treatises).

Upajjhāya: A senior monk who conducts the ordination ceremony and is also responsible for the teaching of newly ordained monks for the first five years.

Upekkhā: Neutrality, equanimity, indifference.

Uposatha: Observance day, corresponding to the phases of the moon, on which Buddhist lay people gather to listen to the Dhamma and to observe special precepts. On the new-moon and full-moon *uposatha* days monks assemble to recite the *Pātimokkha* rules.

Vassa: Rains Retreat. A period from July to October, corresponding roughly to the rainy season, in which each monk is required to live settled in a single place and not wander freely about.

Vedanā: Feeling — pleasure (ease), pain (stress), or neither pleasure nor pain.

Vipassanā: Clear intuitive insight into physical and mental phenomena as they arise and disappear, seeing them for what they actually are — in and of themselves — in terms of the three characteristics (see *ti-lakkhaṇa*) and in terms of stress, its origin, its disbanding, and the way leading to its disbanding.

Viññāṇa: Consciousness; cognizance; the act of taking note of sense data and ideas as they occur. There is also a type of consciousness that lies outside of the *khandhas* — called consciousness without feature (*viññāṇam anidassanam*) — which is not related to the six senses at all.

Wat: Temple

Related Websites for Further Reading

More teachings on Theravāda Buddhism and the contemporary Thai Forest Tradition can be obtained from the following websites:

www.kammattana.com, www.phrasuchart.com

Recorded Mp3 teachings of Ajahn Suchart Abhijāto in English and Thai

www.accesstoinsight.org

- English translation of *Theravāda Tipiṭaka*
- Some translation of the teachings from the Thai Forest Meditation Masters

www.forestdhamma.org

Translation in various languages on the teachings by Luangta Mahā Boowa





My word of advice to you is to be thankful to have come across the teachings of the Buddha, because what the Buddha knew and what he told us is a hard-to-come-by transcendental truth that will make us happy all the time and free us from all forms of stress and grief. If you study his teachings and apply them in your daily life, I'm sure you'll always be happy.



My Dhamma talks are usually about looking after or taking care of things that you can take care of and abandoning things that you cannot look after or take care of.

The ultimate goal of Buddhist meditation is to train the mind to be neutral and to see things as they are.



Once you can stop your mind, you will become peaceful, at ease, and contented.

Be happy with what you have. Live as simply as you can.

Just have the four requisites of life: food, shelter, clothing, and medicine.

Once you have these, there's no need to have anything else.



There is nothing better in the world than Dhamma. Dhamma can help you from being affected by all forms of suffering.

Ajahn Suchart Abhijāto websites

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