



FOOD *for*
the HEART

AJAHN CHAH

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Transcendence

Given on a lunar observance night (uposatha), at Wat Pah Pong in 1975.

When the group of five ascetics¹ abandoned the Buddha, he saw it as a stroke of luck, because he would be able to continue his practice unhindered. With the five ascetics living with him, things weren't so peaceful, he had responsibilities. And now the five ascetics had abandoned him because they felt that he had slackened his practice and reverted to indulgence. Previously he had been intent on his ascetic practices and self-mortification. In regards to eating, sleeping and so on, he had tormented himself severely, but it came to a point where, looking into it honestly, he saw that such practices just weren't working. It was simply a matter of views, practising out of pride and clinging. He had mistaken worldly values and mistaken himself for the truth.

For example, if one decides to throw oneself into ascetic practices with the intention of gaining praise – this kind of practice is all 'world-inspired', practising for adulation and fame. Practising with this kind of intention is called 'mistaking worldly ways for truth'.

Another way to practise is 'to mistake one's own views for truth'. You only believe in yourself, in your own practice. No matter what others say you stick to your own preferences. You don't carefully consider the practice. This is called 'mistaking oneself for truth'.

Whether you take the world or take yourself to be truth, it's all simply blind attachment. The Buddha saw this, and saw that there was no 'adhering to the Dhamma', practising for the truth. So his practice had been fruitless, he still hadn't given up defilements.

Then he turned around and reconsidered all the work he had put into practice right from the beginning in terms of results. What were the results of all that practice? Looking deeply into it he saw that it just wasn't right. It was full of conceit, and full of the world. There was no Dhamma, no insight into not-self, *anattā*, no emptiness or letting go. There may have been letting go of a kind, but it was the kind that still hadn't let go.

Looking carefully at the situation, the Buddha saw that even if he were to explain these things to the five ascetics they wouldn't be able to understand. It wasn't something he could easily convey to them, because those ascetics were still firmly entrenched in the old way of practice and seeing things. The Buddha saw that you could practise like that until your dying day, maybe even starve to death, and achieve nothing, because such practice is inspired by worldly values and by pride.

Considering deeply, he saw the right practice, *sammā-patipadā*: the mind is the mind, the body is the body. The body isn't desire or defilement. Even if you were to destroy the body you wouldn't destroy defilements. That's not their source. Even fasting and going without sleep until the body was a shrivelled-up wraith wouldn't exhaust the defilements. But the belief that defilements could be dispelled in that way, the teaching of self-mortification, was deeply ingrained into the five ascetics.

The Buddha then began to take more food, eating as normal, practising in a more natural way. When the five ascetics saw the change in the Buddha's practice they figured that he had given up and

reverted to sensual indulgence. One person's understanding was shifting to a higher level, transcending appearances, while the other saw that that person's view was sliding downwards, reverting to comfort. Self-mortification was deeply ingrained into the minds of the five ascetics because the Buddha had previously taught and practised like that. Now he saw the fault in it. By seeing the fault in it clearly, he was able to let it go.

When the five ascetics saw the Buddha doing this they left him, feeling that because he was practising wrongly they would no longer follow him. Just as birds abandon a tree which no longer offers sufficient shade, or fish leave a pool of water that is too small, too dirty or not cool, just so did the five ascetics abandon the Buddha.

So now the Buddha concentrated on contemplating the Dhamma. He ate more comfortably and lived more naturally. He let the mind be simply the mind, the body simply the body. He didn't force his practice in excess, just enough to loosen the grip of greed, aversion, and delusion. Previously he had walked the two extremes: *kāmasukhallikānuyogo* – if happiness or love arose he would be aroused and attach to them. He would identify with them and he wouldn't let go. If he encountered pleasantness he would stick to that, if he encountered suffering he would stick to that. These two extremes he called *kāmasukhallikānuyogo* and *attakilamathānuyogo*.

The Buddha had been stuck on conditions. He saw clearly that these two ways are not the way for a *samana*. Clinging to happiness, clinging to suffering: a *samana* is not like this. To cling to those things is not the way. Clinging to those things he was stuck in the views of self and the world. If he were to flounder in these two ways he would never become one who clearly knew the world. He would be constantly running from one extreme to the other. Now the Buddha fixed his attention on the mind itself and concerned himself with training that.

All facets of nature proceed according to their supporting conditions; they aren't any problem in themselves. For instance, illnesses in the body. The body experiences pain, sickness, fever and colds and so on. These all naturally occur. Actually people worry about their bodies too much. They worry about and cling to their bodies so much because of wrong view, they can't let go.

Look at this hall here. We build the hall and say it's ours, but lizards come and live here, rats and geckos come and live here, and we are always driving them away, because we see that the hall belongs to us, not the rats and lizards.

It's the same with illnesses in the body. We take this body to be our home, something that really belongs to us. If we happen to get a headache or stomach-ache we get upset, we don't want the pain and suffering. These legs are 'our legs', we don't want them to hurt, these arms are 'our arms', we don't want anything to go wrong with them. We've got to cure all pains and illnesses at all costs.

This is where we are fooled and stray from the truth. We are simply visitors to this body. Just like this hall here, it's not really ours. We are simply temporary tenants, like the rats, lizards and geckos – but we don't know this. This body is the same. Actually the Buddha taught that there is no abiding self within this body, but we go and grasp on to it as being our self, as really being 'us' and 'them'. When the body changes we don't want it to do so. No matter how much we are told, we don't understand. If I say it straight you get even more fooled. 'This isn't yourself,' I say, and you go even more astray, you

get even more confused and your practice just reinforces the self.

So most people don't really see the self. One who sees the self is one who sees that 'this is neither the self nor belonging to self'. He sees the self as it is in nature. Seeing the self through the power of clinging is not real seeing. Clinging interferes with the whole business. It's not easy to realize this body as it is because *upādāna* clings fast to it all.

Therefore it is said that we must investigate to clearly know with wisdom. This means to investigate the *sankhārā* according to their true nature, use wisdom. Knowing the true nature of *sankhārā* is wisdom. If you don't know the true nature of *sankhārā* you are at odds with them, always resisting them. Now, it is better to let go of the *sankhārā* than to try to oppose or resist them. And yet we plead with them to comply with our wishes. We look for all sorts of means to organize them or 'make a deal' with them. If the body gets sick and is in pain we don't want it to be, so we look for various suttas to chant, such as *Bojjhango*, the *Dhammacakkappavattana Sutta*, the *Anattalakkhana Sutta* and so on. We don't want the body to be in pain, we want to protect it, control it. These suttas become some form of mystical ceremony, getting us even more entangled in clinging. This is because they chant them in order to ward off illness, to prolong life and so on. Actually the Buddha gave us these teachings in order to see clearly, but we end up chanting them to increase our delusion. *Rūpam aniccam, vedanā aniccā, saññā aniccā, sankhārā aniccā, viññānam aniccam.*² We don't chant these words for increasing our delusion. They are recollections to help us know the truth of the body, so that we can let it go and give up our longing.

This is called chanting to cut things down, but we tend to chant in order to extend them all, or if we feel they're too long we try chanting to shorten them, to force nature to conform to our wishes. It's all delusion. All the people sitting there in the hall are deluded, every one of them. The ones chanting are deluded, the ones listening are deluded, they're all deluded! All they can think is, 'How can we avoid suffering?' When are they ever going to practise?

Whenever illnesses arise, those who know see nothing strange about it. Getting born into this world entails experiencing illness. However, even the Buddha and the Noble Ones, contracting illness in the course of things, would also, in the course of things, treat it with medicine. For them it was simply a matter of correcting the elements. They didn't blindly cling to the body or grasp at mystic ceremonies and such. They treated illnesses with right view, they didn't treat them with delusion. 'If it heals, it heals, if it doesn't then it doesn't' – that's how they saw things.

They say that nowadays Buddhism in Thailand is thriving, but it looks to me like it's sunk almost as far as it can go. The Dhamma Halls are full of attentive ears, but they're attending wrongly. Even the senior members of the community are like this; so everybody just leads each other into more delusion.

One who sees this will know that the true practice is almost opposite from where most people are going; the two sides can barely understand each other. How are those people going to transcend suffering? They have chants for realizing the truth but they turn around and use them to increase their delusion. They turn their backs on the right path. One goes eastward, the other goes west – how are they ever going to meet? They're not even close to each other.

If you have looked into this you will see that this is the case. Most people are lost. But how can you

tell them? Everything has become rites and rituals and mystic ceremonies. They chant but they chant with foolishness, they don't chant with wisdom. They study, but they study with foolishness, not with wisdom. They know, but they know foolishly, not with wisdom. So they end up going with foolishness, living with foolishness, knowing with foolishness. That's how it is. And regarding teaching, all they do these days is teach people to be stupid. They say they're teaching people to be clever, giving them knowledge, but when you look at it in terms of truth, you see that they're really teaching people to go astray and grasp at deceptions.

The real foundation of the teaching is in order to see *attā*, the sense of self, as being empty, having no fixed identity. It's void of intrinsic being. But people come to the study of Dhamma to increase their self-view; they don't want to experience suffering or difficulty. They want everything to be cosy. They may want to transcend suffering, but if there is still a self how can they ever do so?

Suppose we came to possess a very expensive object. The minute that thing comes into our possession our mind changes. 'Now, where can I keep it? If I leave it there somebody might steal it.' We worry ourselves into a state, trying to find a place to keep it. And when did the mind change? It changed the minute we obtained that object – suffering arose right then. No matter where we leave that object we can't relax, so we're left with trouble. Whether sitting, walking, or lying down, we are lost in worry.

This is suffering. And when did it arise? It arose as soon as we understood that we had obtained something, that's where the suffering lies. Before we had that object there was no suffering. It hadn't yet arisen because there wasn't yet an object for us to cling to.

Attā, the self, is the same. If we think in terms of 'my self', then everything around us becomes 'mine'. Confusion follows. Why so? The cause of it all is that there is a self; we don't peel off the apparent in order to see the transcendent. You see, the self is only an appearance. You have to peel away the appearances in order to see the heart of the matter, which is transcendence. Upturn the apparent to find the transcendent.

You could compare it to unthreshed rice. Can unthreshed rice be eaten? Sure it can, but you must thresh it first. Get rid of the husks and you will find the grain inside. Now if we don't thresh the husks we won't find the grain. Like a dog sleeping on the pile of unthreshed grain. Its stomach is rumbling 'jork-jork-jork,' but all it can do is lie there, thinking, 'Where can I get something to eat?' When it's hungry it bounds off the pile of rice grain and runs off looking for scraps of food. Even though it's sleeping right on top of a pile of food it knows nothing of it. Why? It can't see the rice. Dogs can't eat unthreshed rice. The food is there but the dog can't eat it.

We may have learning but if we don't practise accordingly we still don't really know; we are just as oblivious as the dog sleeping on the pile of rice grain. It's sleeping on a pile of food but it knows nothing of it. When it gets hungry it's got to jump off and go trotting around elsewhere for food. It's a shame, isn't it? There is rice grain but what is hiding it? The husk hides the grain, so the dog can't eat it. And there is the transcendent. What hides it? The apparent conceals the transcendent, making people simply 'sit on top of the pile of rice, unable to eat it,' unable to practise, unable to see the transcendent. And so they simply get stuck in appearances time and again. If you are stuck in appearances, suffering is in store. You will be beset by becoming, birth, old age, sickness and death.

So there isn't anything else blocking people off, they are blocked right here. People who study the Dhamma without penetrating to its true meaning are just like the dog on the pile of unthreshed rice who doesn't know the rice. He might even starve and still find nothing to eat. A dog can't eat unthreshed rice, it doesn't even know there is food there. After a long time without food it may even die, on top of that pile of rice! People are like this. No matter how much we study the Dhamma of the Buddha we won't see it if we don't practise. If we don't see it, then we don't know it.

Don't go thinking that by learning a lot and knowing a lot you'll know the Buddha Dhamma. That's like saying you've seen everything there is to see just because you've got eyes, or that you've got ears. You may see but you don't see fully. You see only with the 'outer eye', not with the 'inner eye'; you hear with the 'outer ear', not with the 'inner ear'.

If you upturn the apparent and reveal the transcendent, you will reach the truth and see clearly. You will uproot the apparent and uproot clinging.

But this is like some sort of sweet fruit: even though the fruit is sweet we must rely on contact with and experience of that fruit before we will know what the taste is like. Now that fruit, even though no-one tastes it, is sweet all the same. But nobody knows of it. The Dhamma of the Buddha is like this. Even though it's the truth it isn't true for those who don't really know it. No matter how excellent or fine it may be it is worthless to them.

So why do people grab after suffering? Who in this world wants to inflict suffering on themselves? No one, of course. Nobody wants suffering and yet people keep creating the causes of suffering, just as if they were wandering around looking for suffering. Within their hearts people are looking for happiness, they don't want suffering. Then why is it that this mind of ours creates so much suffering? Just seeing this much is enough. We don't like suffering and yet why do we create suffering for ourselves? It's easy to see, it can only be because we don't know suffering, we don't know the end of suffering. That's why people behave the way they do. How could they not suffer when they continue to behave in this way?

These people have *micchā-ditthi*³ but they don't see that it's *micchā-ditthi*. Whatever we say, believe in or do which results in suffering is all wrong view. If it wasn't wrong view it wouldn't result in suffering; we couldn't cling to suffering, nor to happiness or to any condition at all. We would leave things be their natural way, like a flowing stream of water. We don't have to dam it up, we should just let it flow along its natural course.

The flow of Dhamma is like this, but the flow of the ignorant mind tries to resist the Dhamma in the form of wrong view. Suffering is there because of wrong view – this people don't see. This is worth looking into. Whenever we have wrong view we will experience suffering. If we don't experience it in the present it will manifest later on.

People go astray right here. What is blocking them off? The apparent blocks off the transcendent, preventing people from seeing things clearly. People study, they learn, they practise, but they practise with ignorance, just like a person who's lost his bearings. He walks to the west but thinks he's walking east, or walks to the north thinking he's walking south. This is how far people have gone astray. This kind of practice is really only the dregs of practice, in fact it's a disaster. It's a disaster

because they turn around and go in the opposite direction, they fall from the objective of true Dhamma practice.

This state of affairs causes suffering and yet people think that doing this, memorizing that, studying such-and-such will be a cause for the cessation of suffering. Just like a person who wants a lot of things. He tries to amass as much as possible, thinking if he gets enough his suffering will abate. This is how people think, but their thinking goes astray of the true path, just like one person going northward, another going southward, and yet both believing they're going the same way.

Most people are still stuck in the mass of suffering, still wandering in samsāra, just because they think like this. If illness or pain arise, all they can do is wonder how they can get rid of it. They want it to stop as fast as possible, they've got to cure it at all costs. They don't consider that this is the normal way of *sankhārā*. Nobody thinks like this. The body changes and people can't endure it, they can't accept it, they've got to get rid of it at all costs. However, in the end they can't win, they can't beat the truth. It all collapses. This is something people don't want to look at, they continually reinforce their wrong view.

Practising to realize the Dhamma is the most excellent of things. Why did the Buddha develop all the Perfections? So that he could realize this and enable others to see the Dhamma, know the Dhamma, practise the Dhamma and be the Dhamma – so that they could let go and not be burdened.

'Don't cling to things.' Or to put it another way: 'Hold, but don't hold fast.' This is also right. If we see something we pick it up, 'oh, it's this'; then we lay it down. We see something else, pick it up and hold it, but not fast. We hold it just long enough to consider it, to know it, then to let it go. If you hold without letting go, carry without laying down the burden, then you are going to be heavy. If you pick something up and carry it for a while, then when it gets heavy you should lay it down, throw it off. Don't make suffering for yourself.

This we should know as the cause of suffering. If we know the cause of suffering, suffering can not arise. For either happiness or suffering to arise there must be the *attā*, the self. There must be the 'I' and 'mine', there must be this appearance. If when all these things arise the mind goes straight to the transcendent, it removes the appearances. It removes the delight, the aversion and the clinging from those things. Just as when something that we value gets lost, when we find it again our worries disappear.

Even before we see that object our worries may be relieved. At first we think it's lost and suffer over it, but there comes a day when we suddenly remember, 'Oh, that's right! I put it over there, now I remember!' As soon as we remember this, as soon as we see the truth, even if we haven't laid eyes on that object, we feel happy. This is called 'seeing within', seeing with the mind's eye, not seeing with the outer eye. If we see with the mind's eye then even though we haven't laid eyes on that object we are already relieved.

Similarly, when we cultivate Dhamma practice and attain the Dhamma, see the Dhamma, then whenever we encounter a problem we solve the problem instantly, right then and there. It disappears completely, it is laid down, released.

The Buddha wanted us to contact the Dhamma, but people only contact the words, the books and the scriptures. This is contacting that which is about Dhamma, not contacting the actual Dhamma as taught by our great teacher. How can people say they are practising well and properly? They are a long way off.

The Buddha was known as *lokavidū*, having clearly realized the world. Right now we see the world all right, but not clearly. The more we know the darker the world becomes, because our knowledge is murky, it's not clear knowledge. It's faulty. This is called 'knowing through darkness', lacking in light and radiance.

People are only stuck here but it's no trifling matter. It's important. Most people want goodness and happiness but they just don't know what the causes for that goodness and happiness are. Whatever it may be, if we haven't yet seen the harm of it we can't give it up. No matter how bad it may be, we still can't give it up if we haven't truly seen the harm of it. However, if we really see the harm of something beyond a doubt, then we can let it go. As soon as we see the harm of something, and the benefit of giving it up, there's an immediate change.

Why is it we are still unattained, still can not let go? It's because we still don't see the harm clearly, our knowledge is faulty, it's dark. That's why we can't let go. If we knew clearly like the Lord Buddha or the arahant disciples we would surely let go, our problems would dissolve completely with no difficulty at all.

When your ears hear sound, let them do their job. When your eyes perform their function with forms, let them do so. When your nose works with smells, let it do its job. When your body experiences sensations, then it perform its natural functions. Where will problems arise? There are no problems.

In the same way, all those things which belong to the apparent, leave them with the apparent and acknowledge that which is the transcendent. Simply be the 'one who knows', knowing without fixation, knowing and letting things be their natural way. All things are just as they are.

All our belongings, does anybody really own them? Does our father own them, or our mother, or our relatives? Nobody really gets anything. That's why the Buddha said to let all those things be, let them go. Know them clearly. Know them by holding, but not fast. Use things in a way that is beneficial, not in a harmful way by holding fast to them until suffering arises.

To know Dhamma you must know in this way. That is, to know in such a way as to transcend suffering. This sort of knowledge is important. Knowing about how to make things, to use tools, knowing all the various sciences of the world and so on, all have their place, but they are not the supreme knowledge. The Dhamma must be known as I've explained it here. You don't have to know a whole lot, just this much is enough for the Dhamma practitioner – to know and then let go.

It's not that you have to die before you can transcend suffering, you know. You transcend suffering in this very life because you know how to solve problems. You know the apparent, you know the transcendent. Do it in this lifetime, while you are here practising. You won't find it anywhere else. Don't cling to things. Hold, but don't cling.

You may wonder, 'Why does the Ajahn keep saying this?' How could I teach otherwise, how could I say otherwise, when the truth is just as I've said it? Even though it's the truth don't hold fast to even that! If you cling to it blindly it becomes a falsehood. Like a dog if you grab its leg. If you don't let go the dog will spin around and bite you. Just try it out. All animals behave like this. If you don't let go it's got no choice but to bite. The apparent is the same. We live in accordance with conventions. They are here for our convenience in this life, but they are not things to be clung to so hard that they cause suffering. Just let things pass.

Whenever we feel that we are definitely right, so much so that we refuse to open up to anything or anybody else, right there we are wrong. It becomes wrong view. When suffering arises, where does it arise from? The cause is wrong view, the fruit of that being suffering. If it was right view it wouldn't cause suffering.

So I say, 'Allow space, don't cling to things.' 'Right' is just another supposition; just let it pass. 'Wrong' is another apparent condition; just let it be that. If you feel you are right and yet others contend the issue, don't argue, just let it go. As soon as you know, let go. This is the straight way.

Usually it's not like this. People don't often give in to each other. That's why some people, even Dhamma practitioners who still don't know themselves, may say things that are utter foolishness and yet think they're being wise. They may say something that's so stupid that others can't even bear to listen and yet they think they are being cleverer than others. Other people can't even listen to it and yet they think they are smart, that they are right. They are simply advertising their own stupidity.

That's why the wise say, 'Whatever speech disregards *aniccam* is not the speech of a wise person, it's the speech of a fool. It's deluded speech. It's the speech of one who doesn't know that suffering is going to arise right there.'

For example, suppose you had decided to go to Bangkok tomorrow and someone were to ask, 'Are you going to Bangkok tomorrow?' 'I hope to go to Bangkok. If there are no obstacles I'll probably go.' This is called speaking with the Dhamma in mind, speaking with *aniccam* in mind, taking into account the truth, the transient, uncertain nature of the world. You don't say, 'Yes, I'm definitely going tomorrow.' If it turns out you don't go, what are you going to do, send news to all the people who you told you were going? You'd be just talking nonsense.

There's still much more to the practice of Dhamma; it becomes more and more refined. But if you don't see it, you may think you are speaking right even when you are speaking wrongly and straying from the true nature of things with every word. And yet you may think you are speaking the truth. To put it simply: anything that we say or do that causes suffering to arise should be known as *micchā-ditthi*. It's delusion and foolishness.

Most practitioners don't reflect in this way. Whatever they like, they think is right and they just go on believing themselves. For instance, they may receive some gift or title, be it an object, rank or even words of praise, and they think it's good. They take it as some sort of permanent condition. So they get puffed up with pride and conceit, they don't consider, 'Who am I? Where is this so-called 'goodness'? Where did it come from? Do others have the same things?'

The Buddha taught that we should conduct ourselves normally. If we don't dig in, chew over and look into this point, it means it's still sunk within us. It means these conditions are still buried within our hearts – we are still sunk in wealth, rank and praise. So we become someone else because of them. We think we are better than before, that we are something special and so all sorts of confusion arises.

Actually, in truth there isn't anything to human beings. Whatever we may be it's only in the realm of appearances. If we take away the apparent and see the transcendent we see that there isn't anything there. There are simply the universal characteristics – birth in the beginning, change in the middle and cessation in the end. This is all there is. If we see that all things are like this, then no problems arise. If we understand this we will have contentment and peace.

Where trouble arises is when we think like the five ascetic disciples of the Buddha. They followed the instruction of their teacher, but when he changed his practice they couldn't understand what he thought or knew. They decided that the Buddha had given up his practice and reverted to indulgence. If we were in that position we'd probably think the same thing and there'd be no way to correct it. We'd be holding on to the old ways, thinking in the lower way, yet believing it's higher. We'd see the Buddha and think he'd given up the practice and reverted to indulgence, just like those five ascetics: consider how many years they had been practising at that time, and yet they still went astray, they still weren't proficient.

So I say to practise and also to look at the results of your practice. Look especially where you refuse to follow, where there is friction. Where there is no friction, there is no problem, things flow. If there is friction, they don't flow; you set up a self and things become solid, like a mass of clinging. There is no give and take.

Most monks and cultivators tend to be like this. However they've thought in the past they continue to think. They refuse to change, they don't reflect. They think they are right so they can't be wrong, but actually 'wrongness' is buried within 'rightness', even though most people don't know that. How is it so? 'This is right' ... but if someone else says it's not right you won't give in, you've got to argue. What is this? *Ditthi-māna*. *Ditthi* means views, *māna* is the attachment to those views. If we attach even to what is right, refusing to concede to anybody, then it becomes wrong. To cling fast to rightness is simply the arising of self, there is no letting go.

This is a point which gives people a lot of trouble, except for those Dhamma practitioners who know that this matter, this point, is a very important one. They will take note of it. If it arises while they're speaking, clinging comes racing on to the scene. Maybe it will linger for some time, perhaps one or two days, three or four months, a year or two. This is for the slow ones, that is. For the quick, response is instant – they just let go. Clinging arises and immediately there is letting go, they force the mind to let go right then and there.

You must see these two functions operating. Here there is clinging. Now who is the one who resists that clinging? Whenever you experience a mental impression you should observe these two functions operating. There is clinging, and there is one who prohibits the clinging. Now just watch these two things. Maybe you will cling for a long time before you let go.

Reflecting and constantly practising like this, clinging gets lighter, it becomes less and less. Right

view increases as wrong view gradually wanes. Clinging decreases, non-clinging arises. This is the way it is for everybody. That's why I say to consider this point. Learn to solve problems in the present moment.

¹ The *pañcavaggiyā*, or 'group of five', who followed the *bodhisatta*, the Buddha-to-be, when he was cultivating ascetic practices, and who left him when he renounced these ascetic practices for the Middle Way.

² Form is impermanent, feeling is impermanent, perception is impermanent, volition is impermanent, consciousness is impermanent.

³ *Micchā-ditthi*: Wrong-view.

Steady Practice

Given at Wat Keuan to a group of university students who had taken temporary ordination, during the hot season of 1978.

Wat Wana Potiyahn¹ here is certainly very peaceful, but this is meaningless if our minds are not calm. All places are peaceful. That some may seem distracting is because of our minds. However, a quiet place can help us to become calm, by giving us the opportunity to train and thus harmonize with its calm.

You should all bear in mind that this practice is difficult. To train in other things is not so difficult, it's easy, but the human mind is hard to train. The Lord Buddha trained his mind. The mind is the important thing. Everything within this body-mind system comes together at the mind. The eyes, ears, nose, tongue and body all receive sensations and send them into the mind, which is the supervisor of all the other sense organs. Therefore, it is important to train the mind. If the mind is well trained, all problems come to an end. If there are still problems, it's because the mind still doubts, it doesn't know in accordance with the truth. That is why there are problems.

So recognize that all of you have come fully prepared for practising Dhamma. Whether standing, walking, sitting or reclining, you are provided with the tools you need to practise, wherever you are. They are there, just like the Dhamma. The Dhamma is something which abounds everywhere. Right here, on land or in water, wherever, the Dhamma is always there. The Dhamma is perfect and complete, but it's our practice that's not yet complete.

The Lord, the fully enlightened Buddha, taught a means by which all of us may practise and come to know this Dhamma. It isn't a big thing, only a small thing, but it's right. For example, look at hair. If we know even one strand of hair, then we know every strand, both our own and also that of others. We know that they are all simply 'hair'. By knowing one strand of hair we know it all.

Or consider people. If we see the true nature of conditions within ourselves, then we know all the other people in the world also, because all people are the same. Dhamma is like this. It's a small thing and yet it's big. That is, to see the truth of one condition is to see the truth of them all. When we know the truth as it is, all problems come to an end.

Nevertheless, the training is difficult. Why is it difficult? It's difficult because of wanting, *tanhā*. If you don't 'want' then you don't practise. But if you practise out of desire you won't see the Dhamma. Think about it, all of you. If you don't want to practise, you can't practise. You must first want to practise in order to actually do the practice. Whether stepping forward or stepping back you meet desire. This is why the cultivators of the past have said that this practice is something that's extremely difficult to do.

You don't see Dhamma because of desire. Sometimes desire is very strong, you want to see the Dhamma immediately, but the Dhamma is not your mind – your mind is not yet Dhamma. The Dhamma is one thing and the mind is another. It's not that whatever you like is Dhamma and whatever you don't like isn't. That's not the way it goes.

Actually this mind of ours is simply a condition of nature, like a tree in the forest. If you want a plank or a beam, it must come from a tree, but a tree is still only a tree. It's not yet a beam or a plank. Before it can really be of use to us we must take that tree and saw it into beams or planks. It's the same tree but it becomes transformed into something else. Intrinsicly it's just a tree, a condition of nature. But in its raw state it isn't yet of much use to those who need timber. Our mind is like this. It is a condition of nature. As such it perceives thoughts, it discriminates into beautiful and ugly and so on.

This mind of ours must be further trained. We can't just let it be. It's a condition of nature! Train it to realize that it's a condition of nature. Improve on nature so that it's appropriate to our needs, which is Dhamma. Dhamma is something which must be practised and brought within.

If you don't practise you won't know. Frankly speaking, you won't know the Dhamma by just reading it or studying it. Or if you do know it, your knowledge is still defective. For example, this spittoon here. Everybody knows it's a spittoon but they don't fully know the spittoon. Why don't they fully know it? If I called this spittoon a saucepan, what would you say? Suppose that every time I asked for it I said, 'Please bring that saucepan over here,' that would confuse you. Why so? Because you don't fully know the spittoon. If you did, there would be no problem. You would simply pick up that object and hand it to me, because actually there isn't any spittoon. Do you understand? It's a spittoon due to convention. This convention is accepted all over the country, so it's a spittoon. But there isn't any real 'spittoon'. If somebody wants to call it a saucepan it can be a saucepan. It can be whatever you call it. This is called 'concept'. If we fully know the spittoon, even if somebody calls it a saucepan there's no problem. Whatever others may call it, we are unperturbed because we are not blind to its true nature. This is one who knows Dhamma.

Now let's come back to ourselves. Suppose somebody said, 'You're crazy!' or, 'You're stupid,' for example. Even though it may not be true, you wouldn't feel so good. Everything becomes difficult because of our ambitions to have and to achieve. Because of these desires to get and to be, because we don't know according to the truth, we have no contentment. If we know the Dhamma, are enlightened to the Dhamma, greed, aversion and delusion will disappear. When we understand the way things are, there is nothing for them to rest on.

Why is the practice so difficult and arduous? Because of desires. As soon as we sit down to meditate we want to become peaceful. If we didn't want to find peace we wouldn't sit, we wouldn't practise. As soon as we sit down we want peace to be right there, but wanting the mind to be calm makes for confusion, and we feel restless. This is how it goes. So the Buddha says, 'Don't speak out of desire, don't sit out of desire, don't walk out of desire. Whatever you do, don't do it with desire.' Desire means wanting. If you don't want to do something you won't do it. If our practice reaches this point, we can get quite discouraged. How can we practise? As soon as we sit down there is desire in the mind.

It's because of this that the body and mind are difficult to observe. If they are not the self nor belonging to self, then who do they belong to? Because it's difficult to resolve these things, we must rely on wisdom. The Buddha says we must practise with 'letting go'. But if we let go, then we just don't practise, right? Because we've let go.

Suppose we went to buy some coconuts in the market, and while we were carrying them back

someone asked:

‘What did you buy those coconuts for?’

‘I bought them to eat.’

‘Are you going to eat the shells as well?’

‘No.’

‘I don’t believe you. If you’re not going to eat the shells then why did you buy them also?’

Well what do you say? How are you going to answer their question? We practise with desire. If we didn’t have desire we wouldn’t practise. Practising with desire is *tanhā*. Contemplating in this way can give rise to wisdom, you know. For example, those coconuts: Are you going to eat the shells as well? Of course not. Then why do you take them? Because the time hasn’t yet come for you to throw them away. They’re useful for wrapping up the coconut in. If, after eating the coconut, you throw the shells away, there is no problem.

Our practice is like this. The Buddha said, ‘Don’t act on desire, don’t speak from desire, don’t eat with desire.’ Standing, walking, sitting or reclining, whatever, don’t do it with desire. This means to do it with detachment. It’s just like buying the coconuts from the market. We’re not going to eat the shells but it’s not yet time to throw them away. We keep them first.

This is how the practice is. Concept (*sammuti*) and transcendence (*vimutti*) are co-existent, just like a coconut. The flesh, the husk and the shell are all together. When we buy a coconut we buy the whole lot. If somebody wants to accuse us of eating coconut shells that’s their business, we know what we’re doing.

Wisdom is something each of us finds for oneself. To see it we must go neither fast nor slow. What should we do? Go to where there is neither fast nor slow. Going fast or going slow is not the way.

But we’re all impatient, we’re in a hurry. As soon as we begin we want to rush to the end, we don’t want to be left behind. We want to succeed. When it comes to fixing their minds for meditation some people go too far. They light the incense, prostrate and make a vow, ‘As long as this incense is not yet completely burnt I will not rise from my sitting, even if I collapse or die, no matter what, I’ll die sitting.’ Having made their vow they start their sitting. As soon as they start to sit, Māra’s hordes come rushing at them from all sides. They’ve only sat for an instant and already they think the incense must be finished. They open their eyes for a peek, ‘Oh, there’s still ages left!’

They grit their teeth and sit some more, feeling hot, flustered, agitated and confused. Reaching the breaking point they think, ‘It *must* be finished by now’. They have another peek. ‘Oh, no! It’s not even *half-way* yet!’

Two or three times and it’s still not finished, so they just give up, pack it in and sit there hating themselves. ‘I’m so stupid, I’m so hopeless!’ They sit and hate themselves, feeling like a hopeless

case. This just gives rise to frustration and hindrances. This is called the hindrance of ill-will. They can't blame others so they blame themselves. And why is this? It's all because of wanting.

Actually it isn't necessary to go through all that. To concentrate means to concentrate with detachment, not to concentrate yourself into knots. But maybe we read the scriptures about the life of the Buddha, how he sat under the Bodhi tree and determined to himself:

'As long as I have still not attained Supreme Enlightenment I will not rise from this place, even if my blood dries up.'

Reading this in the books you may think of trying it yourself. You'll do it like the Buddha. But you haven't considered that your car is only a small one. The Buddha's car was a really big one, he could take it all in one go. With only your tiny, little car, how can you possibly take it all at once? It's a different story altogether.

Why do we think like that? Because we're too extreme. Sometimes we go too low, sometimes we go too high. The point of balance is so hard to find.

Now I'm only speaking from experience. In the past my practice was like this. Practising in order to get beyond wanting. If we don't want, can we practise? I was stuck here. But to practise with wanting is suffering. I didn't know what to do, I was baffled. Then I realized that the practice which is steady is the important thing. One must practise consistently. They call this the practice that is 'consistent in all postures'. Keep refining the practice, don't let it become a disaster. Practice is one thing, disaster is another.² Most people usually create disaster. When they feel lazy they don't bother to practise, they only practise when they feel energetic. This is how I tended to be.

All of you ask yourselves now, is this right? To practise when you feel like it, not when you don't: is that in accordance with the Dhamma? Is it straight? Is it in line with the teaching? This is what makes practice inconsistent.

Whether you feel like it or not you should practise just the same: this is how the Buddha taught. Most people wait till they're in the mood before practising; when they don't feel like it they don't bother. This is as far as they go. This is called 'disaster', it's not practice. In the true practice, whether you are happy or depressed you practice; whether it's easy or difficult you practice; whether it's hot or cold you practice. It's straight like this. In the real practice, whether standing, walking, sitting or reclining you must have the intention to continue the practice steadily, making your sati consistent in all postures.

At first thought it seems as if you should stand for as long as you walk, walk for as long as you sit, sit for as long as you lie down. I've tried it but I couldn't do it. If a meditator were to make his standing, walking, sitting and lying down all equal, how many days could he keep it up for? Stand for five minutes, sit for five minutes, lie down for five minutes. I couldn't do it for very long. So I sat down and thought about it some more. 'What does it all mean? People in this world can't practise like this!'

Then I realized. 'Oh, that's not right, it can't be right because it's impossible to do. Standing, walking, sitting, reclining ... make them all consistent. To make the postures consistent the way they explain it

in the books is impossible.’

But it is possible to do this: the mind, just consider the mind. To have sati, recollection, *sampajañña*, self-awareness, and paññā, all-round wisdom, this you can do. This is something that’s really worth practising. This means that while standing we have sati, while walking we have sati, while sitting we have sati, and while reclining we have sati – consistently. This is possible. We put awareness into our standing, walking, sitting, lying down – into all postures.

When the mind has been trained like this it will constantly recollect *Buddho, Buddho, Buddho ...* which is knowing. Knowing what? Knowing what is right and what is wrong at all times. Yes, this is possible. This is getting down to the real practice. That is, whether standing, walking, sitting or lying down there is continuous sati.

Then you should understand those conditions which should be given up and those which should be cultivated. You know happiness, you know unhappiness. When you know happiness and unhappiness your mind will settle at the point which is free of happiness and unhappiness. Happiness is the loose path, *kāmasukhallikānuyogo*. Unhappiness is the tight path, *attakilamathānuyogo*.³ If we know these two extremes, we pull it back. We know when the mind is inclining towards happiness or unhappiness and we pull it back, we don’t allow it to lean over. We have this sort of awareness, we adhere to the One Path, the single Dhamma. We adhere to the awareness, not allowing the mind to follow its inclinations.

But in your practice it doesn’t tend to be like that, does it? You follow your inclinations. If you follow your inclinations it’s easy, isn’t it? But this is the ease which causes suffering, like someone who can’t be bothered working. He takes it easy, but when the time comes to eat he hasn’t got anything. This is how it goes.

I’ve contended with many aspects of the Buddha’s teaching in the past, but I couldn’t really beat him. Nowadays I accept it. I accept that the many teachings of the Buddha are straight down the line, so I’ve taken those teachings and used them to train both myself and others.

The practice which is important is *patipadā*. What is *patipadā*? It is simply all our various activities: standing, walking, sitting, reclining and everything else. This is the *patipadā* of the body. Now the *patipadā* of the mind: how many times in the course of today have you felt low? How many times have you felt high? Have there been any noticeable feelings? We must know ourselves like this. Having seen those feelings, can we let go? Whatever we can’t yet let go of, we must work with. When we see that we can’t yet let go of some particular feeling, we must take it and examine it with wisdom. Reason it out. Work with it. This is practice. For example, when you are feeling zealous, practise, and when you feel lazy, try to continue the practice. If you can’t continue at ‘full speed’ then at least do half as much. Don’t just waste the day away by being lazy and not practising. Doing that will lead to disaster, it’s not the way of a practitioner.

Now I’ve heard some people say, ‘Oh, this year I was really in a bad way.’

‘How come?’

‘I was sick all year. I couldn’t practise at all.’

Oh! If they don’t practise when death is near, when will they ever practise? If they’re feeling well, do you think they’ll practise? No, they only get lost in happiness. If they’re suffering they still don’t practise, they get lost in that. I don’t know when people think they’re going to practise! They can only see that they’re sick, in pain, almost dead from fever – that’s right, bring it on heavy, that’s where the practice is. When people are feeling happy it just goes to their heads and they get vain and conceited.

We must cultivate our practice. What this means is that whether you are happy or unhappy you must practise just the same. If you are feeling well you should practise, and if you are feeling sick you should also practise. There are those who think, ‘This year I couldn’t practise at all, I was sick the whole time’. If these people are feeling well, they just walk around singing songs. This is wrong thinking, not right thinking. This is why the practitioners of the past have all maintained the steady training of the heart. If things go wrong, just let them be with the body, not in the mind.

There was a time in my practice, after I had been practising about five years, when I felt that living with others was a hindrance. I would sit in my kutī and try to meditate and people would keep coming by for a chat and disturbing me. I ran off to live by myself. I thought I couldn’t practise with those people bothering me. I was fed up, so I went to live in a small, deserted monastery in the forest, near a small village. I stayed there alone, speaking to no-one because there was nobody else to speak to.

After I’d been there about fifteen days the thought arose, ‘Hmm. It would be good to have a novice or *pah-kow* here with me. He could help me out with some small jobs.’ I knew it would come up, and sure enough, there it was!

‘Hey! You’re a real character! You say you’re fed up with your friends, fed up with your fellow monks and novices, and now you want a novice. What’s this?’

‘No,’ it says, ‘I want a good novice.’

‘There! Where are all the good people, can you find any? Where are you going to find a good person? In the whole monastery there were only no-good people. You must have been the only good person, to have run away like this!’

You have to follow it up like this, follow up the tracks of your thoughts until you see.

‘Hmm. This is the important one. Where is there a good person to be found? There aren’t any good people, you must find the good person within yourself. If you are good in yourself then wherever you go will be good. Whether others criticize or praise you, you are still good. If you aren’t good, then when others criticize you, you get angry, and when they praise you, you are pleased.

At that time I reflected on this and have found it to be true from that day on until the present. Goodness must be found within. As soon as I saw this, that feeling of wanting to run away disappeared. In later times, whenever I had that desire arise I let it go. Whenever it arose I was aware of it and kept my awareness on that. Thus I had a solid foundation. Wherever I lived, whether people condemned me or whatever they said, I would reflect that the point is not whether *they* were good or bad. Good or evil

must be seen within ourselves. The way other people are, that's their concern.

Don't go thinking, 'Oh, today is too hot,' or, 'Today is too cold,' or, 'Today is' Whatever the day is like, that's just the way it is. Really, you are simply blaming the weather for your own laziness. We must see the Dhamma within ourselves, then there is a surer kind of peace.

So for all of you who have come to practise here, even though it's only for a few days, many things will arise. Many things may be arising which you're not even aware of. There is some right thinking, some wrong thinking – many, many things. So I say this practice is difficult.

Even though some of you may experience some peace when you sit in meditation, don't be in a hurry to congratulate yourselves. Likewise, if there is some confusion, don't blame yourselves. If things seem to be good, don't delight in them, and if they're not good don't be averse to them. Just look at it all, look at what you have. Just look, don't bother judging. If it's good, don't hold fast to it; if it's bad, don't cling to it. Good and bad can both bite, so don't hold fast to them.

The practice is simply to sit, sit and watch it all. Good moods and bad moods come and go as is their nature. Don't only praise your mind or only condemn it, know the right time for these things. When it's time for congratulations, congratulate it, but just a little, don't overdo it. Just like teaching a child, sometimes you may have to spank it a little. In our practice sometimes we may have to punish ourselves, but don't punish yourself all the time. If you punish yourself all the time, in a while you'll just give up the practice. But then you can't just give yourself a good time and take it easy either. That's not the way to practise. We practise according to the Middle Way. What is the Middle Way? This Middle Way is difficult to follow, you can't rely on your moods and desires.

Don't think that just sitting with your eyes closed is practise. If you do think this way then quickly change your thinking! Steady practice is having the attitude of practice while standing, walking, sitting and lying down. When coming out of sitting meditation, reflect that you're simply changing postures. If you reflect in this way you will have peace. Wherever you are, you will have this attitude of practice with you constantly, you will have a steady awareness within yourself.

Those of you who, simply indulge in your moods, spending the whole day letting the mind wander where it wants, will find that the next evening in sitting meditation all you get is the 'backwash' from the day's aimless thinking. There is no foundation of calm because you have let it go cold all day. If you practise like this, your mind gets gradually further and further from the practice. When I ask some of my disciples, 'How is your meditation going?' They say, 'Oh, it's all gone now.' You see? They can keep it up for a month or two but in a year or two it's all finished.

Why is this? It's because they don't take this essential point into their practice. When they've finished sitting they let go of their samādhi. They start to sit for shorter and shorter periods, till they reach the point where as soon as they start to sit they want to finish. Eventually they don't even sit. It's the same with bowing to the Buddha image. At first they make the effort to prostrate every night before going to sleep, but after a while their minds begin to stray. Soon they don't bother to prostrate at all, they just nod, till eventually it's all gone. They throw out the practice completely.

Therefore, understand the importance of sati, practise constantly. Right practice is steady practice.

Whether standing, walking, sitting or reclining, the practice must continue. This means that practice, meditation, is done in the mind, not in the body. If our mind has zeal, is conscientious and ardent, there will be awareness. The mind is the important thing. The mind is that which supervises everything we do.

When we understand properly, we practise properly. When we practise properly, we don't go astray. Even if we only do a little, that is still all right. For example, when you finish sitting in meditation, remind yourselves that you are not actually finishing meditation, you are simply changing postures. Your mind is still composed. Whether standing, walking, sitting or reclining, you have sati with you. If you have this kind of awareness you can maintain your internal practice. In the evening when you sit again the practice continues uninterrupted. Your effort is unbroken, allowing the mind to attain calm.

This is called steady practice. Whether we are talking or doing other things we should try to make the practice continuous. If our mind has recollection and self-awareness continuously, our practice will naturally develop, it will gradually come together. The mind will find peace, because it will know what is right and what is wrong. It will see what is happening within us and realize peace.

If we are to develop sīla or samādhi, we must first have paññā. Some people think that they'll develop moral restraint one year, samādhi the next year and the year after that they'll develop wisdom. They think these three things are separate. They think that this year they will develop sīla, but if the mind is not firm (samādhi), how can they do it? If there is no understanding (paññā), how can they do it? Without samādhi or paññā, sīla will be sloppy.

In fact these three come together at the same point. When we have sīla we have samādhi, when we have samādhi we have paññā. They are all one, like a mango. Whether it's small or fully grown, it's still a mango. When it's ripe it's still the same mango. If we think in simple terms like this, we can see it more easily. We don't have to learn a lot of things, just know these things, know our practice.

When it comes to meditation some people don't get what they want, so they just give up, saying they don't yet have the merit to practise meditation. They can do bad things, they have that sort of talent, but they don't have the talent to do good. They give it up, saying they don't have a good enough foundation. This is the way people are, they side with their defilements.

Now that you have this chance to practise, please understand that whether you find it difficult or easy to develop samādhi it is entirely up to you, not the samādhi. If it is difficult, it is because you are practising wrongly. In our practice we must have 'right view' (*sammā-ditthi*). If our view is right, everything else is right: right view, right intention, right speech, right action, right livelihood, right effort, right recollection, right concentration – the Eightfold Path. When there is right view all the other factors will follow.

Whatever happens, don't let your mind stray off the track. Look within yourself and you will see clearly. As I see it, for the best practice, it isn't necessary to read many books. Take all the books and lock them away. Just read your own mind. You have all been burying yourselves in books from the time you entered school. I think that now you have this opportunity and have the time, take the books, put them in a cupboard and lock the door. Just read your mind.

Whenever something arises within the mind, whether you like it or not, whether it seems right or wrong, just cut it off with, ‘this is not a sure thing.’ Whatever arises just cut it down, ‘not sure, not sure.’ With just this single axe you can cut it all down. It’s all ‘not sure’.

For the duration of this next month that you will be staying in this forest monastery, you should make a lot of headway. You will see the truth. This ‘not sure’ is really an important one. This one develops wisdom. The more you look, the more you will see ‘not sure-ness’. After you’ve cut something off with ‘not sure’ it may come circling round and pop up again. Yes, it’s truly ‘not sure’. Whatever pops up just stick this one label on it all – ‘not sure’. You stick the sign on, ‘not sure’, and in a while, when its turn comes, it crops up again, ‘Ah, not sure.’ Dig here! Not sure. You will see this same old one who’s been fooling you month in, month out, year in, year out, from the day you were born. There’s only this one who’s been fooling you all along. See this and realize the way things are.

When your practice reaches this point you won’t cling to sensations, because they are all uncertain. Have you ever noticed? Maybe you see a clock and think, ‘Oh, this is nice.’ Buy it and see – in not many days you’re bored with it already. ‘This pen is really beautiful,’ so you take the trouble to buy one. In not many months you tire of it. This is how it is. Where is there any certainty?

If we see all these things as uncertain, their value fades away. All things become insignificant. Why should we hold on to things that have no value? We keep them only as we might keep an old rag to wipe our feet with. We see all sensations as equal in value because they all have the same nature.

When we understand sensations we understand the world. The world is sensations and sensations are the world. If we aren’t fooled by sensations, we aren’t fooled by the world. If we aren’t fooled by the world, we aren’t fooled by sensations.

The mind which sees this will have a firm foundation of wisdom. Such a mind will not have many problems. Any problems it does have, it can solve. When there are no more problems there are no more doubts. Peace arises in their stead. This is called ‘practice’. If we really practise it must be like this.

Note: This talk has been published elsewhere under the title: ‘Right Practice Steady Practice

¹ One of the many branch monasteries of Ajahn Chah’s main monastery, Wat Pah Pong.

² The play on words here between the Thai *‘patibat’* (practice) and *‘wibut’* (disaster) is lost in the English.

³ These are the two extremes pointed out as wrong paths by the Buddha in his First Discourse. They are normally rendered as ‘indulgence in sense pleasures’ and ‘self-mortification’.

Detachment Within Activity

Given at Wat Pah Pong during the rains retreat, 1977.

Take a look at the example of the Buddha. Both in his own practice and in his methods for teaching the disciples he was exemplary. The Buddha taught the standards of practice as skilful means for getting rid of conceit. He couldn't do the practice for us. Having heard that teaching, we must further teach ourselves, practise for ourselves. The results will arise here, not at the teaching.

The Buddha's teaching can only enable us to get an initial understanding of the Dhamma, but the Dhamma is not yet within our hearts. Why not? Because we haven't yet practised, we haven't yet taught ourselves. The Dhamma arises within the practice. If you know it, you know it through the practice. If you doubt it, you doubt it in the practice. Teachings from the Masters may be true, but simply listening to Dhamma is not yet enough to enable us to realize it. The teaching simply points out the way to realizing the Dhamma. To realize the Dhamma we must take that teaching and bring it into our hearts. That part which is for the body we apply to the body, that part which is for speech we apply to speech, and that part which is for the mind we apply to the mind. This means that after hearing the teaching we must further teach ourselves to know that Dhamma, to be that Dhamma.

The Buddha said that those who simply believe others are not truly wise. A wise person practises until he is one with the Dhamma, until he can have confidence in himself, independent of others.

On one occasion, while Venerable Sāriputta was sitting at the Buddha's feet, listening respectfully as the Buddha expounded the Dhamma, the Buddha turned to him and asked,

‘Sāriputta, do you believe this teaching?’

Venerable Sāriputta replied, ‘No, I don't yet believe it.’

Now this is a good illustration. Venerable Sāriputta listened, and he took note. When he said he didn't yet believe he wasn't being careless, he was speaking the truth. He simply took note of that teaching, because he had not yet developed his own understanding of it, so he told the Buddha that he didn't yet believe – because he really didn't believe. These words almost sound as if Venerable Sāriputta was being rude, but actually he wasn't. He spoke the truth, and the Buddha praised him for it.

‘Good, good, Sāriputta. A wise person doesn't readily believe. He should consider first before believing.’

Conviction in a belief can take various forms. One form reasons according to Dhamma, while another form is contrary to the Dhamma. This second way is heedless, it is a foolhardy understanding, *micchā-ditthi*, wrong view. One doesn't listen to anybody else.

Take the example of Dīghanakha the Brāhman. This Brāhman only believed himself, he wouldn't believe others. At one time when the Buddha was resting at Rājagaha, Dīghanakha went to listen to his teaching. Or you might say that Dīghanakha went to teach the Buddha because he was intent on

expounding his own views.

‘I am of the view that nothing suits me.’

This was his view. The Buddha listened to Dīghanakha’s view and then answered,

‘Brāhman, this view of yours doesn’t suit you either.’

When the Buddha had answered in this way, Dīghanakha was stumped. He didn’t know what to say. The Buddha explained in many ways, till the Brāhman understood. He stopped to reflect and saw.

‘Hmm, this view of mine isn’t right.’

On hearing the Buddha’s answer the Brāhman abandoned his conceited views and immediately saw the truth. He changed right then and there, turning right around, just as one would invert one’s hand. He praised the teaching of the Buddha thus:

‘Listening to the Blessed One’s teaching, my mind was illumined, just as one living in darkness might perceive light. My mind is like an overturned basin which has been uprighted, like a man who has been lost and finds the way.’

Now at that time a certain knowledge arose within his mind, within that mind which had been uprighted. Wrong view vanished and right view took its place. Darkness disappeared and light arose.

The Buddha declared that the Brāhman Dīghanakha was one who had opened the Dhamma Eye. Previously Dīghanakha clung to his own views and had no intention of changing them. But when he heard the Buddha’s teaching his mind saw the truth, he saw that his clinging to those views was wrong. When the right understanding arose, he was able to perceive his previous understanding as mistaken, so he compared his experience with a person living in darkness who had found light. This is how it is. At that time the Brāhman Dīghanakha transcended his wrong view.

Now we must change in this way. Before we can give up defilements, we must change our perspective. We must begin to practise correctly and practise well. Previously we didn’t practise rightly or well, and yet we thought we were right and good just the same. When we really look into the matter we upright ourselves, just like turning over one’s hand. This means that the ‘one who knows’, or wisdom, arises in the mind, so that it is able to see things anew. A new kind of awareness arises.

Therefore, practitioners must develop this knowing, which we call *Buddho*, the one who knows, in their minds. Originally the one who knows is not there, our knowledge is not clear, true or complete. This knowledge is therefore too weak to train the mind. But then the mind changes, or inverts, as a result of this awareness, called ‘wisdom’ or ‘insight’, which exceeds our previous awareness. That previous ‘one who knows’ did not yet know fully and so was unable to bring us to our objective.

The Buddha therefore taught to look within, *opanayiko*. Look within, don’t look outwards. Or if you look outwards, then look within to see the cause and effect therein. Look for the truth in all things,

because external objects and internal objects are always affecting each other. Our practice is to develop a certain type of awareness until it becomes stronger than our previous awareness. This causes wisdom and insight to arise within the mind, enabling us to clearly know the workings of the mind, the language of the mind and the ways and means of all the defilements.

The Buddha, when he first left his home in search of liberation, was probably not really sure what to do, much like us. He tried many ways to develop his wisdom. He looked for teachers, such as Uddaka Rāmaputta to practise meditation – right leg on left leg, right hand on left hand, body erect, eyes closed, letting go of everything until he was able to attain a high level of absorption (*samādhi*).¹ But when he came out of that *samādhi* his old thinking came up and he would attach to it just as before. Seeing this, he knew that wisdom had not yet arisen. His understanding had not yet penetrated to the truth, it was still incomplete, still lacking. Seeing this he nonetheless gained some understanding – that this was not yet the summation of practice – but he left that place to look for a new teacher.

When the Buddha left his old teacher he didn't condemn him, he did as the bee does, it takes nectar from the flower without damaging the petals.

The Buddha then proceeded to study with ālāra Kālāma and attained an even higher state of *samādhi*, but when he came out of that state Bimba and Rāhula² came back into his thoughts again, the old memories and feelings came up again. He still had lust and desire. Reflecting inward he saw that he still hadn't reached his goal, so he left that teacher also. He listened to his teachers and did his best to follow their teachings. He continually reviewed the results of his practice; he didn't simply do things and then discard them for something else.

Then, after trying ascetic practices, he realized that starving until one is almost a skeleton is simply a matter for the body. The body doesn't know anything. Practising in that way was like executing an innocent person while ignoring the real thief.

When the Buddha really looked into the matter he saw that practise is not a concern of the body, it is a concern of the mind. The Buddha had tried *Attakilamathānuyogo* (self-mortification) and found that it was limited to the body. In fact, all Buddhas are enlightened in mind.

Whether in regard to the body or to the mind, just throw them all together as transient, imperfect and ownerless – *aniccam*, *dukkham* and *anattā*. They are simply conditions of nature. They arise depending on supporting factors, exist for a while and then cease. When there are appropriate conditions they arise again; having arisen they exist for a while, then cease once more. These things are not a 'self', a 'being', an 'us' or a 'them'. There's nobody there, there are simply feelings. Happiness has no intrinsic self, suffering has no intrinsic self. No self can be found, there are simply elements of nature which arise, exist and cease. They go through this constant cycle of change.

All beings, including humans, tend to see the arising as themselves, the existence as themselves, and the cessation as themselves. Thus they cling to everything. They don't want things to be the way they are, they don't want them to be otherwise. For instance, having arisen they don't want things to cease; having experienced happiness, they don't want suffering. If suffering does arise they want it to go away as quickly as possible, but it is even better if it doesn't arise at all. This is because they see this body and mind as themselves, or belonging to themselves, and so they demand those things to follow

their wishes.

This sort of thinking is like building a dam or a dyke without making an outlet to let the water through. The result is that the dam bursts. And so it is with this kind of thinking. The Buddha saw that thinking in this way is the cause of suffering. Seeing this cause, the Buddha gave it up.

This is the Noble Truth of the cause of suffering. The truths of suffering, its cause, its cessation and the way leading to that cessation – people are stuck right here. If people are to overcome their doubts, it's right at this point. Seeing that these things are simply *rūpa* and *nāma*, or corporeality and mentality, it becomes obvious that they are not a being, a person, an 'us', or a 'them'. They simply follow the laws of nature.

Our practice is to know things in this way. We don't have the power to really control these things, we aren't really their owners. Trying to control them causes suffering, because they aren't really ours to control. Neither body nor mind are 'self' or 'other'. If we know this as it really is, then we see clearly. We see the truth, we are at one with it. It's like seeing a lump of red hot iron which has been heated in a furnace. It's hot all over. Whether we touch it on top, the bottom or the sides it's hot. No matter where we touch it, it's hot. This is how you should see things.

Mostly when we start to practise we want to attain, to achieve, to know and to see, but we don't yet know what it is we're going to achieve or know. There was once a disciple of mine whose practice was plagued with confusion and doubts. But he kept practising, and I kept instructing him, till he began to find some peace. But when he eventually became a bit calm he got caught up in his doubts again, saying, 'What do I do next?' There! The confusion arises again. He says he wants peace but when he gets it, he doesn't want it, he asks what he should do next!

So in this practice we must do everything with detachment. How are we to detach? We detach by seeing things clearly. Know the characteristics of the body and mind as they are. We meditate in order to find peace, but in doing so we see that which is not peaceful. This is because movement is the nature of the mind.

When practising *samādhi* we fix our attention on the in-breath and out-breath at the nose tip or the upper lip. This 'lifting' the mind to fix it is called *vitakka*, or 'lifting up'. When we have thus 'lifted' the mind and are fixed on an object, this is called *vicāra*, the contemplation of the breath at the nose tip. This quality of *vicāra* will naturally mingle with other mental sensations, and we may think that our mind is not still, that it won't calm down, but actually this is simply the workings of *vicāra* as it mingles with those sensations. Now if this goes too far in the wrong direction, our mind will lose its collectedness. So then we must set up the mind afresh, lifting it up to the object of concentration with *vitakka*. As soon as we have thus established our attention *vicāra* takes over, mingling with the various mental sensations.

Now when we see this happening, our lack of understanding may lead us to wonder: 'Why has my mind wandered? I wanted it to be still, why isn't it still?' This is practising with attachment.

Actually the mind is simply following its nature, but we go and add on to that activity by wanting the mind to be still and thinking, 'Why isn't it still?' Aversion arises and so we add that on to everything

else, increasing our doubts, increasing our suffering and increasing our confusion. So if there is *vicāra*, reflecting on the various happenings within the mind in this way, we should wisely consider, ‘Ah, the mind is simply like this.’ There, that’s the one who knows talking, telling you to see things as they are. The mind is simply like this. We let it go at that and the mind becomes peaceful. When it’s no longer centred we bring up *vitakka* once more, and shortly there is calm again. *Vitakka* and *vicāra* work together like this. We use *vicāra* to contemplate the various sensations which arise. When *vicāra* becomes gradually more scattered we once again ‘lift’ our attention with *vitakka*.

The important thing here is that our practice at this point must be done with detachment. Seeing the process of *vicāra* interacting with the mental sensations we may think that the mind is confused and become averse to this process. This is the cause right here. We aren’t happy simply because we want the mind to be still. This is the cause – wrong view. If we correct our view just a little, seeing this activity as simply the nature of mind, just this is enough to subdue the confusion. This is called letting go.

Now, if we don’t attach, if we practise with ‘letting go’ – detachment within activity and activity within detachment – if we learn to practise like this, then *vicāra* will naturally tend to have less to work with. If our mind ceases to be disturbed, then *vicāra* will incline to contemplating Dhamma, because if we don’t contemplate Dhamma, the mind returns to distraction.

So there is *vitakka* then *vicāra*, *vitakka* then *vicāra*, *vitakka* then *vicāra* and so on, until *vicāra* becomes gradually more subtle. At first *vicāra* goes all over the place. When we understand this as simply the natural activity of the mind, it won’t bother us unless we attach to it. It’s like flowing water. If we get obsessed with it, asking ‘Why does it flow?’ then naturally we suffer. If we understand that the water simply flows because that’s its nature, then there’s no suffering. *Vicāra* is like this. There is *vitakka*, then *vicāra*, interacting with mental sensations. We can take these sensations as our object of meditation, calming the mind by noting those sensations.

If we know the nature of the mind like this, then we let go, just like letting the water flow by. *Vicāra* becomes more and more subtle. Perhaps the mind inclines to contemplating the body, or death for instance, or some other theme of Dhamma. When the theme of contemplation is right, there will arise a feeling of well-being. What is that well-being? It is *pīti* (rapture). *Pīti*, well-being, arises. It may manifest as goose-pimples, coolness or lightness. The mind is enrapt. This is called *pīti*. There is also pleasure, *sukha*, the coming and going of various sensations; and the state of *ekaggatārammana*, or one-pointedness.

Now if we talk in terms of the first stage of concentration, it must be like this: *vitakka*, *vicāra*, *pīti*, *sukha*, *ekaggatā*. So what is the second stage like? As the mind becomes progressively more subtle, *vitakka* and *vicāra* become comparatively coarser, so that they are discarded, leaving only *pīti*, *sukha*, and *ekaggatā*. This is something that the mind does of itself, we don’t have to conjecture about it, we just know things as they are.

As the mind becomes more refined, *pīti* is eventually thrown off, leaving only *sukha* and *ekaggatā*, and so we take note of that. Where does *pīti* go to? It doesn’t go anywhere, it’s just that the mind becomes increasingly more subtle so that it throws off those qualities that are too coarse for it. Whatever is too coarse it throws out, and it keeps throwing off like this until it reaches the peak of

subtlety, known in the books as the fourth *jhāna*, the highest level of absorption. Here the mind has progressively discarded whatever becomes too coarse for it, until only *ekaggatā* and *upekkhā*, equanimity remain. There's nothing further, this is the limit.

When the mind is developing the stages of *samādhi* it must proceed in this way, but please let us understand the basics of practice. We want to make the mind still but it won't be still. This is practising out of desire, but we don't realize it. We have the desire for calm. The mind is already disturbed and then we further disturb things by wanting to make it calm. This very wanting is the cause. We don't see that this wanting to calm the mind is *tanhā*. It's just like increasing the burden. The more we desire calm the more disturbed the mind becomes, until we just give up. We end up fighting all the time, sitting and struggling with ourselves.

Why is this? Because we don't reflect back on how we have set up the mind. Know that the conditions of mind are simply the way they are. Whatever arises, just observe it. It is simply the nature of the mind; it isn't harmful unless we don't understand its nature. It's not dangerous if we see its activity for what it is. So we practise with *vitakka* and *vicāra* until the mind begins to settle down and becomes less forceful. When sensations arise we contemplate them, we mingle with them and come to know them.

However, usually we tend to start fighting with them, because right from the beginning we're determined to calm the mind. As soon as we sit, the thoughts come to bother us. As soon as we set up our meditation object our attention wanders, the mind wanders off following all the thoughts, thinking that those thoughts have come to disturb us, but actually the problem arises right here, from the very wanting to calm the mind.

If we see that the mind is simply behaving according to its nature, that it naturally comes and goes like this, and if we don't get over-interested in it, we can understand that its ways are much the same as a child. Children don't know any better, they may say all kinds of things. If we understand them we just let them talk, because children naturally talk like that. When we let go like this, we are not obsessed with the child. We can talk to our guests undisturbed, while the child chatters and plays around. The mind is like this. It's not harmful unless we grab on to it and get obsessed over it. That's the real cause of trouble.

When *pīti* arises one feels an indescribable pleasure, which only those who experience it can appreciate. *Sukha* (pleasure) arises, and there is also the quality of one-pointedness. There is *vitakka*, *vicāra*, *pīti*, *sukha* and *ekaggatā*. These five qualities all converge at one place. Even though they are different qualities they are all collected in one place, and we can see them all there, just like seeing many different kinds of fruit in one bowl. *Vitakka*, *vicāra*, *pīti*, *sukha* and *ekaggatā* – we can see them all in one mind, all five qualities. If one were to ask, 'How is there *vitakka*, how is there *vicāra*, how is there *pīti* and *sukha*? 'It would be difficult to answer, but when they converge in the mind we will see how it is for ourselves.

At this point our practice becomes somewhat special. We must have recollection and self-awareness and not lose ourselves. Know things for what they are. These are stages of meditation, the potential of the mind. Don't doubt anything with regard to the practice. Even if you sink into the earth or fly into the air, or even 'die' while sitting, don't doubt it. Whatever the qualities of the mind are, just stay with

the knowing. This is our foundation: to have sati, recollection, and *sampajañña*, self-awareness, whether standing, walking, sitting, or reclining. Whatever arises, just leave it be, don't cling to it. Whether it's like or dislike, happiness or suffering, doubt or certainty, contemplate with *vicāra* and gauge the results of those qualities. Don't try to label everything, just know it. See that all the things that arise in the mind are simply sensations. They are transient. They arise, exist and cease. That's all there is to them, they have no self or being, they are neither 'us' nor 'them'. None of them are worthy of clinging to.

When we see all *rūpa* and *nāma* in this way with wisdom, then we will see the old tracks. We will see the transience of the mind, the transience of the body, the transience of happiness, suffering, love and hate. They are all impermanent. Seeing this, the mind becomes weary; weary of the body and mind, weary of the things that arise and cease and their transience. When the mind becomes disenchanted it will look for a way out of all those things. It no longer wants to be stuck in things, it sees the inadequacy of this world and the inadequacy of birth.

When the mind sees like this, wherever we go, we see *aniccam* (transience), *dukkham* (imperfection) and *anattā* (ownerlessness). There's nothing left to hold on to. Whether we sit at the foot of a tree, on a mountain top or in a valley, we can hear the Buddha's teaching. All trees will seem as one, all beings will be as one, there's nothing special about any of them. They arise, exist for a while, age and then die, all of them.

We thus see the world more clearly, we see this body and mind more clearly. They are clearer in the light of transience, clearer in the light of imperfection and clearer in the light of ownerlessness. If people hold fast to things, they suffer. This is how suffering arises. If we see that body and mind are simply the way they are, no suffering arises, because we don't hold fast to them. Wherever we go we will have wisdom. Even when seeing a tree we can consider it with wisdom. Seeing grass and the various insects will be food for reflection.

When it all comes down to it, they all fall into the same boat. They are all Dhamma, they are invariably transient. This is the truth, this is the true Dhamma, this is certain. How is it certain? It is certain in that the world is that way and can never be otherwise. There's nothing more to it than this. If we can see in this way, we have finished our journey.

In Buddhism, with regard to view, it is said that to feel that we are more foolish than others is not right; to feel that we are equal to others is not right; and to feel that we are better than others is not right, because there isn't any 'we'. This is how it is, we must uproot conceit.

This is called *lokavidū* – knowing the world clearly as it is. If we thus see the truth, the mind will know itself completely and will sever the cause of suffering. When there is no longer any cause, the results can not arise. This is the way our practice should proceed.

The basics which we need to develop are: firstly, to be upright and honest; secondly, to be wary of wrongdoing; thirdly, to have the attribute of humility within our heart, to be aloof and content with little. If we are content with little in regards to speech and all other things, we will see ourselves, we won't be drawn into distractions. The mind will have a foundation of *sīla*, *samādhi*, and *paññā*.

Therefore, practitioners of the path should not be careless. Even if you are right, don't be careless. And if you are wrong, don't be careless. If things are going well or you're feeling happy, don't be careless. Why do I say 'don't be careless'? Because all of these things are uncertain. Note them as such. If you get peaceful just leave the peace be. You may really want to indulge in it but you should simply know the truth of it, the same as for unpleasant qualities.

This practice of the mind is up to each individual. The teacher only explains the way to train the mind, because that mind is within each individual. We know what's in there, nobody else can know our mind as well as we can. The practice requires this kind of honesty. Do it properly, don't do it half-heartedly. When I say 'do it properly,' does that mean you have to exhaust yourselves? No, you don't have to exhaust yourselves, because the practice is done in the mind. If you know this, you will know the practice. You don't need a whole lot. Just use the standards of practice to reflect on yourself inwardly.

Now the Rains Retreat is half way over. For most people it's normal to let the practice slacken off after a while. They aren't consistent from beginning to end. This shows that their practice is not yet mature. For instance, having determined a particular practice at the beginning of the retreat, whatever it may be, then we must fulfil that resolution. For these three months make the practice consistent. You must all try. Whatever you have determined to practise, consider that and reflect whether the practice has slackened off. If so, make an effort to re-establish it. Keep shaping up the practice, just the same as when we practise meditation on the breath. As the breath goes in and out the mind gets distracted. Then re-establish your attention on the breath. When your attention wanders off again bring it back once more. This is the same. In regard to both the body and the mind the practice proceeds like this. Please make an effort with it.

Note: This talk has been published elsewhere under the title 'Sammā Samādhi - Detachment Within Activity'.

¹ The level of nothingness, one of the 'formless absorptions', sometimes called the seventh *jhāna*, or absorption.

² Bimba, or Princess Yasodharā, the Buddha's former wife; Rāhula, his son.

Dhamma Fighting

Excerpt from a talk given to monks and novices at Wat Pah Pong.

Fight greed, fight aversion, fight delusion – these are the enemy. In the practice of Buddhism, the path of the Buddha, we fight with Dhamma, using patient endurance. We fight by resisting our countless moods.

Dhamma and the world are interrelated. Where there is Dhamma there is the world, where there is the world there is Dhamma. Where there are defilements there are those who conquer defilements, who do battle with them. This is called fighting inwardly. To fight outwardly people take hold of bombs and guns to throw and to shoot; they conquer and are conquered. Conquering others is the way of the world. In the practice of Dhamma we don't have to fight others, but instead conquer our own minds, patiently enduring and resisting all our moods.

When it comes to Dhamma practice we don't harbour resentment and enmity amongst ourselves, but instead let go of all forms of ill will in our own actions and thoughts, freeing ourselves from jealousy, aversion and resentment. Hatred can only be overcome by not harbouring resentment and bearing grudges.

Hurtful actions and reprisals are different but closely related. Actions once done are finished with; there's no need to answer with revenge and hostility. This is called 'action' (kamma). 'Reprisal' (*vera*) means to continue that action further with thoughts of 'You did it to me so I'm going to get you back.' There's no end to this. It brings about the continual seeking of revenge, and so hatred is never abandoned. As long as we behave like this the chain remains unbroken, there's no end to it. No matter where we go, the feuding continues.

The supreme teacher¹ taught the world; he had compassion for all worldly beings. But the world nevertheless goes on like this. The wise should look into this and select those things which are of true value. The Buddha had trained in the various arts of warfare as a prince, but he saw that they weren't really useful; they are limited to the world with its fighting and aggression.

Therefore, we who have left the world, need to train ourselves; we must learn to give up all forms of evil, giving up all those things which are the cause for enmity. We conquer ourselves, we don't try to conquer others. We fight, but we fight only the defilements; if there is greed, we fight that; if there is aversion, we fight that; if there is delusion, we strive to give it up.

This is called 'Dhamma fighting'. This warfare of the heart is really difficult, in fact it's the most difficult thing of all. We become monks in order to contemplate this, to learn the art of fighting greed, aversion and delusion. This is our prime responsibility.

This is the inner battle, fighting with defilements. But there are very few people who fight like this. Most people fight with other things, they rarely fight defilements. They rarely even see them.

The Buddha taught us to give up all forms of evil and to cultivate virtue. This is the right path.

Teaching in this way is like the Buddha picking us up and placing us at the beginning of the path. Having reached the path, whether we walk along it or not is up to us. The Buddha's job is finished right there. He shows the way, that which is right and that which is not right. This much is enough, the rest is up to us.

Now, having reached the path we still don't know anything, we still haven't seen anything; so we must learn. To learn we must be prepared to endure some hardship, just like students in the world. It's difficult enough to obtain the knowledge and learning necessary for them to pursue their careers. They have to endure. When they think wrongly or feel averse or lazy they must force themselves to continue before they can graduate and get a job. The practice for a monk is similar. If we determine to practise and contemplate, then we will surely see the way.

Ditthi-māna is a harmful thing. *Ditthi* means 'view' or 'opinion'. All forms of view are called *ditthi*: seeing good as evil, seeing evil as good – any way whatsoever that we see things. This is not the problem. The problem lies with the clinging to those views, called *māna*; holding on to those views as if they were the truth. This leads us to spin around from birth to death, never reaching completion, just because of that clinging. So the Buddha urged us to let go of views.

If many people live together, as we do here, they can still practise comfortably if their views are in harmony. But even two or three monks would have difficulty living together if their views were not good or harmonious. When we humble ourselves and let go of our views, even if there are many of us, we come together at the place of the Buddha, Dhamma and Sangha.

It's not true to say that there will be disharmony just because there are many of us. Just look at a millipede. A millipede has many legs, doesn't it? Just looking at it you'd think it would have difficulty walking, but actually it doesn't. It has its own order and rhythm. In our practice it's the same. If we practise as the Noble Sangha of the Buddha practised, then it's easy. That is, *supatipanno* – those who practise well; *ujupatipanno* – those who practise straightly; *ñāyapatipanno* – those who practise to transcend suffering, and *sāmīcipatipanno* – those who practise properly. These four qualities, established within us, will make us true members of the Sangha. Even if we number in the hundreds or thousands, no matter how many we are, we all travel the same path. We come from different backgrounds, but we are the same. Even though our views may differ, if we practise correctly there will be no friction. Just like all the rivers and streams which flow to the sea, once they enter the sea they all have the same taste and colour. It's the same with people. When they enter the stream of Dhamma, it's the one Dhamma. Even though they come from different places, they harmonize, they merge.

But the thinking which causes all the disputes and conflict is *ditthi-māna*. Therefore the Buddha taught us to let go of views. Don't allow *māna* to cling to those views beyond their relevance.

The Buddha taught the value of constant sati, recollection. Whether we are standing, walking, sitting or reclining, wherever we are, we should have this power of recollection. When we have sati we see ourselves, we see our own minds. We see the 'body within the body', 'the mind within the mind'. If we don't have sati we don't know anything, we aren't aware of what is happening.

So sati is very important. With constant sati we will listen to the Dhamma of the Buddha at all times.

This is because ‘eye seeing forms’ is Dhamma; ‘ear hearing sounds’ is Dhamma; ‘nose smelling odours’ is Dhamma; ‘tongue tasting flavours’ is Dhamma; ‘body feeling sensations’ is Dhamma; when impressions arise in the mind, that is Dhamma also. Therefore one who has constant sati always hears the Buddha’s teaching. The Dhamma is always there. Why? Because of sati, because we are aware.

Sati is recollection, *sampajañña* is self-awareness. This awareness is the actual *Buddho*, the Buddha. When there is *sati-sampajañña*, understanding will follow. We know what is going on. When the eye sees forms: is this proper or improper? When the ear hears sound: is this appropriate or inappropriate? Is it harmful? Is it wrong, is it right? And so on like this with everything. If we understand we hear the Dhamma all the time.

So let us all understand that right now we are learning in the midst of Dhamma. Whether we go forward or step back, we meet the Dhamma – it’s all Dhamma if we have sati. Even seeing the animals running around in the forest we can reflect, seeing that all animals are the same as us. They run away from suffering and chase after happiness, just as people do. Whatever they don’t like they avoid; they are afraid of dying, just like people. If we reflect on this, we see that all beings in the world, people as well, are the same in their various instincts. Thinking like this is called ‘*bhāvanā*’, seeing according to the truth, that all beings are companions in birth, old age, sickness and death. Animals are the same as human beings and human beings are the same as animals. If we really see things the way they are our mind will give up attachment to them.

Therefore it is said we must have sati. If we have sati we will see the state of our own mind. Whatever we are thinking or feeling we must know it. This knowing is called *Buddho*, the Buddha, the one who knows, who knows thoroughly, who knows clearly and completely. When the mind knows completely we find the right practice.

So the straight way to practise is to have mindfulness, sati. If you are without sati for five minutes you are crazy for five minutes, heedless for five minutes. Whenever you are lacking in sati you are crazy. So sati is essential. To have sati is to know yourself, to know the condition of your mind and your life. This is to have understanding and discernment, to listen to the Dhamma at all times. After leaving the teacher’s discourse, you still hear the Dhamma, because the Dhamma is everywhere.

So therefore, all of you, be sure to practise every day. Whether you are lazy or diligent, practise just the same. Practice of the Dhamma is not done by following your moods. If you practise following your moods then it’s not Dhamma. Don’t discriminate between day and night, whether the mind is peaceful or not – just practise.

It’s like a child who is learning to write. At first he doesn’t write nicely – big, long loops and squiggles – he writes like a child. After a while the writing improves through practice. Practising the Dhamma is like this. At first you are awkward, sometimes you are calm, sometimes not, you don’t really know what’s what. Some people get discouraged. Don’t slacken off! You must persevere with the practice. Live with effort, just like the schoolboy: as he gets older he writes better and better. From writing badly he grows to write beautifully, all because of the practice from childhood.

Our practice is like this. Try to have recollection at all times: standing, walking, sitting or reclining. When we perform our various duties smoothly and well, we feel peace of mind. When there is peace

of mind in our work it's easy to have peaceful meditation; they go hand in hand. So make an effort. You should all make an effort to follow the practice. This is training.

¹ That is, the Buddha.

Understanding Vinaya

Given to the assembly of monks after the recitation of the pātimokkha, at Wat Pah Pong during the rains retreat of 1980.

This practice of ours is not easy. We may know some things but there is still much that we don't know. For example, when we hear teachings such as 'know the body, then know the body within the body'; or 'know the mind, then know the mind within the mind'. If we haven't yet practised these things, then when we hear them we may feel baffled. The Vinaya is like this. In the past I used to be a teacher,¹ but I was only a 'small teacher', not a big one. Why do I say a 'small teacher?' Because I didn't practise. I taught the Vinaya but I didn't practise it. This I call a small teacher, an inferior teacher. I say an 'inferior teacher' because when it came to the practice I was deficient. For the most part my practice was a long way off the theory, just as if I hadn't learned the Vinaya at all.

However, I would like to state that in practical terms it's impossible to know the Vinaya completely, because some things, whether we know them or not, are still offences. This is tricky. And yet it is stressed that if we do not yet understand any particular training rule or teaching, we must study that rule with enthusiasm and respect. If we don't know, then we should make an effort to learn. If we don't make an effort, that is in itself an offence.

For example, if you doubt – suppose there is a woman and, not knowing whether she is a woman or a man, you touch her.² You're not sure, but still go ahead and touch – that's still wrong. I used to wonder why that should be wrong, but when I considered the practice, I realized that a meditator must have sati, he must be circumspect. Whether talking, touching or holding things, he must first thoroughly consider. The error in this case is that there is no sati, or insufficient sati, or a lack of concern at that~time.

Take another example: it's only eleven o'clock in the morning but at the time the sky is cloudy, we can't see the sun, and we have no clock. Now suppose we estimate that it's probably afternoon – we really feel that it's afternoon – and yet we proceed to eat something. We start eating and then the clouds part and we see from the position of the sun that it's only just past eleven. This is still an offence.³ I used to wonder, 'Eh? It's not yet past midday, why is this an offence?'

An offence is incurred here because of negligence, carelessness; we don't thoroughly consider. There is a lack of restraint. If there is doubt and we act on the doubt, there is a *dukkata*⁴ offence just for acting in the face of the doubt. We think that it is afternoon when in fact it isn't. The act of eating is not wrong in itself, but there is an offence here because we are careless and negligent. If it really is afternoon but we think it isn't, then it's the heavier *pācittiya* offence. If we act with doubt, whether the action is wrong or not, we still incur an offence. If the action is not wrong in itself it is the lesser offence; if it is wrong then the heavier offence is incurred. Therefore the Vinaya can get quite bewildering.

At one time I went to see Venerable Ajahn Mun.⁵ At that time I had just begun to practise. I had read the *Pubbasikkhā*⁶ and could understand that fairly well. Then I went on to read the *Visuddhimagga*, where the author writes of the *Sīlaniddesa* (Book of Precepts), *Samādhiniddesa* (Book of Mind-

Training) and *Paññāniddesa* (Book of Understanding). I felt my head was going to burst! After reading that, I felt that it was beyond the ability of a human being to practise. But then I reflected that the Buddha would not teach something that is impossible to practise. He wouldn't teach it and he wouldn't declare it, because those things would be useful neither to himself nor to others. The *Sīlaniddesa* is extremely meticulous, the *Samādhiniddesa* more so, and the *Paññāniddesa* even more so! I sat and thought, 'Well, I can't go any further. There's no way ahead.' It was as if I'd reached a dead end.

At this stage I was struggling with my practice, I was stuck. It so happened that I had a chance to go and see Venerable Ajahn Mun, so I asked him: 'Venerable Ajahn, what am I to do? I've just begun to practise but I still don't know the right way. I have so many doubts I can't find any foundation at all in the practice.'

He asked, 'What's the problem?'

'In the course of my practice I picked up the *Visuddhimagga* and read it, but it seems impossible to put into practice. The contents of the *Sīlaniddesa*, *Samādhiniddesa* and *Paññāniddesa* seem to be completely impractical. I don't think there is anybody in the world who could do it, it's so detailed and meticulous. To memorize every single rule would be impossible, it's beyond me.'

He said to me: 'Venerable, there's a lot, it's true, but it's really only a little. If we were to take account of every training rule in the *Sīlaniddesa* that would be difficult, that is true; but actually, what we call the *Sīlaniddesa* has evolved from the human mind. If we train this mind to have a sense of shame and a fear of wrongdoing, we will then be restrained, we will be cautious

'This will condition us to be content with little, with few wishes, because we can't possibly look after a lot. When this happens our sati becomes stronger. We will be able to maintain sati at all times. Wherever we are we will make the effort to maintain thorough sati. Caution will be developed. Whatever you doubt don't say it, don't act on it. If there's anything you don't understand, ask the teacher. Trying to practise every single training rule would indeed be burdensome, but we should examine whether we are prepared to admit our faults or not. Do we accept them?'

This teaching is very important. It's not so much that we must know every single training rule, if we know how to train our own minds.

'All that stuff that you've been reading arises from the mind. If you still haven't trained your mind to have sensitivity and clarity, you will be doubting all the time. You should try to bring the teachings of the Buddha into your mind. Be composed in mind. Whatever arises that you doubt, just give it up. If you don't really know for sure, then don't say it or do it. For instance, if you wonder, "Is this wrong or not?" – that is, you're not really sure – then don't say it, don't act on it, don't discard your restraint.'

As I sat and listened, I reflected that this teaching conformed with the eight ways for measuring the true teaching of the Buddha: any teaching that speaks of the diminishing of defilements; which leads out of suffering; which speaks of renunciation (of sensual pleasures); of contentment with little; of humility and disinterest in rank and status; of aloofness and seclusion; of diligent effort; of being easy

to maintain – these eight qualities are characteristics of the true Dhamma-Vinaya, the teaching of the Buddha. Anything in contradiction to these is not.

If we are genuinely sincere we will have a sense of shame and a fear of wrongdoing. We will know that if there is doubt in our mind we will not act on it nor speak on it. The *Sīlaniddesa* is only words. For example, *hiri-ottappa* in the books is one thing, but in our minds it is another.

Studying the Vinaya with Venerable Ajahn Mun I learned many things. As I sat and listened, understanding arose.

So, when it comes to the Vinaya, I've studied considerably. Some days during the Rains Retreat I would study from six o'clock in the evening through till dawn. I understand it sufficiently. All the factors of *āpatti*⁷ which are covered in the *Pubbasiṅkhā* I wrote down in a notebook and kept in my bag. I really put effort into it, but in later times I gradually let go. It was too much. I didn't know which was the essence and which was the trimming, I had just taken all of it. When I understood more fully I let it drop off because it was too heavy. I just put my attention into my own mind and gradually did away with the texts.

However, when I teach the monks here I still take the *Pubbasiṅkhā* as my standard. For many years here at Wat Pah Pong it was I myself who read it to the assembly. In those days I would ascend the Dhamma-seat and go on until at least eleven o'clock or midnight, some days even until one or two o'clock in the morning. We were interested. And we trained. After listening to the Vinaya reading we would go and consider what we'd heard. You can't really understand the Vinaya just by listening to it. Having listened to it you must examine it and delve into it further.

Even though I studied these things for many years my knowledge was still not complete, because there were so many ambiguities in the texts. Now that it's been such a long time since I looked at the books, my memory of the various training rules has faded somewhat, but within my mind there is no deficiency. There is a standard there. There is no doubt, there is understanding. I put away the books and concentrated on developing my own mind. I don't have doubts about any of the training rules. The mind has an appreciation of virtue, it won't dare do anything wrong, whether in public or in private. I do not kill animals, even small ones. If someone were to ask me to intentionally kill an ant or a termite, to squash one with my hand, for instance, I couldn't do it, even if they were to offer me thousands of *baht* to do so. Even one ant or termite! The ant's life would have greater value to me.

However, it may be that I may cause one to die, such as when something crawls up my leg and I brush it off. Maybe it dies, but when I look into my mind there is no feeling of guilt. There is no wavering or doubt. Why? Because there was no intention. *Cetanāham bhikkhave sīlam vadāmi*: intention is the essence of moral training. Looking at it in this way I see that there was no intentional killing. Sometimes while walking I may step on an insect and kill it. In the past, before I really understood, I would really suffer over things like that. I would think I had committed an offence.

'What? There was no intention.' 'There was no intention, but I wasn't being careful enough!' I would go on like this, fretting and worrying.

So this Vinaya is something which can disturb practitioners of Dhamma, but it also has its value, in

keeping with what the teachers say – ‘Whatever training rules you don’t yet know you should learn. If you don’t know you should question those who do.’ They really stress this.

Now if we don’t know the training rules, we won’t be aware of our transgressions against them. Take, for example, a Venerable Thera of the past, Ajahn Pow of Wat Kow Wong Got in Lopburi Province. One day a certain *Mahā*, a disciple of his, was sitting with him, when some women came up and asked,

‘Luang Por! We want to invite you to go with us on an excursion, will you go?’

Luang Por Pow didn’t answer. The *Mahā* sitting near him thought that Venerable Ajahn Pow hadn’t heard, so he said, ‘Luang Por, Luang Por! Did you hear? These women invited you to go for a trip.’

He said, ‘I heard.’

The women asked again, ‘Luang Por, are you going or not?’

He just sat there without answering, and so nothing came of the invitation. When they had gone, the *Mahā* said,

‘Luang Por, why didn’t you answer those women?’

He said, ‘Oh, *Mahā*, don’t you know this rule? Those people who were here just now were all women. If women invite you to travel with them you should not consent. If they make the arrangements themselves that’s fine. If I want to go I can, because I didn’t take part in making the arrangements.’

The *Mahā* sat and thought, ‘Oh, I’ve really made a fool of myself.’

The Vinaya states that to make an arrangement, and then travel together with women, even though it isn’t as a couple, is a *pācittiya* offence.

Take another case. Lay people would bring money to offer Venerable Ajahn Pow on a tray. He would extend his receiving cloth,⁸ holding it at one end. But when they brought the tray forward to lay it on the cloth he would retract his hand from the cloth. Then he would simply abandon the money where it lay. He knew it was there, but he would take no interest in it. He would just get up and walk away, because in the Vinaya it is said that if one doesn’t consent to the money it isn’t necessary to forbid laypeople from offering it. If he had desire for it, he would have to say, ‘Householder, this is not allowable for a monk.’ He would have to tell them. If you have desire for it, you must forbid them from offering that which is unallowable. However, if you really have no desire for it, it isn’t necessary. You just leave it there and go.

Although the Ajahn and his disciples lived together for many years, still some of his disciples didn’t understand Ajahn Pow’s practice. This is a poor state of affairs. As for myself, I looked into and contemplated many of Venerable Ajahn Pow’s subtler points of practice.

The Vinaya can even cause some people to disrobe. When they study it all the doubts come up. It goes right back into the past ... ‘My ordination, was it proper?⁹ Was my preceptor pure? None of the monks

who sat in on my ordination knew anything about the Vinaya, were they sitting at the proper distance? Was the chanting correct?’ The doubts come rolling on ... ‘The hall I ordained in, was it proper? It was so small ...’ They doubt everything and fall into hell.

So until you know how to ground your mind it’s really difficult. You have to be very cool, you can’t just jump into things. But to be so cool that you don’t bother to look into things is wrong also. I was so confused I almost disrobed because I saw so many faults within my own practice and that of some of my teachers. I was on fire and couldn’t sleep because of those doubts.

The more I doubted, the more I meditated, the more I practised. Wherever doubt arose I practised right at that point. Wisdom arose. Things began to change. It’s hard to describe the change that took place. The mind changed until there was no more doubt. I don’t know how it changed. If I were to tell someone they probably wouldn’t understand.

So I reflected on the teaching *Paccattam veditabbo viññūhi* – the wise must know for themselves. It must be a knowing that arises through direct experience. Studying the Dhamma-Vinaya is certainly correct but if it’s just the study it’s still lacking. If you really get down to the practice you begin to doubt everything. Before I started to practise I wasn’t interested in the minor offences, but when I started practising, even the *dukkata* offences became as important as the *pārājika* offences. Before, the *dukkata* offences seemed like nothing, just a trifle. That’s how I saw them. In the evening you could confess them and they would be done with. Then you could commit them again. This sort of confession is impure, because you don’t stop, you don’t decide to change. There is no restraint, you simply do it again and again. There is no perception of the truth, no letting go.

Actually, in terms of ultimate truth, it’s not necessary to go through the routine of confessing offences. If we see that our mind is pure and there is no trace of doubt, then those offences drop off right there. That we are not yet pure is because we still doubt, we still waver. We are not really pure so we can’t let go. We don’t see ourselves, this is the point. This Vinaya of ours is like a fence to guard us from making mistakes, so it’s something we need to be scrupulous with.

If you don’t see the true value of the Vinaya for yourself it’s difficult. Many years before I came to Wat Pah Pong I decided I would give up money. For the greater part of a Rains Retreat I had thought about it. In the end I grabbed my wallet and walked over to a certain *Mahā* who was living with me at the time, setting the wallet down in front of him.

‘Here, *Mahā*, take this money. From today onwards, as long as I’m a monk, I will not receive or hold money. You can be my witness.’

‘You keep it, Venerable, you may need it for your studies.’ The Venerable *Mahā* wasn’t keen to take the money, he was embarrassed. ‘Why do you want to throw away all this money?’

‘You don’t have to worry about me. I’ve made my decision. I decided last night.’

From the day he took that money it was as if a gap had opened between us. We could no longer understand each other. He’s still my witness to this very day. Ever since that day I haven’t used money or engaged in any buying or selling. I’ve been restrained in every way with money. I was constantly

wary of wrongdoing, even though I hadn't done anything wrong. Inwardly I maintained the meditation practice. I no longer needed wealth, I saw it as a poison. Whether you give poison to a human being, a dog or anything else, it invariably causes death or suffering. If we see clearly like this we will be constantly on our guard not to take that 'poison'. When we clearly see the harm in it, it's not difficult to give up.

Regarding food and meals brought as offerings, if I doubted them, then I wouldn't accept them. No matter how delicious or refined the food might be, I wouldn't eat it. Take a simple example, like raw pickled fish. Suppose you are living in a forest and you go on almsround and receive only rice and some pickled fish wrapped in leaves. When you return to your dwelling and open the packet you find that it's raw pickled fish, just throw it away!¹⁰ Eating plain rice is better than transgressing the precepts. It has to be like this before you can say you really understand, then the Vinaya becomes simpler.

If other monks wanted to give me requisites, such as bowl, razor or whatever, I wouldn't accept, unless I knew them as fellow practitioners with a similar standard of Vinaya. Why not? How can you trust someone who is unrestrained? They can do all sorts of things. Unrestrained monks don't see the value of the Vinaya, so it's possible that they could have obtained those things in improper ways. I was as scrupulous as this.

As a result, some of my fellow monks would look askance at me. 'He doesn't socialize, he won't mix ...' I was unmoved: 'Sure, we can mix when we die. When it comes to death we are all in the same boat,' I thought. I lived with endurance. I was one who spoke little. If others criticized my practice I was unmoved. Why? Because even if I explained to them they wouldn't understand. They knew nothing about practice. Like those times when I would be invited to a funeral ceremony and somebody would say, 'Don't listen to him! Just put the money in his bag and don't say anything about it, don't let him know.'¹¹ I would say, 'Hey, do you think I'm dead or something? Just because one calls alcohol perfume doesn't make it become perfume, you know. But you people, when you want to drink alcohol you call it perfume, then go ahead and drink. You must be crazy!'

The Vinaya, then, can be difficult. You have to be content with little, aloof. You must see, and see right. Once, when I was travelling through Saraburi, my group went to stay in a village temple for a while. The Abbot there had about the same seniority as myself. In the morning, we would all go on almsround together, then come back to the monastery and put down our bowls. The laypeople would then bring dishes of food into the hall and set them down. Then the monks would go and pick them up, open them and lay them in a line to be formally offered. One monk would put his hand on the dish at the other end. And that was it! With that the monks would bring them over and distribute them to be eaten.

About five monks were travelling with me at the time, but not one of us would touch that food. On almsround all we received was plain rice, so we sat with them and ate plain rice. None of us would dare eat the food from those dishes.

This went on for quite a few days, until I began to sense that the Abbot was disturbed by our behaviour. One of his monks had probably gone to him and said, 'Those visiting monks won't eat any of the food. I don't know what they're up to.'

I had to stay there for a few days more, so I went to the Abbot to explain.

I said, ‘Venerable Sir, may I have a moment please? At this time I have some business which means I must call on your hospitality for some days, but in doing so I’m afraid there may be one or two things which you and your fellow monks find puzzling: namely, concerning our not eating the food which has been offered by the laypeople. I’d like to clarify this with you, sir. It’s really nothing, it’s just that I’ve learned to practise like this, that is, the receiving of the offerings, sir. When the laypeople lay the food down and then the monks go and open the dishes, sort them out and then have them formally offered, this is wrong. It’s a *dukkata* offence. Specifically, to handle or touch food which hasn’t yet been formally offered into a monk’s hands, ‘ruins’ that food. According to the Vinaya, any monk who eats that food incurs an offence.’

‘It’s simply this one point, sir. It’s not that I’m criticizing anybody, or that I’m trying to force you or your monks to stop practising like this – not at all. I just wanted to let you know of my good intentions, because it will be necessary for me to stay here for a few more days.’

He lifted his hands in añjali, ‘*Sādhu!* Excellent! I’ve never yet seen a monk who keeps the minor rules in Saraburi. There aren’t any to be found these days. If there still are such monks they must live outside of Saraburi. May I commend you. I have no objections at all, that’s very good.’

The next morning when we came back from almsround not one of the monks would go near those dishes. The laypeople themselves sorted them out and offered them, because they were afraid the monks wouldn’t eat. From that day onwards the monks and novices there seemed really on edge, so I tried to explain things to them, to put their minds at rest. I think they were afraid of us, they just went into their rooms and closed themselves in, in silence.

For two or three days I tried to make them feel at ease because they were so ashamed, I really had nothing against them. I didn’t say things like ‘There’s not enough food,’ or ‘Bring this or that food.’ Why not? Because I had fasted before, sometimes for seven or eight days. Here I had plain rice, I knew I wouldn’t die. Where I got my strength from was the practice, from having studied and practised accordingly.

I took the Buddha as my example. Wherever I went, whatever others did, I wouldn’t involve myself. I devoted myself solely to the practice, because I cared for myself, I cared for the practice.

Those who don’t keep the Vinaya or practise meditation and those who do practise can’t live together, they must go their separate ways. I didn’t understand this myself in the past. As a teacher I taught others but I didn’t practise. This is really bad. When I looked deeply into it, my practice and my knowledge were as far apart as earth and sky.

Therefore, those who want to go and set up meditation centres in the forest, don’t do it. If you don’t yet really know, don’t bother trying, you’ll only make a mess of it. Some monks think that by going to live in the forest they will find peace, but they still don’t understand the essentials of practice. They cut grass for themselves,¹² do everything themselves. Those who really know the practice aren’t interested in places like this, they won’t prosper. Doing it like that won’t lead to progress. No matter how peaceful the forest may be you can’t progress if you do it wrong.

They see the forest monks living in the forest and go to live in the forest like them, but it's not the same. The robes are not the same, eating habits are not the same, everything is different. Namely, they don't train themselves, they don't practise. The place is wasted, it doesn't really work. If it does work, it does so only as a venue for showing off or publicizing, just like a medicine show. It goes no further than that. Those who have only practised a little and then go to teach others are not yet ripe, they don't really understand. In a short time they give up and it falls apart. It just brings trouble.

So we must study somewhat, look at the *Navakovāda*,¹³ what does it say? Study it, memorize it, until you understand. From time to time ask your teacher concerning the finer points, he will explain them. Study like this until you really understand the Vinaya.

¹ This refers to the Venerable Ajahn's early years in the monkhood, before he had begun to practise in earnest.

² The second *sanghādisesa* offence, deals with touching a woman with lustful intentions.

³ Referring to *pācittiya* offence No. 36, for eating food outside of the allowed time, which is from dawn until noon.

⁴ *Dukkata*, offences of 'wrongdoing', the lightest class of offences in the Vinaya, of which there are a great number; *pārājika* – offences of defeat, of which there are four, are the most serious, involving expulsion from the Bhikkhu Sangha.

⁵ Venerable Ajahn Mun Bhūridatto, probably the most renowned and highly respected meditation master from the forest tradition in Thailand. He had many disciples who have become teachers in their own right, of whom Ajahn Chah is one. Venerable Ajahn Mun died in 1949.

⁶ *Pubbasikkhā Vannanā*, 'The Elementary Training', a Thai Commentary on Dhamma-Vinaya based on the Pāli Commentaries; *Visuddhimagga*, 'The Path to Purity', ācariya Buddhaghosa's exhaustive commentary on Dhamma-Vinaya.

⁷ *āpatti*: the offences of various classes for a Buddhist monk or nun.

⁸ A 'receiving cloth' is a cloth used by Thai monks for receiving things from women, from whom they do not receive things directly. That Venerable Ajahn Pow lifted his hand from the receiving cloth indicated that he was not actually receiving the money.

⁹ There are very precise and detailed regulations governing the ordination procedure which, if not adhered to, may render the ordination invalid.

¹⁰ The Vinaya forbids bhikkhus from eating raw meat or fish.

¹¹ Although it is an offence for monks to accept money, there are many who do. Some may accept it while appearing not to, which is probably how the laypeople in this instance saw the Venerable Ajahn's refusal to accept money. They thought that he actually would accept it if they didn't overtly offer it to him, but just slipped it into his bag.

¹² Another transgression of the precepts, a *pācittiya* offence.

¹³ Navakovāda: a simplified synopsis of elementary Dhamma-Vinaya.

Maintaining The Standard

Given at Wat Pah Pong, after the completion of the Dhamma exams, 1978.

Today we are meeting together as we do every year after the annual Dhamma examinations.¹ At this time all of you should reflect on the importance of carrying out the various duties of the monastery; those toward the preceptor and those toward the teachers. These are what hold us together as a single group, enabling us to live in harmony and concord. They are also what lead us to have respect for each other, which in turn benefits the community.

In all communities, from the time of the Buddha till the present, no matter what form they may take, if the residents have no mutual respect they can not succeed. Whether they be secular communities or monastic ones, if they lack mutual respect they have no solidarity. If there is no mutual respect, negligence sets in and the practice eventually degenerates.

Our community of Dhamma practitioners has lived here for about twenty-five years now, steadily growing, but it could deteriorate. We must understand this point. But if we are all heedful, have mutual respect and continue to maintain the standards of practice, I feel that our harmony will be firm. Our practice as a group will be a source of growth for Buddhism for a long time to come.

Now in regard to study and practice, they are a pair. Buddhism has grown and flourished until the present time because of study going hand in hand with practice. If we simply learn the scriptures in a heedless way, negligence sets in. For example, in the first year here we had seven monks for the Rains Retreat. At that time, I thought to myself, 'Whenever monks start studying for Dhamma Examinations the practice seems to degenerate.' Considering this, I tried to determine the cause, so I began to teach the monks who were there for the Rains Retreat – all seven of them. I taught for about forty days, from after the meal till six in the evening, every day. The monks went for the exams and it turned out there was a good result in that respect, all seven of them passed.

That much was good, but there was a certain complication regarding those who were lacking in circumspection. To study, it is necessary to do a lot of reciting and repeating. Those who are unrestrained and unreserved tend to grow lax with meditation practice and spend all their time studying, repeating and memorizing. This causes them to throw out their old abiding, their standards of practice. And this happens very often.

So it was that when they had finished their studies and taken their exams I could see a change in the behaviour of the monks. There was no walking meditation, only a little sitting, and an increase in socializing. There was less restraint and composure.

Actually, in our practice, when you do walking meditation, you should really determine to walk; when sitting in meditation, you should concentrate on doing just that. Whether you are standing, walking, sitting or lying down, you should strive to be composed. But when people do a lot of study, their minds are full of words, they get high on the books and forget themselves. They get lost in externals. Now this is so only for those who don't have wisdom, who are unrestrained and don't have steady sati. For these people studying can be a cause for decline. When such people are engaged in study

they don't do any sitting or walking meditation and become less and less restrained. Their minds become more and more distracted. Aimless chatter, lack of restraint and socializing become the order of the day. This is the cause for the decline of the practice. It's not because of the study in itself, but because certain people don't make the effort, they forget themselves.

Actually the scriptures are pointers along the path of practice. If we really understand the practice, then reading or studying are both further aspects of meditation. But if we study and then forget ourselves, it gives rise to a lot of talking and fruitless activity. People throw out the meditation practice and soon want to disrobe. Most of those who study and fail soon disrobe. It's not that study is not good, or that the practice is not right. It's that people fail to examine themselves.

Seeing this, in the second Rains Retreat I stopped teaching the scriptures. Many years later more and more young men came to become monks. Some of them knew nothing about the Dhamma-Vinaya and were ignorant of the texts, so I decided to rectify the situation; asking those senior monks who had already studied to teach, and they have taught up until the present time. This is how we came to have studying here.

However, every year when the exams are finished, I ask all the monks to re-establish their practice. So all those scriptures which aren't directly concerned with the practice, put them away in the cupboards. Re-establish yourselves, go back to the regular standards. Re-establish the communal practices such as coming together for the daily chanting. This is our standard. Do it even if only to resist your own laziness and aversion. This encourages diligence.

Don't discard your basic practices: eating little, speaking little, sleeping little; restraint and composure; aloofness; regular walking and sitting meditation; meeting together regularly at the appropriate times. Please make an effort with these, every one of you. Don't let this excellent opportunity go to waste. Do the practice. You have this chance to practise here because you live under the guidance of the teacher. He protects you on one level, so you should all devote yourselves to the practice. You've done walking meditation before, now also you should walk. You've done sitting meditation before, now also you should sit. In the past you've chanted together in the mornings and evenings, and now also you should make the effort. These are your specific duties, please apply yourselves to them.

Those who simply 'kill time' in the robes don't have any strength, you know. The ones who are floundering, homesick, confused – do you see them? These are the ones who don't put their minds into the practice. They don't have any work to do. We can't just lie around here. Being a Buddhist monk or novice you live and eat well; you shouldn't take it for granted. *Kāmasukhallikānuyyogo*² is a danger. Make an effort to find your own practice. Whatever is faulty, work to rectify, don't get lost in externals.

One who has zeal never misses walking and sitting meditation, never lets up in the maintenance of restraint and composure. Just observe the monks here. Whoever, having finished the meal and any business, having hung out his robes, walks meditation – and when we walk past his kutī we see that this walking path is a well-worn trail, and we see him often walking on it – this monk is not bored with the practice. This is one who has effort, who has zeal.

If all of you devote yourselves to the practice like this, not many problems will arise. If you don't abide with the practice, the walking and sitting meditation, you are doing nothing more than just travelling around. Not liking it here you go travelling over there; not liking it there you come touring back here. That's all you are doing, following your noses everywhere. These people don't persevere, it's not good enough. You don't have to do a lot of travelling around, just stay here and develop the practice, learn it in detail. Travelling around can wait till later, it's not difficult. Make an effort, all of you.

Prosperity and decline hinge on this. If you really want to do things properly, then study and practise in proportion; use both of them together. It's like the body and the mind. If the mind is at ease and the body free of disease and healthy, then the mind becomes composed. If the mind is confused, even if the body is strong there will be difficulty, let alone when the body experiences discomfort.

The study of meditation is the study of cultivation and relinquishment. What I mean by study here is: whenever the mind experiences a sensation, do we still cling to it? Do we create problems around it? Do we experience enjoyment or aversion over it? To put it simply: do we still get lost in our thoughts? Yes, we do. If we don't like something we react with aversion; if we do like it we react with pleasure the mind becomes defiled and stained. If this is the case then we must see that we still have faults, we are still imperfect, we still have work to do. There must be more relinquishing and more persistent cultivation. This is what I mean by studying. If we get stuck on anything, we recognize that we are stuck. We know what state we're in, and we work to correct ourselves.

Living with the teacher or apart from the teacher should be the same. Some people are afraid. They're afraid that if they don't do walking meditation the teacher will upbraid or scold them. This is good in a way, but in the true practice you don't need to be afraid of others, just be wary of faults arising within your own actions, speech or thoughts. When you see faults in your actions, speech or thoughts you must guard yourselves. *Attano codayattānam* – 'you must exhort yourself,' don't leave it to others to do. We must quickly improve ourselves, know ourselves. This is called 'studying', cultivating and relinquishing. Look into this till you see it clearly.

Living in this way we rely on endurance, persevering in the face of all defilements. Although this is good, it is still on the level of 'practising the Dhamma without having seen it'. If we have practised the Dhamma and seen it, then whatever is wrong we will have already given up, whatever is useful we will have cultivated. Seeing this within ourselves, we experience a sense of well-being. No matter what others say, we know our own mind, we are not moved. We can be at peace anywhere.

Now, the younger monks and novices who have just begun to practise may think that the senior Ajahn doesn't seem to do much walking or sitting meditation. Don't imitate him in this. You should emulate, but not imitate. To emulate is one thing, to imitate another. The fact is that the senior Ajahn dwells within his own particular contented abiding. Even though he doesn't seem to practise externally, he practises inwardly. Whatever is in his mind can not be seen by the eye. The practice of Buddhism is the practice of the mind. Even though the practice may not be apparent in his actions or speech, the mind is a different matter.

Thus, a teacher who has practised for a long time, who is proficient in the practice, may seem to let go of his actions and speech, but he guards his mind. He is composed. Seeing only his outer actions

you may try to imitate him, letting go and saying whatever you want to say, but it's not the same thing. You're not in the same league. Think about this.

There's a real difference, you are acting from different places. Although the Ajahn seems to simply sit around, he is not being careless. He lives with things but is not confused by them. We can't see this, because whatever is in his mind is invisible to us. Don't judge simply by external appearances, the mind is the important thing. When we speak, our minds follow that speech. Whatever actions we do, our minds follow, but one who has practised already may do or say things which his mind doesn't follow, because it adheres to Dhamma and Vinaya. For example, sometimes the Ajahn may be severe with his disciples, his speech may appear to be rough and careless, his actions may seem coarse. Seeing this, all we can see are his bodily and verbal actions, but the mind which adheres to Dhamma and Vinaya can't be seen. Adhere to the Buddha's instruction: 'Don't be heedless.' 'Heedfulness is the way to the Deathless. Heedlessness is death.' Consider this. Whatever others do is not important, just don't be heedless yourself, this is the important thing.

All I have been saying here is simply to warn you that now, having completed the exams, you have a chance to travel around and do many things. May you all constantly remember yourselves as practitioners of the Dhamma; a practitioner must be collected, restrained and circumspect.

Consider the teaching which says 'Bhikkhu: one who seeks alms.' If we define it this way our practice takes on one form – a very coarse one. If we understand this word the way the Buddha defined it, as one who sees the danger of samsāra, this is much more profound.

One who sees the danger of samsāra is one who sees the faults, the liability of this world. In this world there is so much danger, but most people don't see it, they see the pleasure and happiness of the world. Now, the Buddha says that a bhikkhu is one who sees the danger of samsāra. What is samsāra? The suffering of samsāra is overwhelming, it's intolerable. Happiness is also samsāra. The Buddha taught us not to cling to it. If we don't see the danger of samsāra, then when there is happiness we cling to the happiness and forget suffering. We are ignorant of it, like a child who doesn't know fire.

If we understand Dhamma practice in this way, Bhikkhu: one who sees the danger of samsāra; if we have this understanding, walking, sitting or lying down, wherever we may be, we will feel dispassion. We reflect on ourselves, heedfulness is there. Even sitting at ease, we feel this way. Whatever we do we see this danger, so we are in a very different state. This practice is called being 'one who sees the danger of samsāra'.

One who sees the danger of samsāra lives within samsāra and yet doesn't. That is, he understands concepts and he understands their transcendence. Whatever such a person says is not like that of ordinary people. Whatever he does is not the same, whatever he thinks is not the same. His behaviour is much wiser.

Therefore it is said: 'Emulate but don't imitate.' There are two ways – emulation and imitation. One who is foolish will grab on to everything. You mustn't do that! Don't forget yourselves.

As for me, this year my body is not so well. Some things I will leave to the other monks and novices to help take care of. Perhaps I will take a rest. From time immemorial it's been this way, and in the

world it's the same: as long as the father and mother are still alive, the children are well and prosperous. When the parents die, the children separate. Having been rich they become poor. This is usually how it is, even in the lay life, and one can see it here as well. For example, while the Ajahn is still alive everybody is well and prosperous. As soon as he passes away decline begins to set in immediately. Why is this? Because while the teacher is still alive people become complacent and forget themselves. They don't really make an effort with the study and the practice. As in lay life, while the mother and father are still alive, the children just leave everything up to them. They lean on their parents and don't know how to look after themselves. When the parents die they become paupers. In the monkhood it's the same. If the Ajahn goes away or dies, the monks tend to socialize, break up into groups and drift into decline, almost every time.

Why is this? It's because they forget themselves. Living off the merits of the teacher everything runs smoothly. When the teacher passes away, the disciples tend to split up. Their views clash. Those who think wrongly live in one place, those who think rightly live in another. Those who feel uncomfortable leave their old associates and set up new places and start new lineages with their own groups of disciples. This is how it goes. In the present it's the same. This is because we are at fault. While the teacher is still alive we are at fault, we live heedlessly. We don't take up the standards of practice taught by the Ajahn and establish them within our own hearts. We don't really follow in his footsteps.

Even in the Buddha's time it was the same. Remember the scriptures? That old monk, what was his name ...? Subhadda Bhikkhu! When Venerable Mahā Kassapa was returning from Pāvā he asked an ascetic on the way: 'Is the Lord Buddha faring well?' The ascetic answered: 'The Lord Buddha entered *Parinibbāna* seven days ago.'

Those monks who were still unenlightened were grief-stricken, crying and wailing. Those who had attained the Dhamma reflected to themselves, 'Ah, the Buddha has passed away. He has journeyed on.' But those who were still thick with defilements, such as Venerable Subhadda, said:

'What are you all crying for? The Buddha has passed away. That's good! Now we can live at ease. When the Buddha was still alive he was always bothering us with some rule or other, we couldn't do this or say that. Now the Buddha has passed away, that's fine! We can do whatever we want, say what we want. Why should you cry?'

It's been so from way back then till the present day.

However that may be, even though it's impossible to preserve entirely; suppose we had a glass and we took care to preserve it. Each time we used it we cleaned it and put it away in a safe place. Being very careful with that glass we can use it for a long time, and then when we've finished with it others can also use it. Now, using glasses carelessly and breaking them every day or using one glass for ten years before it breaks – which is better?

Our practice is like this. For instance, if out of all of us living here, practising steadily, only ten practise well, then Wat Pah Pong will prosper. Just as in the villages: in a village of one hundred houses, even if there are only fifty good people that village will prosper. Actually to find even ten would be difficult. Or take a monastery like this one here: it is hard to find even five or six monks who have real commitment, who really do the practice.

In any case, we don't have any responsibilities now, other than to practise well. Think about it, what do we own here? We don't have wealth, possessions, and families anymore. Even food we take only once a day. We've given up many things already, even better things than these. As monks and novices we give up everything. We own nothing. All those things people really enjoy have been discarded by us. Going forth as a Buddhist monk is in order to practise. Why then should we hanker for other things, indulging in greed, aversion or delusion? To occupy our hearts with other things is no longer appropriate.

Consider: why have we gone forth? Why are we practising? We have gone forth to practise. If we don't practise then we just lie around. If we don't practise, then we are worse off than laypeople, we don't have any function. If we don't perform any function or accept our responsibilities, it's a waste of the *samana's* life. It contradicts the aims of a *samana*.

If this is the case then we are heedless. Being heedless is like being dead. Ask yourself, will you have time to practise when you die? Constantly ask yourself, 'When will I die?' If we contemplate in this way our mind will be alert every second; heedfulness will always be present. When there is no heedlessness, sati – recollection of what is what – will automatically follow. Wisdom will be clear, seeing all things clearly as they are. Recollection guards the mind, knowing the arising of sensations at all times, day and night. That is to have sati. To have sati is to be composed. To be composed is to be heedful. If one is heedful then one is practising rightly. This is our specific responsibility.

So today I would like to present this to you all. If in the future you leave here for one of the branch monasteries or anywhere else, don't forget yourselves. The fact is you are still not perfect, still not completed. You still have a lot of work to do, many responsibilities to shoulder, namely, the practices of cultivation and relinquishment. Be concerned about this, every one of you. Whether you live at this monastery or a branch monastery, preserve the standards of practice. Nowadays there are many of us, many branch temples. All the branch monasteries owe their origination to Wat Pah Pong. We could say that Wat Pah Pong was the 'parent', the teacher, the example for all branch monasteries. So, especially the teachers, monks and novices of Wat Pah Pong should try to set the example, to be the guide for all the other branch monasteries, continuing to be diligent in the practices and responsibilities of a *samana*.

¹ Many monks undertake written examinations of their scriptural knowledge, sometimes, as Ajahn Chah points out, to the detriment of their application of the teachings in daily life.

² Indulgence in sense pleasures, indulgence in comfort.

The Flood Of Sensuality

Given to the assembly of monks after the recitation of the pātimokkha, at Wat Pah Pong during the rains retreat, 1978.

Kāmogha, the flood of sensuality: sunk in sights, in sounds, in smells, in tastes, in bodily sensations. Sunk because we only look at externals, we don't look inwardly. People don't look at themselves, they only look at others. They can see everybody else but they can't see themselves. It's not such a difficult thing to do, but it's just that people don't really try.

For example, look at a beautiful woman. What does that do to you? As soon as you see the face you see everything else. Do you see it? Just look within your mind. What is it like to see a woman? As soon as the eyes see just a little bit the mind sees all the rest. Why is it so fast?

It's because you are sunk in the 'water'. You are sunk, you think about it, fantasize about it, are stuck in it. It's just like being a slave, somebody else has control over you. When they tell you to sit you've got to sit, when they tell you to walk you've got to walk; you can't disobey them because you're their slave. Being enslaved by the senses is the same. No matter how hard you try you can't seem to shake it off. And if you expect others to do it for you, you really get into trouble. You must shake it off for yourself.

Therefore, the Buddha left the practice of Dhamma, the transcendence of suffering, up to us. Take Nibbāna for example. The Buddha was thoroughly enlightened, so why didn't he describe Nibbāna in detail? Why did he only say that we should practise and find out for ourselves? Why is that? Shouldn't he have explained what Nibbāna is like?

'The Buddha practised, developing the perfections over countless world ages for the sake of all sentient beings, so why didn't he point out Nibbāna so that they all could see it and go there too?' Some people think like this. 'If the Buddha really knew he would tell us. Why should he keep anything hidden?'

Actually this sort of thinking is wrong. We can't see the truth in that way. We must practise, we must cultivate, in order to see. The Buddha only pointed out the way to develop wisdom, that's all. He said that we ourselves must practise. Whoever practises will reach the goal.

But that path which the Buddha taught goes against our habits. We don't really like to be frugal, to be restrained so we say, 'Show us the way, show us the way to Nibbāna, so that those who like it easy like us can go there too.' It's the same with wisdom. The Buddha can't show you wisdom, it's not something that can be simply handed around. The Buddha can show the way to develop wisdom, but whether one develops much or only a little depends on the individual. Merit and accumulated virtues of people naturally differ.

Just look at a material object, such as the wooden lions in front of the hall here. People come and look at them and can't seem to agree: one person says, 'Oh, how beautiful,' while another says, 'How revolting!' It's the one lion, both beautiful and ugly. Just this is enough to know how things are.

Therefore the realization of Dhamma is sometimes slow, sometimes fast. The Buddha and his disciples were all alike in that they had to practise for themselves, but even so they still relied on teachers to advise them and give them techniques in the practice.

Now, when we listen to Dhamma we may want to listen until all our doubts are cleared up, but they'll never be cleared up simply by listening. Doubt is not overcome simply by listening or thinking, we must first clean out the mind. To clean out the mind means to revise our practice. No matter how long we were to listen to the teacher talk about the truth we couldn't know or see that truth just from listening. If we did, it would be only through guesswork or conjecture.

However, even though simply listening to the Dhamma may not lead to realization, it is beneficial. There were, in the Buddha's time, those who realized the Dhamma, even realizing the highest realization – arahantship – while listening to a discourse. But those people were already highly developed, their minds already understood to some extent. It's like a football. When a football is pumped up with air it expands. Now the air in that football is all pushing to get out, but there's no hole for it to do so. As soon as a needle punctures the football the air comes bursting out.

This is the same. The minds of those disciples who were enlightened while listening to the Dhamma were like this. As long as there was no catalyst to cause the reaction this 'pressure' was within them, like the football. The mind was not yet free because of this very small thing concealing the truth. As soon as they heard the Dhamma and it hit the right spot, wisdom arose. They immediately understood, immediately let go and realized the true Dhamma. That's how it was. It was easy. The mind uprighted itself. It changed, or turned, from one view to another. You could say it was far, or you could say it was very near.

This is something we must do for ourselves. The Buddha was only able to give techniques on how to develop wisdom, and so with the teachers these days. They give Dhamma talks, they talk about the truth, but still we can't make that truth our own. Why not? There's a 'film' obscuring it. You could say that we are sunk, sunk in the water. *Kāmogha* – the 'flood' of sensuality. *Bhavogha* – the 'flood' of becoming.

'Becoming' (*bhava*) means 'the sphere of birth'. Sensual desire is born at the sights, sounds, tastes, smells, feelings and thoughts, with which we identify. The mind holds fast and is stuck to sensuality.

Some cultivators get bored, fed up, tired of the practice and are lazy. You don't have to look very far, just look at how people can't seem to keep the Dhamma in mind, and yet if they get scolded they'll hold on to it for ages. They may get scolded at the beginning of the Rains, and even after the Rains Retreat has ended they still haven't forgotten it. They won't forget it their whole lives if it goes down deep enough.

But when it comes to the Buddha's teaching, telling us to be moderate, to be restrained, to practise conscientiously – why don't people take these things to their hearts? Why do they keep forgetting these things? You don't have to look very far, just look at our practice here. For example, establishing standards, such as, after the meal not chattering while washing your bowls! Even this much seems to be beyond people. Even though we know that chattering is not particularly useful and binds us to sensuality, people still like talking. Pretty soon they start to disagree and eventually get into arguments

and squabbles. There's nothing more to it than this.

Now this isn't anything subtle or refined, it's pretty basic, and yet people don't seem to really make much effort with it. They say they want to see the Dhamma, but they want to see it on their own terms, they don't want to follow the path of practice. That's as far as they go. All these standards of practice are skilful means for penetrating and seeing the Dhamma, but people don't practise accordingly.

To say 'real practice' or 'ardent practice' doesn't necessarily mean you have to expend a whole lot of energy – just put some effort into the mind, making some effort with all the feelings that arise, especially those which are steeped in sensuality. These are our enemies.

But people can't seem to do it. Every year, as the end of the Rains Retreat approaches, it gets worse and worse. Some of the monks have reached the limit of their endurance, the 'end of their tether'. The closer we get to the end of the Rains the worse they get, they have no consistency in their practice. I speak about this every year and yet people can't seem to remember it. We establish a certain standard and in not even a year it's fallen apart. It starts when the retreat is almost finished – the chatter, the socializing and everything else. The practice all goes to pieces. This is how it tends to be.

Those who are really interested in the practice should consider why this is so: it's because people don't see the adverse results of these things.

When we are accepted into the Buddhist monkhood we live simply. And yet some disrobe to go to the front, where the bullets fly past them every day – they prefer it like that. They really want to go. Danger surrounds them on all sides and yet they're prepared to go. Why don't they see the danger? They're prepared to die by the gun but nobody wants to die developing virtue. Just seeing this is enough. It's because they're slaves, nothing else. See this much and you know what it's all about. People don't see the danger.

This is really amazing, isn't it? You'd think they could see it but they can't. If they can't see it even then, then there's no way they can get out. They're determined to whirl around in samsāra. This is how things are. Just talking about simple things like this we can begin to understand.

If you were to ask them, 'Why were you born?' they'd probably have a lot of trouble answering, because they can't see it. They're sunk in the world of the senses and sunk in becoming (*bhava*).¹ *Bhava* is the sphere of birth, our birthplace. To put it simply, beings are born from *bhava* – it is the preliminary condition for birth. Wherever birth takes place, that's *bhava*.

For example, suppose we had an orchard of apple trees that we were particularly fond of. That's a *bhava* for us if we don't reflect with wisdom. How so? Suppose our orchard contained a hundred or a thousand apple trees – it doesn't really matter what kind of trees they are, just so long as we consider them to be 'our own' trees. Then we are going to be 'born' as a 'worm' in every single one of those trees. We bore into every one, even though our human body is still back there in the house, we send out 'tentacles' into every one of those trees.

Now, how do we know that it's a *bhava*? It's a *bhava* (sphere of existence) because of our clinging to the idea that those trees are our own, that that orchard is our own. If someone were to take an axe and

cut one of the trees down, the owner over there in the house 'dies' along with the tree. He gets furious, and has to go and set things right, to fight and maybe even kill over it. That quarrelling is the 'birth'. The 'sphere of birth' is the orchard of trees that we cling to as our own. We are 'born' right at the point where we consider them to be our own, born from that *bhava*. Even if we had a thousand apple trees, if someone were to cut down just one it would be like cutting the owner down.

Whatever we cling to, we are born right there, we exist right there. We are born as soon as we 'know'. This is knowing through not-knowing: we know that someone has cut down one of our trees. But we don't know that those trees are not really ours. This is called 'knowing through not-knowing'. We are bound to be born into that *bhava*.

Vatta, the wheel of conditioned existence, operates like this. People cling to *bhava*, they depend on *bhava*. If they cherish *bhava*, this is birth. And if they fall into suffering over that same thing, this is also a birth. As long as we can't let go we are stuck in the rut of *samsāra*, spinning around like a wheel. Look into this, contemplate it. Whatever we cling to as being us or ours, that is a place for birth.

There must be a *bhava*, a sphere of birth, before birth can take place. Therefore, the Buddha said, whatever you have, don't 'have' it. Let it be there but don't make it yours. You must understand this 'having' and 'not having', know the truth of them, don't flounder in suffering.

The place that we were born from; you want to go back there and be born again, don't you? All of you monks and novices, do you know where you were born from? You want to go back there, don't you? Right there, look into this. All of you getting ready. The nearer we get to the end of the retreat, the more you start preparing to go back and be born there.

Really, you'd think that people could appreciate what it would be like, living in a person's belly. How uncomfortable would that be? Just look, merely staying in your *kuṭī* for one day is enough. Shut all the doors and windows and you're suffocating already. How would it be to lie in a person's belly for nine or ten months? Think about it.

People don't see the liability of things. Ask them why they are living, or why they are born, and they have no idea. Do you still want to get back in there? Why? It should be obvious but you don't see it. Why can't you see it? What are you stuck on, what are you holding on to? Think it out for yourself.

It's because there is a cause for becoming and birth. Just take a look at the preserved baby in the main hall, have you seen it? Isn't anybody alarmed by it? No, no one's alarmed by it. A baby lying in its mother's belly is just like that preserved baby. And yet you want to make more of those things, and even want to get back and soak in there yourself. Why don't you see the danger of it and the benefit of the practice?

You see? That's *bhava*. The root is right there, it revolves around that. The Buddha taught to contemplate this point. People think about it but still don't see. They're all getting ready to go back there again. They know that it wouldn't be very comfortable in there, to put their necks in the noose is really uncomfortable, yet they still want to lay their heads in there. Why don't they understand this? This is where wisdom comes in, where we must contemplate.

When I talk like this people say, ‘If that’s the case then everybody would have to become monks, and then how would the world be able to function?’ You’ll never get everybody to become monks, so don’t worry. The world is here because of deluded beings, so this is no trifling matter.

I first became a novice at the age of nine. I started practising from way back then. But in those days I didn’t really know what it was all about. I found out when I became a monk. Once I became a monk I became so wary. The sensual pleasures people indulged in didn’t seem like so much fun to me. I saw the suffering in them. It was like seeing a delicious banana which I knew was very sweet but which I also knew to be poisoned. No matter how sweet or tempting it was, if I ate it I would die. I considered in this way every time; every time I wanted to ‘eat a banana’ I would see the ‘poison’ steeped inside, and so eventually I could withdraw my interest from those things. Now at this age, such things are not at all tempting.

Some people don’t see the ‘poison’; some see it but still want to try their luck. ‘If your hand is wounded don’t touch poison, it may seep into the wound.’

I used to consider trying it out as well. When I had lived as a monk for five or six years, I thought of the Buddha. He practised for five or six years and was finished, but I was still interested in the worldly life, so I thought of going back to it: ‘Maybe I should go and ‘build the world’ for a while, I would gain some experience and learning. Even the Buddha had his son, Rāhula. Maybe I’m being too strict?’

I sat and considered this for some time, until I realized: ‘Yes, well, that’s all very fine, but I’m just afraid that this “Buddha” won’t be like the last one.’ A voice in me said, ‘I’m afraid this “Buddha” will just sink into the mud, not like the last one.’ And so I resisted those worldly thoughts.

From my sixth or seventh Rains Retreat up until the twentieth, I really had to put up a fight. These days I seem to have run out of bullets, because I’ve been shooting for a long time. I’m just afraid that you younger monks and novices have still got so much ammunition, you may just want to go and try out your guns. Before you do, consider carefully first.

It’s hard to give up sensual desire. It’s really difficult to see it as it is. We must use skilful means. Consider sensual pleasures as like eating meat which gets stuck in your teeth. Before you finish the meal you have to find a toothpick to pry it out. When the meat comes out you feel some relief for a while, maybe you even think that you won’t eat anymore meat. But when you see it again you can’t resist it. You eat some more and then it gets stuck again. When it gets stuck you have to pick it out again, which gives some relief once more, until you eat some more meat. That’s all there is to it. Sensual pleasures are just like this, no better than this. When the meat gets stuck in your teeth there’s discomfort. You take a toothpick and pick it out and experience some relief. There’s nothing more to it than this sensual desire. The pressure builds up and up until you let a little bit out. Oh! That’s all there is to it. I don’t know what all the fuss is about.

I didn’t learn these things from anybody else, they occurred to me in the course of my practice. I would sit in meditation and reflect on sensual pleasure as being like a red ants’ nest.² Someone takes a piece of wood and pokes the nest until the ants come running out, crawling down the wood and into their faces, biting their eyes and ears. And yet they still don’t see the difficulty they are in.

However, it's not beyond our ability. In the teaching of the Buddha it is said that if we've seen the harm of something, no matter how good it may seem to be, we know that it's harmful. Whatever we haven't yet seen the harm of, we just think it's good. If we haven't yet seen the harm of anything we can't get out of it.

Have you noticed? No matter how dirty it may be people like it. This kind of 'work' isn't clean but you don't even have to pay people to do it, they'll gladly volunteer. With other kinds of dirty work, even if you pay a good wage people won't do it, but this kind of work they submit themselves to gladly, you don't even have to pay them. It's not that it's clean work, either, it's dirty work. Yet why do people like it? How can you say that people are intelligent when they behave like this? Think about it.

Have you ever noticed the dogs in the monastery grounds here? There are packs of them. They run around biting each other, some of them even getting maimed. In another month or so they'll be at it. As soon as one of the smaller ones gets into the pack the bigger ones are at him – out he comes yelping, dragging his leg behind him. But when the pack runs on he hobbles on after it. He's only a little one, but he thinks he'll get his chance one day. They bite his leg for him and that's all he gets for his trouble. For the whole of the mating season he may not even get one chance. You can see this for yourself in the monastery here.

When these dogs run around howling in packs, I figure if they were humans they'd be singing songs! They think it's such great fun they're singing songs, but they don't have a clue what it is that makes them do it, they just blindly follow their instincts.

Think about this carefully. If you really want to practise you should understand your feelings. For example, among the monks, novices or laypeople, who should you socialize with? If you associate with people who talk a lot they induce you to talk a lot also. Your own share is already enough, theirs is even more; put them together and they explode!

People like to socialize with those who chatter a lot and talk of frivolous things. They can sit and listen to that for hours. When it comes to listening to Dhamma, talking about practice, there isn't much of it to be heard. Like when giving a Dhamma talk: as soon as I start off '*Namo Tassa Bhagavato*³ they're all sleepy already. They don't take in the talk at all. When I reach the '*Evam*' they all open their eyes and wake up. Every time there's a Dhamma talk people fall asleep. How are they going to get any benefit from it?

Real Dhamma cultivators will come away from a talk feeling inspired and uplifted, they learn something. Every six or seven days the teacher gives another talk, constantly boosting the practice.

This is your chance, now that you are ordained. There's only this one chance, so take a close look. Look at things and consider which path you will choose. You are independent now. Where are you going to go from here? You are standing at the crossroads between the worldly way and the Dhamma way. Which way will you choose? You can take either way, this is the time to decide. The choice is yours to make. If you are to be liberated it is at this point.

¹ The Thai word for *bhava*, '*pop*', would have been a familiar term to Ajahn Chah's audience. It is

generally understood to mean ‘sphere of rebirth’. Ajahn Chah’s usage of the word here is somewhat unconventional, emphasizing a more practical application of the term.

² Both the red ants and their eggs are used for food in North-East Thailand, so such raids on their nests were not so unusual.

³The first line of the traditional *Pāli* words of homage to the Buddha, recited before giving a formal Dhamma talk. *Evam* is the traditional *Pāli* word for ending a talk.

In The Dead Of Night ...

Given on a lunar observance night (uposatha), at Wat Pah Pong, in the late 1960s.

Take a look at your fear. One day, as it was nearing nightfall, there was nothing else for it. If I tried to reason with myself I'd never go, so I grabbed a *pah-kow* and just went.

'If it's time for it to die then let it die. If my mind is going to be so stubborn and stupid then let it die.' That's how I thought to myself. Actually in my heart I didn't really want to go but I forced myself to. When it comes to things like this, if you wait till everything's just right you'll end up never going. When would you ever train yourself? So I just went.

I'd never stayed in a charnel ground before. When I got there, words can't describe the way I felt. The *pa-kow* wanted to camp right next to me but I wouldn't have it. I made him stay far away. Really I wanted him to stay close to keep me company but I wouldn't have it. I made him move away, otherwise I'd have counted on him for support.

'If it's going to be so afraid then let it die tonight.'

I was afraid, but I dared. It's not that I wasn't afraid, but I had courage. In the end you have to die anyway.

Well, just as it was getting dark I had my chance, in they came carrying a corpse. Just my luck! I couldn't even feel my feet touch the ground, I wanted to get out of there so badly. They wanted me to do some funeral chants but I wouldn't get involved, I just walked away. In a few minutes, after they'd gone, I just walked back and found that they had buried the corpse right next to my spot, making the bamboo used for carrying it into a bed for me to stay on.

So now what was I to do? It's not that the village was nearby, it was a good two or three kilometres away.

'Well, if I'm going to die, I'm going to die.' If you've never dared to do it you'll never know what it's like. It's really an experience.

As it got darker and darker I wondered where there was to run to in the middle of that charnel ground.

'Oh, let it die. One is born to this life only to die, anyway.'

As soon as the sun sank the night told me to get inside my *glot*. I didn't want to do any walking meditation, I only wanted to get into my net. Whenever I tried to walk towards the grave it was as if something was pulling me back from behind, to stop me from walking. It was as if my feelings of fear and courage were having a tug-of-war with me. But I did it. This is the way you must train yourself.

When it was dark I got into my mosquito net. It felt as if I had a seven-tiered wall all around me. Seeing my trusty alms bowl there beside me was like seeing an old friend. Even a bowl can be a friend sometimes! Its presence beside me was comforting. I had a bowl for a friend at least.

I sat in my net watching over the body all night. I didn't lie down or even doze off, I just sat quietly. I couldn't be sleepy even if I wanted to, I was so scared. Yes, I was scared, and yet I did it. I sat through the night.

Now who would have the guts to practise like this? Try it and see. When it comes to experiences like this who would dare to go and stay in a charnel ground? If you don't actually do it you don't get the results, you don't really practise. This time I really practised.

When day broke I felt, 'Oh! I've survived!' I was so glad, I just wanted to have daytime, no night time at all. I wanted to kill off the night and leave only daylight. I felt so good, I had survived. I thought, 'Oh, there's nothing to it, it's just my own fear, that's all.'

After almsround and eating the meal I felt good, the sunshine came out, making me feel warm and cosy. I had a rest and walked a while. I thought, 'This evening I should have some good, quiet meditation, because I've already been through it all last night. There's probably nothing more to it.'

Then, later in the afternoon, wouldn't you know it? In comes another one, a big one this time.¹ They brought the corpse in and cremated it right beside my spot, right in front of my *glot*. This was even worse than last night!

'Well, that's good,' I thought, 'bringing in this corpse to burn here is going to help my practice.'

But still I wouldn't go and do any rites for them, I waited for them to leave first before taking a look.

Burning that body for me to sit and watch over all night, I can't tell you how it was. Words can't describe it. Nothing I could say could convey the fear I felt. In the dead of night, remember. The fire from the burning corpse flickered red and green and the flames pattered softly. I wanted to do walking meditation in front of the body but could hardly bring myself to do it. Eventually I got into my net. The stench from the burning flesh lingered all through the night.

And this was before things really started to happen. As the flames flickered softly I turned my back on the fire.

I forgot about sleep, I couldn't even think of it, my eyes were fixed rigid with fear. And there was nobody to turn to, there was only me. I had to rely on myself. I could think of nowhere to go, there was nowhere to run to in that pitch-black night.

'Well, I'll sit and die here. I'm not moving from this spot.'

Here, talking of the ordinary mind, would it want to do this? Would it take you to such a situation? If you tried to reason it out you'd never go. Who would want to do such a thing? If you didn't have strong faith in the teaching of the Buddha you'd never do it.

Now, about 10 p.m., I was sitting with my back to the fire. I don't know what it was, but there came a sound of shuffling from the fire behind me. Had the coffin just collapsed? Or maybe a dog was getting the corpse? But no, it sounded more like a buffalo walking steadily around.

‘Oh, never mind.’

But then it started walking towards me, just like a person!

It walked up behind me, the footsteps heavy, like a buffalo’s, and yet not. The leaves crunched under the footsteps as it made its way round to the front. Well, I could only prepare for the worst, where else was there to go? But it didn’t really come up to me, it just circled around in front and then went off in the direction of the *pa-kow*. Then all was quiet. I don’t know what it was, but my fear made me think of many possibilities.

It must have been about half an hour later, I think, when the footsteps started coming back from the direction of the *pa-kow*. Just like a person! It came right up to me, this time, heading for me as if to run me over! I closed my eyes and refused to open them.

‘I’ll die with my eyes closed.’

It got closer and closer until it stopped dead in front of me and just stood stock still. I felt as if it were waving burnt hands back and forth in front of my closed eyes. Oh! This was really it! I threw out everything, forgot all about Buddho, Dhammo and Sangho. I forgot everything else, there was only the fear in me, stacked in full to the brim. My thoughts couldn’t go anywhere else, there was only fear. From the day I was born I had never experienced such fear. Buddho and Dhammo had disappeared, I don’t know where. There was only fear welling up inside my chest until it felt like a tightly stretched drum skin.

‘Well, I’ll just leave it as it is, there’s nothing else to do.’

I sat as if I wasn’t even touching the ground and simply noted what was going on. The fear was so great that it filled me, like a jar completely filled with water. If you pour water until the jar is completely full, and then pour some more, the jar will overflow. Likewise, the fear built up so much within me that it reached its peak and began to overflow.

‘What am I so afraid of anyway?’ a voice inside me asked.

‘I’m afraid of death,’ another voice answered.

‘Well, then, where is this thing “death?” Why all the panic? Look where death abides. Where is death?’

‘Why, death is within me!’

‘If death is within you, then where are you going to run to escape it? If you run away you die, if you stay here you die. Wherever you go it goes with you because death lies within you, there’s nowhere you can run to. Whether you are afraid or not you die just the same, there’s nowhere to escape death.’

As soon as I had thought this, my perception seemed to change right around. All the fear completely disappeared as easily as turning over one’s own hand. It was truly amazing. So much fear and yet it could disappear just like that! Non-fear arose in its place. Now my mind rose higher and higher until I

felt as if I was in the clouds.

As soon as I had conquered the fear, rain began to fall. I don't know what sort of rain it was, the wind was so strong. But I wasn't afraid of dying now. I wasn't afraid that the branches of the trees might come crashing down on me. I paid it no mind. The rain thundered down like a hot season torrent, really heavy. By the time the rain had stopped everything was soaking wet.

I sat unmoving.

So what did I do next, soaking wet as I was? I cried! The tears flowed down my cheeks. I cried as I thought to myself, 'Why am I sitting here like some sort of orphan or abandoned child, sitting, soaking in the rain like a man who owns nothing, like an exile?'

And then I thought further, 'All those people sitting comfortably in their homes right now probably don't even suspect that there is a monk sitting, soaking in the rain all night like this. What's the point of it all?' Thinking like this I began to feel so thoroughly sorry for myself that the tears came gushing out.

'They're not good things anyway, these tears, let them flow right on out until they're all gone.'

This was how I practised.

Now I don't know how I can describe the things that followed. I sat and listened. After conquering my feelings I just sat and watched as all manner of things arose in me, so many things that were possible to know but impossible to describe. And I thought of the Buddha's words, *paccattam veditabbo viññūhi*: 'The wise will know for themselves.'

I had endured such suffering and sat through the rain like this. Who was there to experience it with me? Only I could know what it was like. There was so much fear and yet the fear disappeared. Who else could witness this? The people in their homes in the town couldn't know what it was like, only I could see it. It was a personal experience. Even if I were to tell others they wouldn't really know, it was something for each individual to experience for himself. The more I contemplated this the clearer it became. I became stronger and stronger, my conviction become firmer and firmer, until daybreak.

When I opened my eyes at dawn, everything was yellow. I had been wanting to urinate during the night but the feeling had eventually stopped. When I got up from my sitting in the morning everywhere I looked was yellow, just like the early morning sunlight on some days. When I went to urinate there was blood in the urine!

'Eh? Is my gut torn or something?' I got a bit of fright. 'Maybe it's really torn inside there.'

'Well, so what? If it's torn it's torn, who is there to blame?' a voice told me straight away. 'If it's torn it's torn, if I die I die. I was only sitting here, I wasn't doing any harm. If it's going to burst, let it burst,' the voice said.

My mind was as if arguing or fighting with itself. One voice would come from one side, saying, 'Hey,

this is dangerous!' Another voice would counter it, challenge it and over-rule it.

My urine was stained with blood.

'Hmm. Where am I going to find medicine?'

'I'm not going to bother with that stuff. A monk can't cut plants for medicine anyway. If I die, I die, so what? What else is there to do? If I die while practising like this then I'm ready. If I were to die doing something bad that's no good, but to die practising like this I'm prepared.'

Don't follow your moods. Train yourself. The practice involves putting your very life at stake. You must have cried at least two or three times. That's right, that's the practice. If you're sleepy and want to lie down then don't let it sleep. Make the sleepiness go away before you lie down. But look at you all, you don't know how to practise.

Sometimes, when you come back from almsround and you're contemplating the food before eating, you can't settle down, your mind is like a mad dog. The saliva flows, you're so hungry. Sometimes you may not even bother to contemplate, you just dig in. That's a disaster. If the mind won't calm down and be patient then just push your bowl away and don't eat. Train yourself, drill yourself, that's practice. Don't just keep on following your mind. Push your bowl away, get up and leave, don't allow yourself to eat. If it really wants to eat so much and acts so stubborn then don't let it eat. The saliva will stop flowing. If the defilements know that they won't get anything to eat they'll get scared. They won't dare bother you next day, they'll be afraid they won't get anything to eat. Try it out if you don't believe me.

People don't trust the practice, they don't dare to really do it. They're afraid they'll go hungry, afraid they'll die. If you don't try it out you won't know what it's about. Most of us don't dare to do it, don't dare to try it out; we're afraid.

I've suffered for a long time over eating and the like, so I know what they're about. And that's only a minor thing as well. So this practice is not something one can study easily.

Consider: what is the most important thing of all? There's nothing else, just death. Death is the most important thing in the world. Consider, practice, inquire. If you don't have clothing you won't die. If you don't have betel nut to chew or cigarettes to smoke you still won't die. But if you don't have rice or water, then you will die. I see only these two things as being essential in this world. You need rice and water to nourish the body. So I wasn't interested in anything else, I just contented myself with whatever was offered. As long as I had rice and water it was enough to practise with, I was content.

Is that enough for you? All those other things are extras. Whether you get them or not doesn't matter, the only really important things are rice and water.

'If I live like this can I survive?' I asked myself. 'There's enough to get by on all right. I can probably get at least rice on almsround in just about any village, a mouthful from each house. Water is usually available. Just these two are enough.' I didn't aim to be particularly rich.

In regards to the practice, right and wrong are usually coexistent. You must dare to do it, dare to practise. If you've never been to a charnel ground you should train yourself to go. If you can't go at night then go during the day. Then train yourself to go later and later until you can go at dusk and stay there. Then you will see the effects of the practice, then you will understand.

This mind has been deluded now for who knows how many lifetimes. Whatever we don't like or love we want to avoid; we just indulge in our fears. And then we say we're practising. This can't be called 'practice'. If it's real practice you'll even risk your life. If you've really made up your mind to practise why would you take an interest in petty concerns? 'I only got a little, you got a lot.' 'You quarrelled with me so I'm quarrelling with you.' I had none of these thoughts because I wasn't looking for such things. Whatever others did was their business. When I went to other monasteries I didn't get involved in such things. However high or low others practised I wouldn't take any interest, I just looked after my own business. And so I dared to practise, and the practice gave rise to wisdom and insight.

If your practice has really hit the spot then you really practise. Day or night you practise. At night, when it's quiet, I'd sit in meditation, then come down to walk, alternating back and forth like this at least two or three times a night. Walk, then sit, then walk some more. I wasn't bored, I enjoyed it.

Sometimes it'd be raining softly and I'd think of the times I used to work the rice paddies. My pants would still be wet from the day before but I'd have to get up before dawn and put them on again. Then I'd have to go down to below the house to get the buffalo out of its pen. All I could see of the buffalo would be covered in buffalo shit. Then the buffalo's tail would swish around and spatter me with shit on top of that. My feet would be sore with athlete's foot and I'd walk along thinking, 'Why is life so miserable?' And now here I was walking meditation. What was a little bit of rain to me? Thinking like this I encouraged myself in the practice.

If the practice has entered the stream then there's nothing to compare with it. There's no suffering like the suffering of a Dhamma cultivator and there's no happiness like the happiness of one either. There's no zeal to compare with the zeal of the cultivator and there's no laziness to compare with them either. Practitioners of the Dhamma are tops. That's why I say if you really practise it's a sight to see.

But most of us just talk about practice without having done it or reached it. Our practice is like the man whose roof is leaking on one side so he sleeps on the other side of the house. When the sunshine comes in on that side he rolls over to the other side, all the time thinking, 'When will I ever get a decent house like everyone else?' If the whole roof leaks then he just gets up and leaves. This is not the way to do things, but that's how most people are.

This mind of ours, these defilements – if you follow them they'll cause trouble. The more you follow them the more the practice degenerates. With the real practice sometimes you even amaze yourself with your zeal. Whether other people practise or not, don't take any interest, simply do your own practice consistently. Whoever comes or goes it doesn't matter, just do the practice. You must look at yourself before it can be called 'practice'. When you really practise there are no conflicts in your mind, there is only Dhamma.

Wherever you are still inept, wherever you are still lacking, that's where you must apply yourself. If you haven't yet cracked it don't give up. Having finished with one thing you get stuck on another, so persist with it until you crack it, don't let up. Don't be content until it's finished. Put all your attention on that point. While sitting, lying down or walking, watch right there.

It's just like a farmer who hasn't yet finished his fields. Every year he plants rice but this year he still hasn't managed to get it all finished, so his mind is stuck on that, he can't rest contented. His work is still unfinished. Even when he's with friends he can't relax, he's all the time nagged by his unfinished business. Or like a mother who leaves her baby upstairs in the house while she goes to feed the animals below; she's always got her baby in mind, lest it should fall from the house. Even though she may do other things, her baby is never far from her thoughts.

It's just the same for us and our practice – we never forget it. Even though we may do other things our practice is never far from our thoughts, it's constantly with us, day and night. It has to be like this if you are really going to make progress.

In the beginning you must rely on a teacher to instruct and advise you. When you understand, then practice. When the teacher has instructed you, follow the instructions. If you understand the practice it's no longer necessary for the teacher to teach you, just do the work yourselves.

Whenever heedlessness or unwholesome qualities arise know for yourself, teach yourself. Do the practice yourself. The mind is the one who knows, the witness. The mind knows for itself if you are still very deluded or only a little deluded. Wherever you are still faulty try to practise right at that point, apply yourself to it.

Practice is like that. It's almost like being crazy, or you could even say you are crazy. When you really practice you are crazy, you 'flip'. You have distorted perception and then you adjust your perception. If you don't adjust it, it's going to be just as troublesome and just as wretched as before.

So there's a lot of suffering in the practice, but if you don't know your own suffering you won't understand the Noble Truth of suffering. To understand suffering, to kill it off, you first have to encounter it. If you want to shoot a bird but don't go out and find it, how will you ever shoot it? Suffering, suffering – the Buddha taught about suffering: the suffering of birth, the suffering of old age. If you don't want to experience suffering, you won't see suffering. If you don't see suffering, you won't understand suffering. If you don't understand suffering, you won't be able to get rid of suffering.

Now people don't want to see suffering, they don't want to experience it. If they suffer here, they run over there. You see? They're simply dragging their suffering around with them, they never kill it. They don't contemplate or investigate it. If they feel suffering here, they run over there; if it arises there they run back here. They try to run away from suffering physically. As long as you are still ignorant, wherever you go you'll find suffering. Even if you boarded an aeroplane to get away from it, it would board the plane with you. If you dived under the water it would dive in with you, because suffering lies within us. But we don't know that. If it lies within us, where can we run to escape it?

People have suffering in one place so they go somewhere else. When suffering arises there they run off again. They think they're running away from suffering but they're not, suffering goes with them.

They carry suffering around without knowing it. If we don't know the cause of suffering then we can't know the cessation of suffering, there's no way we can escape it.

You must look into this intently until you're beyond doubt. You must dare to practise. Don't shirk it, either in a group or alone. If others are lazy it doesn't matter. Whoever does a lot of walking meditation, a lot of practice, I guarantee results. If you really practise consistently, whether others come or go or whatever, one Rains Retreat is enough. Do it like I've been telling you here. Listen to the teacher's words, don't quibble, don't be stubborn. Whatever he tells you to do, go right ahead and do it. You needn't be timid about the practice, knowledge will surely arise from it.

Practice is also *patipadā*. What is *patipadā*? Practice evenly, consistently. Don't practice like Old Reverend Peh. One Rains Retreat he determined to stop talking. He stopped talking all right but then he started writing notes. 'Tomorrow please toast me some rice.' He wanted to eat toasted rice! He stopped talking but ended up writing so many notes that he was even more scattered than before. One minute he'd write one thing, the next another, what a farce! I don't know why he bothered determining not to talk. He didn't know what practice was.

Actually our practice is to be content with little, to just be natural. Don't worry whether you feel lazy or diligent. Don't even say 'I'm diligent' or 'I'm lazy.' Most people practise only when they feel diligent, if they feel lazy they don't bother. This is how people usually are. But monks shouldn't think like that. If you are diligent you practise, when you are lazy you still practise. Don't bother with other things, cut them off, throw them out, train yourself. Practise consistently, whether day or night, this year, next year, whatever the time, don't pay attention to thoughts of diligence or laziness, don't worry whether it's hot or cold, just do it. This is called *sammā patipadā* – right practice.

Some people really apply themselves to the practice for six or seven days. Then, when they don't get the results they wanted, give it up and revert completely, indulging in chatter, socializing and whatever. Then they remember the practice and go at it for another six or seven days, then give it up again. It's like the way some people work. At first they throw themselves into it, then, when they stop, they don't even bother picking up their tools, they just walk off and leave them there. Later on, when the soil has all caked up, they remember their work and do a bit more, only to leave it again.

Doing things this way you'll never get a decent garden or paddy. Our practice is the same. If you think this *patipadā* is unimportant you won't get anywhere with the practice. *Sammā patipadā* is unquestionably important. Do it constantly. Don't listen to your moods. So what if your mood is good or not. The Buddha didn't bother with those things. He had experienced all the good things and bad things, the right things and wrong things. That was his practice. Taking only what you like and discarding whatever you don't like isn't practice, it's disaster. Wherever you go you will never be satisfied, wherever you stay there will be suffering.

Practising like this is like the Brāhmins making their sacrifices. Why do they do it? Because they want something in exchange. Some of us practise like this. Why do we practise? Because we seek rebirth, another state of being, we want to attain something. If we don't get what we want then we don't want to practise, just like the Brahmins making their sacrifices. They do so because of desire.

The Buddha didn't teach like that. The cultivation of the practice is for giving up, for letting go, for

stopping, for uprooting. You don't do it for re-birth into any particular state.

There was once a Thera who had gone forth into the *Mahānikaya*² sect initially. But he found it not strict enough so he took *Dhammayuttika* ordination. Then he started practising. Sometimes he would fast for fifteen days, then when he ate he'd eat only leaves and grass. He thought that eating animals was bad kamma, that it would be better to eat leaves and grass.

After a while he thought 'Hmm. Being a monk is not so good, it's inconvenient. It's hard to maintain my vegetarian practice as a monk. Maybe I'll disrobe and become a *pa-kow*.' So he disrobed and became a *pa-kow* so that he could gather the leaves and grass for himself and dig for roots and yams. He carried on like that for a while till in the end he didn't know what he should be doing. He gave it all up. He gave up being a monk, gave up being a *pa-kow*, gave up everything. These days I don't know what he's doing. Maybe he's dead, I don't know. This is because he couldn't find anything to suit his mind. He didn't realize that he was simply following defilements. The defilements were leading him on but he didn't know it.

Did the Buddha disrobe and become a *pa-kow*? How did the Buddha practice? What did he do? He didn't consider this. Did the Buddha go and eat leaves and grass like a cow? Sure, if you want to eat like that go ahead, if that's all you can manage, but don't go round criticizing others. Whatever standard of practice you find suitable then persevere with that. Don't gouge or carve too much or you won't have a decent handle.³ You'll be left with nothing and in the end just give up.

Some people are like this. When it comes to walking meditation they really go at it for fifteen days or so. They don't even bother eating, just walk. Then when they finish that they just lie around and sleep. They don't bother considering carefully before they start to practise. In the end nothing suits them. Being a monk doesn't suit them, being a *pa-kow* doesn't suit them, so they end up with nothing.

People like this don't know practice, they don't look into the reasons for practising. Think about what you're practising for. This teaching is taught for the sake of letting go, for giving up. The mind wants to love this person and hate that person. These things may arise but don't take them to be real. So what are we practising for? Simply so that we can give up these very things. Even if you attain peace, throw out the peace. If knowledge arises, throw out the knowledge. If you know then you know, but if you take that knowing to be your own then you think you know something. Then you think you are better than others. After a while you can't live anywhere, wherever you live problems arise. If you practise wrongly it's just as if you didn't practise at all.

Practise according to your capacity. Do you sleep a lot? Then try going against the grain. Do you eat a lot? Then try eating less. Take as much practice as you need, using *sīla*, *samādhi* and *paññā* as your basis. Then throw in the *dhutanga* practices also. These *dhutanga* practices are for digging into the defilements. You may find the basic practices still not enough to really uproot the defilements, so you have to incorporate the *dhutanga* practices as well.

These *dhutanga* practices are really useful. Some people can't kill off the defilements with basic *sīla* and *samādhi*, they have to bring in the *dhutanga* practices to help out. The *dhutanga* practices cut off many things. Living at the foot of a tree isn't against the precepts. But if you determine the *dhutanga* practice of living in a charnel ground and then don't do it, that's wrong. Try it out. What's it like to

live in a charnel ground? Is it the same as living in a group?

Dhutanga: this translates as ‘the practices which are hard to do’. These are the practices of the Noble Ones. Whoever wants to be a Noble One must use the *dhutanga* practices to cut the defilements. It’s difficult to observe them and it’s hard to find people with the commitment to practise them, because they go against the grain.

For instance they say to limit your robes to the basic three robes; to maintain yourself on almsfood; to eat only from the bowl; to eat only what you get on almsround – if anyone brings food to offer afterwards you don’t accept it.

Keeping this last practice in central Thailand is easy. The food is quite adequate, because there they put a lot of food in your bowl. But when you come to the north-east here, this *dhutanga* takes on subtle nuances – here you get plain rice! In these parts the tradition is to put only plain rice in the almsbowl. In central Thailand they give rice and other foods also, but around these parts you get only plain rice. This *dhutanga* practice becomes really ascetic. You eat only plain rice, whatever is offered afterwards you don’t accept. Then there is eating once a day, at one sitting, from only one bowl – when you’ve finished eating you get up from your seat and don’t eat again that day.

These are called *dhutanga* practices. Now who will practise them? It’s hard these days to find people with enough commitment to practise them because they are demanding; but that is why they are so beneficial.

What people call practice these days is not really practice. If you really practise it’s no easy matter. Most people don’t dare to really practise, don’t dare to really go against the grain. They don’t want to do anything which runs contrary to their feelings. People don’t want to resist the defilements, they don’t want to dig at them or get rid of them.

In our practice they say not to follow your own moods. Consider: for countless lifetimes already we have been fooled into believing that the mind is our own. Actually it isn’t, it’s just an imposter. It drags us into greed, drags us into aversion, drags us into delusion, drags us into theft, plunder, desire and hatred. These things aren’t ours. Just ask yourself right now: do you want to be good? Everybody wants to be good. Now doing all these things, is that good? There! People commit malicious acts and yet they want to be good. That’s why I say these things are tricksters, that’s all they are.

The Buddha didn’t want us to follow this mind, he wanted us to train it. If it goes one way, then take cover another way. When it goes over there take cover back here. To put it simply: whatever the mind wants, don’t let it have it. It’s as if we’ve been friends for years but we finally reach a point where our ideas are no longer the same. We split up and go our separate ways. We no longer understand each other; in fact we even argue, so we break up. That’s right, don’t follow your own mind. Whoever follows his own mind, follows its likes and desires and everything else. That person hasn’t yet practised at all.

This is why I say that what people call practice is not really practice it’s disaster. If you don’t stop and take a look, don’t try the practice, you won’t see, you won’t attain the Dhamma. To put it straight, in our practice you have to commit your very life. It’s not that it isn’t difficult, this practice has to

entail some suffering. Especially in the first year or two, there's a lot of suffering. The young monks and novices really have a hard time.

I've had a lot of difficulties in the past, especially with food. What can you expect? Becoming a monk at twenty when you are just getting into your food and sleep, some days I would sit alone and just dream of food. I'd want to eat bananas in syrup, or papaya salad, and my saliva would start to run. This is part of the training. All these things are not easy. This business of food and eating can lead one into a lot of bad kamma. Take someone who's just growing up, just getting into his food and sleep, and constrain him in these robes and his feelings run amok. It's like damming a flowing torrent, sometimes the dam just breaks. If it survives that's fine, but if not it just collapses.

My meditation in the first year was nothing else, just food. I was so restless. Sometimes I would sit there and it was almost as if I was actually popping bananas into my mouth. I could almost feel myself breaking the bananas into pieces and putting them in my mouth. And this is all part of the practice.

So don't be afraid of it. We've all been deluded for countless lifetimes now so coming to train ourselves, to correct ourselves, is no easy matter. But if it's difficult it's worth doing. Why should we bother with easy things? Anybody can do the easy things. We should train ourselves to do that which is difficult.

It must have been the same for Buddha. If he had just worried about his family and relatives, his wealth and his past sensual pleasures, he'd never have become the Buddha. These aren't trifling matters, either, they're just what most people are looking for. So going forth at an early age and giving up these things is just like dying. And yet some people come up and say, 'Oh, it's easy for you, Luang Por. You never had a wife and children to worry about, so it's easier for you!' I say, 'Don't get too close to me when you say that or you'll get a clout over the head!' ... As if I didn't have a heart or something!

When it comes to people it's no trifling matter. It's what life is all about. So we Dhamma practitioners should earnestly get into the practice, really dare to do it. Don't believe others, just listen to the Buddha's teaching. Establish peace in your hearts. In time you will understand. Practise, reflect, contemplate, and the fruits of the practice will be there. The cause and the result are proportional.

Don't give in to your moods. In the beginning even finding the right amount of sleep is difficult. You may determine to sleep a certain time but can't manage it. You must train yourself. Whatever time you decide to get up, then get up as soon as it comes round. Sometimes you can do it, but sometimes as soon as you awake you say to yourself 'get up!' and the body won't budge! You may have to say to yourself, 'One, two, if I reach the count three and still don't get up may I fall into hell!' You have to teach yourself like this. When you get to three you'll get up immediately, you'll be afraid of falling into hell.

You must train yourself, you can't dispense with the training. You must train yourself from all angles. Don't just lean on your teacher, your friends or the group all the time or you'll never become wise. It's not necessary to hear so much instruction, just hear the teaching once or twice and then do it.

The well-trained mind won't dare cause trouble, even in private. In the mind of the adept there is no

such thing as ‘private’ or ‘public’. All Noble Ones have confidence in their own hearts. We should be like this.

Some people become monks simply to find an easy life. Where does ease come from? What is its cause? All ease has to be preceded by suffering. In all things it’s the same: you must work before you get rice. In all things you must first experience difficulty. Some people become monks in order to rest and take it easy, they say they just want to sit around and rest a while. If you don’t study the books do you expect to be able to read and write? It can’t be done.

This is why most people who have studied a lot and become monks never get anywhere. Their knowledge is of a different kind, on a different path. They don’t train themselves, they don’t look at their minds. They only stir up their minds with confusion, seeking things which are not conducive to calm and restraint. The knowledge of the Buddha is not worldly knowledge, it is supramundane knowledge, a different knowledge altogether.

This is why whoever goes forth into the Buddhist monkhood must give up whatever level or status or position they have held previously. Even when a king goes forth he must relinquish his previous status, he doesn’t bring that worldly stuff into the monkhood with him to throw his weight around with. He doesn’t bring his wealth, status, knowledge or power into the monkhood with him. The practice concerns giving up, letting go, uprooting, stopping. You must understand this in order to make the practice work.

If you are sick and don’t treat the illness with medicine do you think the illness will cure itself? Wherever you are afraid you should go. Wherever there is a cemetery or charnel ground which is particularly fearsome, go there. Put on your robes, go there and contemplate, ‘*Aniccā vata sankhārā*’⁴ do standing and walking meditation there, look inward and see where your fear lies. It will be all too obvious. Understand the truth of all conditioned things. Stay there and watch until dusk falls and it gets darker and darker, until you are even able to stay there all night.

The Buddha said, ‘Whoever sees the Dhamma sees the *Tathāgata*. Whoever sees the *Tathāgata* sees Nibbāna.’ If we don’t follow his example, how will we see the Dhamma? If we don’t see the Dhamma, how will we know the Buddha? If we don’t see the Buddha, how will we know the qualities of the Buddha? Only if we practise in the footsteps of the Buddha will we know that what the Buddha taught is utterly certain, that the Buddha’s teaching is the supreme truth.

¹ The body on the first night had been that of a child.

² *Mahānikaya* and *Dhammayuttika* are the two sects of the Theravāda Sangha in Thailand.

³ A translated Thai expression meaning, ‘Don’t overdo it’.

⁴ ‘Truly, conditioned things cannot last’

The Fountain Of Wisdom

Given to the assembly of monks after the recitation of the pātimokkha, at Wat Pah Pong during the rains retreat, 1978

All of us have made up our minds to become bhikkhus and sāmaneras in the Buddhist Dispensation in order to find peace. Now what is true peace? True peace, the Buddha said, is not very far away, it lies right here within us, but we tend to continually overlook it. People have their ideas about finding peace but still tend to experience confusion and agitation, they still tend to be unsure and haven't yet found fulfilment in their practice. They haven't yet reached the goal. It's as if we have left our home to travel to many different places. Whether we get into a car or board a boat, no matter where we go, we still haven't reached our home. As long as we still haven't reached home we don't feel content, we still have some unfinished business to take care of. This is because our journey is not yet finished, we haven't reached our destination. We travel all over the place in search of liberation.

All of you bhikkhus and sāmaneras here want peace, every one of you. Even myself, when I was younger, searched all over for peace. Wherever I went I couldn't be satisfied. Going into forests or visiting various teachers, listening to Dhamma talks, I could find no satisfaction. Why is this?

We look for peace in peaceful places, where there won't be sights, or sounds, or odours, or flavours, thinking that living quietly like this is the way to find contentment, that herein lies peace.

But actually, if we live very quietly in places where nothing arises, can wisdom arise? Would we be aware of anything? Think about it. If our eyes didn't see sights, what would that be like? If the nose didn't experience smells, what would that be like? If the tongue didn't experience flavours, what would that be like? If the body didn't experience feelings at all, what would that be like? To be like that would be like being a blind and deaf man, one whose nose and tongue had fallen off and who was completely numb with paralysis. Would there be anything there? And yet people tend to think that if they went somewhere where nothing happened they would find peace. Well, I've thought like that myself, I once thought that way.

When I was a young monk just starting to practise, I'd sit in meditation and sounds would disturb me. I'd think to myself, 'What can I do to make my mind peaceful?' So I took some beeswax and stuffed my ears with it so that I couldn't hear anything. All that remained was a humming sound. I thought that would be peaceful, but no, all that thinking and confusion didn't arise at the ears after all. It arose in the mind. That is the place to search for peace.

To put it another way, no matter where you go to stay, you don't want to do anything because it interferes with your practice. You don't want to sweep the grounds or do any work, you just want to be still and find peace that way. The teacher asks you to help out with the chores or any of the daily duties, but you don't put your heart into it because you feel it is only an external concern.

I've often brought up the example of one of my disciples who was really eager to 'let go' and find peace. I taught about 'letting go' and he accordingly understood that to let go of everything would indeed be peaceful. Actually right from the day he had come to stay here he didn't want to do

anything. Even when the wind blew half the roof off his kutī he wasn't interested. He said that that was just an external thing. So he didn't bother fixing it up. When the sunlight and rain streamed in from one side he'd move over to the other side. That wasn't any business of his. His business was to make his mind peaceful. That other stuff was a distraction, he wouldn't get involved. That was how he saw it.

One day I was walking past and saw the collapsed roof.

'Eh? Whose kutī is this?'

Someone told me whose it was, and I thought, 'Hmm. Strange' So I had a talk with him, explaining many things, such as the duties in regard to our dwellings, the *senāsana-vatta*. 'We must have a dwelling place, and we must look after it. "Letting go" isn't like this, it doesn't mean shirking our responsibilities. That's the action of a fool. The rain comes in on one side so you move over to the other side. Then the sunshine comes out and you move back to that side. Why is that? Why don't you bother to let go there?' I gave him a long discourse on this; then when I'd finished, he said,

'Oh, Luang Por, sometimes you teach me to cling and sometimes you teach me to let go. I don't know what you want me to do. Even when my roof collapses and I let go to this extent, still you say it's not right. And yet you teach me to let go! I don't know what more you can expect of me.'

You see? People are like this. They can be as stupid as this.

Are there visual objects within the eye? If there are no external visual objects would our eyes see anything? Are there sounds within our ears if external sounds don't make contact? If there are no smells outside would we experience them? Where are the causes? Think about what the Buddha said: All dhammas¹ arise because of causes. If we didn't have ears would we experience sounds? If we had no eyes would we be able to see sights? Eyes, ears, nose, tongue, body and mind – these are the causes. It is said that all dhammas arise because of conditions; when they cease it's because the causal conditions have ceased. For resulting conditions to arise, the causal conditions must first arise.

If we think that peace lies where there are no sensations, would wisdom arise? Would there be causal and resultant conditions? Would we have anything to practise with? If we blame the sounds, then where there are sounds we can't be peaceful. We think that place is no good. Wherever there are sights we say that's not peaceful. If that's the case then to find peace we'd have to be one whose senses have all died, blind, and deaf. I thought about this.

'Hmm. This is strange. Suffering arises because of eyes, ears, nose, tongue, body and mind. So should we be blind? If we didn't see anything at all maybe that would be better. One would have no defilements arising if one were blind, or deaf. Is this the way it is?'

But, thinking about it, it was all wrong. If that was the case then blind and deaf people would be enlightened. They would all be accomplished if defilements arose at the eyes and ears. There are the causal conditions. Where things arise, at the cause, that's where we must stop them. Where the cause arises, that's where we must contemplate.

Actually, the sense bases of the eye, ear, nose, tongue, body, and mind are all things which can facilitate the arising of wisdom, if we know them as they are. If we don't really know them we must deny them, saying we don't want to see sights, hear sounds, and so on, because they disturb us. If we cut off the causal conditions, what are we going to contemplate? Think about it. Where would there be any cause and effect? This is wrong thinking on our part.

This is why we are taught to be restrained. Restraint is *sīla*. There is the *sīla* of sense restraint; eyes, ears, nose, tongue, body and mind: these are our *sīla*, and they are our *samādhi*. Reflect on the story of Sāriputta. At the time before he became a bhikkhu he saw Assaji Thera going on almsround. Seeing him, Sāriputta thought,

'This monk is most unusual. He walks neither too fast nor too slow, his robes are neatly worn, his bearing is restrained.' Sāriputta was inspired by him and so approached Venerable Assaji, paid his respects and asked him,

'Excuse me, sir, who are you?'

'I am a *samana*.'

'Who is your teacher?'

'Venerable Gotama is my teacher.'

'What does Venerable Gotama teach?'

'He teaches that all things arise because of conditions.

When they cease it's because the causal conditions have ceased.'

When asked about the Dhamma by Sāriputta, Assaji explained only in brief, he talked about cause and effect.

'Dhammas arise because of causes. The cause arises first and then the result. When the result is to cease the cause must first cease.'

That's all he said, but it was enough for Sāriputta. [2](#)

Now this was a cause for the arising of Dhamma. At that time Sāriputta had eyes, he had ears, he had a nose, a tongue, a body and a mind. All his faculties were intact. If he didn't have his faculties would there have been sufficient causes for wisdom to arise for him? Would he have been aware of anything? But most of us are afraid of contact. Either that or we like to have contact but we develop no wisdom from it; instead, we repeatedly indulge through eyes, ears, nose, tongue, body and mind, delighting in and getting lost in sense objects. This is how it is. These sense bases can entice us into delight and indulgence or they can lead to knowledge and wisdom. They have both harm and benefit, depending on our wisdom.

Now let us understand that, having gone forth and having come here to practise, we should take

everything as practice. Even the bad things. We should know them all. Why? So that we may know the truth. When we talk of practice we don't simply mean those things that are good and pleasing to us. That's not how it is. In this world some things are to our liking, some are not. These things all exist in this world, nowhere else. Usually, whatever we like we want, even regarding fellow monks and novices. Whatever monk or novice we don't like we don't want to associate with, we only want to be with those we like. You see? This is choosing according to our likes. Whatever we don't like we don't want to see or know about.

Actually the Buddha wanted us to experience these things. *Lokavidū* – look at this world and know it clearly. If we don't know the truth of the world clearly, then we can't go anywhere. Living in the world we must understand the world. The Noble Ones of the past, including the Buddha, all lived with these things; they lived in this world, among deluded people. They attained the truth right in this very world, nowhere else. They didn't run off to some other world to find the truth. They had wisdom. They restrained their senses, but the practice is to look into all these things and know them as they are.

Therefore, the Buddha taught us to know the sense bases, our points of contact. The eye contacts forms and sends them 'in' to become sights. The ears make contact with sounds, the nose makes contact with odours, the tongue makes contact with tastes, the body makes contact with tactile sensations, and so awareness arises. Where awareness arises is where we should look and see things as they are. If we don't know these things as they really are we will either fall in love with them or hate them. Where these sensations arise is where we can become enlightened, where wisdom can arise.

But sometimes we don't want things to be like that. The Buddha taught restraint, but restraint doesn't mean we don't see anything, hear anything, smell, taste, feel or think anything. That's not what it means. If practitioners don't understand this then as soon as they see or hear anything they cower and run away. They don't deal with things. They run away, thinking that by so doing those things will eventually lose their power over them, that they will eventually transcend them. But they won't. They won't transcend anything like that. If they run away not knowing the truth of them, later on the same stuff will pop up to be dealt with again.

For example, those practitioners who are never content, be they in monasteries, forests, or mountains, wander on 'dhutanga pilgrimage' looking at this, that and the other, thinking they'll find contentment that way. They go, and then they come back. They didn't see anything. They try going to a mountain top. 'Ah! This is the spot, now I'm right.' They feel at peace for a few days and then get tired of it. 'Oh, well, off to the seaside.' 'Ah, here it's nice and cool. This'll do me fine.' After a while they get tired of the seaside as well. Tired of the forests, tired of the mountains, tired of the seaside, tired of everything. This is not being tired of things in the right sense,³ this is not right view. It's simply boredom, a kind of wrong view. Their view is not in accordance with the way things are.

When they get back to the monastery, 'Now, what will I do? I've been all over and came back with nothing.' So they throw away their bowls and disrobe. Why do they disrobe? Because they haven't got any grip on the practice, they don't see anything; they go to the north and don't see anything; they go to the seaside, to the mountains, into the forests and still don't see anything. So it's all finished – they 'die'. This is how it goes. It's because they're continually running away from things. Wisdom doesn't

arise.

Now take another example. Suppose there is one monk who determines to stay with things, and not run away. He looks after himself. He knows himself and also knows those who come to stay with him. He's continually dealing with problems. Take the abbot for example. If one is an abbot of a monastery there are constant problems to deal with, there's a constant stream of things that demand attention. Why so? Because people are always asking questions. The questions never end, so you must be constantly on the alert. You are constantly solving problems, your own as well as other people's. You must be constantly awake. Before you can doze off they wake you up again with another problem. So this causes you to contemplate and understand things. You become skilful: skilful in regard to yourself and skilful in regard to others. Skilful in many, many ways.

This skill arises from contact, from confronting and dealing with things, from not running away. We don't run away physically but we 'run away' in mind, using our wisdom. We understand with wisdom right here, we don't run away from anything.

This is a source of wisdom. One must work, must associate with other things. For instance, living in a big monastery like this we must all help out to look after the things here. Looking at it in one way you could say that it's all defilement. Living with lots of monks and novices, with many laypeople coming and going, many defilements may arise. Yes, I admit, but we must live like this for the development of wisdom and the abandonment of foolishness. Which way are we to go? Are we going to live in order to get rid of foolishness or to increase our foolishness?

We must contemplate. Whenever our eyes, ears, nose, tongue, body or mind make contact we should be collected and circumspect. When suffering arises, we should ask, 'Who is suffering? Why did this suffering arise?' The abbot of a monastery has to supervise many disciples. Now that may be suffering. We must know suffering when it arises. Know suffering. If we are afraid of suffering and don't want to face it, where are we going to do battle with it? If suffering arises and we don't know it, how are we going to deal with it? This is of utmost importance – we must know suffering.

Escaping from suffering means knowing the way out of suffering, it doesn't mean running away from wherever suffering arises. By doing that you just carry your suffering with you. When suffering arises again somewhere else you'll have to run away again. This is not transcending suffering, it's not knowing suffering.

If you want to understand suffering you must look into the situation at hand. The teachings say that wherever a problem arises it must be settled right there. Where suffering lies is right where non-suffering will arise, it ceases at the place where it arises. If suffering arises you must contemplate it right there, you don't have to run away. You should settle the issue right there. One who runs away from suffering out of fear is the most foolish person of all. He will simply increase his stupidity endlessly.

We must understand: suffering is none other than the First Noble Truth, isn't that so? Are you going to look on it as something bad? *Dukkha sacca, samudaya sacca, nirodha sacca, magga sacca*. Running away from these things isn't practising according to the true Dhamma. When will you ever see the truth of suffering? If we keep running away from suffering we will never know it. Suffering is

something we should recognize – if you don't observe it, when will you ever recognize it? Not being content here you run over there, when discontent arises there you run off again. You are always running. If that's the way you practice you'll be racing with the Devil all over the country!

The Buddha taught us to 'run away' using wisdom. For instance: suppose you had stepped on a thorn or splinter and it got embedded in your foot. As you walk it occasionally hurts, occasionally not. Sometimes you may step on a stone or a stump and it really hurts, so you feel around your foot. But not finding anything you shrug it off and walk on a bit more. Eventually you step on something else, and the pain arises again.

Now this happens many times. What is the cause of that pain? The cause is that splinter or thorn embedded in your foot. The pain is constantly near. Whenever the pain arises you may take a look and feel around a bit, but, not seeing the splinter, you let it go. After a while it hurts again so you take another look.

When suffering arises you must note it, don't just shrug it off. Whenever the pain arises, 'Hmm ... that splinter is still there.' Whenever the pain arises there arises also the thought that that splinter has got to go. If you don't take it out there will only be more pain later on. The pain keeps recurring again and again, until the desire to take out that thorn is constantly with you. In the end it reaches a point where you make up your mind once and for all to get that thorn out – because it hurts!

Now our effort in the practice must be like this. Wherever it hurts, wherever there's friction, we must investigate. Confront the problem, head on. Take that thorn out of your foot, just pull it out. Wherever your mind gets stuck you must take note. As you look into it you will know it, see it and experience it as it is.

Our practice must be unwavering and persistent. They call it *viriyārambha* – putting forth constant effort. Whenever an unpleasant feeling arises in your foot, for example, you must remind yourself to get that thorn out, and not to give up your resolve. Likewise, when suffering arises in our hearts we must have the unwavering resolve to try to uproot the defilements, to give them up. This resolve is constantly there, unremitting. Eventually the defilements will fall into our hands where we can finish them off.

So in regard to happiness and suffering, what are we to do? If we didn't have these things what could we use as a cause to precipitate wisdom? If there is no cause how will the effect arise? All dhammas arise because of causes. When the result ceases it's because the cause has ceased. This is how it is, but most of us don't really understand. People only want to run away from suffering. This sort of knowledge is short of the mark. Actually we need to know this very world that we are living in, we don't have to run away anywhere. You should have the attitude that to stay is fine, and to go is fine. Think about this carefully.

Where do happiness and suffering lie? If we don't hold fast to, cling to or fix on to anything, as if it weren't there – suffering doesn't arise. Suffering arises from existence (*bhava*). If there is existence, then there is birth. *Upādāna* – clinging or attachment – this is the pre-requisite which creates suffering. Wherever suffering arises look into it. Don't look too far away, look right into the present moment. Look at your own mind and body. When suffering arises ask, why is there suffering? Look

right now. When happiness arises ask, what is the cause of that happiness? Look right there. Wherever these things arise be aware. Both happiness and suffering arise from clinging.

The cultivators of old saw their minds in this way. There is only arising and ceasing. There is no abiding entity. They contemplated from all angles and saw that there was nothing much to this mind, they saw nothing is stable. There is only arising and ceasing, ceasing and arising, nothing is of any lasting substance. While walking or sitting they saw things in this way. Wherever they looked there was only suffering, that's all. It's just like a big iron ball which has just been blasted in a furnace. It's hot all over. If you touch the top it's hot, touch the sides and they're hot – it's hot all over. There isn't any place on it which is cool.

Now if we don't consider these things we won't know anything about them. We must see clearly. Don't get 'born' into things, don't fall into birth. Know the workings of birth. Such thoughts as, 'Oh, I can't stand that person, he does everything wrong,' will no longer arise. Or, 'I really like so and so.' These things don't arise. There remains merely the conventional worldly standards of like and dislike, but one's speech is one way, one's mind another. They are separate things. We must use the conventions of the world to communicate with each other, but inwardly we must be empty. The mind is above those things. We must bring the mind to transcendence like this. This is the abiding of the Noble Ones. We must all aim for this and practise accordingly. Don't get caught up in doubts.

Before I started to practise, I thought to myself, 'The Buddhist religion is here, available for all, and yet why do only some people practise while others don't? Or if they do practise, they do so only for a short while and then give up. Or again those who don't give it up still don't knuckle down and do the practice. Why is this?' So I resolved to myself, 'Okay, I'll give up this body and mind for this lifetime and try to follow the teaching of the Buddha down to the last detail. I'll reach understanding in this very lifetime, because if I don't I'll still be sunk in suffering. I'll let go of everything else and make a determined effort, no matter how much difficulty or suffering I have to endure, I'll persevere. If I don't do it I'll just keep on doubting.'

Thinking like this I got down to practice. No matter how much happiness, suffering or difficulty I had to endure I would do it. I looked on my whole life as if it was only one day and a night. I gave it up. 'I'll follow the teaching of the Buddha, I'll follow the Dhamma to understanding – why is this world of delusion so wretched?' I wanted to know, I wanted to master the teaching, so I turned to the practice of Dhamma.

How much of the worldly life do we monastics renounce? If we have gone forth for good then it means we renounce it all, there's nothing we don't renounce. All the things of the world that people enjoy are cast off: sights, sounds, smells, tastes and feelings – we throw them all away. And yet we experience them. So Dhamma practitioners must be content with little and remain detached. Whether in regard to speech, eating or whatever, we must be easily satisfied: eat simply, sleep simply, live simply. Just like they say, 'an ordinary person' is one who lives simply. The more you practise the more you will be able to take satisfaction in your practice. You will see into your own heart.

The Dhamma is *paccattam*, you must know it for yourself. To know for yourself means to practise for yourself. You can depend on a teacher only fifty percent of the way. Even the teaching I have given you today is completely useless in itself, even if it is worth hearing. But if you were to believe it all

just because I said so, you wouldn't be using the teaching properly.

If you believed me completely you'd be foolish. To hear the teaching, see its benefit, put it into practice for yourself, see it within yourself, do it yourself – this is much more useful. You will then know the taste of Dhamma for yourself.

This is why the Buddha didn't talk about the fruits of the practice in much detail, because it's something one can't convey in words. It would be like trying to describe different colours to a person blind from birth, 'Oh, it's so white,' or 'It's bright yellow,' for instance. You couldn't convey those colours to them. You could try but it wouldn't serve much purpose.

The Buddha brings it back down to the individual – see clearly for yourself. If you see clearly for yourself you will have clear proof within yourself. Whether standing, walking, sitting or reclining you will be free of doubt. Even if someone were to say, 'Your practice isn't right, it's all wrong,' still you would be unmoved, because you have your own proof.

A practitioner of the Dhamma must be like this wherever he goes. Others can't tell you, you must know for yourself. *Sammā-ditthi* must be there. The practice must be like this for every one of us. To do the real practice like this for even one month out of five or ten Rains Retreats would be rare.

Our sense organs must be constantly working. Know content and discontent, be aware of like and dislike. Know appearance and know transcendence. The apparent and the transcendent must be realized simultaneously. Good and evil must be seen as coexistent, arising together. This is the fruit of the Dhamma practice.

So whatever is useful to yourself and to others, whatever practice benefits both yourself and others, is called 'following the Buddha'. I've talked about this often. The things which should be done, people seem to neglect. For example, the work in the monastery, the standards of practice and so on. I've talked about them often and yet people don't seem to put their hearts into it. Some don't know, some are lazy and can't be bothered, some are simply scattered and confused.

But that's a cause for wisdom to arise. If we go to places where none of these things arise, what would we see? Take food, for instance. If food doesn't have any taste, is it delicious? If a person is deaf, will he hear anything? If you don't perceive anything, will you have anything to contemplate? If there are no problems, will there be anything to solve? Think of the practice in this way.

Once I went to live up north. At that time I was living with many monks, all of them elderly but newly ordained, with only two or three Rains Retreats. At the time I had ten Rains. Living with those old monks I decided to perform the various duties – receiving their bowls, washing their robes, emptying their spittoons and so on. I didn't think in terms of doing it for any particular individual, I simply maintained my practice. If others didn't do the duties I'd do them myself. I saw it as a good opportunity for me to gain merit. It made me feel good and gave me a sense of satisfaction.

On the *uposatha* days I knew the required duties. I'd go and clean out the *uposatha* hall and set out water for washing and drinking. The others didn't know anything about the duties, they just watched. I didn't criticize them, because they didn't know. I did the duties myself, and having done them I felt

pleased with myself, I had inspiration and a lot of energy in my practice.

Whenever I could do something in the monastery, whether in my own kutī or in others', if it was dirty, I'd clean up. I didn't do it for anyone in particular, I didn't do it to impress anyone, I simply did it to maintain a good practice. Cleaning a kutī or dwelling place is just like cleaning rubbish out of your own mind.

Now this is something all of you should bear in mind. You don't have to worry about harmony, it will automatically be there. Live together with Dhamma, with peace and restraint, train your mind to be like this and no problems will arise. If there is heavy work to be done, everybody helps out and in no time the work is done, it gets taken care of quite easily. That's the best way.

I have come across some other types, though – I used it as an opportunity to grow. For instance, living in a big monastery, the monks and novices may agree among themselves to wash robes on a certain day. I'd go and boil up the jackfruit wood.⁴ Now there'd be some monks who'd wait for someone else to boil up the jackfruit wood and then come along and wash their robes, take them back to their kutīs, hang them out and then take a nap. They didn't have to set up the fire, didn't have to clean up afterwards. They thought they were on a good thing, that they were being clever. This is the height of stupidity. These people are just increasing their own stupidity because they don't do anything, they leave all the work up to others. They wait till everything is ready then come along and make use of it, it's easy for them. This is just adding to one's foolishness. Those actions serve no useful purpose whatsoever to them.

Some people think foolishly like this. They shirk the required duties and think that this is being clever, but it is actually very foolish. If we have that sort of attitude we won't last.

Therefore, whether speaking, eating or doing anything whatsoever, reflect on yourself. You may want to live comfortably, eat comfortably, sleep comfortably and so on, but you can't. What have we come here for? If we regularly reflect on this we will be heedful, we won't forget, we will be constantly alert. Being alert like this you will put forth effort in all postures. If you don't put forth effort, things go quite differently. Sitting, you sit like you're in the town, walking, you walk like you're in the town. You just want to go and play around in the town with the laypeople.

If there is no effort in the practice the mind will tend in that direction. You don't oppose and resist your mind, you just allow it to waft along the wind of your moods. This is called following one's moods. Like a child, if he indulges all his wants will he be a good child? If the parents indulge all their child's wishes is that good? Even if they do indulge him somewhat at first, by the time he can speak they may start to occasionally spank him because they're afraid he'll end up stupid. The training of our mind must be like this. You have to know yourself and know how to train yourself. If you don't know how to train your own mind, waiting around expecting someone else to train it for you, you'll end up in trouble.

So don't think that you can't practise in this place. Practice has no limits. Whether standing, walking, sitting or lying down, you can always practise. Even while sweeping the monastery grounds or seeing a beam of sunlight, you can realize the Dhamma. But you must have sati at hand. Why so? Because you can realize the Dhamma at any time at all, in any place, if you ardently meditate.

Don't be heedless. Be watchful, be alert. While walking on almsround all sorts of feelings arise, and it's all good Dhamma. When you get back to the monastery and are eating your food there's plenty of good Dhamma for you to look into. If you have constant effort, all these things will be objects for contemplation. There will be wisdom, you will see the Dhamma. This is called *dhamma-vicaya*, reflecting on Dhamma. It's one of the enlightenment factors. If there is sati, recollection, there will be *dhamma-vicaya* as a result. These are factors of enlightenment. If we have recollection then we won't simply take it easy, there will also be inquiry into Dhamma. These things become factors for realizing the Dhamma.

If we have reached this stage, our practice will know neither day or night, it will continue on regardless of the time of day. There will be nothing to taint the practice, or if there is we will immediately know it. Let there be *dhamma-vicaya* within our minds constantly, looking into Dhamma. If our practice has entered the flow, the mind will tend to be like this. It won't go off after other things. 'I think I'll go for a trip over there, or perhaps this other place, over in that province should be interesting.' That's the way of the world. Not long and the practice will die.

So resolve yourselves. It's not just by sitting with your eyes closed that you develop wisdom. Eyes, ears, nose, tongue, body and mind are constantly with us, so be constantly alert. Study constantly. Seeing trees or animals can all be occasions for study. Bring it all inwards. See clearly within your own heart. If some sensation makes an impact on the heart, witness it clearly for yourself, don't simply disregard it.

Take a simple comparison: baking bricks. Have you ever seen a brick-baking oven? They build the fire up about two or three feet in front of the oven, then the smoke all gets drawn into it. Looking at this illustration you can more clearly understand the practice. To make a brick kiln work the right way you have to make the fire so that all the smoke gets drawn inside, none is left over. All the heat goes into the oven, and the job gets done quickly.

We Dhamma practitioners should experience things in this way. All our feelings should be drawn inwards to be turned into right view. The sights we see, the sounds we hear, the odours we smell, the flavours we taste, and so on, the mind draws them all inward to be converted into right view. Those feelings thus become experiences which give rise to wisdom.

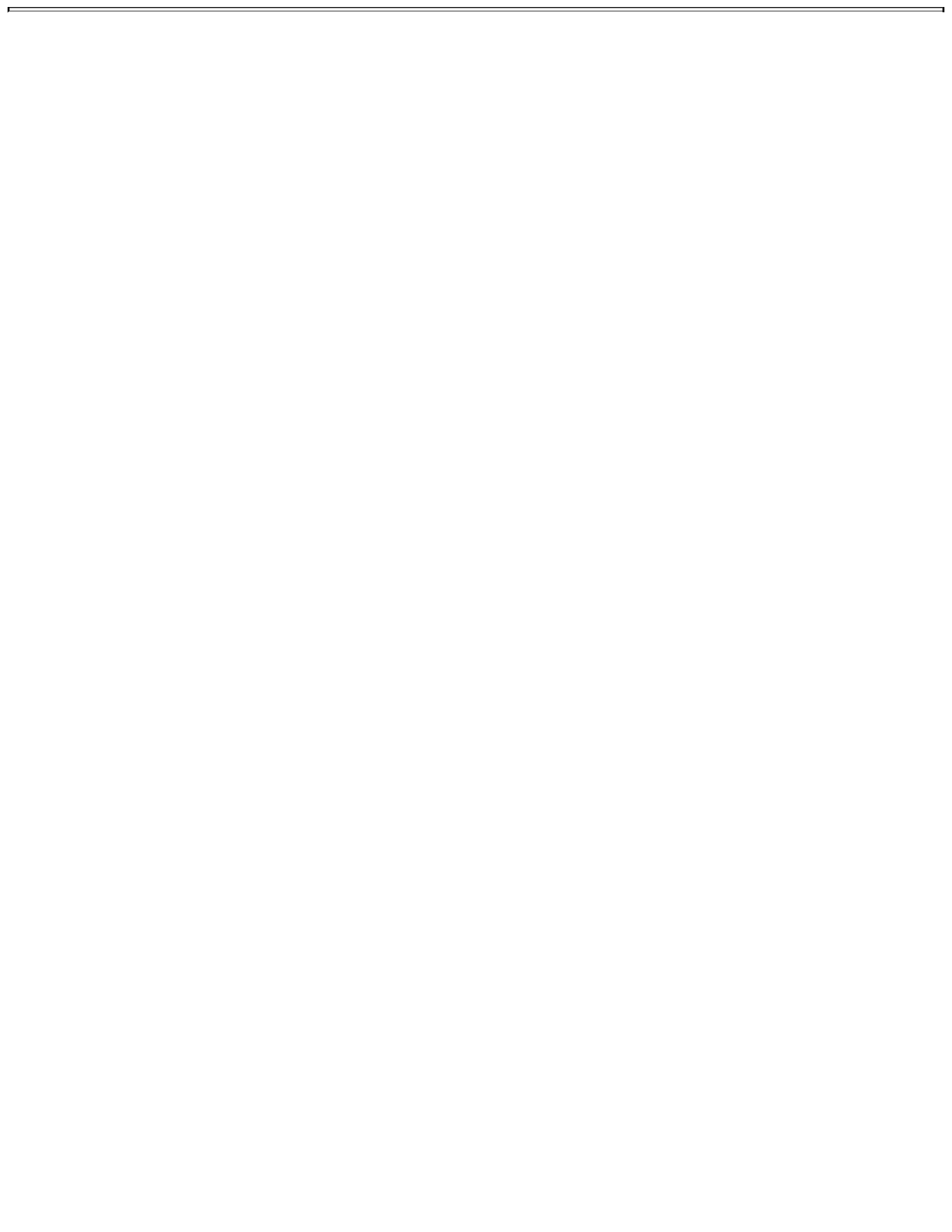
Note: This talk has been published elsewhere under the title: 'Sense Contact The Fountain of Wisdom'

¹ The word dhamma can be used in different ways. In this talk, the Venerable Ajahn refers to Dhamma, the teachings of the Buddha; to dhammas, 'things'; and to Dhamma, the experience of transcendent 'Truth'.

² At that time Sāriputta had his first insight into the Dhamma, attaining *sotāpatti*, or 'stream-entry'.

³ That is, *nibbidā*, disinterest in the lures of the sensual world.

⁴ The heartwood from the jackfruit tree is boiled down and the resulting colour used both to dye and to wash the robes of the forest monks.



Not Sure

An informal talk given at Ajahn Chah's kuti, to some monks and novices one evening in 1980.

There was once a Western monk, a student of mine. Whenever he saw Thai monks and novices disrobing he would say, 'Oh, what a shame! Why do they do that? Why do so many of the Thai monks and novices disrobe?' He was shocked. He would get saddened at the disrobing of the Thai monks and novices, because he had only just come into contact with Buddhism. He was inspired, he was resolute. Going forth as a monk was the only thing to do, he thought he'd never disrobe. Whoever disrobed was a fool. He'd see the Thais taking on the robes at the beginning of the Rains Retreat as monks and novices and then disrobing at the end of it. He would say 'Oh, how sad! I feel so sorry for those Thai monks and novices. How could they do such a thing?'

Well, as time went by some of the Western monks began to disrobe, so he came to see it as something not so important after all. At first, when he had just begun to practise, he was excited about it. He thought that it was a really important thing, to become a monk. He thought it would be easy.

When people are inspired it all seems to be so right and good. There's nothing there to gauge their feelings by, so they go ahead and decide for themselves. But they don't really know what practice is. Those who do know will have a thoroughly firm foundation within their hearts – but even so they don't need to advertise it.

As for myself, when I was first ordained I didn't actually do much practice, but I had a lot of faith. I don't know why, maybe it was there from birth. The monks and novices who went forth together with me, all disrobed at the end of the Rains. I thought to myself, 'Eh? What is it with these people?' However, I didn't dare say anything to them because I wasn't yet sure of my own feelings, I was too stirred up. But within me I felt that they were all foolish. 'It's difficult to go forth, easy to disrobe. These guys don't have much merit, they think that the way of the world is more useful than the way of Dhamma.' I thought like this but I didn't say anything, I just watched my own mind.

I'd see the monks who'd gone forth with me disrobing one after the other. Sometimes they'd dress up and come back to the monastery to show off. I'd see them and think they were crazy, but they thought they looked snappy. When you disrobe you have to do this and that. I'd think to myself that that way of thinking was wrong. I wouldn't say it, though, because I myself was still an uncertain quantity. I still wasn't sure how long my faith would last.

When my friends had all disrobed I dropped all concern, there was nobody left to concern myself with. I picked up the *Pātimokkha* and got stuck into learning that. There was nobody left to distract me and waste my time, so I put my heart into the practice. Still I didn't say anything because I felt that to practise all one's life, maybe seventy, eighty or even ninety years, and to keep up a persistent effort, without slackening up or losing one's resolve, seemed like an extremely difficult thing to do.

Those who went forth would go forth, those who disrobed would disrobe. I'd just watch it all. I didn't concern myself whether they stayed or went. I'd watch my friends leave, but the feeling I had within me was that these people didn't see clearly. That Western monk probably thought like that.

He'd see people become monks for only one Rains Retreat, and get upset.

Later on he reached a stage we call bored; bored with the Holy Life. He let go of the practice and eventually disrobed.

'Why are you disrobing? Before, when you saw the Thai monks disrobing you'd say, "Oh, what a shame! How sad, how pitiful." Now, when you yourself want to disrobe, why don't you feel sorry?'

He didn't answer. He just grinned sheepishly.

When it comes to the training of the mind it isn't easy to find a good standard if you haven't yet developed a 'witness' within yourself. In most external matters we can rely on others for feedback, there are standards and precedents. But when it comes to using the Dhamma as a standard, do we have the Dhamma yet? Are we thinking rightly or not? And even if it's right, do we know how to let go of rightness or are we still clinging to it?

You must contemplate until you reach the point where you let go, this is the important thing, until you reach the point where there isn't anything left, where there is neither good nor bad. You throw it off. This means you throw out everything. If it's all gone, then there's no remainder; if there's some remainder, then it's not all gone.

So in regard to this training of the mind, sometimes we may say it's easy. It's easy to say, but it's hard to do, very hard. It's hard in that it doesn't conform to our desires. Sometimes it seems almost as if the angels are helping us out. Everything goes right, whatever we think or say seems to be just right. Then we go and attach to that rightness and before long we go wrong and it all turns bad. This is where it's difficult. We don't have a standard to gauge things by.

People who have a lot of faith, who are endowed with confidence and belief but are lacking in wisdom, may be very good at samādhi but they may not have much insight. They see only one side of everything, and simply follow that. They don't reflect. This is blind faith. In Buddhism we call this *saddhā-adhimokkha*, blind faith. They have faith all right but it's not born of wisdom. But they don't see this at the time; they believe they have wisdom, so they don't see where they are wrong.

Therefore, they teach about the five powers (*balā*): *saddhā*, *virīya*, *sati*, *samādhi*, *paññā*. *Saddhā* is conviction; *virīya* is diligent effort; *sati* is recollection; *samādhi* is fixedness of mind; *paññā* is all-embracing knowledge. Don't say that *paññā* is simply knowledge – *paññā* is all-embracing, consummate knowledge.

The wise have given these five steps to us so that we can link them, firstly as an object of study, then as a gauge to use for measuring the state of our practice as it is. For example, *saddhā*, conviction. Do we have conviction, have we developed it yet? *Virīya*: do we have diligent effort or not? Is our effort right or is it wrong? We must consider this. Everybody has some sort of effort, but does our effort contain wisdom or not?

Sati is the same. Even a cat has *sati*. When it sees a mouse, *sati* is there. The cat's eyes stare fixedly at the mouse. This is the *sati* of a cat. Everybody has *sati*, animals have it, delinquents have it, sages

have it.

Samādhi, fixedness of mind – everybody has this as well. A cat has it when its mind is fixed on grabbing the mouse and eating it. It has fixed intent. That sati of the cat's is sati of a sort; samādhi, fixed intent on what it is doing, is also there. Paññā, knowledge, like that of human beings. It knows as an animal knows, it has enough knowledge to catch mice for food.

These five things are called powers. Have these five powers arisen from *sammā-ditthi*, or not? *Saddhā*, *virīya*, sati, samādhi, paññā – have these arisen from right view? What is right view? What is our standard for gauging right view? We must clearly understand this.

Right view is the understanding that all these things are uncertain. Therefore, the Buddha and all the Noble Ones don't hold fast to them. They hold, but not fast. They don't let that holding become an identity. The holding which doesn't lead to becoming is that which isn't tainted with desire. Without seeking to become this or that there is simply the practice itself. When you hold on to a particular thing, is there enjoyment, or is there displeasure? If there is pleasure, do you hold on to that pleasure? If there is dislike, do you hold on to that dislike?

Some views can be used as principles for gauging our practice more accurately: for instance knowing views such as one is better than others, or equal to others, or more foolish than others – knowing them all as wrong views. We may feel these things but we also know them with wisdom, that they simply arise and cease. Seeing that we are better than others is not right; seeing that we are equal to others is not right; seeing that we are inferior to others is not right.

The right view is the one that cuts through all of this. So where do we go to? If we think we are better than others, pride arises. It's there but we don't see it. If we think we are equal to others, we fail to show respect and humility at the proper times. If we think we are inferior to others we get depressed, thinking we are inferior, born under a bad sign and so on. We are still clinging to the five khandhas, it's all simply becoming and birth.

This is one standard for gauging ourselves by. Another one is: if we encounter a pleasant experience we feel happy, if we encounter a bad experience we are unhappy. Are we able to look at both the things we like and the things we dislike as having equal value? Measure yourself against this standard. In our everyday lives, in the various experiences we encounter, if we hear something which we like, does our mood change? If we encounter an experience which isn't to our liking, does our mood change? Or is the mind unmoved? Looking right here we have our gauge.

Just know yourself, this is your witness. Don't make decisions on the strength of your desires. Desires can puff us up into thinking we are something which we're not. We must be very circumspect.

There are so many angles and aspects to consider, but the right way is not to follow your desires, but the Truth. We should know both the good and the bad, and when we know them to let go of them. If we don't let go we are still there, we still 'exist', we still 'have'. If we still 'are' then there is a remainder, becoming and birth are in store.

Therefore the Buddha said to judge only yourself; don't judge others, no matter how good or evil they

may be. The Buddha merely points out the way, saying ‘The truth is like this.’ Now, is our mind like that or not?

For instance, suppose a monk took some things belonging to another monk. Then that other monk accused him, ‘You stole my things.’ ‘I didn’t steal them, I only took them.’ So we ask a third monk to adjudicate. How should he decide? He would have to ask the offending monk to appear before the convened Sangha. ‘Yes, I took it, but I didn’t steal it.’ Or in regard to other rules, such as *pārājika* or *sanghādisesa* offences: ‘Yes, I did it, but I didn’t have intention.’ How can you believe that? It’s tricky. If you can’t believe it, all you can do is leave the onus with the doer, it rests on him.

But you should know that we can’t hide the things that arise in our minds. You can’t cover them up, either the wrongs or the good actions. Whether actions are good or evil, you can’t dismiss them simply by ignoring them, because these things tend to reveal themselves. They conceal themselves, they reveal themselves, they exist in and of themselves. They are all automatic. This is how things work.

Don’t try to guess at or speculate about these things. As long as there is still *avijjā* they are not finished with. The Chief Privy Councillor once asked me, ‘Luang Por, is the mind of an *anāgāmi* pure yet?’

‘It’s partly pure.’

‘Eh? An *anāgāmi* has given up sensual desire, how is his mind not yet pure?’

‘He may have let go of sensual desire, but there is still something remaining, isn’t there? There is still *avijjā*. If there is still something left then there is still something left. It’s like the bhikkhus’ alms bowls. There are, a large-sized large bowl, a medium-sized large bowl, a small-sized large bowl; then a large-sized medium bowl, a medium-sized medium bowl, a small-sized medium bowl; then there are a large-sized small bowl, a medium-sized small bowl and a small-sized small bowl. No matter how small it is there is still a bowl there, right? That’s how it is with this – *sotāpanna*, *sakadāgāmi*, *anāgāmi*. They have all given up certain defilements, but only to their respective levels. Whatever still remains, those Noble Ones don’t see. If they could they would all be arahants. They still can’t see all. *Avijjā* is that which doesn’t see. If the mind of the *anāgāmi* was completely straightened out he wouldn’t be an *anāgāmi*, he would be fully accomplished. But there is still something remaining.’

‘Is his mind purified?’

‘Well, it is somewhat, but not 100 percent.’

How else could I answer? He said that later on he would come and question me about it further. He can look into it, the standard is there.

Don’t be careless. Be alert. The Lord Buddha exhorted us to be alert. In regards to this training of the heart, I’ve had my moments of temptation too, you know. I’ve often been tempted to try many things but they’ve always seemed like they’re going astray of the path. It’s really just a sort of swaggering in

one's mind, a sort of conceit. *Ditthi* (views) and *māna* (pride) are there. It's hard enough just to be aware of these two things.

There was once a man who wanted to become a monk here. He carried in his robes, determined to become a monk in memory of his late mother. He came into the monastery, laid down his robes, and without so much as paying respects to the monks, started walking meditation right in front of the main hall back and forth, back and forth, like he was really going to show his stuff.

I thought, 'Oh, so there are people around like this, too!' This is called *saddhā adhimokkha* – blind faith. He must have determined to get enlightened before sundown or something, he thought it would be so easy. He didn't look at anybody else, he just put his head down and walked as if his life depended on it. I just let him carry on, but I thought, 'Oh, man, you think it's that easy or something?' In the end I don't know how long he stayed, I don't even think he ordained.

As soon as the mind thinks of something we send it out, send it out every time. We don't realize that it's simply the habitual proliferation of the mind. It disguises itself as wisdom and waffles off into minute detail. This mental proliferation seems very clever; if we didn't know, we would mistake it for wisdom. But when it comes to the crunch it's not the real thing. When suffering arises where is that so-called wisdom then? Is it of any use? It's only proliferation after all.

So stay with the Buddha. As I've said before many times, in our practice we must turn inwards and find the Buddha. Where is the Buddha? The Buddha is still alive to this very day, go in and find him. Where is he? At *aniccam*, go in and find him there, go and bow to him: *aniccam*, uncertainty. You can stop right there for starters.

If the mind tries to tell you, 'I'm a *sotāpanna* now,' go and bow to the *sotāpanna*. He'll tell you himself, 'It's all uncertain.' If you meet a *sakadāgāmī* go and pay respects to him. When he sees you he'll simply say, 'Not a sure thing!' If there is an *anāgāmī* go and bow to him. He'll tell you only one thing – 'Uncertain.' If you even meet an arahant, go and bow to him, he'll tell you even more firmly, 'It's all even more uncertain!' You'll hear the words of the Noble Ones: 'everything is uncertain, don't cling to anything.'

Don't just look at the Buddha like a simpleton. Don't cling to things, holding fast to them without letting go. Look at things as functions of the apparent and then send them on to transcendence. That's how you must be. There must be appearance and there must be transcendence.

So I say, 'Go to the Buddha.' Where is the Buddha? The Buddha is the Dhamma. All the teachings in this world can be contained in this one teaching: *aniccam*. Think about it. I've searched for over forty years as a monk and this is all I could find. That and patient endurance. This is how to approach the Buddha's teaching – *aniccam*: it's all uncertain.

No matter how sure the mind wants to be, just tell it, 'Not sure!' Whenever the mind wants to grab on to something as a sure thing, just say, 'It's not sure, it's transient.' Just ram it down with this. Using the Dhamma of the Buddha it all comes down to this. It's not that it's merely a momentary phenomenon. Whether standing, walking, sitting or lying down, you see everything in that way. Whether liking arises or dislike arises you see it all in the same way. This is getting close to the Buddha, close to the

Dhamma.

Now I feel that this is a more valuable way to practise. All my practice from the early days up to the present time has been like this. I didn't actually rely on the scriptures, but then I didn't disregard them either. I didn't rely on a teacher but then I didn't exactly 'go it alone'. My practice was all 'neither this nor that'.

Frankly it's a matter of 'finishing off'; that is, practising to the finish by taking up the practice and then seeing it to completion, seeing the apparent and also the transcendent.

I've already spoken of this, but some of you may be interested to hear it again: if you practise consistently and consider things thoroughly, you will eventually reach this point. At first you hurry to go forward, hurry to come back, and hurry to stop. You continue to practise like this until you reach the point where it seems that going forward is not it, coming back is not it, and stopping is not it either! It's finished. This is the finish. Don't expect anything more than this, it finishes right here. *Khīnāsavo* – one who is completed. He doesn't go forward, doesn't retreat and doesn't stop. There's no stopping, no going forward and no coming back. It's finished. Consider this, realize it clearly in your own mind. Right there you will find that there is really nothing at all.

Whether this is old or new to you depends on you, on your wisdom and discernment. One who has no wisdom or discernment won't be able to figure it out. Just take a look at trees, like mango or jackfruit trees. If they grow up in a clump, one tree may get bigger first and then the others will bend away, growing outwards from that bigger one. Why does this happen? Who tells them to do that? This is nature. Nature contains both the good and the bad, the right and the wrong. It can either incline to the right or incline to the wrong. If we plant any kind of trees at all close together, the trees which mature later will branch away from the bigger tree. How does this happen? Who determines it thus? This is nature, or Dhamma.

Likewise, *tanhā* leads us to suffering. Now, if we contemplate it, it will lead us out of desire, we will outgrow *tanhā*. By investigating *tanhā* we will shake it up, making it gradually lighter and lighter until it's all gone. The same as the trees: does anybody order them to grow the way they do? They can't talk or move around and yet they know how to grow away from obstacles. Wherever it's cramped and crowded and growing is difficult, they bend outwards.

Right here is Dhamma, we don't have to look at a whole lot. One who is astute will see the Dhamma in this. Trees by nature don't know anything, they act on natural laws, yet they do know enough to grow away from danger, to incline towards a suitable place.

Reflective people are like this. We go forth into the homeless life because we want to transcend suffering. What is it that makes us suffer? If we follow the trail inwards we will find out. That which we like and that which we don't like are suffering. If they are suffering then don't go so close to them. Do you want to fall in love with conditions or hate them? They're all uncertain. When we incline towards the Buddha all this comes to an end. Don't forget this. And patient endurance. Just these two are enough. If you have this sort of understanding this is very good.

Actually in my own practice I didn't have a teacher to give as much teachings as all of you get from

me. I didn't have many teachers. I ordained in an ordinary village temple and lived in village temples for quite a few years. In my mind I conceived the desire to practise. I wanted to be proficient, I wanted to train. There wasn't anybody giving any teaching in those monasteries but the inspiration to practise arose. I travelled and I looked around. I had ears so I listened, I had eyes so I looked. Whatever I heard people say, I'd tell myself, 'not sure.' Whatever I saw, I told myself, 'not sure,' or when the tongue contacted sweet, sour, salty, pleasant or unpleasant flavours, or feelings of comfort or pain arose in the body, I'd tell myself, 'This is not a sure thing!' And so I lived with Dhamma.

In truth it's all uncertain, but our desires want things to be certain. What can we do? We must be patient. The most important thing is *khanti*, patient endurance. Don't throw out the Buddha, what I call 'uncertainty' – don't throw that away.

Sometimes I'd go to see old religious sites with ancient monastic buildings, designed by architects, built by craftsmen. In some places they would be cracked. Maybe one of my friends would remark, 'Such a shame, isn't it? It's cracked.' I'd answer, 'If that weren't the case then there'd be no such thing as the Buddha, there'd be no Dhamma. It's cracked like this because it's perfectly in line with the Buddha's teaching.' Really down inside I was also sad to see those buildings cracked but I'd throw off my sentimentality and try to say something which would be of use to my friends, and to myself. Even though I also felt that it was a pity, still I tended towards the Dhamma.

'If it wasn't cracked like that there wouldn't be any Buddha!'

I'd say it really heavy for the benefit of my friends, perhaps they weren't listening, but still I was listening.

This is a way of considering things which is very, very useful. For instance, say someone were to rush in and say, 'Luang Por! Do you know what so and so just said about you?' or, 'He said such and such about you.' Maybe you even start to rage. As soon as you hear words of criticism you start getting these moods every step of the way. As soon as we hear words like this we may start getting ready to retaliate, but on looking into the truth of the matter we may find that no, they had said something else after all.

And so it's another case of 'uncertainty'. So why should we rush in and believe things? Why should we put our trust so much in what others say? Whatever we hear we should take note of, be patient, look into the matter carefully and stay straight.

It's not that we write whatever pops into our heads as some sort of truth. Any speech which ignores uncertainty is not the speech of a sage. Remember this. Whatever we see or hear, be it pleasant or sorrowful, just say 'this is not sure!' Say it heavy to yourself, hold it all down with this. Don't build those things up into major issues, just keep them all down to this one. This point is the important one. This is the point where defilements die. Practitioners shouldn't dismiss it.

If you disregard this point you can expect only suffering, expect only mistakes. If you don't make this a foundation for your practice you are going to go wrong; but then you will come right again later on, because this principle is a really good one.

Actually the real Dhamma, the gist of what I have been saying today, isn't so mysterious. Whatever you experience is simply form, simply feeling, simply perception, simply volition, and simply consciousness. There are only these basic qualities; where is there any certainty within them?

If we come to understand the true nature of things like this, lust, infatuation and attachment fade away. Why do they fade away? Because we understand, we know. We shift from ignorance to understanding. Understanding is born from ignorance, knowing is born from unknowing, purity is born from defilement. It works like this.

Not discarding *aniccam*, the Buddha – this is what it means to say that the Buddha is still alive. To say that the Buddha has passed into Nibbāna is not necessarily true. In a more profound sense the Buddha is still alive. It's much like how we define the word 'bhikkhu'. If we define it as 'one who asks',¹ the meaning is very broad. We can define it this way, but to use this definition too much is not so good – we don't know when to stop asking! If we were to define this word in a more profound way we would say: 'Bhikkhu – one who sees the danger of samsāra.'

Isn't this more profound? It doesn't go in the same direction as the previous definition, it runs much deeper. The practice of Dhamma is like this. If you don't fully understand it, it becomes something else again. When it is fully understood, then it becomes priceless, it becomes a source of peace.

When we have sati, we are close to the Dhamma. If we have sati we will see *aniccam*, the transience of all things. We will see the Buddha and transcend the suffering of samsāra, if not now, then sometime in the future.

If we throw away the attribute of the Noble Ones, the Buddha or the Dhamma, our practice will become barren and fruitless. We must maintain our practice constantly, whether we are working or sitting or simply lying down. When the eye sees form, the ear hears sound, the nose smells an odour, the tongue tastes a flavour or the body experiences sensation – in all things, don't throw away the Buddha, don't stray from the Buddha.

This is how to be one who has come close to the Buddha, to be one who reveres the Buddha constantly. We have ceremonies for revering the Buddha, such as chanting in the morning, *Araham Sammā Sambuddho Bhagavā* This is one way of revering the Buddha but it's not revering the Buddha in such a profound way as I've described here. It's the same with the word 'bhikkhu'. If we define it as 'one who asks' then they keep on asking because it's defined like that. To define it in the best way we should say 'Bhikkhu – one who sees the danger of samsāra.'

Revering the Buddha is the same. Revering the Buddha by merely reciting Pāli phrases as a ceremony in the mornings and evenings is comparable to defining the word 'bhikkhu' as 'one who asks'. If we incline towards *annicam*, *dukkham* and *anattā*² whenever the eye sees form, the ear hears sound, the nose smells an odour, the tongue tastes a flavour, the body experiences sensation or the mind cognizes mental impressions; at all times, this is comparable to defining the word 'bhikkhu' as 'one who sees the danger of samsāra.' It's so much more profound, cuts through so many things. If we understand this teaching we will grow in wisdom and understanding.

This is called *patipadā*. Develop this attitude in the practice and you will be on the right path. If you

think and reflect in this way, even though you may be far from your teacher you will still be close to him. If you live close to the teacher physically but your mind has not yet met him you will spend your time either looking for his faults or adulating him. If he does something which suits you, you say he's so good – and that's as far as your practice goes. You won't achieve anything by wasting your time looking at someone else. But if you understand this teaching you can become a Noble One in the present moment.

That's why this year³ I've distanced myself from my disciples, both old and new, and not given much teaching: so that you can all look into things for yourselves as much as possible. For the newer monks I've already laid down the schedule and rules of the monastery, such as: 'Don't talk too much.' Don't transgress the existing standards, the path to realization, fruition and Nibbāna. Anyone who transgresses these standards is not a real practitioner, not one who has a pure intention to practise. What can such a person ever hope to see? Even if he slept near me every day he wouldn't see me. Even if he slept near the Buddha he wouldn't see the Buddha, if he didn't practise.

So knowing the Dhamma or seeing the Dhamma depends on practice. Have confidence, purify your own heart. If all the monks in this monastery put awareness into their respective minds we wouldn't have to reprimand or praise anybody. We wouldn't have to be suspicious of or favour anybody. If anger or dislike arise just leave them at the mind, but see them clearly!

Keep on looking at those things. As long as there is still something there it means we still have to dig and grind away right there. Some say, 'I can't cut it, I can't do it' – if we start saying things like this there will only be a bunch of thugs here, because nobody cuts at their own defilements.

You must try. If you can't yet cut it, dig in deeper. Dig at the defilements, uproot them. Dig them out even if they seem hard and fast. The Dhamma is not something to be reached by following your desires. Your mind may be one way, the truth another. You must watch up front and keep a lookout behind as well. That's why I say, 'It's all uncertain, all transient.'

This truth of uncertainty, this short and simple truth, is at the same time so profound and faultless that people tend to ignore it. They tend to see things differently. Don't cling to goodness, don't cling to badness. These are attributes of the world. We are practising to be free of the world, so bring these things to an end. The Buddha taught to lay them down, to give them up, because they only cause suffering.

Note: This talk has been published elsewhere under the title 'Not Sure! The Standard of the Noble Ones'.

¹ That is, one who lives dependent on the generosity of others.

² Transience, imperfection, and ownerlessness.

³ 2522 of the Buddhist Era, or 1979 CE.

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