

KAMMA
AND THE END OF
KAMMA

**Dedicated to Goeren and
Kyllie Lindeblad
and
Patricia Buckle**

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‘Kamma should be known. The cause by which kamma comes into play should be known. The diversity in kamma should be known. The result of kamma should be known. The cessation of kamma should be known. The path of practice leading to the cessation of kamma should be known.’ Thus it has been said. Why was it said?

Intention, I tell you, is kamma. Intending, one does kamma by way of body, speech and mind.

And what is the cause by which kamma comes into play?
Contact, bhikkhus.

And what is the diversity in kamma? There is kamma to be experienced in hell, kamma to be experienced in the realm of common animals, kamma to be experienced in the realm of the hungry shades, kamma to be experienced in the human world, kamma to be experienced in the heavenly worlds.

And what is the result of kamma? The result of kamma is of three sorts, I tell you: that which arises right here & now, that which arises later [in this lifetime], and that which arises following that...

And what is the cessation of kamma? From the cessation of contact is the cessation of kamma; and just this noble eightfold path – right view, right aim, right speech, right action, right livelihood, right effort, right mindfulness, right concentration – is the path of practice leading to the cessation of kamma.

Now when a disciple of the noble ones discerns kamma in this way, the cause by which kamma comes into play in this way, the diversity of kamma in this way, the result of kamma in this way, the cessation of kamma in this way, and the path of practice leading to the cessation of kamma in this way, then he discerns this penetrative holy life as the cessation of kamma.

‘Kamma should be known. The cause by which kamma comes into play... The diversity in kamma... The result of kamma... The cessation of kamma... The path of practice for the cessation of kamma should be known.’ Thus it has been said, and this is why it was said.

A. Sixes 63
[Ven Thanissaro, trans.]

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Preface

This book evolved out of some talks I had given in the space of a few years, mostly at Cittaviveka Monastery. In these talks, I had been exploring the relevance of the Buddha's teachings on kamma to the practice of meditation. At first glance the two topics may not seem that closely related: kamma is a teaching on behaviour, and meditation is apparently about doing nothing, isn't it? Or we might have the idea that: 'Kamma is all about who I was in a previous life, what I'm stuck with now, and what I'll get reborn as. Kamma is about being somebody, whilst meditation is about not being anybody.' Not so. I hope that the ensuing texts, which have evolved from talks into essays, help make it clear that the principles of kamma link 'external' behaviour to the 'internal' practice of meditation. And that meditation is one kind of kamma – the kamma that leads to the end of kamma. In fact 'kamma and the end of kamma' is a useful summary of what the Buddha had to offer as a path to well-being and to Awakening.

The Buddha's three knowledges

The foundational experience of the Buddha's Dhamma is in the 'three knowledges:' realisations that are said to have occurred to the Buddha in a sequence, on one night. Despite practising meditation and asceticism to a very high standard, he felt that they had not borne fruit in terms of his quest for 'the Deathless.' But then, through practising more peacefully, three realisations arose; and with these his aim was achieved.

The first of these was the awareness of previous lives. This knowledge transcended the most fundamental definition of our lives – the division that occurs at bodily death. The realisation arose that what is experienced as a 'person' is

one manifestation in an ongoing process, rather than an isolated one-off self.

Touching into this underlying life-force wasn't all that comforting; it stretched the question of being beyond the span of a single life to an existential purgatory of endlessly 'wandering on' (*samsara*). And yet on the other hand, there was an awareness that had moved to that transpersonal overview. The door to the 'Deathless' had begun to open.

The second realisation was that the direction of the wandering on was not haphazard, it moves in accordance with the ethical quality of the deeds that the person effects. The knowledge arose that there are energies that are disruptive or abusive and do not sustain clarity or health; and there are energies that are harmonious, nourishing or clearly attuned. 'Bad' & 'good' (or unskilful/unwholesome/'dark' and skilful/wholesome/'bright' in Buddhist terms) are consequently not just value-judgements imposed by a society. They are references to energies that are psychologically, emotionally and physically palpable. Action in line with wholesome energy supports well-being and harmony, just as the contrary does the opposite. This is the principle of ethical cause and effect, or '*kamma-vipaka*.'

However, *kamma-vipaka* has a deeper significance than just that actions and results. As long as mental consciousness clings to an action – bodily, verbal or psychological – it gives rise to a mental consciousness which is given a personal form by that same clinging. Such action creates the impression of a self who is the result of that action, and is 'flavoured' by the ethical quality of that action. To put it simply: it's not so much that I create kamma, but that kamma creates 'me.' Thus *kamma-vipaka* transcends the separation between action and actor. It embeds consciousness in a field of ethical meaning, where every action forms and informs 'me, mine, my self.'

Also as kamma arises in an ongoing tide of causal energy, results of action can take place in future lives. And this means that kamma binds us to the process of birth and death; something that the Buddha brought to mind in dramatic terms:

‘Long have you (repeatedly) experienced the death of a mother... of a father... the death of a brother... the death of a sister... the death of a son... the death of a daughter... loss with regard to relatives... loss with regard to wealth... loss with regard to disease. The tears you have shed over loss with regard to disease while transmigrating and wandering this long, long time – crying and weeping from being joined with what is displeasing, being separated from what is pleasing – are greater than the water in the four great oceans.

‘Why is that? From an inconstruable beginning comes transmigration. A beginning point is not evident, though beings hindered by ignorance and fettered by craving are transmigrating & wandering on. Long have you thus experienced stress, experienced pain, experienced loss, swelling the cemeteries – enough to become disenchanted with all fabricated things, enough to become dispassionate, enough to be released.’ S XV. 3 [Thanissaro trans.]

However in this admonition there is also the message that liberation from this samsara is possible: through clearing, letting go, and the ‘ceasing’ of those very energy patterns that carry cause and effect – and ‘me.’

These were seen through by the third knowledge, one that brought release from the ‘fabricated things,’ the emotions, drives, sensations and responses that constitute the raw material of grasping. This knowledge is the comprehension of the underlying biases (*asava*) which condition the grasping through which *samsara* operates.

Rebirth and kamma

The agency of *samsara* is not a body or an identity. Bodies endure dependent on conditions for one lifetime only. Identity – as daughter, mother, manager, invalid and so on – arises dependent on causes and conditions. What is above referred to as ‘transmigration’ is not ‘rebirth’ but the process whereby a persisting current of grasping continues to generate sentient beings. Moreover, this current isn’t something that only occurs at death, but is continually fed by kamma in the here and now. Through an inclination called ‘becoming,’ kamma forms something like a psychological genetic code. This code, which is the pattern of each individual’s kammic inheritance, is formed through dynamic processes called *sankhara*. Like one’s personal genetic code, the *sankhara* retain our kammic blueprints, and so from day to day we remain the same person in relative terms.

Variouly translated as ‘formations,’ ‘volitional formations,’ ‘fabrications’ (and more) I render *sankhara* as ‘programs and patterns.’ Some of these programs are functions, such as metabolism, that are bound up with the life-force (*ayu-sankhara*); some are carried by the consciousness that is generated from previous lives; and some are formed through this-life interactions. The most significant programs from the point of view of transmigration are those that weave grasping onto body and mind. These are three ‘outflows’ – the outflow that bonds to sense-input with feelings ranging between delight and aversion; the outflow of ‘becoming’ that generates the sense of an autonomous self; and the outflow of ignorance that obscures the truth about *samsara*. These outflows are unsatisfying at best and stressful or painful at worst because they keep programming the mind to depend on the changeable qualities of sensory input, and to form an identity on the shaky ground of mental states. Because of this existential discomfort, the un-Awakened consciousness reacts with habits of greed, aversion and confusion.

The good news is that we aren't as embedded in *samsara* as it might seem. Not every aspect of mind is caught up in outflows. We can 'know' the outflows. And it is only the outflows that have to be eliminated. The action that prepares for and culminates in this cutting off is the noble path, the Eightfold Path that the Buddha taught. Practising this is the kamma that leads to the end of kamma.

The teachings on kamma, on cause and effect, give us a Path to release. In brief, when you know how it works, and you have the skills and tools to deconstruct the programs of consciousness, you can stop doing *samsara*. In greater detail, the Buddha's teaching is one of a guide to sustained action in both external and internal domains, in which practice in the external domain – that of effecting a moral and responsive life – sets the guidelines, and encourages the skills, to clarify the inner domain. Transpersonal causal factors, such as mindfulness, investigation, concentration and equanimity, can then bring around the effect of abolishing the patterning of the outflows. This practice doesn't so much extract the person from *samsara* as switch off the *samsaric* process for that individual awareness. What remains for that individual can then be summarised as a functioning body and mind for this life span, and an unbiased awareness that doesn't participate in the dynamic of further birth.

The kamma behind this book

I admit to certain biases. There are many ways to meditate and many experienced teachers who can guide others in that respect. However it's often the case that people need help in terms of integrating meditative attention and insight into their ordinary lives. This is partly because the insight gained in meditation retreats doesn't arise out of the context of daily life and action, but out of a specialised setting such as a meditation centre. In these situations, topics

such as mindfulness of breathing receive considerable attention, but themes which are not immediately relevant to the solitude and tranquillity of sitting on a retreat don't receive the attention that they require for a harmonious life. Interpersonal relationships, when one comes out of a 'no contact, no talking' retreat scenario, seem difficult to integrate – yet they form part of everyone's life. Similarly if we've developed meditation in terms of peacefully accepting what is present in our awareness, how do we become decisive regarding choices around livelihood, and having sustainable plans for the future? Also, can we get guidance in the kind of personal development that encourages us to take responsibility, allows us to accept, share or question authority – and all the rest of what the society needs in terms of mature individuals?

Sadly, it can also be the case that people have valid 'spiritual' experiences on a subtle level, yet remain quite oblivious to their own biases and blind-spots in terms of actions and personal interactions. What helps, in meditation and in daily life, is to learn how to sustain and moderate one's sense of purpose; how to be sensitive and authentic in oneself and in relationship to other people; and how to value and adjust the quality of effort that we apply to our lives. All this and more comes under the topic of kamma. We therefore need to get very familiar with what is skilful kamma in terms of subtle internal and obvious external changing contexts.

Therefore I stress the centrality of understanding causality as a key to Awakening because it makes practice a whole-life way, rather than a meditation technique. It underlines the truth that *samsara* is a habit, not a place. So 'getting out of *samsara*' does not entail indifference to the world, the body or other people. Nor is it about getting hold of a piece of refined psycho-spiritual territory. It is the abandonment of

that negativity, that indifference and that thirst; and that means cultivating and honouring good kamma. This in turn is the basis for complete liberation from personal dis-ease. The wholeness of the Buddha's presentation is to me its beauty and depth: Truth, Virtue and Peace can come forth in the same focus.

The talks didn't form a series, but were spread out over time. So once they were transcribed, editing was necessary to standardize the language, cut out repetitions, and paste in material that the listeners got from other talks around that time. Even when this was done, it seemed to me that some aspects needed a fuller explanation. Accordingly, I've worked more written material into the oral material to amplify it. I also thought to tag on some quotes and notes from the Pali Canon; and as this was getting to be rather theoretical, interleaved the essays with some necessarily brief but relevant meditation instructions. Still, the presentation is not one of a step-by-step exposition, but of peeking in through various windows of concern and reviewing those concerns from the perspective of kamma.

I'd like to acknowledge the help of Ajahn Thaniya who selected and commented on the material and Dorothea Bowen who edited the root texts. From time to time, the manuscript has also been passed around other contemplative friends for feedback: Ajahn Amaro, Ajahn Kovida, Ajahn Viradhammo and friends in Ottawa, Sister Cintamani, David and Nimmala Glendining, Gabriel Hodes, Douglas and Margaret Jones. Ajahn Kusalo undertook the typesetting and design. There's a lot of other people's good kamma in this book – and I wish that this will continue to lead them on towards greater well-being and freedom.

*Ajahn Sucitto
Cittaviveka 2007*



And how bhikkhus, does a person live both for his own good and for the good of others? He himself practises for the removal of lust, hatred and delusion and he also encourages others to do so.

Ang. Fours 96

Where There's A Will, There's A Way

An Overview of the Buddha's Teachings on Kamma

What is 'kamma,' and what does it have to do with Awakening? Well, as a word, 'kamma' is the Pali language version of the Sanskrit term 'karma,' which has slipped into colloquial English as meaning something like a person's fate or destiny. Taken in this way, the notion can support a passive acceptance of circumstances: if something goes wrong, one can say 'it was my karma,' meaning that it had to happen. Where the idea really goes astray is when it is used to condone actions, as in 'it's my karma to be a thief.' If karma meant this, it would rob us of responsibility for our lives. Furthermore, there would be no way in which we could guide ourselves out of our circumstances or past history: which is what Awakening is about. However, 'kamma' in the way the Buddha taught it means skilful or unskilful action – something that we do now. It's the active aspect of a cause and effect process known as *kamma-vipaka*, in which *vipaka* or 'old kamma' means the effect, the result of previous actions. And, for the most part, we get bound up with the results of our actions.

However, as 'action,' kamma supports choice. We can choose what actions we undertake. Cause and effect

governs the activities of volcanoes, plants and planetary systems, but kamma relates specifically to beings who can exercise choice over what they cause – which means you and me. Also, not everything that we experience is because of past kamma (other than that of being born).¹ So if you're sick or caught up in an earthquake, it's not necessarily because of you did bad things in a previous life. Instead, kamma centres on your current intention or 'volition' (*cetana*).² The teachings on kamma therefore encourage a sense of responsibility for action; the responsibility to give attention to the many conscious and half-conscious choices we make in terms of what we do. What this means is that in this present moment we do have a choice as to how the future pans out: whether we will feel joyful and at ease with ourselves, or anxious and depressed depends on our actions now. And similarly, through our actions now, we can be liberated from the past, present and future. That's what Awakening to kamma brings about.

Bodily, verbal and mental kamma

'Kamma' means 'action' in a more than physical sense; it also includes verbal action – whether we insult and yell at people, or say truthful and reliable things; and that includes the 'internal speech' of thinking! But actually the kamma of our emotive responses – 'mental' (or 'heart') kamma – is the strongest.³ Responses – and the inclinations that they're based upon – govern the actions of body and speech, and also engender results in the domain of emotions, attitudes, and mind-states. Similarly, we only do things physically or verbally because of convictions, assumptions, interpretations and attitudes – mind. By itself, the body does neither good nor evil; these ethical qualities are rooted in the mind that initiates the physical deed. It's the same with speech and thought: language is neutral – it's the kindness or malice of the mind using the language and concepts that brings fortunate or unfortunate results.

Considering kamma in this light motivates us to clear the mind of ill-will or greed, because these lead to verbal and physical actions that leave an unpleasant tone: they engender harshness and grasping and demanding – and later on, worry, regret, and doubt. On the other hand, actions and thoughts based on compassion give the mind clarity and warmth. Hence the teachings on cause and effect: they remind us to check, investigate, and purify the mind-state associated with any action. As our actions bring conflict or harmony into the context within which we live, taking hold of kamma allows us to have a positive effect on the world around us. Understanding kamma then also offers us the significant realisation that our own well-being is not separate from how we act towards others.

The dynamics of kamma

The law of kamma is that an effect or result is inevitable from an active cause. If I curse and abuse someone today, the effect of that is that they get hurt – and that means that they're probably going to be unpleasant towards me in the future. It's also likely that that action will have immediate effects in my own mind: agitation and remorse. Or, it may be that I get accustomed to acting in that way: so I continue to act abusively, develop an insensitive mind and lose friends. So effects accrue both in terms of states of mind (offence and remorse) and also behavioural structures (a pattern or program of being loud-mouthed or self-centred). The really problematic stuff is the ongoing programs, 'formations,' or, in Buddhist language, *sankhara*. These behaviour patterns become part of our identity, and because we don't see past our own ingrained habits, these patterns and programs sustain the rolling-on, or *samsara*, of cause and effect.

It's important then if we want to get free, to get a hold on how we're operating. And it's possible, because the *kamma-*

vipaka process forms feedback loops of mental feelings of stress or agitation or ease that we can contemplate and consider. Moreover we can respond in different ways to the results of our actions – so each effect does not inevitably engender a corresponding cause. Here's the choice: I can pause, come out of the mind-state of irritation or recklessness, give it due consideration, and try to do better in the future. That's the first step towards liberation.

The teaching on kamma is most readily accessible in the context of external behaviour. The Buddha saw that clarity in regard to behaviour offers a pragmatic way in which suffering and stress can be avoided, and peace, trust and clarity generated. Hence he spoke of dark kamma – actions such as murder, theft, falsehood and sexual abuse that lead to bad results; and bright kamma – actions such as kindness, generosity, and honesty – that do the reverse. He also referred to a mixture of bright and dark kamma – actions which have some good intentions in them, but are carried out unskillfully. An example of this would be having the aim to protect and care for one's family but carrying that out in a way which abuses one's neighbours.

Kamma is also dynamic – we act according to input, and as we receive the feedback of agreeable or disagreeable results, that moderates our further actions. However as some feedback doesn't occur immediately, and may even take years to occur, aspects of the feedback loop are chaotic. This means that our rate of learning doesn't necessarily keep up with the rate at which we can commit further action. We were blithely polluting the atmosphere for decades before it became clear what was going on; by which time other actions had taken place – establishing industries and lifestyles dependent on unsustainable resources – that make it difficult to bring about change.

This point is significant: it encourages us to put effort into clarifying awareness of the mind and its impulses. We need to investigate our minds and mental programs more thoroughly and more often. Then it's possible to interrupt the feedback loop with input that arrests or moderates our impulses. This input is the kamma that leads to the end of kamma, and it is the hinge-point of the Buddha's teaching.⁴ In it's deepest fulfilment it can lead not just to changes in behaviour, but to complete liberation.

Birth: the inheritance of cause and effect.

Complete liberation means stepping out of the whole cause and effect process. This process is what we're experiencing right now. Being born is old kamma; and it has brought us into the predicament of existing within the domain of cause and effect, with the potential to keep rolling on in it. Having inherited the effect of being embodied, we are affected by food, health and climate. And along with this comes the potential for defending, seeking nourishment, and procreation. Mind is attuned to respond to all this instinctively, with fight-freeze-flight drives that can kick in at a moment's notice. And with mind, there comes the awareness of ageing, sickness and death; and with that separation from the loved, and being disagreeably affected by that; and furthermore being seemingly impotent to do anything about it. Thus, the rolling-on of *samsara* traps us in its spin.



Old kamma is also all the powerfully social and behavioural programs that tell us how to operate in terms of customs and attitudes. Psychologically we experience the need to belong, to understand and to otherwise feel at peace with

our circumstances. This is a basis for fresh kamma: one of our most continual mental actions is that of interpreting and filing away experience to derive meaning and purpose. Also we pick up a lot of information – including biases and redundant information as well as sound advice – from other people. This mental kamma forms the program, the mind-set, through which we interpret our present experience. Installed and occasionally modified, at any given moment this program applies an interpretation to a present experience to tell us what a thing is ‘like.’ And this goes for much more than objective definition: ‘Is it safe; is it friendly, is it allowed, will I be valued by acquiring this’ and so on, become impression-filters that help us make many spur-of-the-moment decisions in our lives. Yet how reliable is that crucial process?

Memories rise up that incline us one way, bodily conditions arise that affect our mood, attention span fluctuates, and the result of a conversation we had an hour ago is still stirring our hearts. Meanwhile our social context connects us to the effects of other people’s minds, each with their own interpretations and misinterpretations, so we’re also affected by that. Programs get transferred, or trigger off other programs, and our minds get caught up in a flood of impressions, any one of which can trigger off impulses at any moment.

The really crucial part of what we inherit then is ‘mind’ – a complex affective-responsive consciousness which carries a huge potential for further kamma. Through mind, we can be conscious of, reflect on and develop in accordance with the results of what we do and say. We can learn. And as our responses amplify and intensify our experience, we can be creative. We can get focused on an idea and develop that into a wonderful invention or beautiful work of art. Yet on the other hand we can get overwhelmed by an escalating emotion. If the mood is one of mistrust or

resentment, we can produce demonic world-views and commit atrocities. The possibilities have a wide range: the Buddha refers to many unfortunate and hellish realms that are the result of immoral actions, or 'dark kamma.' The good news is that there are even more numerous fortunate and heavenly realms that one may be born into as a result of good or 'bright' kamma.⁵ At any rate, it isn't all over in one lifetime! Nowadays people like to interpret these cosmological 'realms' as psychological states – but even in that view, kamma, bright or dark, is action that will give rise to a future state of being. And at first it seems there's no way out of that: we experience our lives as taking place within a dynamic continuum that affects and shapes us – just as we affect and shape it.

All in all, the process of *kamma-vipaka* is like that of an ocean that can lift us up, engulf us, or sweep us in any direction. It operates through continual interplay between inherited effects as they arise in the present and the range of consequent responses and inclinations to act. The past is not dead; its effects carry potential. And the future will arise according to how we act on that.

Awakening to cause and effect

At first this vision of kamma seems to be one of imprisonment, rather than liberation. But when you're in a jail cell, you start to investigate it more fully to see firstly how to make it more liveable, and then how to get out of it.

Firstly, if we must generate kamma, we can at least determine whether it will be bright or dark. Remember, there's a choice: kamma depends on mental volition, or intention, whether this be a carefully considered intention or a compulsive drive or a psychological reflex. In this sense, 'intention' is not just a deliberate plan. In fact right at the heart of our conundrum is the fact that we're not always that

clear about what we're doing and why. We may be operating on automatic, or with blurred or biased attention, but still attending to and moved along by the 'push' of a passion or a habit. For many of us, the main problem is not deliberate evil intention, but action based either on confusion, inattention or misunderstanding. Many of our troubles come from being pre-occupied or getting stuck in habits; then we don't bring clear attention into association with our actions. Or we think things are OK so why bother, or that they're not but we have no choice in the matter. But there is always the choice to at least investigate kamma, and that's where the turn-around begins.

This is because mental volition can be understood and directed if we give it wise attention. We can direct attention to our thoughts and impulses, pause and receive them



more fully, and thereby get a feel for the bright or dark quality that they bring into the mind. This helps us understand what to act upon, and how. For example, a feeling for bright kamma encourages someone who inherits good fortune such as wealth or intelligence, to share it. They will then be making the best use of that old kamma by turning it into bright

new kamma. In fact for a person who doesn't share good fortune, the pleasure of it goes stale: wealthy people who are selfish and complacent generally want more, or get stingy and self-obsessed.

As another instance, we can be experiencing the dark effect of being abused or hurt or anxious, but determine not to take it out on someone else. Or, start investigating and relaxing that mood, and perhaps learn what caused those effects. In this kind of action, volition is not moving towards

some future state, but towards penetrating the present state. Penetration isn't a matter of understanding all the whys and wherefores of kamma: in fact the details of why we experience a particular mood or intuition or urge at any particular moment are too complex to understand – like trying to figure out which river or rain-cloud gave rise to which drop of water in the ocean.⁶ The important point about penetrating kamma is to enter the underlying currents of the mind and turn the tide of effects. And to do that we need to cultivate an awareness that's firm, clear and not flustered by moods and sensations. This recognition, based on 'right view,' brings 'right aim', the activation of the Eightfold Path out of suffering and stress.⁷

One point that becomes clear about the current of the mind is that whatever way it's flowing, we tend to get bound up with it. We want to protect and sustain a happy state and feel bad about its eventual decline and disappearance; our identity gets based on that state. On the other hand we feel stuck with and desperate about unhappy states. In this way, all kamma gives rise to, defines, and psychologically locates us. Hence even good kamma has a certain disadvantage, because we still have an investment in the arena of kamma. Within that arena, the wheel of fortune can turn downwards: we may be attacked, and will certainly suffer disease, pain, death and separation. We may also get caught up with some overwhelming passion or impulse and do something we regret for the rest of our lives. So the Buddha pointed to a better option: to get out of the arena. In other words, to deepen awareness beyond the range of kamma and vipaka. This is the aim that leads to Awakening and complete liberation.

Kamma and the sense of self

In its fullest sense, liberation from kamma is liberation from cause and effect in the mind. It's a process of mentally,

emotionally, stepping back from any state and seeing it just as a state, without reactions and attitudes. This simple skill, which most of us can do from time to time, is what we develop in Buddhist practice. More radically, it means stepping out of the program that asserts that my life gets fulfilled by having or being some state or another... in this world or another. This is the view that perpetuates kamma. When this view is the lens, I keep looking for, or imagining some unchangeable subjective state that I could be, have, or in fact already am. Have you ever found one? This 'self-view' attaches to bodies, feelings, notions, mental programs, and sense-data as 'this is me, this is mine, this is my self.' But have you ever found one that you can have forever and that never lets you down?

And who is the self that could have something, and what could he or she be? How can I own a feeling, when the pleasant ones go when I don't want them to, and the disagreeable ones roll in uninvited? How could I be my impulses, ideas, or moods when they arise, condition each other and pass away like a tag team? You can't call the feelings a permanent self because they come and go and they change. You can't even call the propensity to feel 'a self' because that too is subject to whether we're asleep or awake, numbed, inattentive or hyper-sensitive. Moreover, the personal meanings that we project onto life, and the reactions and psychological responses that are our thumbprints, are also subject to change. The dynamic of this process is so continual, that it gives rise to the sense of solidity, but a core permanent essence or entity can't be found.

If you consider the topic further, anything that is 'self' would have to be independent – just 'self,' and not part of anything else. But the existence and constitution of the

body, for example, is dependent on parents and food and many other things. It doesn't arise independently. When you cut your hair or nails, you don't lose your sense of self, so self cannot be associated with embodiment. And aren't feelings and the propensity to feel dependent on something 'other?' We see some thing, we feel some thing – what kind of seeing or feeling could occur without an object? Furthermore, the self cannot be associated with mind states and activities – don't they arise dependent on physical states or other mind-states or activities? Then again, if body, feelings and sense data were my self, surely I could say 'let them be like this and not like that.' But actually, they go their own way, the way of cause and effect. So what is self? And what is going on?

We may not be able to find anything that we can call a self, yet we continually have the experience of being something, a continual feeling of 'I am.' How is that? It's because of consciousness – whose normal function is to discriminate experience in terms of a separate subject and object. But subject and object are inferences rather than realities; and they depend on each other – you can't have a sense of a subject without some object and vice versa. Now when mental consciousness attends to our inner, subjective dimension, it again separates subject from object, with an inference of 'I,' as the propagator, and 'me,' the inheritor, of mind-states, moods, thoughts and the rest. (As in 'here I am feeling confused by myself, because that action is unlike me and I'm not feeling quite like myself right now.')

Every sensation, every thought, every feeling that passes through is either tagged as 'what I am – this is mine' (even though they pass and change); or else the notion is held that 'I am other than this' – even though I am defined in

terms of input that affects me). Either of these two instinctive psychological activities of ‘selfing’ (‘I am this,’ or ‘I’m other than this’) continually determines a sense of self in ways that generate more specific self-definition. However, because I can’t hold onto what I want, and can’t get away from what I don’t want, the underlying mood of self is restless and unfulfilled. I keep trying to find the good state... but this one isn’t quite it. Thus there is dis-ease. Liberation from this dis-ease and stress is thus synonymous with Awakening out of the dissatisfied self.

Developing yourself to freedom from self

The strong inclination to sustain a self – called ‘becoming’ or ‘being’ (*bhava*) stores that sense of ‘I’ and ‘me’ as a notion, a self-impression that lasts as the reference point for whatever my mind has been involved with. This self is thus not an entity but a pattern, a ‘self-construction program’ (*abamkara*), made up of emotional and psychological behaviours. These give rise to the sense that: ‘this is how I operate, these are my opinions, this is my history,’ and accordingly there is the impression of being a self in such and such a state, with strategies of how to continue to be in it, augment it, or get out of it. But all that is not an identity, not a fixed thing, but a process of ‘being this and becoming that.’ ‘Becoming’ is the core program behind kamma. It’s the reason why there is so much activity in the mind. But because it’s an activity, it can stop. However, ‘becoming’ is deep-rooted and instinctive: it doesn’t stop through reasoning. As an instinct it has to be arrested in the depth of the heart – and that is a process which involves steering the push of intention towards clearing the ‘selfing’ view.

First we need to develop strength, skill, capacity. So, much of the Buddha’s teaching favours ‘becoming’ in terms of

becoming clearer, steadier, more warm-hearted.⁸ We generate good kamma through acts of generosity, kindness, and through letting go of behaviour that does harm. We become calmer, brighter people. Right view encourages awareness of the results of what we do, awareness of sharing this world with others, and awareness of the importance of our inner, psychological realm over that of sense-contact. If the deeper sense of fulfilment through compassion and calm gets established, then we can let go of getting and gaining and holding on: major causes of stress. We can shift out of the drive towards short-term efficiency, convenience, success, comfort, and sex appeal. Then we're on the right track for liberation.

Consider the social scenario: in the West many of us can live in physical comfort, yet because we are continually being presented with more refined commodities or changing standards by which to measure ourselves, there's not much contentment. And there are social and group pressures. A person might very well feel that if they're not wearing the 'right' clothes their job is at risk, so they have to bear this in mind. People can become depressed, even neurotic, if their bodies don't match up to the current standards of beauty, or if their personality is not smart enough, cynical enough, seedy enough – whatever the fashion is. We want to avoid losing out on good opportunities, and we fear the loneliness of not having any friends. So there can be a nervous feeling of inadequacy and insecurity which deprives us of a sense of trust in our innate worth as a human being.



So because of just this, it's important that we sense and define ourselves as 'being' apart from those currents, if only

to get onto some firmer ground. And what really helps is to be able to calm and collect the mind, and to develop oneself in what gives greater benefit. To live one's own life with authenticity. We can cultivate simplicity of needs, and a sense of truthfulness and integrity. We can gain contentment through acknowledging the good in ourselves and others. People have problems and flaws, but to recognize and honour the goodness that we all have is skilful. It's also wise to regard our tendencies towards reactivity and confusion with compassion. This is because how you attend creates the dwelling place of the mind. So if we can begin to experience clarity and empathy for ourselves and others, we find ourselves living in a more appreciative and balanced way that encourages goodness to develop. In this way, we incline towards good kamma, and a basis develops that really supports our well-being.

Working with the mind's impressions in this way can bring around radical changes in life. We discover that the 'feel-good' factor required by our sense of self is most fully acquired through inclining towards ethically-based, compassionate behaviour. The qualities that arise from these inclinations are immensely nourishing. This is cultivating 'self' in a right way, and it is an essential aspect of Dhamma practice. From this we realise that we can make meaningful choices in our lives; this enables us to sense the potential in being human, and encourages us to investigate it further.

Insight and not-self

All this good kamma is based on mind cultivation; and the skill of calming and stilling the mind through meditation is another form of 'good' or 'bright' mental kamma. Broadly speaking, there are two main meditation themes for stabilising the mind: that of firming up attention and that of bringing well-being into the heart. These focus

on good, gladdening effects to both bring immediate well-being to the mind, and to switch off the really destructive programs of resentment, depression, anxiety and the rest. So we become a 'good self,' with a mind that is calm and open. That makes it possible to investigate how 'self' happens, and how 'becoming' can be relinquished altogether. This is the cultivation of 'insight.'

These two aspects of mental cultivation – developing a 'good self' and becoming liberated from the self-notion – go together. When we can develop a good self, we can investigate the basis of that, and realise that it is based upon states which are dependent on good programs – such as kindness, resolve, or concentration. They're not inherently yours or anyone's. This is the view of insight: causes and conditions give rise to fortunate and unfortunate effects. Moreover the fortunate ones arise more readily and constantly if the mind isn't preoccupied with affirming or denying a self who has or doesn't have them. That view of self as success or as failure adds a bias that the mind gets stuck in – and when it's stuck it feels stressful, and so lays down the conditions for restlessness, uncertainty, craving, despondency and so on.

But self-view has to be handled: to be penetrated and revealed as a series of stress-producing programs. Trying to get rid of a self involves intention; and even an attitude of indifference generates effects. Any nihilistic approach carries the seeds of dark kamma: wanting to not be anything (*vibhava*) still operates from the premise that one is something in the first place, and it entails the intention to annihilate. All that makes us less confident and warm-hearted in our actions and relationships. Instead, the process of Awakening has to shift the emphasis from that of self-construction to one of supporting and appreciating balance

in the mind. We need to feel that inner stability in the present to be able to let go of the assumptions and biases of the past, and the becoming drive that strives for or is anxious about the future. And it is through that letting go of becoming that a still point, where old kamma ceases to affect the mind, is found.

Daily practice

As everyone who practises it soon realises, this introspective cultivation has to move against the current of much of mainstream culture. We have a massive distraction industry that encourages us to take time to get away from where we're at – read something, eat something, half-watch the TV – and this takes us away from reviewing or cultivating the mind. It also often puts us into situations in which we can have no responsible input. Distraction seems to offer an easy way out of stress, but it doesn't do us a lot of good. It's a way of ignoring negative effects that we



don't want to, or know how to, deal with – but it doesn't fully remove them. For example, say your working day is stressful, and then you drive through the jangle and aggressive behaviour of the traffic: all that random rapid and potentially risky contact agitates the nervous system.

So you arrive home feeling frayed and stressed, and there's the reflex to contact something pleasant or easeful. Maybe you just flop down and eat something, drink something or watch something on TV, you get vaguely relaxed or amused for a while, but the state of ease is superficial, induced and dependent on props. In this scenario, the mind becomes weak and undeveloped, and gradually the forms of distraction need to become more powerful. If the pattern is

allowed to persist, a lifetime can be spent becoming psychologically and emotionally weak.

Most of us need reminders not to pick up the mood of the social context willy-nilly. And that we can come out of the program of the daily round. For a start, I always have a Buddha-image in my living space, on a small shrine, or somewhere where I can relate to it. It's something that reminds me of the value of being fully present; it encourages me to pause, and acknowledge and respond to whatever state I'm in. It reminds me that the first priority is to clear some space in the mind, rather than even make cultivation another thing to be busy doing. If the day rotates around fixing things, getting things done and being on the go, it's good to learn how to moderate volition by not fixing and not getting things done or sorted out.

When you are in an emotionally rocky state, the most skilful response may simply be to receive what you are feeling at the present moment with some clarity and sympathy; to sit quietly and allow things to blow through. Whatever the state, the initial response has to be to stay present and cultivate spaciousness. But the way that cause and effect work is that even five minutes of not acting on or suppressing the present mind-state results in some kind of ease or diminution of pressure. Then we begin to recognize a natural sanity, a seed of Awakening that's there when the doing stops. It's not far off. But we do need to get in touch with and encourage it.

It's always possible

The most significant realisation that comes from a five or ten minute break from aspects of being and becoming, is that things stop by themselves. This isn't to say that a few minutes of just chilling out is the end of

kamma and the dawning of Ultimate Truth, but it does show us that the mind can have a different direction from zigzagging forwards (or backwards). The mind can open. And in that opening, the whole scenario changes: mental awareness is experienced as a field within which thoughts, moods and sensations come and go. And we can witness, rather than act upon, that mental content. Furthermore, a good amount of mental content just whirrs to a halt when there isn't the view that one has to do, or fix or even stop, and there isn't the buzzy urgent self keeping it going.⁹ This in a nutshell is a description of how the kamma of cultivation leads to the end of kamma.


But it's a subtle process to undertake. Thoughts and moods don't stop through trying to make them go away – that trying is more volition, more kamma. They stop when the identification program, the basis of becoming, is not switched on. This is worth remembering because when one considers the complexity of the feedback loops of cause and effect, it's easy to imagine that a very complex process of unwinding would be needed. But a glimpse at how ceasing happens – through not supporting the view and energy of identification – shows us that the way out of dis-ease and stress is direct and simple. And that encourages us to set up occasions wherein we can take non-identification into deeper levels of our psychological activity. This is through the ongoing process of meditation; but we all need to, and can, back that up in our daily life. We don't have to drink the water we're swimming through.

To not drink in the ocean of *samsara* means checking and restraining the pull of the senses, checking and putting aside the programs of the mainstream, and cultivating full attention and awareness. In other words, it's a whole-life path, the Eightfold Path. And that proceeds from right

Where There's a Will There's a Way

view and right aim, not from views of self, fate or through automatic systems and techniques. Through following it, you realise that you're not as embedded in *samsara* as it might seem. For a start, you never actually become anything for very long. Sure, you seem to go through periods of agitation and tension, but with practice there are periods of joy and humour – and as you get more skilled in attending to the mind, the habit of holding on to particular states loosens up. You find yourself identifying with this or that state less and less; and that reduces the stress and turmoil.

Seen like this, human life is a great opportunity. Regardless of the effects that we inherit, we can always act skilfully and cultivate the mind; we can always move towards goodness, happiness and liberation.



meditation

Sitting Peacefully:

Sit still in a quiet and settled place in a way that feels comfortable. Relax your eyes, but let them stay open or half-open, with a relaxed gaze. Be aware of the sensation of your eyeballs resting in the eye-sockets (rather than focusing on what you can see). Be sensitive to the tendency for the eyes to fidget, and keep relaxing that. Alternatively, you may find it helpful to let your gaze rest, in a relaxed way, on a suitable object, such as a view into the distance.

Then bring your attention to the sensations of your hands, then your jaw and tongue. See if they, too, can take a break from being ready to act or be on guard. Let your tongue rest in the floor of your mouth. Then sweep that relaxing attention from the corners of the eyes and around the head, as if you were unfastening a bandana. Let the scalp feel free.

Let your eyes close. As you relax all around your head and face, bring that quality of attention, slowly, gradually, down over your throat. Loosen up there, as if allowing each out-breath to sound an inaudible drone.

Keeping in touch with these places in your body, be aware of the flow of thoughts and emotions that pass through the mind. Listen to them as if you're listening to flowing water, or the sea. If you find yourself reacting to them, bring your attention to the next out-breath, continuing to relax through the eyes, throat and hands.

If you feel like extending this, sweep that attention down your body to the soles of your feet. In this way, build up a whole sense of the body at ease.

While maintaining awareness of the overall presence of your body, practise stepping back from, or letting go of, any thoughts and emotions that arise. Don't add to them; let them pass. Whenever you do that, notice the sense of spaciousness, however brief, that seems to be there, behind the thoughts and feelings. Attune to the peacefulness of that.

Feeling the peacefulness of that, take it in. Rather than demand or try to achieve calm, make a practice of quietly offering peace to the energies that pass through you.



Whoever does good is glad now and in the hereafter, in both worlds. They are glad and rejoice when recollecting their pure actions.

Dhammapada 16

Bright Kamma

Support for Attention

In the last few weeks, a Buddha-image has been created in this monastery by Ajahn Nonti. He's a sculptor from Thailand who came here to do this as an act of generosity. It's been a lovely occasion, because the Buddha-image is being made in a friendly and enjoyable way. Many people have been able to join in and help with it. Yesterday there were nine people at work sanding the Buddha-image. It's not that big, yet nine people were scrubbing away on it, not colliding with each other, and enjoying doing that together.

Bright and dark kamma arise in the heart

Nine people working together in a friendly enjoyable way is a pretty good thing to have happening. Moreover, it was all voluntary, and came about not through prior arrangement: people got interested in the project and gathered around it. It's because of what the Buddha represents, and because people love to participate in good causes. That's the magic of good kamma. It arises around doing something which will have long-term significance, and also from acting in a way that feels happy rather than intense or compulsive. Kamma – intentional or volitional action – always has a result or residue, and here it's obvious that the good kamma is having good results. There's an immediate result – people are feeling happy through working

together. And there's a long-term result – they are doing something that will bring benefit to others.

In a few days we hope to install the Buddha-image in the meditation Hall. It is an image that makes me feel good when I look at it. It has a soft, inviting quality that brings up a sense of feeling welcome and relaxed. This is a very good reminder for meditation. Sometimes people can get quite tense about 'enlightenment,' and that brings up worries, needs, and demands; but often what we really need is to feel welcomed and blessed. This is quite a turn-around from our normal mind-set; but when we are sitting somewhere where we feel trusted, where there's benevolence around us, we can let ourselves open up. And as we open our hearts, we can sense the clarity of presence and firm up around that. This firmness arising from gentleness is what the Buddha-image stands for. It reminds us that there was an historical Buddha whose Awakening is still glowing through the ages – but when this is presented as a heart-impression rather than just a piece of history, it carries more resonance. Then the image serves as a direct reflection on what good kamma feels like.

Good kamma in the scriptures is generally called 'bright kamma' as opposed to 'dark kamma.' 'Bright' means you feel bright and uplifted. It's not just an idea. Brightness is a felt tone rather than a judgment – good or bad, right or wrong. It has beauty. The word 'bright' has the sense of something opening, of softness and joy; it has these tones to it. While 'dark' implies being shut down, contracted and hopeless. So this is something to check inwardly: the quality of the actions that we do and the context that we generate around ourselves – is it bright? Even if we own up to some painful truth about our actions, isn't there a brightness, a certain dignity, when we do that willingly? Look for brightness in occasions when we come forth like that, rather than

in terms of superficial ease or of being dutifully good: the attitude behind what we say and think – is it bright or dark? That tone, rather than charm or obedience, is the setting, the abiding place of our hearts.

Mind-organ and mind-base

The energy of kamma moves through three channels. The first is the body: physically we do things. The second is the faculty of speaking (which includes the ‘internal speech’ of thinking). The third is through the mind, the sense of being affected and responding. In English, the word ‘mind’ straddles both conceptual activity and the affective sense which gives the mind an overall state or mood. But in the Pali language, there are two words. ‘*Mano*’ refers to the mind-organ that focuses on the input of any of the senses. This function is called ‘attention’ (*manasikara*). The mind-organ can also define and articulate; it brings things to mind and produces concepts. Tonally, it’s quite neutral. It’s not happy or sad; it is the rationality that defines: ‘That’s that.’

‘*Citta*’ on the other hand refers to the mind as ‘heart,’ the base that receives the impressions that attention has brought to it. It is affected in terms of pleasure and pain, and these affects become mind-states of varying degrees of happiness and unhappiness. *Citta* also forms signs, perceptions or ‘felt meanings’ (*sañña*) of the impressions it has received and is moved by. Then we can judge new input by referring to the signs that are already established: an orange-coloured globe of a certain size and texture is probably an orange. At least it’s not a tiger or a person. This meaning carries nuances that then determine another mental function, intention – the mind moves towards the object willingly or with an interest in eating. Intention or volition occurs as a response to being affected, and this is how mental kamma arises.

The way that mind-base and mind-organ operate is that when *citta* is affected, its organ, *mano*, may then produce a verbal concept to fit, so having recognized an object we can then say, 'This is a dog; this is a bell.' The mind-organ may also scan the affective mind-base and define its states. All this is the action of *mano*. The problem is that people can think just about anything, based on seeing, hearing and ideas, without necessarily reflecting on how the heart has been affected. There are plenty of quarrels over truth, peace, love and freedom and other great ideals, because passions or fears get mixed up with those notions. However, up there in the *mano* faculty you don't feel a thing. Therefore this non-acknowledgement of subjective bias is called 'objective truth.'(!) But to know fully, not just think or have somebody tell you, but to really feel the quality of goodness, love and so on, you have to enter into and purify this heart. Hence the most important kamma for deepening our truth, peace and freedom begins with turning the mind around; with having *mano* scan the *citta*.

Felt meanings

When we look at what causes our impulses and actions, it's clear that they arise from feelings and inclinations in the heart. These mental feelings and inclinations are bound up with perceptions or 'felt meanings,' such as 'feeling lonely' or 'feeling welcome;' based on that we 'feel like taking a walk,' or 'feel like visiting so-and-so:' there is an inclination. Somebody says something to us and we might say, 'Oh, that sounded really hostile to me.' That's a 'felt meaning,' a mental perception. There's an emotive interpretation of the words that somebody uttered; and it's likely that that will be the basis for intention: our inclinations, actions and reactions. The 'feel' in that, the perception, is a heart-impression (called 'designation-contact,' *adbhivacana-phassa*). Although it is based upon external contact, this designation contact, rather than contact with

those to mind, mull them over, get affected by them and act in accordance. So the scanning mind can keep selecting impressions in accordance with biases of the heart and thereby build up and intensify those biases. Attention is therefore also bound up with intention, and in generating kamma. What all this means is that you can't just rely on heart alone or on attention alone. You have to cultivate skilful attention, attention to the heart, to get to the end of biases.

Fathoming, mindfulness and full awareness

Considering all this, how can we scan, and respond, more skilfully? How do we acknowledge feeling dumped on or abused and not just react or suppress? Maybe we need to say a few things to a few people... or maybe it's a matter of correcting our own misperceptions.... In any case, the best way to start is by scanning the heart. This process begins with 'fathoming attention' (*yoniso manasikara*) – which is attention backed up by the intention to consider experience in terms of how it affects you. It is a heartfelt approach, whereby rather than just going along with the topic of a thought, you listen to it deeply; you sift through the flood of interpretations or digressions around topics with an inquiring sense that asks: 'What's the meaning behind this thought or attitude? What is the assumption, and how realistic is it? How am I with my mind being like that?' This is a sympathetic, not a critical, survey. And it asks you to get an accurate feel for the psychologies that direct your life. Then: 'Is this stressful or not?'

This process reveals underlying impulses and heart impressions – whether these are feelings of being threatened or alienated, or of uplift and confidence. This underlying stuff is what powers how we think and what we think about. It's important to know what's making you tick in any situation, so putting a check on this process isn't a suppression, it's more about allowing us to survey our inner territory. It helps us to

see beyond the boundaries of our self-image. But we put analysis and further action on hold; we don't try to fix things; we don't go spasming into an opinion about ourselves based on that survey. And the simple beauty of this process is that when we suspend the reactions of what we should and shouldn't be feeling, there is clarity and spaciousness. With that we reconnect with our innate ethical sensitivity, the good kamma which supports clarity and compassion.

These, thankfully, are the basic qualities that we all have as human beings. But because our way of attending is often superficial, or goal-oriented, those qualities aren't always accessible to us. So they surface dependent on a 'selfless' regard, a regard that is without pressure, opinions and judgements. This regard is fathoming attention. It just looks out for what is stressful and what is to be let go of. And this simple internal directness is often all we really need – we can generally figure out the details of what to do, and how, or whether to do nothing at all, once we have got this point of view straight.

A further development of attention is mindfulness (*sati*) the ability to bear a theme, mood, thought or sensation in mind. It's a skilful use of *mano*, the mind-organ. Whereas fathoming is an active attention that sifts through the topics of the mind, mindfulness holds attention on a point – such as a thought or sensation – in order to look into the nature of that as a phenomenon. For example mindfulness attends to an emotion as an emotion and doesn't let it harden into an attitude or an action. It holds the boundary of the present moment so that we can really discern what a feeling is, and what a mood is, rather than act upon or explain or suppress them. Mindfulness is vital because in the feeling sense there are no boundaries; mental feeling goes everywhere. And if that felt sense starts to proliferate, it becomes 'I am. I always will be. People don't like me. I'm terrible...' – and goes on

reverberating. Even in the case of a positive mood, if mindfulness is absent we may assume that everything's great and be quite insensitive to the moods of others. So it's always skilful to steady the domain of citta with mindfulness. Then



we don't attach to the perception and feeling and proliferate around the heart-impression or mind-states that may subsequently arise.

A complement to mindfulness is 'full awareness' (*sampajañña*). Full awareness is the capacity to be alert and receptive, the ability to feel out what we're sensitive to. It is *citta-based*.

Mindfulness holds a boundary so that we don't get overwhelmed, shut down or react to the feelings that we have, then with full awareness, we get the whole of it, how that impression arises and what it does. We may then understand: 'this feeling or impression is based upon this perception and thought, and it subsides when that thought or perception is removed.' 'This negative impression arises with that perception or that memory and it subsides when I practise loving-kindness, or even when I can just sit with it and let it subside.' Together mindfulness and full awareness acknowledge what is going on, and where it stops. They don't bring 'I am,' 'I should be' into it.

If we establish these skills of attention, they free the mind from acting on or reacting to the results of the past. If we attend to the present impressions, the present moods and sensations, and cut off the proliferations and projections, we're not living in the fog of resentment, fantasy, romance, or other biases. This means that our attention, and consequently, our moods, actions and speech, are going to be clearer and brighter. Because of this, we can get freer from our habitual action – or inaction. (Withdrawing from action

is still an action – and that gets to be a habit too!) But if there is skilful attention to the heart, we can speak of how things seem, what incidents give rise to the ‘feeling’ of being mistreated, and have a sense that, whether anyone else listens or responds, at least we have brought some clarity into our lives. We don’t have to keep creating fresh kamma based upon old habits – skilful attention is kamma that leads to the end of kamma.

Guarding and collecting attention

To establish mindfulness and full awareness in daily life relies on a skilful filtering of the input of stuff coming at us from all directions, because the sheer deluge of contact can overwhelm them. Contact is a source for kamma: what we give attention to receives our energy and enters our hearts, and there it stimulates action and reaction.¹⁰ Because we consequently build up bright or dark habits, we need to be responsible about what we give attention to. Part of cultivation is therefore about turning away from input and actions that just pull the mind out into craving or aversion or distraction. So another function of fathoming is to be discriminative; it has intention, it checks, sifts through, discards the dross, and retains the gold.

In fact, rather than have the mind absorb into whatever is being pumped out by the media, there are themes that it’s good to give attention to.¹¹ Fathoming is also about recollection. Recollections vary, but you can do them throughout the day. First of all, there’s mortality. If you consider the fact of death carefully and coolly, it helps to calm and steady the mind; you don’t get reckless or greedy, and don’t hold grudges. The perception of mortality causes some of the sticky stuff to lose its grip. Where’s the pressure to get, or to be, something when everything you get, you lose? What is really worthwhile giving time and attention to? The recollection of mortality also reminds us that our resources, our

energy, mental agility and health are finite and dwindling. We can use our resources in a way that will enhance or free our lives, or we can waste the time in fantasies and frustrations. Used wisely then, the recollection of death keeps the mind in shape, clean and present. It tells us it's time to put down the load.

Another positive quality that comes out of recollecting mortality is empathy. One of the greatest sources of affliction, and basis for negative kamma, is a loss of empathy with others. In modern urban life, we may experience many people through media stereotypes, or in the no-man's land of busy streets and public places. People then become 'other' – other nationalities, other religions etc. – and we may feel either nothing, or mistrust, for them. In an emotional field with such a bias, indifference, and even brutality, finds room to breed. But if we consider our common ground – that like us, others have to endure stress, illness, bereavement and death – that helps to generate empathy. For example, one of the monks was telling me he has a picture of famine victims and people with terrible afflictions and deformities, and whenever life was getting tense and tight and he was starting to feel irritable or losing perspective, he would look at these. Then he'd experience a sense of compassion for the human realm, as well as gratitude for the enormous blessing of being healthy, free from punishment, well-fed and looked after. Recollection evokes a tone that, with sustained mindfulness, can become a steady abiding place for the heart. Then harshness, indifference and self-pity don't take over.

We can also broaden empathy to recollect that 'others too have joy and despair, humour and fear, birth, families, and their kamma.... Then why don't I relate to others in the way that I'd like them to relate to me.' Morality is really only empathy put into forms of behaviour.

I find it really useful to meditate on ‘others’ and what they bring up for me. And to notice that any effect that comes up is in my own affective mind; because I’m the one who has to live with that indifference, harshness or empathy. When the heart is defensive or dismissive, it is tight, constricted – and it can’t access the energy that supports me. And the more I feel heavy and tight about others, the heavier and tighter my life gets. Sure, opening the heart often entails feeling all kinds of conditioned irritations and fears – but, if there is fathoming attention, the heart also finds access to the courage and the compassion that is its potential. And as I tune into the theme of the good kamma of being human, I can really enjoy and taste the nourishment of kindness, the protective care of compassion, the joy of appreciation, and the equanimity to hold the space that allows emotions to move. Empathy gives me access to my innate sanity.

Images of Awakening

In order to gladden the heart, it’s good to bring an image or topic to mind. What is generally most useful is to recollect the qualities of people who are part of our life, because we learn a lot about bright kamma from contemplating the actions of others. Therefore, one of the greatest supports for Awakening is to have meaningful relationships with other people. This can include our parents, friends or peers, who represent or invoke our sense of gratitude, uprightness, compassion – value. Without human reference-points, alive or deceased, the mind deals in abstractions: even towards itself. Isolated people get locked into unreal notions of themselves, or into hobbies, plans, gadgets or various forms of showmanship. Then there’s no sense of being held by or part of something larger than oneself. That’s an enormous loss.

To work against this, the recollection of Sangha brings us to the humanity of the practice; it’s not just a text-book and

ideas thing. One of the main benefits of a lineage and tradition is to awaken us to this larger sense of ourselves, as sharing companionship of the spirit with good people, over the entire world, throughout time. We can also recollect sharing a value-system that gives great significance to kamma: this is the recollection of Dhamma. So we recollect aspiration and Awakening as our common touchstone, and suffering, and dis-ease as our common challenge. Then we no longer feel so alone with our difficult mind-states, and we can handle them in a more open and aware way. Recollection of Dhamma and Sangha reminds us that although there is greed, anger, and confusion, there is a way to handle them which leads out of that. And there are people who have come along this way.

The very context of the practice can be uplifted by using shrines, making offerings to a Buddha-image and chanting. This is *pūja*: the act of honouring the Buddha, bringing to mind the miracle of Awakening in an embodied form. But it's not about worshipping an image. We use ritual means because it allows for acting out, rather than thinking, and we can do it together through body, thought and heart. Group enactment heightens the sense of participation in the meaning of Awakening. Fully tuning in, and participating, brings us out of ourselves and into a deep resonance. This is about making recollection feel good.

That's why in a monastery, we have a tangible, manifest Buddha-image. It's something that we can hold with respect – physically clean it, illuminate it with lights, offer flowers to it. Soft light, flowers and gestures of offering encourage the attention to dwell in the heart-impression of the shrine, and so the mind gets touched by the sense of stability, or of peacefulness or of radiance and can dwell in that. If these impressions and felt meanings are established regularly, it gets so that just seeing a Buddha-image lifts the spirits or steadies the mind.

Chanting, particularly in a group, can have a harmonizing, settling effect: sonorous and unhurried, it really helps one to appreciate one's fellow practitioners. Here we are, for once without our names and histories, human beings intent on being fully aware. Then we sense our own presence within a broader perspective. In some ways it's still just your body/mind with all its stuff – but recollection opens an empathic knowing of all that.

Non-involvement needs support

Fathoming attention then is an action that causes us to pause, and takes us into our minds and hearts more deeply. This prepares us for meditation. If you start meditating from a dark or muddled place, mindfulness and full awareness are weak. We might tell ourselves that being dark or muddled is being authentic and we should just be mindful of that. Which has some truth in it. However, memories, plans, worries and grudges generally have a lot of power in them, so rather than being mindful of them, they capture attention, and get obsessive. So it's important to establish a focus with right view – that we bear in mind how we're being affected by what we give attention to. There's no point in spending time with attention held captive by worry or grudges. Sitting with no resources for the heart isn't meditation.



It's more useful to enter meditation through fathoming, even pondering and considering how the mind is being affected by things. That is, we handle the mind heartfully; we scan, and discern: 'What brings suffering and stress? What releases that?' This intention brings around a mindfulness that supports the wisdom of Awakening: to look into dis-ease and the release from dis-ease. Mindfulness

just bears things in mind; so for Awakening, the heart-base, it needs to be backed up by right intention – which is what fathoming attention and full awareness do.

The practice isn't going to go far if the mind isn't acting from a committed, ethical and skilful base. But if we do cultivate the mind along these lines, they support fathoming, mindfulness and full awareness. Then we can handle positive states, negative states or just 'nothing special' states, and find wisdom and release. Because what is essential in all cases is that there's a mindful stepping back from the pull of a habit or spin of a mood. That brings around a drop in the intensity and momentum of the mind-state, so there is a momentary weakening or ending of kamma. This shift happens when we're clear and honest: it doesn't happen if we're trying to hide something or trying to make something happen – even if we're trying to be non-attached! This is because the shift is away from trying to find something or be something, and towards being upright and clear in the presence of our stuff. And the good we have done, the patience, the honesty, all contribute towards strengthening the mind-base to make that stepping back possible.


Then when there is darkness in the heart, we know how to attend to it wisely. We don't have to figure out where it comes from and whose fault it is. Maybe it's from some past action, or maybe it's a critical, negative habit creating a memory or interpretation right now. But all we have to know is that this is dark *vipaka*, and where that gets cleared. I'd say the process is almost like putting a piece of dirty laundry into a lake. The cleaning is done both by the action of placing the laundry in the lake, and without action – because the water does the cleaning. You take that dark residue and put it into whatever clarity or purity there is, and though you may have to swish and really massage the grubby bits, it's our basic sanity that washes the dirt out.

We establish mindfulness, and then full awareness keeps feeling it, and sensing it, and letting go of what comes up. Whenever some of the dark residues get cleared, full awareness senses the lightness, or brightness. And we can tune in to that. Over time as we cultivate, there develops an increasing ground of well-being, a brightness that we can abide in. But because there isn't the sense that 'I've done this,' or 'I'm going to get this,' the mind doesn't get puffed up; it remains quiet and receptive.

In fact any kind of self-view just confuses things. Because, as you witness in meditation, getting caught up in thoughts and moods isn't a personal decision. And it's not that 'I am not attached' either. The mind was spacious and steady, then thoughts about your future, or someone who's giving you a hard time comes up, and suddenly, you're in there, tightening up and speeding up and proliferating about it all; and the view comes in as to whose fault... and what you should do... and why me.... It starts with a bias, moves into an action, and then it becomes a person. So getting free can't be done through an apparent self who is, or should be, in control. Instead it requires the skills of an attention that has the capacity to handle old kamma as it comes to the surface.

Our practice then is led by Dhamma rather than driven by self-view; and it inclines towards stopping the old rather than becoming something new. It's a cultivation that frees up, protects, and gathers us into a free space at the centre of life. It's the kamma that leads to the end of kamma – and it tastes of freedom.

meditation



Recollection:

Sit in an upright alert position that allows your body to be free from discomfort and fidgeting yet encourages you to be attentive. Let your eyes close or half-close. Bring your mental awareness to bear on your body, feeling its weight, pressures, pulses and rhythms. Bring up the suggestion of settling in to where you are right now, and put aside other concerns for the time being.

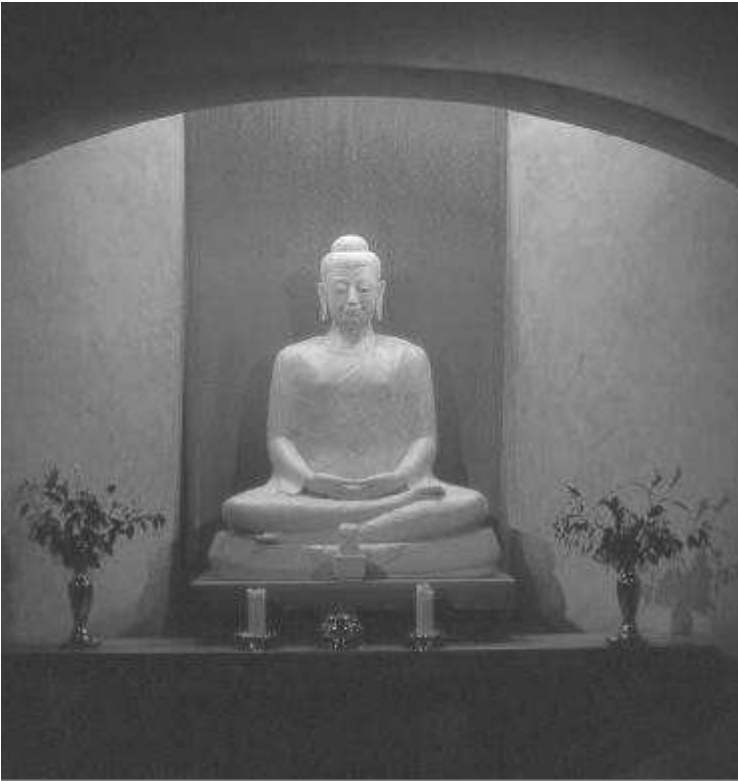
Take a few long slow out-breaths sensing your breath flowing out into the space around you; let the in-breath begin by itself. Sense how the in-breath draws in from the space around you. Attune to the rhythm of that process, and interrupt any distracting thoughts by re-establishing your attention on each out-breath.

Bring to mind any instances of people's actions that have touched you in a positive way, in terms of kindness, or patience, or understanding. Repeatedly touch the heart with a few specific instances, dwelling on the feeling that it evokes.

Stay with the most deeply-felt recollection for a minute or two, with a sense of curiosity ‘How does this affect me?’ Sense any effect in terms of heart: there may be a quality of uplift, or of calming, or of firmness. You may even detect a shift in your overall body tone. Allow yourself all the time in the world to be here with no particular purpose other than to feel how you are with this in a sympathetic listening way.

Settle into that feeling, and focus particularly on the mood tone, which may be of brightness or of stability or of uplift. Put aside analytical thought. Let any images come to mind and pass through. Dwelling upon and expand awareness of the sense of vitality or stillness, comfort, space or light.

In accordance with time and energy, conclude the process by fully feeling who you are in that state. First feel how you are in bodily terms. Then notice what inclinations and attitudes seem natural and important when you are dwelling in your place of value. Then bring those to your daily-life situation by asking: ‘What is important to me now?’ ‘What matters most?’ Then give yourself time to let the priorities of action establish themselves in accordance with that.



Wisdom springs from meditation; without meditation, wisdom wanes. Acknowledging these ways of progress or decline, guide yourself so that wisdom increases.

Dhammapada 282

The Kamma of Meditation

Clearing Programs

Meditation is a deeply transformative activity. This may sound strange, as meditation doesn't look that active: it often centres on sitting still, and within that, in silence. And as for doing anything with the mind... all that it apparently entails is a few seemingly inconsequential things like bringing attention onto the sensations associated with breathing; or, maybe witnessing thoughts as they pass through. Meditation doesn't seem to be a very significant process at all. Beginners ask: 'What am I supposed to be doing while I sit here? What am I supposed to do with my mind to make it better... what should I think about?' In fact, one point about meditation is that it's about moderating that 'doing' energy; and consequently being more receptive.

The teaching is that the more we moderate our energy in this way, the more we're going to arrive at a resultant brightness, confidence and clarity. Then restlessness, worry, and impulses to distract ourselves don't arise. And because of this, meditation can generate far-reaching effects in our life: we get to enjoy and value stillness and simplicity, and that inclines us towards wanting less and letting go.

Meditation centres around two functions. The first is a kind of healing, a tonic. It's called 'calming' (*samatha*): the settling and easing of bodily and mental energies. The

second function is ‘insight’ (*vipassana*) which is more a matter of looking into the body/mind that has become calm, and taking in how things really are. The two functions work together: as you settle down your attention gets clearer, and as you see things more clearly, there’s less agitation, confusion or things to fix. And where the two processes conclude is in guiding the mind – or rather the moods, attitudes and memories that get us going – to a place of resolution. Meditation is about action that leads to the end of action.

Programming: body, mind and rationality

We begin meditation practice by extending a steady awareness over the body while it is sitting, walking, standing, reclining... and in its ongoing process of breathing in and out. We put aside the more temporary issues and circumstances, and we attend to our body-mind system.

What becomes clear with introspection is how dynamic this system is: the body’s sensations throb and change, and its energies flush and flow. On the mental domain, moods swing, thoughts race and spark off memories, plans – which mean we’re hardly ever completely with what we’re doing now. What gets bundled together as ‘my body’ and ‘my mind’ is really an ongoing dynamic of sensations, moods and impulses that slow down, speed up, and change all the time. Bodily intelligence gives us a sense of location – but we’re only with that for necessary moments, because the emotional intelligence is meanwhile telling us how we are, and the rational faculty is telling us what we should or can’t do. These intelligences interact – moods and thoughts send flushes or even shocks into the body’s energy-system, and vice versa. Sometimes a burst of irritation or fear will cause some tightening, or the notion of having lots of things

to do generates a spin in which we lose awareness of the body. And although this stuff seems to be ‘me,’ it has no lasting substance. The substantiality is just created by the ongoing blur and interplay of bodily and mental energies, like the apparently solid disk that is created by the blades of a spinning fan.

These interplaying energies are our bodily, mental/emotional and rational programs (*sankhara*). Programs are coded instructions that we associate with computer software. But they’re not just a modern invention. Far from it. The capacity to reason and use logic is a program. And just as our rational mind gets programmed to formulate plans and reasons, the affective mind is programmed to be affected by feelings and impressions, and to formulate impulses and responses. The body is also programmed in how it functions, and in generating and circulating energy around breathing in and out. These are the functional programs that are established by the life-force (*ayusankhara*).

On these elementary bases more complex programs, further *sankhara*, get built. That is: the *sankhara* of thinking gets programmed into particular attitudes and ways of thinking; and our emotional program of liking and disliking gets fine-tuned to a range of responses. Out of the ongoing nature of all that patterning, another level of program interprets all that as ‘me,’ ‘mine’ my self.’ That interpretation then creates a centre for subjective bias, inclination and aversion that gives rise to complex behaviour. All of these behaviours, patterns and programs, bound up with survival, biases and stress are called ‘*sankhara*.’

The *sankhara* programs are both active – in which intention, the urge to do, gets the process going – and resultant, in that

once established, those programs become each individual's normal patterns of thinking, emotionally responding, and their normal sense of body energy. Thus *sankhara* program our behaviour, and are the carriers of kamma.

To use an analogy: if you clear a path through undergrowth, a pattern has been created that has the resultant tendency to encourage others to walk that way. Follow that path enough times and you've got a highway, an established program. Like cars on a road, soon there's a lot of traffic going down that road that don't go any other way. Similarly in life, as a result of attitudes and biases, our thinking and acting follow a habitual track. If we have always reacted in a certain way – say to dogs or crowds or to not getting what we want – then that reaction gets fixed as a real and unalterable fact that 'dogs are horrible,' or that we have a problem with dogs. Our emotions don't go any other way as far as dogs are concerned; that's the program around canines. As this program gets set, the impression gets established that 'I have' those attitudes and behaviours. Furthermore, if that program gets really locked, it gives rise to the assumption 'this is me, and I can't, or won't, change.' That resultant pattern, that self-view, becomes an identity. And that identity is an enormously significant piece of programming. It becomes the basis for further action – say I avoid dogs; or I get tense if I'm in the same room as one. And that's just a tiny piece of 'me.' Therefore at a range of levels, patterns and program are the medium for the actions and the effects that characterise us: 'this is me, this is my way, and I stand on this.'

The aim of meditation, in fact of all Dhamma-practice, is to get free from programs and from encoding new ones – that's the program of meditation! As the paradox suggests, practice entails using the mind in particular ways to counteract negative

programs, generate more skilful ones, and to see through and uproot ones that are based on ignorance. The support of meditation is that as it calms the surface *sankhara* of thoughts and emotions, underlying biases, hankering, resistance and confusion, get revealed. With further steadying and relinquishment of bias, the mind can come to rest and purity. That's the practice. However it's a deep process: some of these afflictive programs are latent rather than active, and rather like seeds in dry soil, they only sprout when the rain falls. When our inner system is warm and sunny, it may seem that we don't have any tendencies to ill-will or sense-desire, but it may well be the case that they're lying dormant. Therefore to really be of benefit, meditation is something you undertake as a process, to expose and resolve the patterning come rain, come shine....



The meditative process has to work through three programs: body, thought/speech and heart.¹² The crucial program is *citta-sankhara*, which occurs with *citta* – the mind as ‘heart.’ This mind is the affective sense which experiences meaning and feelings, and produces responses and attitudes. Because of *citta*, because we're sensitive, we interpret and derive meaning; we're moved in terms of happiness or sadness. Then from the sense of enjoyment or disappointment (and so on) with how we've been moved, more deliberate purposes get formulated – we decide to act on a thought or impulse. And so there is fresh kamma. And it leaves resultant patterns: we favour and develop tastes that become ‘my style, my attitudes, my take on things.’ The habitual nature of all this means that we see situations according to how we're accustomed to seeing them and respond to them in standardised ways. Then it appears that ‘this kind of thing always makes me feel like this.’ It really does make ‘me,’ doesn't it? The sense of ‘I am’

comes up very powerfully when our feelings are triggered. We don't notice or penetrate the triggering that moves us into what is sometimes painful, sometimes pleasant, but generally familiar emotional territory. It's familiar because it's a pattern and a program, often with a recognizable self as independent or victimised or fun-loving configured at the centre of it. And as self gets patterned in there, we act in accordance with its program, get controlled (and sometimes overwhelmed) by its moods and impulses. There's a blur... a speeding up, a reaction, and something has been said or done from that bias. Our lives swerve accordingly through assumptions, subjective bias, and impulses that some mindful recollection would have let pass. What underpins this running on automatic is the underlying bias of ignorance (*avijja*), the programming that is most fundamental to our suffering and stress.

Ignorance is blinding, so we don't see it. However, we may acknowledge the tendency to handle or pre-judge situations through biased perceptions: 'my take on how you should be;' 'the problem with women is....' And then it becomes 'the problem with me is....' But when an analysis and view-point precedes, or even replaces, the occasion that it should be the result of, something's got to be wrong: we're not actually fully with what's in front of us; we're in a program talking to our formulated perceptions and impressions. Yet we love these fabricated attitudes, they cut out the awkward process of being with things afresh – and they are handy. They're old kamma, stored up as *citta-sankhara*.

Even if our attitude is one of sidelining or suppressing our emotions – that too is a pattern and a program. And so is delighting in and affirming the emotions as, 'this is true and real.' Thus, without apparently doing much at all, there is mental kamma. It can be good, or bad, or mixed, but it

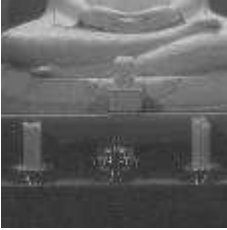
forms a mental standpoint out of moment-by-moment resonances. And through this we feel preoccupied; very busy being ‘me.’

The program for verbal kamma, *vaci-sankhara*, formulates thoughts and speech. It operates through a two-fold process. Firstly, the rational mind scans for a sensory impression or a heart-impression and names it: ‘cow,’ ‘bell.’ This is ‘bringing to mind’ or ‘directed thought,’ *vitakka*. In tandem with that, it checks out how that concept really fits; it fine-tunes or evaluates, and may give rise to further concepts: ‘the cow looks sick/angry.’ This is evaluation, *vicara*. The whole dynamic is powered by an impulse to define, be clear, and plan, but when the program becomes compulsive, the mind gets crowded with feedback loops of conceiving and evaluating, planning and pondering.

We might be an incessant thinker or a worrying thinker, or someone who is pleased by thinking, who enjoys the ability to generate ideas. Or our thinking might go in spurts, moving backwards and forwards, confused, ragged and uncomfortable; thinking about how to stop thinking. We can get restless, absorbed in our own inner chatter and not see things directly as they are. So the verbal programs affect the mind: we get pleased with, fascinated or depressed by our thoughts and capacity to think. Hence verbal kamma feeds mental kamma, and becomes a source for action.

Finally, the program for bodily kamma is *kaya-sankhara*, the flow of body-energy around breathing. Because of breathing, the body, energized or in rest state, is a dynamic process. And its vitality (or lack of it) pleases, fascinates (or disappoints) us. So this process affects the mind. Therefore the crucial program, the one everything feeds back to, is *citta-sankhara*. Furthermore, it is through its

interpretations and responses that fresh kamma gets generated. It also carries the underlying bias of ignorance, that self-view. Therefore for clarity and release we work on



the patterning and programs of the mind by using two meditative programs – *samatha* and *vipassana*. With *samatha* we calm and steady the entire system – through clearing and directing the thought-faculty, brightening and steadying the bodily energy, and gentling the heart. And as we do this, we review the *sankhara*

programs with insight: when I interpret this thought or energy as me or mine, does that lead to tension and stress? And: how does this mood get sensed as mine? The aim of insight is specifically to clear the self-view, its biases, and the holding on, defending and needing that comes with that.

Working with programming in meditation

How we attend, and what we notice, affects us – that’s the basic *citta* program. So it’s important to get the right quality of heart involved with the practice of meditation, to give yourself the time to approach your experience with friendliness. Take the time to notice the feeling of space around your body; time to dwell in that and sit in that. Make it so that there’s nothing you have to be or develop or fix right now. Take the time to be present and deepen into simple moment-by-moment attitudes of well-wishing: ‘May I be well,’ ‘May others be well.’

All that affects intention, which is the leader in the programming process. Now, when the habit of your working life is to hurry up, get things done, fix things and get results, coming out of that kind of intention is a major shift. For many people the volitional energy, particularly through the

thinking mind, is hugely overwrought. Our minds race, and there's the anxiety to get it right. It's a whole attitude towards life: 'Life is a struggle. You've got to work hard. Get out there and make it work for you.' Notions such as these give a driven quality to our lives. This is very much the mind-set of the modern world.

But if we are too tight we don't clear anything, and if we are too loose we don't clear anything. Somewhere in the middle is the best course, that of mindful attention. Grant yourself all the time in the world to attune simply and calmly, to whatever is the most stable pattern of physical sensations occurring as your body is sitting still: the pressure of your body against what is sitting on, the sense of the upright posture, and maybe the flow of an out-breath. With this, we check our attitudes and our intention. We move from 'I've got to get it right' to 'Let's just take this a moment at a time.' We adjust the mode and attitude of attention to suit what makes the mind workable, fluid, interested – even playful. We pick up a pattern that can be a supportive theme from the heart.

When we work with verbal/rational programs in meditation, we train the mind to be aware of how we think and what the results of that are. We train the thinking mind to do what's relevant and sufficient: to assist attention and to deconstruct the complexities of speculative or analytical thought. Thus one simply notices, 'this is breathing in,' 'this is breathing out,' 'this is walking.' And evaluates: 'this sensation is soft,' 'this breath is long.' We don't always have to make a verbal note, but at least we point our attention. It's as if we're defining what we're experiencing in a very moment-to-moment way: 'The body is this. It feels like this.' We know the warmth of it, the solidity of it, the pressures of it, and so on.

To work with *kaya-sankhara* we refer to the bodily energy. We can feel very charged up, and pleased by its brightness or its vigour, or fed-up with its dullness or imbalances, its hormonal changes, its sexual energies, and all the things that give a feeling of being in this body. How this body is directly experienced, and how I sense myself in this body, is the area of *kaya-sankhara*. It's the whole formative, active, impulsive experience of body, not a thing we can see with the eye; it's not meat and bones. So, instead of its outward appearance, we attune to the body's pressures and flushes, weight, and warmth. Referring to the body in such ways helps you to be aware of how the body is affected and how to bring its sensitivity into play. And we can benefit from the grounding effect of the body.

It's worth taking the time to steady the body in the sitting position for meditation; to set the body upright and relax what is tight. That means tuning in to how the body is right now; and finding out how best it sits in order to maintain alertness without stress. It can take some time to find an even balance because of habitual bad posture or residual tension in the body. Practise finding that balance also when you are standing and walking. Keep referring to two bases: the spine – try to sit, stand and walk in a way that brings the whole spine into alignment, from the top of the head to the tail, as if you were hanging upside down. Aim for a balance which creates the least stress. Secondly, let your body sense the space around it. This helps to get the front of the body to relax. If you get lost in thought, or feel uncomfortable, just keep coming back to these two reference points.

Relationships between body, speech and mind

How we hold the body has a deeper significance than just getting comfortable. Although kamma is generated

through the *citta*, through attitudes and emotions, the body provides the energy for that. It's difficult to keep a happy meditation practice going if your body energy is out of whack. It's also difficult to stay upset if your body energy feels relaxed and bright: depression doesn't linger. Whereas, if your body energy feels drab, sinking and erratic, then quite quickly that conduces to the emotive tone of depression and apathy. If your body energy is racing and pushy, then it makes your heart feel jumpy. Body and mind are very much interconnected.

On the other hand, if your heart is passionate or forceful, then your body gets signals to give you more energy, so your nervous system starts to rev up. The body gets that signal from the *citta* – 'more energy, more energy, more energy' – so you get tensed up to 'action stations.' Just notice how much nervous energy you can use up getting emotionally worked up about things. Notice how draining that can be. Train yourself to find a good balance of resolve and sensitivity that means that you're not sustaining ideals or imperatives in ways that you can't back up in terms of the body's energy and capacity. 'Sitting here until I realise complete enlightenment' is more likely to rupture your knee ligaments and stir up conflict with thoughts and moods than achieve the desired result.

However, we can steady the affective mind by attuning it to the simple rhythms of the body's breathing. We can give it a place that is comforting and intimate, so that it doesn't have to grab or rush around. We can breathe through our moods and find out where they are held in the body – tight chest, stiff diaphragm, closed throat.... Spreading attention there in a massaging way gives the *citta* a good place to stay where it can do skilful work and feel pleased with that. Then the interconnection works in a positive way, and you can empty the heart's

stress by holding it in the flow of bodily energy. Connecting to the body in this way is skilful kamma, because when we get in touch with the body's energies and rhythms, the whole of the nervous system gets toned up and massaged by contact that is simple and steady.

Verbal and bodily patterning are also related. The Buddha said that too much thinking tires the body.¹³ Thinking affects the nervous system. Often people are frazzled by an overload of verbalisation – office work can be exhausting, and if one can't adjust this energy to a lower frequency, the system burns out through nervous stress. Bad kamma: not through deliberate bad intentions, but through neglect of the system that's operating one's life. So attend to the energy of speech and thought: it affects everything.

For example, if you think you should stop thinking... you struggle. But in noticing the energetic effect that thinking has, the speed or the contraction, there is a stepping back... and if you bring that more spacious perspective to bear on the energy that drives the thought, your mind settles, and you get an insight into the emotional under-pinning of that thought. Whether you're eager, running on will-power, or anxiety... whatever. Once you reveal that, you can consider how relevant or helpful that emotional format is. That helps thoughts and moods to find resolution: they may firm up, or dissolve, in a steady and insightful way. So you refer to the emotional energy to review and release the patterns of thought, and the body to review and release the emotions. In this way, meditation discharges tension. And above all, you learn to relate to your mind with clarity and empathy.

Breath in meditation

In the practice of mindfulness of breathing (*anapanasati*) you review and release programs to realise freedom, which we could call 'the Unprogrammed

(*asankhata*).’ Mind, speech and body are all brought into that meditative process. That is, you start with the attitude of ‘all the time in the world to just be breathing’ to ease and steady the mind. Then as you settle into your sitting, you then moderate your thought-capacity by giving its attention to breathing in and breathing out. To be clear and attentive to breathing through the period of one whole inhalation and one whole exhalation definitely reveals and unravels compulsive thought-patterns.

So how does thinking support that practice? Well, you can use a mantra such as ‘Buddho,’ thinking ‘Bud-’ as you breathe in, and getting the ‘sound’ of that syllable to extend over the entirety of that bodily process. Then the same with ‘-dho’ on the out-breath. However, you may find this verbalisation gets in the way after a while. Personally, I recommend setting up an initial thought, asking: ‘How do I know I am breathing?’ And then: ‘How is that?’ And using it just enough to sustain a focused inquiry. It doesn’t entail a lot of thinking, but there’s thoughtfulness.

We are considering something, listening to it, picking it up: ‘Where is it now?’ And noticing that we know the breathing because of a sense of swelling, tightening, and subsiding, in the chest or diaphragm. This is skilful verbal kamma, because it brightens and clarifies, as well as calms the mind. It leads to stopping the thought-patterns, not through annihilation, but through tuning in.



There are different modes of bodily patterning that can be attuned to when breathing in and out. First, one can recognize the purely physical, fleshly aspects of breathing, for example the repeated swelling of the chest or the abdomen, and the tightening and relaxing of the skin;

second, one can feel the flow of air through the nose and down the back of the throat. Third, there's the energetic effect: as you breathe in, you get a brightening effect, and as you breathe out, you get a quiet, calming effect. These are three strata of breath experience. Given time, you can discern them all.

I place some emphasis on the energetic effect because it's discernable through the whole system, at any place that suits you, and it brightens and calms the mind. However if we conceive of our body and breath in a purely physical way – breathe in, the lungs fill up, and then breathe out again – we overlook this aspect of breathing. And if you try to attend to a physical point where the energy is not apparent, it's difficult to get relaxed and comfortable. But if we just put the concept of the body to one side and ask, 'How do I experience my body right now?' we can sense the body more dynamically. We find that there are all kinds of trembles and surges and flushes and tingles and throbs going on. Also, the body is quite intelligent. It seems to know what to do. When it feels tight, and the mind gets out of the way, it loosens. When it needs to breathe in, it breathes in. It never breathes out when it needs to breathe in. It never mixes up the two; it has an intelligent system that takes care of itself. That whole process is the bodily patterning, *kaya-sankhara*; and breathing in and breathing out are right in its centre as an energetic experience.

In fact, the Buddha himself doesn't mention focusing on one point in the body, or even on the breath; but more in terms of being receptive to the whole process of breathing. He simply says: 'Know you're breathing in, and know you're breathing out.'¹⁴ He doesn't say anything about where you should focus your attention. He just encourages us to be aware of the 'in-out,' the rhythm. To me that's significant,

because rhythm has a heart effect. Every musician, every parent rocking a baby, knows that. If focusing feels tense, try just receiving the rhythm – say the slight swell in the chest, or even the belt around your waist tightening and loosening; something that keeps coming back so it is easily noted. Just be aware of the body as a pattern of repeated sensations that occur with the breathing. When you pick up the repetitive quality, you'll discern the energy, because that's the source of that flowing vitality: *kaya-sankhara*.

The training is to get simple. Give yourself whatever time you need to get really simple – this alone reverses the trends of a lifetime. And when you lose focus, don't make a problem out of it. That could turn another *citta* habit around. So if you never do more than just notice when you've drifted off, and at that point just ask, 'What's happening with breathing right now?'... and pick up whatever sensation comes to the fore connected with breathing. That makes the practice accessible. And you're probably shifting ingrained programs just by not pushing. Then, as you get lighter and simpler, the rest of the practice follows.

As your mind tunes in, you can refine the process by attuning to the full length of the breath. This gets us in touch with the ending, the release and stillness at the end of the breath; and with the complete fullness and stillness at the completion of an inhalation. This steady completion, this coming to stillness, is an aspect of bodily energy that we often miss out on in our normal way of life. But giving yourself 'all the time in the world' to attune to the breathing allows you to be with that movement to stillness. And you attune to that through being receptive to tactile impressions: which itself is an important shift of attention from the rational or visual bases that normally dominate our lives. The tactile sense is highly sensitive and respon-

sive, in a non-verbal way. Also it is intimate: when I touch something, it touches me... so it comes with trust. Breathing in and out is a reliable and pleasant process that encourages a deepening of that trust. And when one trusts, the energy relaxes, and the heart brightens. Hence, being in touch with breathing brings sensitivity and relaxation: bright kamma.

So there are somatic and emotive effects that come with this practice. One feels deeply relaxed, tender, fulfilled, refreshed. This is the experience of rapture (*piti*), a



buoyant and refreshed state, and ease (*sukha*). These carry the sense of being in the flow with something. It's not just that one is doing good, but that good things are happening – and as we pick up the sense of that, the *citta* and the body calm, the breathing gets softer and the combined effects permeate the entire

system. The thinking mind, the heart, and the body come together, they begin to be unified, and the unification is both bright and still. That's 'right concentration' (*samadhi*).

The factors of samadhi

Samadhi is much more than the concentration that we might develop for solving problems, or when being absorbed into a thrilling entertainment. These pursuits work by flooding rather than training attention: you don't develop much skill in sensitising and handling your programs when you're watching the World Cup! But as *samadhi* depends on and affects how you apply the mind, it requires overhauling how the mind operates. Focused intention needs to be developed to keep the mind interested, engaged and contained. However, if the intention is too forceful and impatient, then the mind lacks the receptivity and ability to appreciate and enjoy. Concentration

depends on modifying intention and attention: you have to learn how to encourage interest, how to appreciate, how to let go, and how to enjoy. Learning these skills alone is a good enough reason to practise.

It's helpful to bear in mind that *samadhi* depends upon five factors coming into play: bringing to mind (*vitakka*), evaluation (*vicara*), rapture, ease, and one-pointedness (*ekaggata*). Firstly, bringing to mind and evaluation: these establish a reference to the breathing and samples how it feels. That is: one primes and guides the attention with appropriate prompts such as 'How do I know I'm breathing?' 'What is it like right now?' Then one can probe subtler effects: the duration of the breathing, the immediate point of any impact and resonances in terms of feelings. You can use the thought capacity to direct attention to the way that the patterns interrelate: when a flurry of thoughts comes up, rather than think about them, ask, 'How is this in my body?' Or: 'How is this in my heart?' Ordinary discursive thinking generally brings a certain tightening into the field of bodily energy: it may feel more charged or hard-edged. There may be an increase of energy in the shoulders, the hands or the face, the 'do-it' bits of the body. There may be a slight contraction in the diaphragm, the 'brace yourself' bit of the body. But then: 'Where is the breathing now?' The breath too will be affected; often its span is reduced. So: 'What if I wait for the next out-breath, and just let that flow through the whole body?' Then let that happen.

Similarly with the heart: thinking sets up a swirl and a flurry. But rather than react to the topic of the thought, feel the briskness, the urgent tone, the bubbling or the grinding of it, and: 'What is the emotive sense of this?' Sometimes there's anxiety or the urge to get something done; or there

might be a sense of hurt beneath the complaining of the thoughts; or the giddy whirl that comes with some great idea. (Of which I seem to have many when I'm trying to meditate!) Then: 'What is the effect of this?' But rather than analyse and scold yourself for wandering off again and



'how many times...! etc.,' just pause.... You might then bring the sense of 'May I be well...' into the heart. Then: 'Why not flow with the breathing for now?' If the thoughtfulness is simple and caring, it brightens the attention and directs it towards the subtle well-being that is the calm of the body and the mind.

This is rapture and ease, the second pair of factors of *samadhi*. These 'feel-good' factors then bring the mind out of hankering and criticising, or being blanketed by drowsiness, or fretting, or getting trapped in doubt. They clear hindrances by smoothing out the energies of tension, unevenness, numbness that support ill-will, doubt, restlessness and craving. That's their main purpose, their medicinal effect.

One-pointedness is the last of the factors to come into play. It is a result of the mind being steered into, and enjoying, the bodily and mental energy when the system is not being thrown around by hindrances and distractions. Although the term is 'one-pointed,' it comes around through recognizing the unified ease of the whole field of bodily energy. Often attention may settle around one point in the body, say the back of the nasal passages, or the diaphragm, or wherever it feels comfortable as the imbalances, tightness, or numbness in the body's energy get cleared. But when the centring occurs with rapture, there is a radiant effect, and the breath-energy permeates

the entire body. The hard edges and stiffness of the body dissolve and the body is sensed more as an energetic field. Ease then stabilises attention within that to counteract any giddiness or apprehension. The result is that one feels held by a grounding energy: that is one-pointedness. When this develops as an enduring effect, this is the concentration known as ‘absorption’ (*jhana*).

Ending kamma through insight

Samadhi is of the nature of kamma, of cause and effect generated through programs of intention and attention in the present. It also relies upon dispositions (programs established in the past); and naturally sets up programs for the future: one inclines to simpler, and more peaceful ways of living. With all this, it’s good to remember that the ongoing purpose of meditation is liberation from old programs and from formulating new ones. *Samadhi* provides us with a temporary liberation from some kammic themes – such as sense-desire, worry, or ill-will – in the present, and it gives us a firm grounded mind, which feels bright. But *samadhi* itself is formulated.

Also, it takes time to develop *samadhi*. And meanwhile, the very notion of ‘getting *samadhi*’ can trigger off stressful formulations such as: ‘Can’t do it,’ ‘I’m a failure,’ and so on. Accordingly the learning point for both one who does, and for one who doesn’t, develop strong *samadhi*, is to handle and review the programming. ‘How much *me* is in this; how much holding on is left?’ That’s the process of insight. It’s always relevant.

Holding on, gaining, getting, losing: the formulating energy of *sankhara* – collected or uncollected, driving or drifting – is something that can be witnessed. And you can moderate it by referring the speech and the mind to the body. For

example, when a verbal exchange is getting over-heated, knowing how the body and mind are interrelated is a great help. You can attune to what's happening in the body: the palms of the hands, temples and the eyes are accessible indicators of energy. Does this energy need to be relaxed? Sometimes I find that just acknowledging and adjusting the speed of walking shifts attitudes and moods; or softening and diffusing the gaze. Or you're feeling dull or depressed: is your body fully present: chest... throat...? Perhaps giving some attention there with a kindly attitude helps the energy to brighten up and shift the mind-state.

We can notice the surge of glee or despondency, the lure of achievement, and the itch to get more. But in contemplating the moods and instincts that arise as they really are, we can focus on their patterns and programs just as that, rather than 'this is me;' 'this is mine;' 'I take my stand on this;' or even, 'I am different from this stuff.' This is the focus of insight. It's about witnessing programs: how they depend on self-views; how they arise with a contraction, a grasping; and how they lead to the creation of ideas and notions. With meditation, you contemplate the whole rigmarole of success and failure, what I am and what I will be: all this is more formulating. It's all more kamma, more 'self-view,' more stuff to get busy with. But if you see the futility of all that, you get free of the program. And that's the only way to get free of kamma.

When that point becomes clear, there's actually not a lot more to do than to keep attentive to what arises and passes through your awareness. Because when one just refers to emotional, physical and conceptual energies as programs, that doesn't support the view 'I am.' Being unsupported by that view, they come to rest. Then we can handle life without getting thrown up and down by it. We don't actually have to


The Kamma of Meditation

keep proving ourselves, defending ourselves, creating ourselves from moment to moment. Kamma can cease.

But it's like scratching an itch, or smoking a cigarette: even though you get the idea that it might be good to stop, your system won't do it unless it gets a feel for the benefits of stopping; and you feel firm enough to do so. These qualities of ease and firmness are what *samatha* provides in meditation. It opens and heals our systems, and allows clarity to go into areas and aspects of programming that often get skipped over in daily life. Then, with that calm and ease, insight allows kamma to cease.



m e d i t a t i o n



Embodying the Mind:

Sit in an upright posture, and bring awareness to the present moment experience of the body. Ask yourself, ‘How do I know I have a body?’ In other words, seek the direct experience of embodiment – the pressures, energies, pulses and vitality that signify awareness of the body. Then from that place of direct sensitivity, look for more details.

Push down a little through your tail and pelvic floor. Notice how that helps to shift the spinal column into a balance where the sacrum is straightened and the lumbar region of the back forms a springy arch. Avoid locking or straining. Use a slight downward push to form the arch, rather than force an exaggerated bow with an upward thrust of the lumbar muscles. This gives the posture its crucial foundation: it allows the body to be carried by a spring that transfers its weight down to what you’re sitting on.

Move your awareness gradually and sensitively up your spine from the tail tip through the sacrum, and the lumbar and thoracic vertebrae. Lightly stretch the body upwards from the hips. Check out the centre of the back, between the lower tips of the shoulder blades: bring this place alive by drawing it inwards towards the heart. Moving upwards, make sure that the shoulders are dropped and

relaxed, and sweep a relaxing awareness from the base of the skull down the sides of the neck and across the tops of the shoulders. Bring awareness to the neck vertebrae – that there is a sense of space between the back of the skull and the top of the neck. For this it may help if you tuck your chin in and tilt it down a fraction. Check the overall balance – that the head feels balanced on the spine, directly above the pelvis. Check that the spine feels uncramped; relax the shoulders, the jaw, and let the chest be open. Spend some time feeling into the skeletal structure, with the suggestion that all the joints, between the arms and the shoulders for example, loosen and feel open. Let the arms be long. Relax into balance.

Attend to the bodily sensations in bodily terms: for example how the weight of the body feels distributed; or the degree of vitality and inner warmth that is present. Feel for the subtle movements in the body even when it is still – pulses, throbs, and the rhythmic sensations associated with breathing in and out. Get comfortable: evaluate the bodily impressions in terms of ease. A certain pressure in one place may feel solid and grounding, in another feel tight or stiff. The energies and inner sensations moving through your body may feel agitated, or vibrant. Let go of mental interpretations as to what causes these, or any reactions as to whether they are right or wrong. Instead

spread awareness evenly over the entire body, with an intent of harmony and steadiness. Let that attitude be felt as an energy spread over the body. This will allow any tightness to relax and bring brightness to slack or dull areas.

As things come into harmony, the sensations of the breathing will become more apparent, deep and steady. You may find that not only does the breathing flow down into the abdomen, but it also sets up a subtle flush or tingle that can be felt in the face, the palms, and chest. Dwell in that and explore how it feels. It's likely that the mind will wander, but make sure, above all, that you stay with the intent of harmony and steadiness. So, when you notice that your mind has drifted, at that moment of realisation – pause. Don't react. As the mind hovers for that moment, introduce the query 'How do I know I'm breathing now?' Or, simply, 'Breathing?' Attune to whatever sense arises that tells you you're breathing, and follow the next out-breath, letting the mind rest on that out-breath. See if you can stay with that out-breath to the very last sensation and into the pause before the in-breath. Then follow the in-breath in like fashion, to the very last sensation. In this way, let the rhythm of the breathing lead the mind – rather than impose an idea of mindfulness onto the natural process of breathing.

Explore how you experience breathing in different parts of your body, beginning with the abdomen. 'How does the abdomen know breathing?' You may experience it as a

‘fluid’ swelling of sensation. Be with that for a few minutes, letting the mind take that in. Then, ‘How does the solar plexus know breathing?’ This may feel more solid, an opening and closing. Then the chest, where swelling ‘airy’ sensations predominate. Check out the throat, and the centre of the brow above the bridge of the nose. Notice how the breathing is not one mode of sensations or energies, and yet in terms of energy, the distinction between in- and out-breathing is always recognizable.

Eventually your mind will want to settle and centre itself at one point in the body – let it choose which feels the most comfortable. It may be the chest or in the upper passages of the nose for example. Then continue following and sampling the breath as before. As the mind merges into the breath-energy, spread its awareness over the entirety of the bodily sense, in the manner of suffusing or pervading. The distinct sensations of breathing may well diffuse and dissolve into that energy. Allow some trust, letting the thinking attention relax, and relying on the enjoyment of subtle energy to hold your awareness. Be present but not engaged with whatever arises.

When you wish to stop, draw your attention back to the textures of the flesh and the firmness of the skeletal structure. As you feel that grounded presence, allow your eyes to open without looking at anything in particular. Instead, let the light and forms take shape by themselves.



Whoever was reckless in the past, but is so no longer, illuminates the world like the moon freed from the clouds.

Dhammapada 172

Kamma and Memory

Clearing the Past

Do you ever remember things you wish you hadn't done? Or sometimes after coming out with a cutting remark, or catching yourself exaggerating in order to get your own way, have the sinking realisation: 'Oh-oh, lost it again!... Probably take me lifetimes to control my mind... I've got a lot of kamma...'

At some time or another, all of us have said or done things that we look back on with some regret. Or we have not done things – not said the generous, friendly thing we wish we had said, not done the noble or caring deed that we wish we had done. Then again, we may have had unpleasant things done to us. Other people may have taken advantage of us or abused us; people we trusted let us down. Perhaps the mistrust of other people is still lingering, and that may make us feel withdrawn and isolated. So there can be these unpleasant 'perceptions' or 'felt meanings' in the mind that lessen our self-respect and our confidence in doing things or in being with others. These felt meanings can form patterns of behaviour or life-statements of who we are: the victim, the one who gets left out, the flawed, unloved or impure. And those patterns can keep weaving through and informing different scenarios: it's like the actors and backdrops change, but the tones of mistrust or alienation keep resounding in our hearts.

Old kamma doesn't die

This is *vipaka*, 'old kamma.' And it doesn't die, not without some assistance. But not all of it is a result of actions that you've done. The most basic old kamma is that of being born; of inheriting consciousness (*viññana*). Consciousness is what internalises sense experience, it gives rise to the sense 'this is happening to me.' A chicken or a lizard gets that; it's the result of being born with consciousness. That is, some sense-object is in the presence of a functioning sense-organ, and with that 'disturbance contact' (*patigha-phassa*), consciousness arises. Then mental consciousness forms 'perception,' an impression of what has been seen and so on. That's the way experience is internalised: where-ever mental consciousness takes place, there is an impression or 'designation contact.'¹⁵ We're affected by and respond to this impression.

'Contact' is the act of registering experience. Now take the case when we're intensely focused on reading a book or watching a movie: awareness of our bodies, of the pressure of the chair, and maybe even a minor ache or pain, disappears. The mind's attention is absorbed in seeing and processing the seen, so the tactile impressions of the chair, and of sitting here, don't register an internal impression.¹⁶ In such a case, contact can't be said to have occurred. Contact depends on where the attention is.

When we do experience contact, there's a shift – something resonates. What occurs is that certain patterns of energy in the bodily, conceptual or emotive domains respond. So to be conscious of something entails an energetic shift – we focus, light up, relax, or retract; we are moved. The way in which we are moved, dependent on attention and contact, forms programs and patterning (*sankhara*) such as arousal, relaxation or defence. Consciousness is bound up with these; it is programmed to form and retain further programs

and patterns. And these carry intention in the forms of momentary response, or of sustained purpose. The most fundamental intention is to ascertain whether a sight, sound, touch etc. is an indication of threat or enjoyment. This, at a very basic level, is what programs our lives: we seek the agreeable, and seek to avoid the disagreeable.

The nature of intention also affects attention: when a thief looks at a saint, he notices the saint's pockets. And the intention is steered by what our minds have designated as offering pleasure (such as acquiring some money) or of course displeasure. But, as in the above example, it's not the tactile sensation of holding coins in the hand that is pleasing, but what that means. So the 'felt meaning' of an experience – this 'heart-impression,' or 'designation contact' – is the most important aspect of contact. Through these felt meanings, we cognize, we learn the meaning of things: smile means friendly, this person is trustworthy etc. Then we 'recognize' those signs when we come across them or others like them. This is how felt meanings, appetites and needs of the heart have their effect on what gets looked out for and what gets recorded. Then what grabs the mind's attention are signs that represent those pleasant or unpleasant meanings. These signs become reference points for how we'll feel good or not in the present. In the above case, this means that the thief weighs up his opportunity, then, when the saint's attention is elsewhere, picks the pocket. In other words, designation-contact depends on the patterning, the old kamma, and is a basis for action, fresh kamma.



This patterning process is more than a mental one. The body also 'learns' and even 'remembers.' For example, it

has learnt how to stand up and maintain balance. It knows what sensations, what pressures in the feet etc. indicate that it is firmly balanced. Also this bodily intelligence provides us with flight, freeze, and fight reflexes. When we are in an argument, the body tightens up; a loud noise may cause us to 'jump;' a 'warm' smile trigger off a flutter in the pulse, and so on. Body and mind-base are essentially not separate, and at an instinctive reflex level, bodily-intelligence will override the rational. This is important to bear in mind, because even when a memory, or the result of kamma, is reasoned with and dismissed, forgotten, or suppressed, there can still be a bodily and emotive memory of significant events; and like any other memory that can arise at an unexpected time.

What we loosely call 'memory' then, is the reference of consciousness to established patterns. And when memory takes place it acts as a sudden call: 'This is what happened and you in the present are part of that.' This memory may be something you bring around deliberately, or it can be an involuntary occurrence such as emotionally-charged flash-backs or traumas with their sudden shifts in bodily energy. Based on this triggering of old patterns I assess a current situation in terms of my past and determine what to do. I assess a current situation according to how it resembles one in the past; and that helps me to determine what to do.

Although it's neutral at times, the memory process is emotive and is sometimes intensely evocative. If an event has emotionally moved us in the past, the heart-impression is strong. Then with the memory, the emotion is brought up. It is involuntary, and it can be scary when the present suddenly becomes an intense re-living of the emotional 'past:' you were talking to someone, the conversation took a few turns and suddenly you were back arguing with your father, or feeling rejected by a loved one... again. This re-

living of past events is the case even when we didn't do anything, but were the recipients of other people's bad or good actions. Why? Because retaining an emotional affect as a heart-impression, and then recycling it, is the program of the affective mind or 'heart.' That's the 'old kamma' of having an affective mind. And heart-impressions, whether they are of delight or fear, get referred to as 'me,' 'mine;' 'my self.'

So our sense of self is not just generated by how we've acted, it also arises through an instinctive acceptance and re-enactment of what we've been told we are; or what we've 'felt' we are. Our personality keeps evolving in that way. And so, unless we cultivate letting go of old patterns, and give up accepting heart-impressions as unbiased truth and 'my self,' the issues of the past will be the basis for further kamma.

Reaping – and clearing – results from the past

Afflictive patterns such as depression, anxiety, resentment and guilt act as a dead weight on the potential of the mind. So when the memory process brings these up, we need to clear them – for other people's welfare as well as our own. This process of clearing as outlined by the Buddha is twofold: first to acknowledge the results of action, and to determine not to act in such ways again; and secondly to spread inclinations of good will through the whole system and towards anyone else connected to the action.

So the past doesn't go away by itself. When you commit an unwholesome deed, it leaves a strong and lingering impression. Then when there is a memory, it brings up the mood and image of that action. It seems as if the past comes flooding back; but how could it do that if it's really past? What has actually happened is that the past event has laid down a *sankhara* pattern, a kind of track in the current

of the mind. Then a program in the present sends mental energy down that track and the past ‘comes back.’ That’s the way the mind is: the patterns and programs of *sankhara*, good and bad, are the means through which the mind operates. They formulate our self-image, and they can bring the past to the surface independently of one’s wishes. That’s how the past, and who we see ourselves as being, stays with us.

Any form of abuse – physical, verbal, psychological – of others or of oneself, closes down or perverts the mind’s sensitivity. And all that leaves its track as ‘memory,’ or *vipaka*. Even unskilful thoughts have that effect; particularly



as we can do them many times more than we can physical deeds. If we allow the mind to repeatedly formulate deceit, jealousy, or even guilt, that creates a track down which the emotional and psychological energies will run. It’s likely that sooner or later physical or verbal actions will move down that track, but even without that, attitudes and ways of thought will occur

that have strong effects on the mind. People can harbour grudges, and recite the wrongs that have been done to them for years after the event. And they can also feel chronic guilt and despondency over the actions they have done; or be running programs of self-disparagement and lack of worth over the actions and attitudes that they have been the recipients of. Worse still: when it’s bound up with a self-view, we don’t notice it as such. It’s so ingrained that it becomes normal – that inadequate self is who I am. And that self-view is then the basic program that affects every action of our lives.

So, if what I notice in the present, what I remember of the past, what I imagine about the future, and even how I

conceive myself, are not unvarnished truth but dependent on kamma... what do I do to get clear of living out old kamma with its habits and biases?

The Buddha defines kamma as intention. That is: intention doesn't create kamma; intention – 'impulse energy' – that in itself is kamma. Kamma is not some remote faceless deity, or automatic system that adds up the good you've done, subtracts all the bad you've done from that sum and then comes out with a result. Kamma is the flush in our nervous systems, the swell of brightness in the heart, or the hardening of the gaze. One of the first things we find out through Dhamma-practice is the kind of potential we're carrying in these *sankhara*; and the second is that we don't have to act upon it or react to it. And finally, that it is through accessing the pattern of our skilful kamma that we begin to clear the past.

What needs to be cleared occurs on three levels: there are active patterns, the programs that are running; there are involuntary tendencies, programs that lie dormant but came to the surface under stress, or as the mind unfolds in meditation; and finally there's the self-view. In all cases, the method entails accessing the patterns and programs of old kamma in the mind, and revealing their track. So the good news is that because kamma moves along these tracks, clearing the past is not a matter of going through every specific act of wrongdoing we've done – it's more a case of straightening, uprooting, or leaving, the track.

At the first most obvious level, that of acknowledging actions and of changing how we're going to act in the future, we own up to any unskilful deed we feel we've done, and reflect on the underlying pattern. It's not enough to try and change without looking into how it is that we act, and what tendencies move us. But if we do, then it's likely that we'll start to

reveal the underlying tendencies – sometimes it's just that tendency of ignorance that makes us careless, or inconsiderate of how we affect others. At any rate, when we look into that, and comprehend that that pattern doesn't feel good and doesn't go anywhere good, we can deeply intend, or vow, to refrain from acting in such ways in the future. And then the general theme of practice is to spread loving-kindness (*metta*), compassion (*karuna*), appreciative joy (*mudita*), and equanimity (*upekkha*) with regard to other beings we feel we may have affected.

It's also the case that we should cultivate the same qualities towards our own hearts when they have become infected with violence or deceitfulness and so on. The practice covers both ourselves and others, because in the heart, 'self and other' are interdependent. That is, our personality is established and moulded dependent on whom we're interacting with. This is obviously the case when we're in the presence of people who have been either hostile or welcoming towards us: we may feel and act like a victim or like an old friend. So when we recollect an unskillful deed we've done towards another, we also bring to mind the insensitive personality we may have been at that time. And when we 'remember' ourselves as the object of others' abuse or lack of empathy, we do much the same. We have to take the whole scenario of who we feel we've been, and who we feel the other has been, and suffuse the entirety with good will.

The Buddha uses the simile of someone blowing on a conch to describe the sending forth of kindness, or compassion, or appreciative joy, or equanimity – one or all of them.¹⁷ Collectively, they're called 'the measureless intent' because their sound blows without restriction in all directions: to others as to oneself; to the heart that acted on those energies and to any others who have been affected by them.

Exactly what ‘tune’ one plays is something that arises dependent on the distortion one is healing. There are pains that bring up the awareness of the basic need for the nourishing quality of kindness; whereas sometimes the awareness of how volatile and vulnerable we all are calls forth compassion, the protective energy. Sometimes it’s the case whereby we recognize the harm that comes from neglecting what is good in ourselves and others, or even through taking others for granted. Then the sense in appreciating goodness, however obscured, can arise. It’s important to not neglect this one – the stream of good deeds that you did do, the kind words that just seemed natural, but were the right thing at the right time. It’s important not to overlook it, because we so often do.

Equanimity holds the empathic space and allows things to unfold. It doesn’t ask for results, but attunes to how things are right now. It is where the issue of kamma comes to an end, because it is imbued with the understanding that ultimately no-one ‘did’ anything. There was patterning based on previous actions and on what each person has had done to them. In the world in general, there’s a huge inheritance of abusive patterns based upon violence and deprivation – and who knows where all that began. But, instead of blaming and agonizing, we can regard our own and other people’s actions in terms of cause and effect. That regard is equanimity, the most reliable base for action.

The great heart

In the course of working on kammic patterning, we need to develop the ‘measureless intent,’ as well as other strengths to help us both with involuntary tendencies, and with self-view – the way we habitually regard ourselves. This means developing great heart, and deep insight.

The two developments are based on awareness of patterning. This is what occurs through meditation. You may acknowl-

edge a negative pattern such as residual tension, irritability, a sense of inadequacy or heaviness in the heart. Negative moods may arise; the mind may feel cramped and jaded; and memories, mood-tones and flash-backs may rise up with poignant intensity. That gives us an unpleasant weight, a sense of being someone who is carrying years of history and accumulated habits.... The pattern feels like a huge lot of baggage – how to put it down? How much more is there? Also if we've picked up some baggage just through being alive, the likelihood is that we'll go on picking up more! So how to drop the weight and stickiness of being alive?

Well if I'm averse to it, that aversion merely adds to the weight. If I sustain the view that the way I am is because of what others have or haven't done to me, and resign myself to that – that resignation locks rather than releases the old patterns. Telling myself to snap out of it doesn't clear anything. If I ignore the nature of my patterning by absorbing into sights and sounds, tastes and ideas in the present, then I may be unaware of it for a while, but when the music stops... it's back to me again with my mood swings and jaded self-image. Meanwhile the actions that I have undertaken to get away from myself, and the act of negligence and distraction – all that kamma has its effects.

Dropping this weight comes around through meeting patterns with great heart.¹⁸ Which entails cultivating a strong current of intent. We do this by cultivating the three streams of patterning – body, heart/mind and thought/speech. So we leave the negative track and establish a track based on clarity and goodness.

When you do this in meditation, mindfulness of breathing can spread and refine any positive effect through the entire nervous system. Then mindfulness of breathing can spread

and refine that positive effect through the entire nervous system. When the mind spins out, you can direct it back through a simple thought, asking, ‘Where am I now?’ or ‘Where is my breathing in this?’ Then the energetic form of the negative pattern – its hindering tightness, or push – gradually dissolves into the stream of steady presence. This is how *samadhi* – concentration – gets developed. It embeds the emotive/impulsive base of the mind in deeper currents than that of sense-contact and discursive thought, so that a sense of firm ease acts as a keel to check memories and moods from overwhelming the mind. This process makes the mind great in terms of its energetic boundaries and capacity: you have some gravity that isn’t just internal tension.

In tandem with this, you develop great heart through attending to the heart, with measureless intent. From this angle, if sorrow or agitation or fear well up, rather than re-enact old habits of feeling bereft, trying to figure out a solution, or analysing the problem, you ask: ‘How am I with this, now?’ The aim is not to shift away from the topic, but to a non-involved view of the topic; to allow mindful awareness to get underneath the story to the emotion. There may be a numb, tense or agitated emotional state along with tension in the chest or palpitations in the heart. Don’t go into that; instead, find a place in your body where you sense ease or steadiness, and spread awareness from that place to the edges of the difficult area. Be at a place where your heart-sense can be onlooking and compassionate, being with but not in the feeling. If you sustain that empathy and steadiness, the great heart develops. It has a positive current which can straighten, uplift, and refresh the body and mind; and you just sit in that and bathe and bathe the afflicted places until



the system comes into balance and feels fresh. This is basic sanity. If you go into a world of random cause and effect when you're ill at ease, tense or depressed, you're leaving yourself wide open to laying down some unskilful kamma. But with the great heart we don't get knocked about, defensive, or reactive.

Unseating the Inner Tyrant

Normally, as a negative mood arises, it catches hold and infects the whole mind – we become that mood, with its characteristic form. This is the big weakness of the undeveloped mind – it makes how I feel into who I am. There's a grasp, a contraction, and we get pulled into the story, get mesmerised by it and rehash it time and time again. We fixate on the details of 'she said this five years ago and then yesterday she did this;' or we go into 'I'm always anxious and am never going to make it' again. But when there is great heart, it can meet that piece of narrative without being sucked into it. And from there a skilful response, rather than an involvement or a reaction, can occur.

This is vital, because trying to change your negative mind-state more directly isn't always the remedy. Because it's not always your kamma in the first place. You may be carrying psychological patterns that are not the result of what you've done, but of what you've had done to you, or of how you've been brought up. If you were bullied at school, or have been discriminated against because of ethnic background or gender, the only thing you may well have done is take on the negative kamma of other people. In that case what you need to do is not just to address the states of insecurity or the sense of intimidation or resentment, but more fundamentally, the view that this kammic patterning is who I am. If you address the way that you've taken it on, and continue to hold it as an aspect of your identity, the mind-state falls away by itself.

Any review of psychological patterns tends to address the 'Inner Tyrant.' You've probably met this one: it is the partner of the afflicted self-view. The Tyrant is the nagging voice that will always demand you achieve impossible standards of perfection, never offers congratulation or appreciation, exaggerates short-comings, indicts you with total responsibility for events that you may have been only part of; and based on this delivers indifference, scolding and punishment. Sometimes the Tyrant offers just a cold condescending self-regard. Sometimes the Tyrant keeps urging you to do more, to forgive others, to pull yourself together and to take responsibility – advice which may have its place, but is completely inappropriate when it comes to shifting self-view. It just entrenches the belief that this stuff is what I am. That is the weight, the weight of patterns and programs which we're trying to shift. And it comes from the involuntary action of adopting psychological patterns as myself. Stupid, but we all do it (there's always the belief that I'll find one that is satisfying, and fits!).

The Tyrant's actions, which urge you to adopt punishing programs, come from the loss of empathy. The scenarios are exaggerated, the verdicts severe, the punishments only make matters worse and heal nothing – but the Tyrant can't operate any other way. The Tyrant is trapped; it is a piece of stuck *vipaka*. We're not born with that, but develop it because of a confused non-empathic human environment. The social need to compete with others and to avoid being second-rate, doesn't allow for having empathy with what we or others are actually experiencing. Under this pressure, the mind splits into how I'm feeling and what I'm supposed to be. Thus empathy and wholeness get jettisoned in favour of achievement and performance. The social pressure gets held in place by being internalised as two 'selves:' the 'Inner Tyrant' forms as the agent of the pressure, and its victim is 'Little Me.'

As long as we keep being Little Me, the victim, we support the fragmentation and of course the Tyrant. Sometimes Little Me rebels, or seeks affirmation in order to become Big Me. And so the Tyrant has made us create another self-image – which can't sustain itself without continual ego-food. So we have to drop the image-making tendency and instead restore the empathic patterns of a balanced mind. And this is through the skilful kamma of being with, and feeling with, the energy and the feel of a thought or a mood or a pattern rather than following or believing it. This is why we need great heart.

It's particularly important to cultivate appreciative joy. When the heart is great in that sense, it can hold the Tyrant in check, and scan past his/her narratives to a deeper sense of its own healthy awareness. It can bring to mind the sense that 'I am greater than this Tyrant, I don't own them any favours, I don't need this stuff.' 'I value just being here, even with my bleakness or insecurity. I can be with that, and have compassion for that, and I don't even have to change it.' Because just to abide in compassionate awareness, not fixing, not blaming, and not changing anything, this itself is good. You are not acting from a contracted needy Little Me. And then transformation can occur. You stop being Little Me, you step out of its stories, and you can listen to the Tyrant's ranting and grumbling with mindfulness, compassion – and eventually humour.

This way of deconstructing the Tyrant is completed by inhabiting him/her. That is, having established great heart to be able to witness the complaining and hardness, you shift to experiencing the Tyrant programs from first-person perspective. Rather than have the Tyrant as referring to you, you feel into, and inhabit the program. Really listen to the Tyrant's voice – and imagine what he/she looks like. Imagine what it would feel like to be that Tyrant. Then adopting the Tyrant's point of view, feel out what you want. You hate all these silly moods and weaknesses? Fine. Be with and feel with that energy.

You want to control everyone and everything? Fine. Be with and feel with that, feel its energy in your body – until there is an empathy that suffuses the whole program. With this, ‘Little Me’ fades out, and as it does so, the objects of the Tyrant’s wishes and finally the Tyrant itself deconstructs. Crazy as it may sound, this process brings a very deep and powerful learning into our reflexes, an experience of dropping self-forms for Dhamma. And in this what is so often needed is not to be someone with an answer, but to unify around empathy – because a loss of empathy and unity were the primary causes of the whole problematic scenario. Then, when you offer yourself a collected and empathic energy your own naturally great heart is returned to you.

View, insight and self

So to clear old kamma you have to meet it. And address it in a way that unravels its patterns. But that takes the mature awareness, the great heart.

Otherwise, as long how I feel becomes who I am, fresh kamma follows the old pattern. And based on that, a self arises: me as bright, me as needy, me as important, me as misunderstood – I get to feel bound by these personae; but fighting with them, or any other attitude that adopts these personae as true and real, doesn’t release them.

Because the notion ‘I am’ is the result, not the agent, of the kamma it’s trying to deal with. It’s a tail chasing its dog. And its wagging just creates more kamma.



This self-view is such a conjurer. Have you ever planned the ideal set-up for meditation, or rehearsed a dozen different strategies of how you’re going to deal with a situation in your life... only to find out that the flow of actuality always changes from how you expected it to be? Underpinning those plans is


the self-view that needs to know and be in control. Follow this view of who you are, and what you want and what you fear, and in trying to create a secure self in the future, you create an agitated self in the present. This is why the Buddha wouldn't affirm self. His interest was in addressing the underlying suffering and stress.

So the advice is not to mess with the self and its story, but instead apply skilful attention towards loosening the contracting energies, soothing the push of defensiveness, or brightening the dullness of resignation. It's not that the story about being stuck with a raw deal is never justified. But sometimes all you can do is to address the patterning and the self-image that they create. I know of people with cancer who have refused to go into resignation and despair and become the victim; and people who survived totalitarian regimes by never accepting the scenario of loss of freedom. That's the kind of intent that can stop the psychological patterns. And when the pattern is arrested, the afflicted self, me as victim, isn't created. This is insight-wisdom: you begin to know your many selves as not yourself; you grow dispassionate to their programs and don't feed them. And with this you don't have to keep living out the calamity of *samsara*.

Yet in another sense, here we are. With the arising of consciousness, with thinking, seeing, and feeding the kids, comes contact and with that comes the sense of 'me in here' being affected by 'that.' That sense of 'self,' the subjective impression or impulse, is a reference to the changing wave of feelings and intentions as they arise around contact. It shows us how kamma is affecting us, and how we're responding. And yes, we do need an operating system with a coherent operator. This is why the Buddha wouldn't categorically deny self: it's a locus of awareness which can be developed to carry skilful programs. And it needs to be investigated. We need to be clear and skilful in terms of that apparent self. Those energies, those

sankhara that carry the process of consciousness, perform functions that are relevant to incarnation. We have to act and otherwise relate to our everyday context. It's good to wake up each morning as more or less the same person, know the language and have a body that can operate in its environment. So yes, me again. But in knowing that any sense of self is a function of consciousness rather than an identity, we learn how to be an individual within a world of nature and other people, rather than dismiss the concerns of others, be self-obsessed or demanding. So the energies that produce a personal centre and an aim are fine, if they can be used to respond clearly to the way things are. All that really needs to be abolished is the underlying bias that searches for and forms views that make self a solid lasting entity.

View is the instigator of kamma: as you believe, so do you act. View is a magnet that attracts the energy of will and inclinations: develop a certain attitude and you can be sure that your mind will assemble a reality out of that. But if we notice how views attract energy... and how energy creates a pattern... and a mental pattern becomes a conviction... and a conviction becomes a standpoint – that's how I arise. So as long as there is the need for a standpoint, a need to be, and to prove, then that need will support a self-view. Then if there is holding to that standpoint, conflict with others, and not getting my own way, will follow in due course. But if energy can go another way, generating a pattern of groundedness, of empathy, of great heart, the view can shift. It clears with the insight that 'all this stuff, all this energy, is invoked by *sankhara*, shaped by consciousness, given meaning by perception, resonating with feeling, productive of intention, resulting in effects.... All this is changing, insubstantial, there is no self in this, and no self can be established apart from this.' We therefore act with integrity and don't hang on. And there's no stress, no weight in that.



meditation

Friendliness:

We often begin a meditation period with recollections and checking in with our general state of being. What is needed is to develop a sense of befriending oneself, establishing an attitude which is non-judgemental and interested in bringing some immediate well-being into one's life. The most immediate way to bring this around is right here, on the spot where you are, through an applied attitude.

Establish your presence in the place where you're sitting, putting other concerns to one side. Then ask yourself, 'How am I right now?' Repeat this slowly a few times and although the bodily sensations or mind-states may change, attend to the more continual overall feeling of what it's like to be yourself.

If the mind starts spinning with memories or things that you should do or be, steady the energy by following the out-breaths and in-breaths for a while. Add the suggestion that these breaths are given, calming and support your well-being. Think slowly 'May I be well' over the span of an outbreath.

Then consider: ‘What would it be like if... I was in the presence of someone or something that was regarding me with warmth?’ (You can even recollect your dog!) Introduce the thought ‘What would that be like? How would I sense that?’ and attend closely to any resonance in the heart.

Recollect any time in your life when someone was glad to see you, did you a favour, gave you some kindly attention, or enjoyed your presence. ‘How is that, now?’ Then: ‘Does my body know that?’ Attend to any drop in tension, or lift in energy – particularly in the face, and in the heart region.

Put aside more general reflections or memories of that person or that time, and return to the specific moment and how it felt for you. You may repeat this with a few people and several incidents.

When you can establish that process, linger in the heart and bodily effect and lessen the thinking accordingly. Gradually simplify and consolidate the process until you

arrive at a simple image (of warmth or light for example) or a bodily sense – of ease or joy. Sit in that, sweeping it through your body like a massage. Expand your awareness of the feel of that in terms of your overall disposition until there's no need for the thought process.

As you settle into that, breathe it into your presence. Then expand it out through the skin into the space immediately around you. You may wish to express that benevolence to particular people, or to other beings in general.

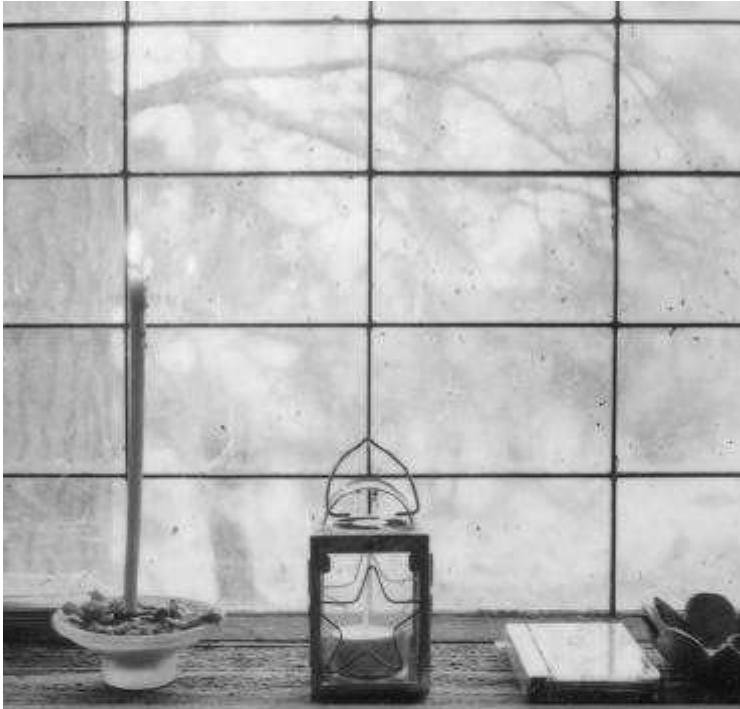
Then bring to mind someone whom you have no strong feelings for. Consider seeing them out of the context in which you normally encounter them. Imagine them enjoying themselves, or worried, or in distress. Spend some time rounding out your impression of them in a sympathetic way. 'May he/she be well.' Expand your awareness of the feel of that wish; notice how it affects your overall disposition and body tone. Enjoy feeling more empathically attuned.

Let the feeling and effect of that settle. Then consider someone you have difficulties with. Focus on an aspect of their behaviour that you don't find difficult. Consider

them out of the context in which you normally encounter them. Imagine them enjoying themselves, or worried, or in distress. Spend some time rounding out your impression of them. Feel what it's like to not feel frightened, or irritated of this person. As you sense your own relaxation, bring to mind the thought: 'May we be free from conflict.' Expand your awareness of that wish and energy.

Now it may be possible to just be with, rather than in, yourself. Explore the felt sense of who you take yourself as being, her/his moods, energies, thought-processes. And however she/he may be: 'May she/he be well. May I have no conflict with them.'

When you wish to conclude, return to the simple presence of the body – the inner core sense, and the peripheral, skin sense, settling and stabilising these before you open your eyes.



...letting go of the world is peacefulness. There is nothing that you need to hold on to and there is nothing that you need to push away.

Sutta Nipata 1098

Regarding the World

When I visited a monastery in China recently, I met an old monk who presented me with a treasured piece of his own calligraphy, a piece that summed up the Dhamma as he understood it. It comprised two ideograms on a scroll. When translated, the ideograms mean: ‘Regard the World.’ ‘Regard the World:’ there’s attention there, but non-involvement – dispassion. Yet one keeps regarding the world, not ignoring it: that implies compassion.

Interdependence

What is this world anyway? Socially, psychologically, environmentally, it’s a web in which different forces, energies and beings support and condition each other’s existence. This isn’t always as nice as it may sound. In the right combination, rain and sun support life, but there are also droughts and floods. Lions and antelopes exist in interdependence – killing and eating antelopes means the lions survive and that the numbers of antelopes are controlled, so that they don’t eat all the grass and bring around their own and other creatures’ extinction. But if I were an antelope, I’d think it’s not fair that a lion should eat me – ‘I haven’t done anything wrong, why should I have to experience fear and violent death?’ And if I were a lion: ‘Why can’t I eat grass, why do I have to run after antelopes to get a meal? Why do they have to run so fast? It’s not fair.’ However, the world doesn’t operate according to self-view, but according to this being

dependent on that. The 'world' implies interdependence. And this interdependence may signify an ecological balance, but it also means that the world of birth and death, of fear and hunger, rolls on endlessly.

The way that the Buddha referred to this dependently-existent world was that it is what we experience through our senses.¹⁹ In brief, that's called 'form' (*rupa*). But this 'form' of raw sense data can't be experienced separately from how our consciousness organizes it into a coherent reality. So this world also includes our inner world of feelings and interpretations, as well as the attention and intention by means of which the mind designates and organizes. All this designating and organizing is summarised as 'name' (*nama*).²⁰ For each of us, the world of 'name and form,' arises dependent on the consciousness that receives sensory input, and the attendant process of meaning that organizes what is seen, touched or felt. Regarding the world this way leaves open the possibility that each of us, through purifying our 'naming' processes, can affect how the world seems and how we respond to it.²¹

To illustrate this: in the act of seeing, a visual object is first detected, then lingered over as the mind recognizes it, and designates it with a percept, a felt meaning, such as 'person' or 'car.' Dependent on that and the current mood or intent, a response arises. One can then linger further and develop possibilities and plans. Regarding all this, we may feel uplifted, overwhelmed or bored with the energies and emotions that come up. Accordingly, 'the world' may seem exciting, dreadful or hum-drum.

Now if there is a fathoming attention to what we see, we set aside other interpretations in order to first check whether the possibilities and plans that our minds create support clarity, kindness, freedom from stress – or not. So we can sift out

the skilful from the unskilful, and look into the roots of our mental behaviour. How many of our thoughts and assumptions about the world and ourselves are based just on the particular mind-set at this moment? How are my attitudes and mind-sets colouring what arises? How am I continually creating my world and myself as someone embedded in it? To purify attention is to acknowledge and clear these biases in order to get free.

The end of the world

This world is the interdependent realm of cause and effect. Most intimately ‘my world’ is bound up with designations and consequent responses; it is the process of kamma. And it does keep going on and on. The reminder from the Buddha is that you don’t get to the end of our own upheavals until you have got to the end of your world.²² Moreover, the teaching is that this doesn’t happen through running around the world, running away from it or creating another world, but through contemplating names and forms, and penetrating the basis on which they arise. We can have some say as to how we experience sense-contact, in terms of how we attend and how we respond. We don’t have to seek out or absorb into every sight and sound; and if the mind is centred, we don’t have to react. It all depends on how we cultivate our minds. This cultivation is the kamma that ends kamma, the hinge that turns towards Awakening.

To take a simple example: we can cultivate reflection on how things happen and their results. When we do this, we gravitate towards operating ethically in the world. In this respect, other animals don’t have so great a capacity: humans can develop radically in terms of generosity, kindness and clarity. Although we can butcher other creatures, and even humans, quite mercilessly, we also create organizations to care for the sick and those in need – including other creatures. One change

then is to live in accordance with empathic values: it gives our lives a richer meaning. Co-operation and friendship depend on such values. Certainly none of us would have survived birth without a great deal of help from other people. And now that we're sharing the planet with an increasing number of people, it becomes increasingly important to dispel conflict by developing ways of co-operating. To keep thinking purely in terms of how much I and mine can gain, while ignoring or abusing other beings, is a threat to planetary existence.

The path to the end of the world entails handling the kammic energies of our minds with right intent, right speech, action and livelihood as well as in meditation – in all aspects of the Eightfold Path. Much of the Buddha's teachings are based on generating good kamma in daily life: firmly establishing purity of intent in terms of the world is a basis for liberation. This is because relating to people and duties and so on gives good results. You find that if you bring forth purity and don't ask for anything in return, it ends your stress with regard to the world. Then you can live with self-respect and equanimity. You're not caught up in the success/failure, praise/blame pitfalls of the world. You really get to know and see through these: which doesn't always happen when you work on the internal level alone.

In meditation, the demand for improvement, the trying to get it right, doesn't necessarily get seen as a source of stress. But if the success/failure assessment isn't seen through, it gets internalised as a nagging critic, an Inner Tyrant – who continually berates us over not being good enough; or demands a spiritual pay-off – 'how long is it going to take me to get *it?*' That's the world arising, right there; and it doesn't end by following it. In all cases, internal or external, ending stress occurs in accordance with the degree with which one can give up concern over self-image. This is what

is meant by purifying the intent. It means letting go of that self-seeking that sets us up for a fall.

The path of transcendence: parami

Why act and why meditate, if there's nothing to gain from it? Well, you act and meditate in order to get your intent straightened out, not to win any awards. The rewards come by themselves. In this respect, the persistent cultivation of kamma in terms of 'perfections' (*parami* or *paramita*) has evolved into a main theme in Buddhist cultures.²³ *Parami* are ways of generating good kamma in a very thorough way so that practising in the world, the mind is yet trained to release unskillful mind-sets and deepen into transcendent ones. They help us to broaden the mind into an awareness that is uncluttered and bright. For this reason '*parami*' also carries the meaning of 'qualities that cross over.'



In the Theravada tradition, the *parami* are listed as generosity, morality, renunciation, wisdom/discernment, persistence, patience, truthfulness, kindness, resolution, and equanimity. All these ask us to bring forth skill from our hearts in response to what we experience; and it's a response which has liberation as its aim. It's good to remember that liberation is not some 'out there' state; it just means the path and the fruit of letting go of greed, aversion, and delusion – and of the basis on which they arise.

Generosity is about sharing; and not just in material terms. It's a whole attitude to life. You share resources of money, time, skills, and energy because of that sense of inter-relatedness that is the bedrock of life. We're in this together,

everything affects everything else: consider others' welfare as you'd like them to consider yours – this is transcendence of self-view on a mundane level. And when any good kamma is enacted from that sense of interdependence, rather than from some moralising basis of 'You should be good,' the result is that you feel good. So everyone gains. The giver feels joy and the receiver feels the effects of kindness. Through the practice of parami a sense of innate value (*puñña*) – in oneself, in others, but mostly in the blessing of skilful action – arises. This does go against the Western 'anti-ego' notion that you shouldn't feel good about your own actions; but not feeling good about your actions just generates a cynical or sad ego. From a Buddhist perspective, release from self-view is a later step that is based upon confidence with regard to your actions and intention. Without that sense of trust, you really don't have a steady foundation.

All the *parami* follow that principle. They speak for themselves. Morality leads to self-respect and the trust of people around you. Renunciation draws you out of the grip of the materialist energies that control much of society. Discernment cuts through the blur of feelings to tell you what is skilful and what isn't. Patience – to not rush, to allow things to move at a harmonious rate – is great for wilful, 'got to get it done' mind-sets. There's a whole life of cultivation just in this *parami* alone.

These *parami* are not always on display in the world; nor does their cultivation mean that you become a success in worldly terms. It's not that likely that you will become the leader of a political party or of a global corporation through such kamma. But maybe. A friend of mine in business told me that, years ago, he vowed to only deal honestly with clients – no false promises, no granting of favours, no illegal

dodges. At first his business declined a little, but after a while, as people realised that they could trust that what he said was what he meant, they began to prefer that straight way of dealing and his business increased. Ethical business can make sense. At any rate, you always gain in terms of having self-respect, a clear conscience and friends that you can rely upon. It's these that will get you through the tough times. When the economy crashes or your health fails, when you're bereaved or blamed, knowing how to live simply and be an equanimous witness to experience are real life-savers.

Latent tendencies

Taken as a whole, the practice of *parami* sets up powerful values that direct personal intent skilfully. And there are benefits. Attitudes and energies that go towards deceit, malice, and covetousness get less food. And, as our intention gets straightened, this affects how we regard the world – because the intention behind what we look at or touch, and why, is a major part of what designates experience. As that purifies, we see things in a way that untangles our world. For example, rather than looking at life in terms of what we can get out of it, if we look at what we can give; rather than wondering how long does it take, we incline towards valuing patience and resolution. Then rather than speculating as to whether we are admired or ignored, we settle in awareness of our integrity. So our 'naming' of the world gets shifted to re-designate it as a vehicle for value and liberation, rather than a me/them; gain/loss ride on a bouncing ball.

The more you hold to the values of a skilful life, the more that purifying process reveals dispositions and tendencies that are latent and unresolved. These latent tendencies (*anusaya*) include basic inclinations such as sensuality, irritation, opinionatedness and conceit – which may not be

revealed as such in ordinary life because our ways of operating avoid a thorough investigation of our inclinations. This is why we practise resolution. We make commitments to acts of value and integrity, especially when things aren't going in line with our wishes.

In this respect, Buddhist practice isn't about peak moments. It's about training. It's about strengthening and broadening commitment to maintaining standards and virtues, even when the peak-experiences aren't rolling in and your unacknowledged tendencies are rising up. One frequently used context of training is just that of living with others. In a lot of Buddhist monasteries, as well as in the world in general, there's a good amount of working with and being with other people. We build, we do management, we wash the dishes, as well as converse and meditate, often in a group situation. The mind is thus held in a shared world; something which doesn't follow purely individual dispositions and energies. Through this, we get to see that our 'naming' – our interpretations of what is normal or friendly, our attitudes around leadership and independence, our sensitivity to other people – all differ. Seeing and responding to this means that a lot of patience, kindness and commitment to clearing biases have to get generated. The point isn't even to have a wonderfully harmonious community, but to loosen attachment to one's own 'naming.' It's that loosening which gives the mind the room and the encouragement to move beyond its habitual standpoints.

I appreciate this integrated approach especially as I didn't start out from that perspective. In the monastery in Thailand in which I began my training as a Buddhist monk there was a section set aside for intensive meditation practice. Monks in the monastery would go into this section in order to review and deepen their understanding of Dhamma. They'd

generally spend a couple of weeks in there and then return to what they were part of. I was one of the few Westerners; the three or four of us there were all new to Thailand, meditation, and monastic life. We had nothing to do, no get-togethers and nowhere else to go. Conversation wasn't allowed. It was, as you might guess, pretty stressful, being in a small hut all day trying to meditate and watching the mind jump over the monastery wall for hours at a time. The one thing that we did do together was go out on alms-round, in silence every morning. It was our only occasion of being together in the entire day; it should have been easy, just walking along receiving offerings. But instead, all kinds of stuff, stuff that wasn't on the Enlightenment script, came up.

The first person in my life who said he'd like to kill me, with an axe if possible, was a fellow-monk. Well I did walk on alms-round at a pace that he felt was too slow, while he had to walk behind me.... As for me, I can't recall having much of a violent impulse until I became a serious meditating monk.... But I could feel violent towards the monk behind me in that file. After all, the Buddha said we should walk quietly, making little noise, so that we could be calm and focused in order to get Enlightened – but every day that monk behind me kept on clearing his throat as we walked along.... That's justification for murder, isn't it?

Naturally we didn't act on these impulses; we let them pass. Which was a little bit of Awakening. There was enough good kamma to have an established sense of morality, and even mindfulness. But, it blew apart the idea that you don't have ill-will just because in solitude no-one's pushing your buttons. So in the context of training, the violent impulse was useful: I had to let go of my idea of my self as being a reasonable, easy-going kind of guy, and focus on the tendency of ill-will. And further when I acknowledged that

solitary practice hadn't made it any easier to share the planet for a couple of hours with another harmless human being who shared my interest in Awakening... the paradigm of mind-cultivation had to shift. I began to understand that you don't get out of kamma by avoiding it.

One thing led to another, and after three years of practising in solitude, I returned to England for a visit. I stopped off in London, where Ajahn Sumedho was leading a small group



of monks. In that community there was more emphasis on action and interaction, as well as on a training in how to make and look after your own robes, how to attend to a teacher, and many small matters of protocol. It also felt like a more friendly way to live; although people could get stirred up at times. But the general idea was to be mindful of whatever the mind

brought up and investigate where the suffering was. It seemed to be a way to broaden and integrate my practice, so I stayed on.

Four bases of clinging

The Buddha spoke of clinging as having four successively deeper levels: clinging to sense objects, to rules and customs, to views, and to impressions of what we are.²⁴ The first is fairly obvious – in hanging on to possessions, and also ‘feeding on’ sights, sounds and the rest of it. In the monastery, with the limitation on sensual input, and with a good amount of physical work going on, most of this intensity would gather around the one meal a day, or the hot drink and occasional sweets at tea-time. The very energy of clinging to the felt meaning of getting fed would sometimes send so much energy through the system that to have a peaceful meal, after patiently waiting for

everyone to gather, patiently filing through to receive the food, patiently waiting for everyone to get back... then the chanting... then waiting for the senior person to begin eating – was quite an achievement! In fact the food was nothing special; sometimes I hardly noticed what it was. Moreover the degree of satisfaction derived from eating was nothing fantastic and offset by feeling dull afterwards. The passion was all around the idea, the felt meaning of eating. Both that state and the appealing nature of the food could shift within minutes. Not only was the clinging painful, but on contemplating the whole issue, it was apparent that the intensity was just around the set of feelings and drives that clinging made solid and real – for a while. Clinging was just clinging to its own designations. It was a useful insight to keep working on: celibacy suddenly made a whole lot more sense.

I could experience the same clinging occurring in terms of the second level of clinging – with reference to the rules and customs of the monastery. Everyone uses rules and customs to regulate their lives or occupations: forms of etiquette, what food to eat at what time on what day of the week, the way I like my office to be arranged, religious observances and social taboos. But there's a tendency to go into automatic, or to get dogmatic about one's own system. One feeling I had about committing to Buddhist practice was to get out of this – to be more spontaneous, to live in the here and now. But after about three years with nothing to do, nothing to belong to, and therefore nothing to be spontaneous about, I really appreciated things like morning chanting every day, observances around how you handled and washed your alms-bowl, and the whole training in conventions that I'd previously missed out on. They helped to keep me focused in daily life, and to develop *parami*. And once I got familiar with them, the rules and customs provided a sense of familiarity, of assurance.

It was the same with the system of meditation that I was using – even if I wasn't always good at it, winning or losing, it defined where I was. I got to feel solid. But then there'd be a strong pull around all that to get even more solid; to be part of a highly-disciplined outfit and be someone who could sit like a rock with unwavering mindfulness of breathing. And, along with that, there crept in a subtle condescension for people who weren't so solid, or couldn't keep up; and an outright dismissal of those 'in the here and now' types who clearly had no sense for resolution.

However, Ajahn Sumedho, the leader of what was supposed to be the crack troop, did from time to time cancel routines, either if he thought people were struggling, or just for a break. Sometimes it was just for us to see what our minds did. (Which was interesting....) Then he lessened the intensity of some of the observances. He allowed an early-morning mug of porridge because some people weren't so well.... And although he sat in meditation a lot, he didn't use much more of a technique than a basic focus on breathing for starters; generally the main theme was one of letting go. It was a complete turn-around to my system, so it was very confusing for another three years (and twenty five years later, I'm still working on it), but it was to the point, and very direct. Let go of clinging. Yes, you do get to recognize that taking hold of a system, firming up and getting righteous about it, carries the same feel and passion that you can get around a bar of chocolate. It's clinging... and it means you're about to suffer. And probably inflict some suffering on someone else.

Much the same thing occurs with the next layer of clinging – to views, typified as views of 'becoming and non-becoming.' These are the ways we extend out of the present direct experience. There is a tendency either to conjure up a future, or to refuse to consider it; to either add a purpose

and a trajectory in life, or deny that there is any purpose; to get involved with building or developing things, or to say that nothing can really be done – that everything's impermanent so there's no point. This is the underlying bias of 'becoming/non-becoming' that creates worlds that solidify and spin. And they can do so with great conviction and passion. This is the passion and clinging that initiates kamma, first in the mind, then in the speech and so on. But you don't get out of cause and effect through trying to get it all finished and solid and real, because once kamma is followed, it continues to set up new goals. But saying that there's no goal, that it's all empty, and let's not bother with the future, also has its effects. Failure to consider cause and effect definitely affects our action in the world.

Even our attempts at getting Enlightened can follow these underlying biases. Is it about having the Ultimate Experience of Deathlessness, or at least a few rewarding ones; or is it about the Final Cessation, of *Nibbana*? Either way, the clinging to these ideas comes from fundamental views that imagine some Timeless Ground of Being, or Blissful Oblivion as the goal. And these depend on whether our self-view inclines towards boundlessness or towards vanishing. We probably switch from one to the other dependent on whether we're feeling upbeat or fed-up, or just as our energies fluctuate. But in either case, we base the views on a self at the core of it all. Of course it doesn't make sense, because the underlying bias varies – one moment we want contact and experience, and the next we want to get away from it. Who's doing that?

Which is what it all comes down to: the last level, that of clinging to self. Clinging to the tendency of becoming generates the sensed self. But that sense itself is a designation occurring in the mind. And it changes all the time, from confident and relaxed to anxious and tense. Notice that as clinging

affects the mind, and intensifies its passion with regard to any form, any thought, any world, so those feelings and impressions become solidified into a self who is the agent or victim of the world. And that world, whether it be a sublime immaterial Ultimate Reality, or the authentic pure Buddhist tradition, or the benighted and unjust world of geo-politics, is then regarded as very solid. And out of that comes a passion and inclination with regard to the world. Thus patterns get established that are sensed as 'me.' Then the good gets tainted with pride and conceit, and the negative arouses despondency, or irritation. There's plenty of room for suffering, and no end to the goings-on that occur around all that. But essentially, 'self' and 'world' arise interdependently as two ends of the same designation process. 'I' can't get liberated; but through the release from clinging, self and world do not arise.

So the four bases give us windows through which to contemplate clinging. Because in themselves, material food and



the rest of it are useful. Rules and customs are useful guides, and vision provides focus for meaningful work in the here and now. Also some sense of self, some reference to your own energies, inclinations, and skills is essential in order to do anything well. But there is also a need to witness and contain the passion and clinging around all this. This is the

purpose of cultivating *parami*. But you don't resolve and clear the mind with *parami* alone. To resolve and clear the tendencies of ignorance and becoming takes factors of Awakening (*bojjhanga*).

Factors of Awakening: the work of release

What is often most disturbing about these tendencies, particularly when they occur in meditation, is that they appear

as out-of-control states, where we become other than who we think we are. We can flood with infantile rage, or be the victim of irrational fears. This is because the tendencies are rooted at a reflex level, a psychological 'place' that precedes our personality. Even a baby has these.²⁵ So cultivating *parami* develops the personality to the point where we can have choice over whether we act upon them or not, but the tendencies in themselves remain as a pre-personal potential in the mind.

It's also the case that we're not always clear about what tendencies remain latent and unresolved. Most obviously, ignorance, loss of stable awareness, is a fundamental tendency that, by definition, we're not clear about. So we might feel quite balanced and at ease... but then, on interpreting a threat to our territory, or feeling a loss of status – up springs ill-will, conceit, fixed views... and so on.

What is needed is a reference, a basis for action and introspection, beyond the 'I am my mind' scenario. *Parami* do give you a handle on that, because they cause you to witness, move against and live through the mind's resistances and passions. Then, if you stay focused at the place where the mind lets go, there is a sense of ease and spaciousness. You get a glimpse of non-clinging, it feels real and good. Then you wonder whether this is 'it', or why you don't just stay here... but as that letting go gets sensed as a state, then there's a perception of being or having some essential self that doesn't cling... until the next hit of suffering wakes you up again. So unless we give up the 'naming' out of which all states arise, the latent tendencies to doubt, to views, to becoming and to identification remain unresolved.

What is needed then is insight into the basis of 'name' – through meditation, or more specifically through the factors of Awakening – mindfulness, investigation, persistence, rapture,

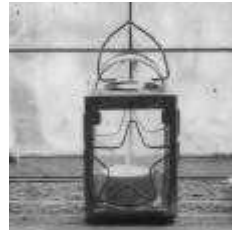
ease, concentration and equanimity. They bring purity of intent, a strong and rich steadiness, to bear upon the push of clinging that forms out of ignorance, out of the loss of clear aware presence.²⁶

In practice this comes down to maintaining mindfulness and investigation around the arising and passing of feeling, interpretation or intention. When you see how they rise up and condition each other, you can realise: this is all cause and effect. This is all kamma, not mine or yours. And, as through persistence, your meditation practice comes into steadiness, the activity of clinging starts to stand out. This is because you have a reference to ease, spaciousness and inner silence that allows you to know clinging by how it feels – a certain tightening in the body/mind – and to recognize the voices – the righteousness, self-pity, and sneakiness – through which it speaks. And as you contemplate it, you get the basic understanding that clinging isn't owned: 'I' arise as a result of the clinging moment, rather than before it. I don't decide, 'Let's go out and cling today, see how much suffering I can create for myself.' So it's not that 'I have a lot of attachments, and cling a lot,' it's just that the origin of clinging has not been seen. Clinging is an action, not a person. That understanding encourages us to find a way where we can stop that grasping reflex.

Rapture and tranquillity are important in relaxing that grasp. They help to ease up one of the big issues of self: can I feel good? But there's more to them than a little ease: the way they occur in meditation also relaxes the self as do-er. You don't do rapture and tranquillity; they come to you, when the mind is settled in its meditation theme. The experience is rather like being a boat that's beached in the sand: as the tide comes in: first there's a gentle touching by some uplifting quality, then gradually things start gently rocking until the

boat is afloat. But it's still intact. So we can let go of 'self as do-er,' without having to be 'self as rigid' or 'self as collapse.' And then: what does that feel like? How is that quality of openness, or non-involvement, furthered? Tranquillity gives you the ease and sensitivity to really check that out; there's the need to develop that so that the psychologies based on 'me trying' give up. There is trust in the process of meditation. Then as mental and somatic tensions relax, *samadhi* arises to unify bodily and mental energies. With that steady sensitivity, the old kamma of defence and strain can then be released.

This release is as much at an energetic as a psychological or emotional level. In other words, it's not only dependent on attitude or understanding; it also depends on not getting caught in the momentum of habitual patterns. The psychologies of self – the anxiety about what is sensed as around and beyond us, and the need to be in control – form a pattern of tight energy in the body as well as the mind, and that energy forms a blockage or exerts a push. Our reactivity is embodied. It is based prior to, or beneath, our emotional attitudes, at an involuntary level where we're 'not ourselves.' And so it takes factors which are not about me trying or me doing it to penetrate that; to go down to that pre-personal potential in the nerve endings, and step back from the pull of kamma. This is why we need all the factors of Awakening, not just some mindfulness or understanding.



It is the power that *samadhi* instills in awareness that can hold calm and ease at this reflex level; then equanimity, the final factor of Awakening, holds a dispassionate space. It's

more than just a check on emotional reactions – equanimity as a factor of Awakening entails sensing and dwelling in the stillness without owning it. Intention is released from doing anything, from claiming anything or from forming a conceptual image of the stillness. It's as if the mind is the stillness. This is the place of giving up where nothing need be said or done. But if the stillness is sensed as a state that I have, rather than as that relinquishment, then consciousness designates it as 'pleasant, desirable'.... Then there's a firming up around that, and the self forms in order to hold on. But by then the ease and spaciousness has already waned, and as the psychological contractions take hold... suffering arises.


So it's not just a clinging to sense-input or systems or views that needs to be dissolved, it's a matter of dissolving the basis. This premise of ignorance is what the factors of Awakening lead us to dissolve. They Awaken the intention which doesn't support that 'naming' basis of mind. It completely surrenders ever being, having, or knowing anything. This is where the world ends. No world, here nor beyond: the fire of such designations goes out.

Path-knowledge

One consequent result is knowledge of the Path; insightful awareness of dependent arising. That is, there are dependently-arisen states that lead to suffering, solidification of world and self; and there are dependently-arisen states that lead to release. The latter arise in accord with Dhamma (*dbammata*).²⁷ Even insight has arisen 'in accordance with Dhamma;' it depends on factors of Awakening such as mindfulness or concentration. And when certain causal biases are removed... that's where the world doesn't arise. So path-knowledge offers the integrative vision of cause and effect, and where cause and effect ceases. In the fruition of Awakening, there is an end to kamma.

But to integrate that relinquishment of self-view in terms of action, the ongoing path of our lives is to maintain and offer spiritual values towards living in harmony with and benefiting the world. We acknowledge the benefits of living in a society which values life and free choice; we acknowledge the parents who kept us alive and psychologically intact for years; we acknowledge the great gift of receiving teachings, and of having a teacher. And without having taken precepts, having committed to a convention and a practice, would the crucible for liberation have been set up? Without training the mind in meditation, would the chemistry that transmutes kamma into liberation have taken place? So skilful kamma sets up the path for cause and effect to move into a transpersonal, transcending mode.

What arises is the wish to serve. To have regard for the world and for healing its suffering, this is compassion; to regard it as a steadily: this is dispassion. Together they handle the arising and ending of the world. This is the action of the Awakened Ones.



meditation

Meeting your World:

Establish a supportive bodily presence: a sense of uprightness, an axis that centres around the spine. Connect to the ground beneath and the space above and around the body. Acknowledge sitting within a space, taking the time and space that you need to settle in. As you settle, let your eyes gently close. Attune to the bodily sense through feeling the breathing: first in the abdomen, allowing the breath to descend through the soft tissues... feel the flexing of the breath mirrored by the effortless release and firming of the abdomen in respiration.

Attend to the upper body, consciously dropping the shoulders and opening the connecting tissues between the upper arms and the main trunk... allow the breathing to subtly flex the chest. Open the head by relaxing the jaw and settling the tongue in the floor of the mouth. Relax around the eyes, the forehead and the temples. As if you were removing a scarf, or unbuttoning a collar, let the neck feel free and the throat open. Feel the breathing move through the throat from the throat notch, up through the back of the mouth and out through the nose and mouth.

As you establish this body reference, settle into it, checking in with the specific points from time to time. If you feel unsettled – snagging flurries or sags of energy or mood – draw attention down your back to the ground, allowing the front of the body to flex freely with the breathing. Refer to the ‘descending breath’ – down through the abdomen – if you feel bustling or uptight. Attune to the ‘rising breath’ – up through the chest and throat – if you feel sunk or flat.

As you come to a sense of balance, bring to mind a current situation in your life. It may well be the case that if you ask yourself: ‘What’s important for me now?’ or ‘What am I dealing with now?’ a meaningful scenario will come to mind. It could be about something at work, or to do with your close friends or family, your well-being or your future. Just get the overall impression of that, without going into the full story. It could trigger off a flurry of expected possibilities, or a heavy sense of having no choice; it could be the ‘so much to do...’ or the ‘I really need this,’ or ‘and then I’ll do this and then I’ll do that.’ Try to catch and distil the emotive sense: burdened, eager, agitated or whatever. As it becomes distinct, feel

the energy, the movement of that (even if you can't quite put it into words). For example, is it a racing sense, a buoyant one, or giddy, or locked? Keep triggering that affect by bringing the scenario to mind until you feel you have the tone of that.

Then contemplate that affect in terms of the body. Notice whether for example, you feel a flush in your face or around your heart, or a tightening in your abdomen, or a subtle tension in your hands or jaw or around your eyes. If the topic is very evocative, you may feel a flurry and then be filled with such a flood of thoughts and emotions that you lose awareness of your body.

If so, open your eyes, breathe out and in slowly and wait for things to become steady again. Then as you re-connect to, or sustain, your embodied awareness, sense that emotive affect again... which area of the body is affected? And as you focus on the bodily affect, what mood does that bring up? Is it positive, something that there is an eagerness for, so that the body sense seems to rise up and open? Or is it negative, accompanied by a sinking or tightening in the body? Whatever it is, create an attentive space around the experience: can you be with this for a little while?

Let the awareness of, the 'being with,' fully feel the tone of that experience. It may settle into an image – such as a bright stream, or something dark and heavy, or something twisted and stuck. Ask yourself: 'What does this look (or feel) like, right now?' Then, as you settle with it for a few seconds, bring up the question: 'What does this need?' or 'What does this want to do?' Follow with attention anything that happens to that sense of reaching out, or sinking back, or tension. Notice if other parts of your body were affected: say you experienced a tightness in the abdomen and when you attended to it, lines of energy were experienced in your chest. Be with the enlarged experience, noticing any changes in the emotive sense. When things feel freer, ask yourself, with curiosity, what is this response?

Carefully repeat this with that aspect of your world until you feel that something has shifted in your response, or that it has given you a key to deeper understanding. You may sense a letting go, or a firming up of your intentions.

Return through the body: the central structure and the softer tissues wrapped around that, the skin around that, the space around all that. Slowly open your eyes, attuning to the space, and the sense of the place that you're sitting in.



... he neither plans for his own harm nor for the harm of others, nor for the harm of both; and he does not experience in his own mind suffering and grief. In this way... Nibbana is directly visible, immediate, inviting one to come and see, worthy of application, to be experienced individually by the wise.

A Threes 55

The Kamma of Relationship

Even when meditating on your own seems fine, you may notice that social contact stirs you up. Opinions about others, concern, attraction, irritation: how to clear all that? How do we work with the kamma of relationship?

The community of value

Relationship is a big part of life, and interaction is a part of what families, friendships and communities such as monasteries are about. In the monastery where I live, even a retreat is a mix of solitude and communality. We encourage restraint and introspection by spending days together in silence alternating sitting in the Hall with periods of walking meditation. There is also a theme of co-operation: we do chores together every morning for up to an hour, sweeping up, cleaning the bathing facilities and toilets. There are talks and dialogue sessions. And there's the space to be individuals too: after a couple of weeks of practising together, a few people at a time go into solitude for weeks at a time, while the rest of us keep to a group format. Meanwhile, people from outside the monastery bring food: some cook the food and offer it to the monks, nuns and the rest of the community. Some people come to otherwise support what we're doing during these months of retreat because they respect the endeavour and want to help us do the work of meditation. So, although in many ways each of us are on our own with our bodily feelings, energies and mental

states, in other ways we're in it together. What will sustain us as individuals is the practice of spiritual friendship.

Life's a shared situation: we're on this planet with other people. As meditators, we're also part of the quest for meaning and truth that has been carried on by millions of people throughout history. In the course of this endeavour great teachers and teachings have arisen; we're in that community of purpose and Awakening. It's a community of value (*puñña*): more than just a group of people, it's a 'field' of the skilful actions and skilful results that people have cultivated. It's important that we see ourselves and other people in those terms; if we only see our lives in terms of our personal history and immediate friends, or of our nationality or of our gender, we conceive ourselves in ways that can cause conflict with people who are outside our group.

The skilful way to consider each other is to think of how, rather than tangle each other up, we can work towards Awakening. So we recollect our potential for good kamma, by considering what is worthy and good in each other. And then we aim to live out that potential in terms of how each of us acts and interacts. To see and respect the good in ourselves and to be keen to live that out, this is conscience (*hiri*); then to see and respect the good in others, and to be keen to live in accordance with that, this is concern (*ottappa*). Conscience and concern are called 'the guardians of the world' – as long as we listen to their advice, our personal world is aligned to the integrity and empathy that support Awakening.

But we can lose touch with that conscience and concern if we neglect valuing our own actions and those of others. Maybe we just expect other people to become ideals, and consequently get negative and critical of their shortcomings.

Or we might imagine that everyone else is enlightened or near it, and we are the laggards of the group with peculiar flaws and needs. All of that is negative mental kamma: the mind has adopted a view of self rather than directly acknowledged good qualities. Of course, it's not that there aren't shortcomings or areas that we haven't yet developed, but it's only when you can acknowledge the good that you're really in the right place to point out the shortcomings. The empathy of conscience and concern is what makes them, rather than righteousness, the guardians of the world.

Proliferation and views

Making fixed judgements and adopting views about others obscures awareness of how unique everyone's kamma is, and how we all have to develop in ways that works for us. Views give rise to mental kamma; and mental kamma, for good or bad, is no small matter. Because if we don't consciously handle mental kamma, it occurs by default. And it takes its cues from the mental tendency that is dominant at the time. The tendency of ill-will could grab the focus, so that we become self-righteous judges – that she doesn't help very much, that so-and-so is always nodding when he sits.... Lingering in what we dislike and proliferating on that tendency fixes a person as being one or two traits, heaps up suffering in our own minds; and that results in a loss of heart that seriously shuts down our ability to practise.

So there's a need for vigilance around the tendency to form views and proliferate (*papañca*).²⁸ This tendency stems from the psychological thirst (*tanha*) which wants to solidify the mind into self – oneself and other people. That is, we conceive ourselves to be some quality or state, and we do the same to others; then we either assume we're better, worse or the same as them. The reference is skewed: a quality is not a person. Qualities, good or bad, depend on kamma, and they can

change. But because of the psychological thirst to form a continuing solid being, the mind formulates 'myself,' 'yourself' and 'those others' out of the flow of changing energies, behaviour and appearance. Any self-view needs some solid ground, some ideological viewpoint or fixed mood or context to stand on; I like to have things go 'my way' because I know how to operate within those parameters. But following 'my way' isn't going to get me out of my habits and my kammic program. So sharing a situation offers ways to look at the clinging to my way, and to let go of it.

However, that is a challenge: when our own individual routines and assumptions get checked, our sense of normality gets unsettled. In a silent retreat, and particularly in multi-national communities like monasteries, we can't always know the details of what's going on. But the practice has to be one of holding core values, such as precepts and friendship in common, and developing trust. Because, unless we trust in ourselves and others, we can't get past our attachment to certainty and being in control. Then we form views about others and how it should be, rather than investigate our assumptions and attitudes about what we think 'should be' means. Then something in us contracts and clamps down, and as we start to hang on to 'my way,' we feel alienated... and in that disorientation the proliferation reflex gets going with views coming thick and fast: 'Why is it like this, it should be like that!' The end result is to lose our sense of flow, and lose touch with Dhamma. We start judging others... and maybe judge and criticise ourselves for that too. The kamma of proliferation starts transforming the present moment into bizarre pictures of how it always is, was, will or should be. It's a program of emotional agitation, expectation, craving, frustration and despair. And it moves us away from meeting, penetrating and abandoning the clinging and suffering of the mind.

The end-point of the proliferation process is the fixed self-view, the major obstacle to Awakening. This view doesn't always stand out; no-one is going around saying or thinking 'mine... me... this is my self.' In fact it's often the opposite: as Buddhists, we think: 'this is not me or mine... but things should be this way, this is right.' The 'way' is of course the psychology, the system, the big picture – but self-view underpins that. This is because the way things should be, or seem to be, qualifies how I sense myself – as in touch with the truth or on the winning team. If I uphold that way, which is the 'right' way, then I become a valued member of the group. I even gain respect by sacrificing my apparent self for the sake of the ideals that I have projected onto the group. This projection gives the underlying 'me' sense some values to feel solid about, and that can be useful. But we can get attached to that view, then, when other people have a different way, feel affronted. Again there's a loss of balance and with that various forms of conceit rise up: 'Why doesn't everyone practise the way I do?' 'How come she's so laid-back and finding it all so easy! Practice is an intense thing and life is suffering, dammit!' Well, before judging who's right and so on, we can learn how other people show us the kammic tendency to project and proliferate.



Part of the practice is therefore about seeing through the reactions, proliferations and views that occur within the way we sense and measure, like or irritate, each other. We learn what we really need to address: within the way I sense and assess you and myself are the messages of my kamma. There may be insecurity, over-estimation or impatience; there may be idolising or noble ideals of everyone living in

harmony. But bad or good, whenever these turn into fixed views of 'my way' and 'other people,' there's going to be trouble. So we need to study this, to get to see how views get created, and how they shape further kamma. It's important: prejudice, conflict, schisms and even wars get generated around it.

Views have their value; they provide us with a summary of experience that we can then store away for easy reference. With a view we have a standpoint; but the problem is that standpoints offer a false sense of solidity. People can blindly adopt just about any religious, political or even nutritional view, just because of it offers a solid place from which to view oneself and everyone else. Then emotional activity, and mental kamma get generated accordingly.

For example, from time to time we have people in the monastery who are very diligent in the meditation hall... but difficult to work with in the kitchen because they have to have things done their way. That's not right, is it? Yet generally their actions are based on what they find to be the most effective and efficient way of operating in order to provide food for the community. So that sounds right.... Then maybe someone talks during times of silence... which is wrong! But they felt that someone needed a bit of contact, or that some light-heartedness was good medicine.... Action based on compassion and non-involvement to routines sounds like a wise point of view – right? Then someone wants to sit when it's walking time, walk when it's a sitting.... Maybe that's what's right for their practice. But we might feel: 'Well we had an agreement to operate in a certain way to strengthen the group resolve and minimise disturbance, and people are expected to let go of their personal perspectives.' That's right too! 'Right' carries a very powerful energy, doesn't it? You can get really convinced and really angry with 'right!'

Now I'm not saying that matters of behaviour aren't to be addressed; that's one of the values of spiritual friendship. But those values operate through an understanding of kamma; and that old kamma is to be investigated from a place of compassion and equanimity. That is right view: it rules out proliferating over a specific piece of behaviour and turning it into the view that 'he is this' and 'she's one of those.' If we form a self out of any pattern of behaviour, our attitudes become stuck and painful. Even a good self ends up either intimidating me, or letting me down when she or he doesn't live up to the image I've created of them. So the only standpoint for self that is useful to bear in mind is: 'I am the owner of my kamma... whatever kamma I shall do, for good or for ill, of that I will be the heir.'²⁹

There are no good and bad people, there is just bright and dark kamma. If we see things that way, it helps us to view ourselves and others in a more understanding and compassionate way. We don't get stuck with self-images, because the view of kamma also allows us to understand that kamma is a changing process. If we set up the views, attitudes and responses that fix people in their kamma, then we support suffering; if we set up views, attitudes and responses that allow intentions and values to change in a good way, we relate skilfully to kamma. There can be an understanding of the behaviours, confused or bright, that drive all of us, rather than views that divide you and me and those 'other people.' In this way we set up the possibilities for our own and other people's release.

When you get this message, you start to shift the intent of your practice from one of trying to have or be something to one of handling and penetrating the suffering involved with the 'me' sense. Then there is a release that also brings out our potential for wisdom, purity and compassion. And that's

the aim of Dhamma-practice, whether we're alone or with others, whatever's going on.

Kamma: the relational field³⁰

Kamma is potent, and tricky. It involves the creative and interpretive energies that are conditioned by each individual's history. There is the result, the *vipaka*, of being born. We experience ourselves as existing within fields of sensations, moods, attitudes and sense-input that overlap and tell us where and how we are. We discern and acquire meaning, and learn from our living context: from the planet, society and family; and from our own bodies. And these physical and psychological fields depend on the consciousnesses that operate through the five external



senses and the mind. Through the external senses we are continually being defined as 'I'm in here receiving that impression.' Mind-consciousness adds more details: through this we feel defined by how others see and relate to us; and even more continually by how we regard ourselves. How we are, or how we think others think we are, gets

defined by the feedback of pleasure, pain, reward and blame. Identity gets programmed in, with the dominant, most deeply ingrained patterns of praise and blame, value, self-respect or neglect forming a self-definition. Thus how we have been (and are being) affected solidifies into who we are.

Our fundamental sense of being something is then based on patterns that arise through being within something: a womb, a family, a nation, a world-order and so on. This is the action of consciousness. From this basis the more

personal sense of 'me' develops through feedback as my appearance and actions get measured and recorded. Out of this mass of what we feel, and what we make of it, comes the sense of 'I am this,' 'I'm in this,' or even 'I want to be other than this.' In this way, the patterns and programs of our minds get established through relationship. If what we're born in is giving us messages of welcome and trust, then our patterns and programs get formed on a foundation of basic confidence in being here. But if it's the other way, if there were misunderstandings; if we have been fed biases, exaggerations and falsehoods... or if the family or society is giving us messages that we're a nuisance, or a burden, or that we've got to be productive, intelligent, and attractive – then even though we may personally acquire those qualities, we do so from a basis of anxiety. In fact we may even get to be very intelligent and vigorous in order to quell the underlying sense that unless we come up with the goods we're not welcome here. We may have developed formidable will-power to feel confident that we're successful and independent and don't need help. But a sense of self that claims complete autonomy is a pointer to a diseased will and relational dysfunctionality. History is full of brilliant but neurotic geniuses, crazy Messiahs, and psychopaths with formidable powers of mind.

If we don't have the sense of belonging to a good and benevolent family, or to a society that upholds skilful values, such as honesty, kindness and generosity, the basic sense of what we're living within feels unreliable or untrustworthy. Then we're not in a community of value, and our own goodness may not be valued. In that scenario, we have to find worth through achievement and know-how. So the relational basis becomes one of strong individuation – 'do it and get it by yourself' – with a weak feeling for sharing, co-operation or integration with others.

It's worse still if we can't achieve value through our own individual efforts: we experience ourselves as worthless. And if the judge of self-worth is our own performance-driven psychology, we never come out as winners: there's always a better or higher that we can imagine becoming. This loss of worth, or sense of being driven, can result in existential despair or breakdowns, depression, substance abuse and even suicide. Unfortunately this is often the case in Western societies where there is considerable stress on individual achievement and little sense of something to which we belong through no effort of the will.

Given the unreliable nature of social relationships, the most reliable sense of belonging is to an overarching cosmos, a field of value, a true or sacred. This is the most important reference; not just to belonging to the group no matter what it's doing; nor to a nation-state no matter what the agenda of its leaders; nor to a cult based on some charismatic leader. If we sign up to be an unquestioning part of a team, we enter a relationship of infantile dependence and of being dumbed down. Therefore it is vital to sense, and to be able to aspire to, a sacred that is free from contaminations and freely available to any wise person through their own cultivation. In Buddhist terms, this is an essential meaning of the term 'Dhamma.'

Aware relationship, in accordance with Dhamma, is therefore crucial. As our kammic inheritance is to be in relationship – to the planet and to the people we share it with – Dhamma practice has to include a sense of relationship, of a 'living with' that has meaning and purpose. This means learning to interact in often messy and tangled real-life situations through basic kindness and respect no matter what and whose programs are running at the time. We change the rules of being in relationship away from winners and losers and higher and

lower, to those associated with non-attachment. We relate because here we are, and let's make it right. And that shift to relational integrity realigns our kammic tendencies in valuable and valuing ways. Because, when our intentionality is based on being within something that is upright, mutual, and supportive, it's not aimed at controlling it or carving out a position within it. It's not about being the best in the group, but about being responsibly engaged within it. Then instead of coming from an intention that is compulsively based on proving oneself or denying relationship, we can then enjoy our social group. We align it to generating the good; but not in order to acquire any trophies.

I remember reading an account of a game played by a tribe living in the Amazon basin. The British field-worker who was observing the game couldn't understand the rules at first. He noticed that the players of the game would split into two teams, who were not necessarily equal in terms of numbers or apparent strength. Each team would grab a large log, and, hoisting it onto their shoulders, start running towards a point a hundred metres or so ahead. The logs also were not of exactly the same size or weight. As he watched, one team would draw ahead of the other, and as it did so, a member of the leading team would leave his or her team and join the other team. Whichever team was in the lead, members of that team would peel off and join the losing team. As the finishing line drew into sight, the excitement would rise until the teams crossed the line, often with very little distance between them. Eventually the field-worker found out the aim of the race: it was to have both teams cross the line at the same time! That aim was carried out through attention and strenuous effort, but with an overriding benevolent intent to arrive at a place with no winners and no losers. It's not a bad analogy for the qualities that support spiritual friendship.³¹

Spiritual friendship is a stepping stone, one that reminds us of these values and models them to a degree. But spiritual friendship is not about ultimately bonding to an individual or a group; it's about cultivating a relatedness which steadily brings values of morality, compassion and inquiry to mind. Then it leads on to the firmest foundation for relationship, that of relating one's actions to a field of value.

Relating to others as to myself

Old kamma is tangled, murky stuff; it is compulsive and compelling. When we're in conflict, the habit is to fix the other person in a dark light. And it's also the case that our desires and needs present other people in a very pink light. Sometimes the impression of another person can switch from pink to black in a matter of hours! But in either case, black or pink, a specific detail gets focused on, a rapid cascade of impressions, moods and thoughts occurs and that gets blown up into an overall view and statement with an 'I am' or 'He/she is' at the end of it. That's 'proliferation.' It's convincing because it comes from an apparently deep and involuntary place; and it is familiar. It's one form of the process of 'becoming' or forming a self; and it creates some solidity, some standpoints, some cardboard cut-out figures to get occupied with. But the mirage of becoming actually deprives us of full presence. Just notice, the next time proliferation and projection take over, that your steady bodily presence gets lost, and the wholeness of your ability to respond gets lost. Where were you? That loss of presence is a mark of the ignorance that becoming is based on. With ignorance we lose access to clarity, spaciousness and empathy.

Then again, sometimes we come to edges in our lives – moments when decisions are needed, scenarios where we're challenged, interactions where differences of views may lead to conflict – and we don't know what to do. Sometimes there

can be a nagging sense of being someone who needs to find an answer to life. Maybe there's a conflict between how I sense I am, and how I wish I could be. These are the great doubt, hovering and wavering scenarios that can keep us occupied or frustrated for years. Uncertainty is difficult to handle; if we can't jump to a conclusion, we may instead drop the topic and space out, or contract into a pre-conceived view. Either way, we may shut off the uncertainty, rather than address and release it. That's ignorance and 'non-becoming,' which is a withdrawal reflex. It is the drive to be a self apart from an event or a situation, and it causes us to 'lose ourselves' in disempowerment and abnegation. Proliferations based on that tendency become fixed into life-views of resignation, fear or inadequacy: 'I can't cope, it's all too much for me, I am small and ineffectual.' And the generalisation: 'Existence is just a pain; it's all a waste of time,' gets embedded. There's a sticking – and that gets interpreted as 'I'm stuck' in a 'meaningless world.'



We need to develop the qualities of spiritual friendship in relationship to ourselves. But what do I befriend and how? How much of that is a fantasy based on the need for a positive self-image? Well, it's not an image that's at stake, but a workable relationship with one's habits, mind-states and programs. Only if there's that can we review rather than react to them. The standard advice that is given to monks by their teachers is 'make an effort with friendliness.' It's to the point. When we have to proceed from a place of imbalance, we have to learn to trust and value our capacity to find balance. It is an act of faith, of having faith in ourselves, beyond any self-image. This is because, when there is inner

conflict, the self-reference comes up with the assumption that there's something wrong with 'me,' and I have to do something to make myself other than I am.

But clearing that pattern doesn't happen through simply affirming that there's nothing wrong with me. That's just another self-view. What restores the balance is to suspend the assumption 'I am,' just to put one's self-definition on hold for a while, and then attend to qualities and energies that can relax the mental patterns behind our apparent self.

For this we attune to the bodily experience of sitting or standing here. That has a grounding effect. The body can't proliferate. It just simply tells us where we are, without judgement, analysis or alternatives. Then there's the heart-



sense: to establish good-will towards oneself. However, both body and heart-sense also need to be specific. And for this there's the rational attention which can focus on what steadies the body and uplifts the heart. This is again just simple stuff such as attuning to posture, or some recollection of the Buddha or of

spiritual friends – the main point is to do it, to trust that simplicity above one's powerful and fascinating proliferations. And to do that rather than figure oneself out, or create a huge psycho-drama of personal history.

So we train the rational mind to be a witness of our kammic tendencies, rather than an analyst or a story-teller. We simply witness the bodily aspect of our experience, which can't create the stories that the heart can. Then we can bring body and heart together in a supportive way: by acknowledging that right now the body is free from harm,

intrusion or obstruction, and then encouraging the heart to really get the sense of that. Maybe there is discomfort, maybe there is tension in the face, temples, chest, and abdomen; but somewhere in the bodily sense – the end of an in-breath, or in the pressure of the soles of your feet, there is a reference to being at ease.

If we relate to that balanced ease in the body, it brings us into the balance of our minds; and it is only from that basis that we can get a feel, through the tangle of anxieties and mood swings, of a simple thread of emotional ease and psychological space. It's a shift from being tense or on guard to something more trusting. And it's through attending to this that we can step back from the biases and old narratives. Healing is a natural result of finding true balance.

As we find balance and the energy settles, we can extend the quality of that trust and benevolent intent into all the tissues and structures of the body; then extend that into the space around us: 'May all this be free from harm or stress.' We can then more specifically extend that to impressions of other people, especially those who mean a lot to us, both good and bad: either friends, or people we have difficulties with. In this way, we share value, forgive, appreciate, and empathize.

It's good to be direct and specific. Practice can't be based on a view of 'what I am and what others should be.' Instead it takes the acknowledgement of the specific events and mood-tones of one's mind. 'At this moment, the feeling is this, the impression is this...' It's really just this agitation, or hurt, or want, and it's just like anyone else's. At that point, we can be with that and not create self around it. And so it is with others' behaviour as it moves our minds: 'The feeling is this, the impression is this, I don't have to

pick up their actions, may they be released from it.' Rather than embed self or others in kamma, we learn to forgive or acknowledge with gratitude, but always with the spaciousness to release them from projections. This is equanimity; this is what is needed to be able to share one's practice with others.

Meeting the good friend

Through working on our own minds, we learn that we only move past difficulties through a relationship based on factors of Awakening such as mindfulness, investigation, concentration and equanimity. When the mind begins to appreciate the clarity and spaciousness that these factors instil, it can come to rest. Then it feels more centred in the steady spaciousness than in any states that could arise, and it



attunes to the inclinations that support it. The process is like meeting an old friend; you naturally recognize and warm to each other. A balanced awareness therefore tunes in to those bright inclinations and results from every occasion when we've extended patience over impatience; when we've extended caring over

indifference or negativity; when we've extended endurance over the wish to cut and run; when we've met the challenge of being present. And the powerful kamma of renunciation attunes us to the source of all spaciousness, the intention of letting go.

Skilful action that supports great heart: this is what the whole frustrating process of restraint and following a group norm helps to generate. I can feel all that wanting to know and have and get something – but rather than believe in or follow its themes, I can attune to what's happening to the

energy. That flaring, contracting, or sinking is the track of kamma – and I really don't want to go down that track again and again.... But there's the way of non-attachment and of relinquishment, where purity of awareness and purity of action support each other. That's where we meet our truest friend; in an awareness which doesn't carry the mark of self. We can trust it, and give up everything else.

A balanced and easeful awareness, like a good friend, also brings wisdom into the events of our lives. At times we may feel moved to express an apology, or gratitude; or we undertake bright kamma from a place of fully settled presence. At other times the response of wisdom is just to allow things to settle and feel the peacefulness or equanimity of that. Through this process of wise relationship to our specific kamma as it manifests in our lives, personal behaviour can develop and grow. And those forms of behaviour, although warm, firm, clear, and spacious in general, are specific to each practitioner: all the wise beings I've known were real characters – with very different personalities. Ironically, we become more authentic people through being selfless. And the simple reason for this is that we operate with enhanced potential when consciousness isn't fettering itself with the strategies of self-view.

m e d i t a t i o n

Meeting Space: A Standing Meditation

Stand with your feet body's width apart, feet parallel, and give the weight of your body over to the ground through the soles of your feet. As the body is accustomed to being propped up, or leaning on something, it often 'forgets' how to stand on its feet – so consciously relax the knees, the buttocks, and the shoulders. Let go of holding in the jaw and around the eyes.

Bring up the sense that where you stand is completely safe and supportive. You may know this in your head, but not in your chest, throat or shoulders. So gradually survey the body, then sense through the skin, being conscious of 'touching' the space. Allow the body to fully feel and acknowledge that the space in front, then above and then behind is unobstructed and non-intrusive. Develop the theme; for example, ask yourself: 'What is behind me?' And then reflect: 'Behind me is strong support. Nothing to ward off.'

Check the posture from time to time to keep the buttocks, chest, shoulders and abdomen from tightening up; keep the knees soft, letting the ground beneath you carry the body's weight. Let the body explore the sense of being supported by the ground beneath. It will relax, find

stability, and the breathing become fuller and its rhythms will help to receive and release any stress. A sense of fully occupying the surrounding space will arise. You may feel a little larger and more at home.

Stay with the general sense of the body, without losing the sense of being 'in' a space, and without attending to any external phenomena in particular. Keep your attention where the sense of your body meets the sense of the space. The mind will probably want to go into something, either into the body, a thought or an attitude, or out to some visual object. It will want to have a purpose, or something to get hold of; there may be a struggle to get rid of moods and feelings. However keep simply focused on the bodily energy, or of moods that arise at the sense of meeting the space around you. Bodily energy may be experienced as rising currents, or shakiness; it may be felt across the chest or in the abdomen. Naturally there may be corresponding emotional states such as excitement, or nervousness. You may experience flushes of tension that move into release. Attune to the upright axis of the body – an imaginary thread connecting the soles of the feet to the sacrum to the spine and on up through the neck and the crown of the head. Extend that thread

down into the ground and up through the crown of the head into the space above you. Let your body be like a bead on this thread. Breathe out and in to provide a sense of steadiness and ease.

Don't go into any bodily or emotional states, but keep aware of the whole thread, the axis of balance, or as much of it as is possible. Within that extended sense of the body allow energies and moods to move as you very slowly sweep your awareness down through your head and over your throat and upper chest. Use the activity of 'bringing to mind' and 'evaluating:' that is, think or bring to mind 'forehead' and then consider how it feels in terms of elemental qualities. Is it firm, solid or tight (earth); is it warm or cold (fire)? Are there movements of energy or pulses in that area?

You may detect subtle tensions holding across the eyes, or around the mouth, or across the throat and upper chest. If so, slow down, centre again on the axis of balance parts and slowly widen your attention across the area that you're focusing on and into the space immediately around your body. Practise meeting whatever arises without going into it. Instead, if a sense comes up that is tight, emotive, or agitated, connect to the axis of balance, soften and widen your attention.

Develop the sense of being seen in that open state, in a simple and appreciative way. Simply attend to that and how it feels. Allow yourself the time to feel take in and enjoy the sense of being in a benevolent space. Images of being in light, or in warmth, or in water, may be beneficial.

Continue practising like this, moving your attention slowly down your entire torso, your legs and into the ground. You may not have the stamina or the time to work through the whole body; if that's the case, then move more quickly and aim to cover the torso, or at least one of these regions: the throat and upper chest; the heart and centre of the chest; the solar plexus and midriff; the lower abdomen beneath the navel.

Practise in accordance with your capacity, then when you feel like concluding, spend some time clearing the space of images and impressions, then focus on the skin again, discerning its boundaries all around the body. Then without losing the overall spaciousness, sense your spine and bodily centre within that bounded space. Come out of the meditation by acknowledging the sounds in the room around you, the visual field and then the specific objects around you. Move lightly, orientating yourself through the sense of touch.



... with the destruction of craving comes the destruction
of kamma; with the destruction of kamma comes the
destruction of suffering.

S46.26

Is There An End?

Do you ever have times when you wonder whether your practice is getting anywhere? Do you sometimes just step back from the fine details and consider, ‘Am I less anxious and opinionated? Am I more at peace with myself and more compassionate towards others? Am I a better person for all this?’

Acknowledgement of results

These are reasonable questions: results are what we’re interested in. And Dhamma practice does have some immediate results: we’re more conscious of what impulses and sensations are running through our systems; and we get a sense for what to act upon and what to put aside. We also start to establish values; ones that can withstand the pressures of busy lives, or the biases of the media.

In other respects, you have to know what to look out for. Basically, we look for and need two things in our life: to feel good, and to feel stable and confident about where we are and where we’re going. Simple needs, it seems. Yet without some guidance and training, the way to fulfilling those needs can get very complex. It can become a tightrope act of off-setting possible future gains and losses against present variables, an act that sends us into obstacles, hold-ups and great unknown spaces.... So if you just assess how you’re doing in terms of daily occurrences, the conclusions aren’t

that reliable. The mind gets stressed over having to handle many options and look out for potential mishaps; and also blown around by input that we have little say over – such as the actions and speech of others, or the input from media and life in the streets. Then there are physical ailments – and they may bring up difficult and uninspiring mind-states. Moreover, the ongoing process of meditation exposes some ungratifying mental programs: escapist fantasies, finding fault with oneself and others, hunger for attention and praise, the need to be in control of situations – they’re all common enough. And along with that comes the impression that this is what you are and you should be something else and you shouldn’t be like this. Hence there is a cross-current of mind-states that well-meaning people go through when they attune to Dhamma practice.

It’s because we’re waking up, and waking up from the accident of life makes us aware of the bruises. We accumulate hurt over what we’ve been through in terms of bodily damage and illness, and get some bruising through the mishaps of confused relationships, unskilful actions, and having what seemed to be a good time at the time but ended up causing us headaches. Yes, that’s part of the confusion around feeling: some actions feel pleasurable at the time, but leave you with a hangover of one kind or another. There’s the need to feel good and on top of things; but an untrained mind constructs unskilful and unreliable ways of bringing that about. So in waking up, we need to meet our tangles and dysfunctions with a willingness to glean some understanding from them. And that means taking Refuge in Dhamma: in the understanding that it is through the process of meeting stress, conflict and dis-ease that something wider and wiser unfolds. We have to find value and assurance just in undertaking that process of waking up, and in doing the work that makes it possible.

Contemplating intention

Essentially it's a matter of finding value in intention. Intention carries a mind-state with it: bright or dark, steady or erratic. It can be gentle, or vigorous; and these states and the feelings that accompany them are food for the heart. So maybe you're body isn't capable of getting to Olympic standard, or being an icon of glamour. And maybe you're never going to be Einstein or Mozart. Moods, feelings, health and success come and go. But what really counts is the intention, because that is something you can have some say over. Intention is the immediate kamma of the mind, and that can generate the inner feelings of steadiness, kindness and so on that take you through the rolling waves of life. Hence what to look for is not the feeling that arises from sense-contact, but that which accompanies intention. The brightness and steadiness of skilful intention encourages you to keep steering with clarity and awareness, and abandoning greed, hatred and delusion. And your potential for clarity, strength and heartfulness increases accordingly.

This is why you begin to clarify, strengthen and rely most fully on the intentions behind what you're doing now. You take responsibility for your life, and determine some values and ethical bases. Then to really work on the roots, there's meditation. But the practice of meditation begins, not with producing wonderful mind-states, but with establishing a foundation that is stable and comfortable. Mindfulness based on the body, together with an attitude of befriending yourself: that foundation allows you to go deeper. You can give attention to the bases of body, thought and mind, and bring them into a supportive alignment. You steady and brighten your body through posture and breathing, then you let your mind get the feel of that. Or you recollect, you bring to mind an idea or an image that gives rise to uplift or calm or gratitude until you get the feel of it in your body. When you can feel the somatic sense of uplift, ease and groundedness that

accompanies a skilful mental state, you know that such a mental state is now settled into something that you can rely upon. It supports calm and insight. So rather than rely on a single thought or a mood, it is in the harmony of body, thought and mind that you find a deeper sense of assurance.

Centring in intention leads to harmony and reduces activity. A proportion of mental activity is unnecessary, unhelpful and just a matter of ricochets and reactions. None of which feels very good. So with Dhamma practice the first aim is to firm up the quality of intention, to get grounded and clear the mind of superfluous activity. That uprightness and clarity carries the good feeling of a skilful intention, of bright kamma now. Then again, compare the feeling associated with being judgemental or manipulative with the feeling associated with the intention to be generous or compassionate. When you turn this over in your mind, you know it's wise to do a lot of bright kamma, just to get the strength and support of feeling good about yourself. It's not a matter of righteousness but of knowing you did good because you wanted to, and it felt good. You learn where to look in order to assess your actions and your life.

Although the feeling isn't ultimately the most important aspect of an action, still it's a source of support for the mind. It gets you to linger into the quality of what you're doing right now, and to develop it. It's important to do this, because when you make a commitment to anything, there are going to be times when it's not what you want to do right now – whether it's exercising your body, or sitting in meditation, or carrying through a resolve to quit smoking. But then you go back to your intention: recollect that, get in touch with where your commitment came from. Get the feel of that bright intention, and expand your awareness of that feel. Then you follow through with a motivation that is linked to uplifting the mind, and that can get you through the

grumpiness, or the disorientation that comes with giving up old kammic habits.

So the first Dhamma-accomplishment is that of turning the mind around from holding on to what it receives and attending to the roots of how it behaves. That shift allows you to place a simple and direct question into the depths of your mind, heart and nervous system: is the state or view or program that I'm running taking me into suffering and stress or out of it?

Self-image and behaviour

The catch is, that often, the issues of behaviour are bound up with, and sometimes secondary to, the matter of self-image. There's a sense of self that's based on mirroring, or 'clinging' to, the current mind state or program; therefore praise and blame, fame and ignominy, gain and loss, happiness and get to define how a person senses themselves. And so motivation gets caught up in how we are esteemed according to popularity, financial or performance barometers. All kinds of instinctive and reactive programs get going around these issues. Sometimes we want to make more of ourselves and take over a situation; sometimes the mind contracts into defence or self-pity; or there is doubt about what we should or shouldn't do about ourselves. Sometimes we want



someone to believe in us, validate us, confirm that we have value, are enlightened, half-enlightened, or getting there. The sense of self biases our behaviour. This is because identifying comes out of the very basic and strong need to feel stable and solid, and when there is ignorance we look for that stability in things that change. If we identify with being praised or esteemed, then something feels wrong if that

changes; so that gives rise to uncertainty. And when we feel uncertain, we sense that this insecurity is an aspect of our identity. Obviously no-one wants an unpleasant state as an identity, so we try to get rid of it, and find a place in our lives where we will be bright and confident instead. And so it goes, and on and on.... It sounds reasonable enough; but the mind doesn't arrive at security through holding on to or reacting to mind-states. Because they pass through. Trying to be some permanent state or non-state only keeps us snagging on, quarrelling with, or squinting into changing images. And all that just makes any introspection a restless and calculating process.

Again, behaviour, rather than identity, is the key. Mental kamma is important. In order to not cling, we have to relate to our stuff. We have to work on a regard that witnesses and empathizes rather than fixates. And this means directly penetrating the unconscious pushes that underpin and formulate what we're experiencing right now. If we're wondering how long it's going to take to get enlightened – that's the push of worry or doubt. If illness is making it difficult to meditate, there's the potential to get pushed into dejection, so right now practice has to involve bringing some warm and supportive intentions towards one's body and easing out of the demand to feel bright and vigorous. You can do a lot of good practice by letting go of the irritation over how it should be or the anxiety over how it might be. That letting go is a vital action. And you back that up by expanding your awareness of the good intentions that you can and do sustain. In ways like this, you let go of forming narratives and pictures of self (as failure, as victim, as monster) that your struggles bring up and instead focus on where you're bright and strong.

Through methods like this you develop capacity. Even if that is just the intention to be patient and maintain resolve over your ethical standards – that is a gain in mental capacity.

And by coming out of habitual patterns and programs, you start to wake up from this view that clings and holds onto with what is passing through. And as you get some release from clinging, that helps you see that identification, and with it your identity, is a changeable process. Instability at that level isn't a weakness; it's a fact to be acknowledged. When this is understood and integrated, the view of letting go, the path to the Deathless, arises.

Becoming, non-becoming and right view

The process of identification is latent in self-view, and activated by clinging. As clinging occurs, the process is given personal traits and character by a biased view called 'becoming' (*bhava*). 'Got it' becomes 'I've got it' or 'I'm stuck in this' or 'I'm always going to be this way.' Clinging sticks this moment to the next moment and becoming makes a pattern – which then can get extended forwards in terms of expectation or dread; or woven into a detailed portrait of 'she's like this' or 'I'll never be like that.' Becoming is ignorance in action, the bottom-line weaver of patterns and programs, the daddy of all *sankhara*.

In detail, becoming carries the blueprints of old kamma, so when there is clinging, becoming adds the personal particulars. It does this by relating to input in ways that are habitually me and mine: old kamma. These may be mixes of impulsiveness or worry, or more positive traits like wanting to oblige others: my way of reacting, my take on things. Becoming forms and informs the ongoing 'me' sense as it moves from this mind-state to that mind-state, through events and scenarios, and through lifetimes. It looks for a stable and satisfying pattern. The tough thing to come to terms with is that this 'me' sense can never be very stable or satisfied, because it arises dependent on holding on to any state of being, and these states change. Holding onto what is change-

able and unstable must give rise to unsatisfactory results. How long is a winner satisfied with his or her success before they have to run a faster race, climb a more challenging mountain, pull off an even bigger deal?

And meanwhile circumstances change. Maybe there's the loss of a partner or a job, maybe there's illness or disability, maybe the belief in a person or a doctrine gets capsized, or the ability to do or make things happen is checked – and we feel disoriented. Our becoming program gets derailed, and with that sorrow, anxiety or rage well up. Then in order to deflect or suppress these emotions, we get active again – we blame, or throw ourselves into work, or seek some affirmation.... And all that activity and energy is further becoming, which just finds another set of mind-states to create an identity around. Thus there is an addiction to kamma, and a firming up of the assumption that all that there is for us are the shower of feelings and the surge of becoming this or that for a while. Becoming keeps us looking for the ultimate, end-it-all, lasting state of being. But there isn't one.

Nevertheless, you don't get out of becoming by shutting the mind down, or by negative intentions. That's non-becoming, the shadow twin of becoming. Non-becoming seeks to break away from mind-states, and identifies around nihilism, dropping out, and the sense of meaninglessness. It is a favoured pattern for the rebel teenage years – a pattern that, however, also generates attitudes, styles, icons, and compulsions. No, you have to grow out of becoming by steering it to places where the fog of ignorance can lift. So you steer your intentions towards practices that support *parami* and factors of Awakening. And you begin to review how your mind works in terms of skilful or unskilful, bright or dark, rather than in terms of what I am or could be. It is this view, of witnessing and evaluation without clinging and

self-mirroring, that has to be borne in mind as mental content and patterns get revealed.³²

The full scope of this selfless view is encapsulated in the teaching of the ‘four noble truths:’ of suffering, its origin, its ceasing and the path to that ceasing. With this teaching you can assess where you’re stuck, what you need to do about it, where you’re getting free and how to develop that. Although it’s an intimate assessment, it isn’t based on self-view. It’s rather like using an x-ray or an angiogram to look into your state of being. You’re not looking to the normal self-image with its inflationary or contracted gaze for definition. Instead you see your patterns in terms of the four noble truths: this is the afflictive area; this is where it’s generated; this is the clearer, more resourceful aspect; this is where development can occur. The four noble truths present us with a map of the old kamma we carry, of how fresh kamma gets generated, and of the kamma that leads to Awakening. That is, if the mind is steadied, opened, and unoccluded, an intrinsic and clear stillness can be experienced. It’s something that you only get a sense of when the affective and impulsive energies of the mind have settled down. It has no intention, it has no feeling, and it doesn’t support becoming and self-view. It’s a kind of weightlessness which at the same time is the most grounded and steady thing you can know.

Establishing the four noble truths

The first noble truth is of dis-ease, ‘unsatisfactoriness,’ suffering and stress: *dukkha*. At first glance, this dis-ease is inescapable: ‘birth is *dukkha*, ageing is *dukkha*, death is *dukkha*... being connected to the disagreeable, being separated from the agreeable, not achieving one’s wishes is *dukkha*; in brief the five aggregates affected by clinging are *dukkha*.’³³ The only questionable aspect of

this is: what's all this about five aggregates (*kbandha*)? These are: material form (such as one's body), feeling-tones, felt meanings, patterns and programs (*sankhara*) and consciousness. Mixes of these constitute our ordinary experience. And to fully understand dukkha means understanding these, so that we can penetrate and let go of clinging. Penetrating and letting go of clinging. So, how to work on that?

Well some things are stuck, with no choice. The body is bound to experience pain and death; one aspect of feeling is bound to be painful; felt meanings are conditioned;



functional programs like breathing and being sentient are choiceless, and the experience of being conscious means that we receive a huge amount of random sense-input that occupies the mind, not always to our benefit. What we need to attend to therefore are what we can have some choice over: the programs of our mind, and the intentions that they carry. There a

choice can be made: with a deliberate intention, we can step back from stuck and harmful intentions. We can let go of aversion and forgive our enemies. We can pull out of habits, compulsions and addictions. And that gives rise to some well-being, and a sense that release is possible.

This degree of letting go changes contact-impressions and broadens attention – which also affect our programs. That is, when we change the intention from getting things done on time to one of patience, attention broadens, and the mind can then open into broader reflections on what is skilful right now. Also, if we shift attention from irritating topics to non-irritating ones, again we come into contact with more

equanimous and open states with resultant balanced behaviour. It's above all the case that when we shift our view from 'me' and 'my way' and 'why is life so unfair' to one of 'where is there stress, and where does it stop?' suffering and stress get curtailed, some long-term programs get switched off and personal development inches along. Consequently to understand the first noble truth encourages us to work on *sankhara*, to really get behind this matter of patterns and programs. It's the most immediate way we have of getting out of stress.

For example, if your daughter-in-law is always bullying your son, when you look at your own sense of grievance over that, your own instinct may be to jump into the fray and sort her or him out. Alternatively, you might just shrug the matter off as purely their concern; but you know, that although this sounds true, actually you are affected, you are part of that scenario. So what can you do without denying the dis-ease, but also without getting righteous and generating more stress for everyone? Well, you might work on how your own patterns are designating her as a witch and see if you can do something about that. Maybe you could broaden your attention: start to see her good side; get to be on good terms with her, and try to understand why she does what she does. When you contemplate how your own patterning works, you might consider that a lot of what she's doing comes from an unconscious reflex. And you might acknowledge that you tend to favour your son, and perhaps don't see his exasperating aspects. But how does he trigger her program? Whatever the results of trying to deeply understand, rather than react to, the dukkha of the situation, at least you've freed up your own sense of frustration and impotence. You've developed the intention to understand, made your attention broader and less reactive, and that feels a lot better than just freezing people into fixed roles, and positions.

As we work on our patterns and programs, we grow to understand how they bind the mind into reflexes of grabbing and rejecting, judging and speculating, worrying and hungering. This takes us into the second noble truth; that *dukkha* has an origin – in the reflex of craving and aversion. That is, there is the craving that is bound up with seeing, hearing, touching, tasting and smelling; and the partiality of that produces irritation and aversion when we don't get what we want. And there is also the craving for becoming and non-becoming. The first thing to do then is to get your mind clear enough and firm enough to check those reflexes, because of their instinctive power to sidetrack Awakening with self-views. This takes motivation (*chanda*), rather than craving: the responsibility to substitute clear intentions for the reflex ones. How much of intention is based upon trying to not be who you assume you are? Or trying to use a system to improve the reflection in that distorting mirror? It's better then to recognize unskilful desires and self-centredness as patterns, rather than deny them and hence draw a veil over the process of clinging. Clinging to self-imagery is to be abandoned.

The third noble truth is that of the stopping of *dukkha*. The intention associated with this is that it is to be fully realised. This means expanding an awareness of the non-suffering, non-afflicted area of our personal domain. We begin by acknowledging the non-pressure and balance in our lives; the times when we're not constructing some future, past or present, the sense of where we feel settled. It's subtle because it's the pressure the pushes and the snags in the heart that grab the attention. We make a big deal, and a life, out of the 'wow' and the 'why me?' of our emotive patterns. So to acknowledge non-suffering takes a deliberate intention.

For example, when there is physical pain, can you cultivate the attention that notices where the pain isn't? If you have

pain in your legs, can you notice the ease in your neck? Because the pattern of the mind is to generate global felt meanings out of local feelings; and from that comes the experience 'I'm in pain.' To shift that to 'there is pain in my leg' is a good start. It checks the *sankhara* program that generates the felt meaning. Then with understanding *dukkha*, you consider that bodies experience feeling, and that one kind of feeling is pain. The body is doing what it's designed to do; which doesn't always go your way. So a small piece of the suffering of ownership of the aggregates can be abandoned. And that allows a certain dispassion, or a shift to a more manageable standpoint regarding the pain. That has to be realised, kept alive, and expanded. That's where the mind isn't stressed. And if you focus on that non-stress, you get a window into the domain of the mind which isn't about feeling and interpreting and responding. You get a sense of a still knowing; although it's not about feeling, it 'feels good' the way that relief from pressure feels good. This is the domain of non-suffering, a place of stability because it is not bound up with feelings, felt meanings and mind-states.

Can you notice the moment when a thought has ended? Or acknowledge that a particular obsession isn't running like it used to? It doesn't sound that significant, but with that you are tackling the *sankhara* that identifies with phenomena, and with problems, as if this is all that you're constituted of. To notice the moment when the phenomenon disappears is a way of training the mind to glimpse non-clinging. You expand your awareness of the moments when the mind isn't seeking stimulation through thoughts or memories. The times, or the places in your awareness, which are peaceful. That unentangled basis is to be realised.

The fourth truth is the truth of the Path, with the intention that it is to be developed. This intention integrates all the practices of ethics, of meditation and of understanding. The

presentation of the fourth truth causes us to consider right view, right aim, right speech, right action, right livelihood, right effort, right mindfulness and right concentration. What is ‘right’ about all of them is that they are based on the truth of kamma, rather than on the notion of self. And the process of kamma is a lot more straightforward than the process of self. Trying to understand and satisfy a self-view is a task that produces more complexities the more you try – but you can get to work on the basic principle of doing good and purifying your intentions in a straightforward way. The Path can be developed. And it is the Path that encourages disentanglement, because it broadens experience into the ease and stability that comes with carrying less need and less self-definition.

From will-power to relinquishment

In terms of scope, intention is to be developed in terms of the four noble truths. And within that, the very quality of intention is to be developed. That is, sometimes letting go is accomplished wilfully, like a rap on the knuckles when you’re about to seriously go astray. Will-power has its uses. When you’re hypnotised, you don’t keep gazing at and meditating on the swinging pendulum, you initially use will-power to break free of addictive habits. And you may need to follow that up with firm and committed resolve.

Similarly, a meditator may apply firm resolve to bear with painful emotions or to push away the forces and images of craving that beset the mind, just to clear some space. But if we only operate from that base, or for too long, we can become brutal and stupid. And will-power is addictive: people who operate largely through will-power find themselves needing to have something to get wilful about, because they feel disoriented without that galvanising effect. Will-power also has the side-effect of reducing receptivity and flexibility, and that hinders the mind’s attunement to subtler

energies, and hence limits the capacity for investigation. Will-power alone can't give rise to calm or insight-wisdom.

So will-power is useful in the short-term, but when we've got to come out of the need to be in control, or the inability to accept responsibility or whatever, what's needed are more sensitive and receptive intentions – such as a clear and unsentimental kindness towards aspects of our pain. In other words, intention is furthered when it adjusts to subtler and more intelligent ways.

This development is in tandem with the decrease in density of the mental phenomena that one has to deal with. The ongoing work of strengthening and training awareness, and of living a more balanced life is just to do this. This is a fundamental aspect of what meditation is about.

Meditation also requires developing non-involvement (*viveka*) and dispassion (*viraga*). So one practises handling and adjusting attention in order to be in the presence of any hindrance or obsession, but not caught in it. Centring in that witnessing, awareness steps back, checks and lets go of the images, stories and energies that support a hindrance – the fantasy wish list, or the tribunals that will vindicate (or condemn) me. And we get to glimpse the non-afflicted, just in that ability to step back and let things stop (*nirodha*). So at that point, where tension and conflict begins, there can instead be a stepping back, and a disentangling kind of knowing. And by attending fully in that mode, the contraction or sinking or spinning of the hindrance stops, and the pattern breaks up.

That experience of the third noble truth is then to be deepened. When the mind is out of the gravitational pull of the hindrances there is a deep relaxation, and as one turns towards and contacts that, intention gets subtler. There seems

to be nothing to do. The flow of mental energy seems to stop or become formless and peaceful. Nothing much arises. We may wonder, 'Well, what now?' or 'Is this it?' or indeed wish to sustain that state. At this point, intention itself is to be let go of.

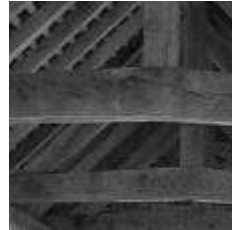
Therefore the final development is of relinquishment (*vossagga*), the relinquishment of intention. And with that there is an abandonment of the kammic domain. So how to do giving up doing? 'By attending to the Deathless' is the short reply. In more detail, it entails fine-tuning attention and intention. Normally a vigorous shift of mind, as from irritation to patience for example, comes around through giving attention to the unpleasant quality of irritation, and the non-irritating aspect of the person or the event that is bothering us. 'OK waiting for an hour for a bus isn't that much fun, but it's dry in the bus shelter and waiting won't kill me.' Or we may recollect patience, deliberately evoke it and attend to that quality. In other words, to move from suffering to non-suffering we substitute one image or mind-state for another. But as you get more skilful at checking irritation, putting aside the images that trigger it, and then investigating its energies, it doesn't move into action and it tends to dissipate by itself. The mind comes back to steady-state just through non-involvement, dispassion and not making anything out of that irritation. This is the 'non-doing' of insight-wisdom.

The depth of this practice is in the way it not only deals with the mind-state, but also with the clinging to it, and even to the view, the inclination, of becoming. Becoming is what makes the mind-state seem so solid and creates an owner who is experiencing it and has to act upon it or do something about it. It is a view that depends on clinging to the old kamma as 'me and mine,' and so it prepares the path for fresh kamma in like vein.³⁴ In other words it keeps seeing

self. But with insight, we're not taking part in that process. We're not identifying with the irritation, nor lining up some alternative pattern to substitute for it, nor being someone who overcomes it. In the domain of insight, things release themselves. And when you can contact that quality of release, that gap in the weave of the patterned mind – that is the Deathless. It's like the holes in the mesh of a net. It's not good or bad. It doesn't cling because it can't cling. It doesn't have that energy, and it doesn't have that view. It is beyond patterns and programs.

Selfless Persons: emptying the mirror

That relinquishment also has a long-term effect: one of letting go of having to carry out kammic programs. I don't have to be something, simply because I never ever have been able to be anything in the first place – all that happened was a tangle of confused activity. The apparent trapped owner of the mind is exposed as a phantom, a confusion of consciousness. And as that confusion abates, so also does the drive of intention; there is a sense of release, of lightness and freedom. A moment of such relinquishment isn't the end of the story, but it is a breakthrough, because for a moment kammic drives stop, and there is a relinquishment of the sense of agency, and with that stress. There can be an unsupported stillness, stillness without an intention holding it. And in the long-term that radically affects one's appetite for states of being: they can be supportive and vital for the Path, but they are not the essence of the Fruit of Awakening.



Because as long as there's the view that a real self is the owner, perpetrator and inheritor of kamma, that view supports patterns of feeling good or bad about it, and of doing some-

thing about it. When that view is relinquished, there is peace, because there's nothing to do. But it's not that there's the view of being a self who is independent of kamma, or the view that there's no such thing as kamma. In the domain of kamma, of cause and effect, then skills around kamma have to be exercised, and in fact are necessary to come out of tangling in the aggregates. Then kamma can cease in the Deathless.


The experience of relinquishment is a start of a graduated process of Awakening that takes in successively deeper levels of kammic programming. But the first stage, of 'stream-entry' is summarised by the removal of three ways in which the self-programs operate – self-orientations if you like. These are: orientation around historical identity, or personality; orientation around uncertainty; and orientation around rules and customs. That is, the average person assumes that their known personality is a historical identity – 'I like this, I am no good at this, I belong to this family, ethnic group, gender.' The tell-tale sign is that that identity has to be sustained by a pretty constant stream of thoughts and emotions that are saying what we should be, or providing personal, relational, ethnic or gender issues to get stirred up by. Some of these are the judgement-and-demand monologues of the Inner Tyrant: the patterns that drive us to do something to prove we're good enough and become something more useful or esteemed or happy. Some are moods of frustration and defeat. But they all depend on this psychological activity; they are old kamma being regurgitated. A stream-enterer has handled their inheritance at this level of identity to the point whereby they are settled in their conventional skin.

An average person trawls through books and speculates in search of certainty: 'Will I get what I need in this? She says Awakening is like that, but he says it's like this...' Or they attach to daily routines, metaphysical or religious systems, or

meditation techniques as ‘This is the Way, do ten of these at these hours and then things will progress.’ But with stream-entry this patterning is also given up: stream-enterers aren’t trying to prove themselves according to an idea or a system; or failing to do so and attempting to cover up that failure. Because they have discovered greater steadiness, clarity and heartfulness through unfettered experience, they don’t attempt to orient themselves in accordance with these fetters. They understand the usefulness and limitations of views, ideas and actions and how to let go of them.

So what manifests is an increasingly selfless person, grateful for the Dhamma and steady in its aims. The reflexes of irritability and sensuality, of fascination with meditative absorptions, of self-reference and restlessness and ignorance remain, but a stream-enterer knows what self-view is, and where it can stop. That means they continue to work on the other fetters with assurance.

For now, this is a good place to stop.



meditation

Meeting the Edge:

Come into full body awareness, centred on the upright axis and breathing in and breathing out.

As this centredness becomes clear, widen the span of awareness. Extend awareness through the body and into the space immediately around you, as far as feels comfortable without losing touch with the centre. Contemplate and enjoy the changing energies within that sphere of awareness.

Disturbances will arise. These may be connected to a sound you can hear, or an unpleasant physical feeling. Feel your awareness ripple or contract at the edge of that disturbance. Maybe things start to speed up, or there are pushes to overcome or get away from the source of the disturbance. Acknowledge what is going on, and relax the responses that are attempting to deal with the disturbance. Instead continue gradually widening the sphere of awareness, as if you are encompassing or even embracing the disturbance. Relax the edge of resistance to disturbance, and silently, slowly contemplate the effect of that.

From time to time, mental disturbances will occur. These may be linked to other sensory disturbance, such as

feeling bothered by a repetitive sound in the next room. Or they may be purely mental – thoughts about things you have to do, or a happy memory or intriguing puzzle that seem to ask you to get involved with them. Sometimes it's regret over the past, or doubt about meditation. Acknowledge any of that in terms of a rippling or an agitation, a change of speed and energy. Slow down and wait in the presence of that. Don't react or be in a hurry to change anything. Instead soften your attitude to the agitation and try to discern it in terms of its energy. Meet the edge of that stirring, and widen your awareness over it.

Keep widening and resting in the sphere of awareness. Let the waves of disturbance go their own way. As things settle, sense and wordlessly contemplate the effect of that.

When you feel it's time to leave the meditation, wait; sense the energy of that intention. Widen your awareness over the edge of that arising intention. Contemplate and open to whatever is revealed.

Incline to the centre, feeling into the core of the body, and the breathing. Open to the space around you, the sounds, and eventually the visual field.



ENDNOTES

In the following, use has been made of the translations of Venerable Bhikkhu Bodhi, or Venerable Thanissaro – with much appreciation and gratitude. Venerable Bodhi’s translations are available through the Wisdom Publications editions of the Discourses. Venerable Thanissaro’s are available on the internet via the ‘Access to Insight’ website [accesstoinsight.org].

References to the suttas are abbreviated thus:

A= Anguttara Nikaya (Gradual, or Numerical, Discourses).

This is followed by the relevant book and sutta within that book.

D = Digha Nikaya (Long Discourses) followed by the number of the sutta and the section within that sutta.

M = Majjhima Nikaya (Middle-Length Discourses); followed by number of the sutta and the section within that sutta.

S = Samyutta Nikaya (Connected Discourses); followed by the number of the particular collection (samyutta) within the entire corpus; and the number of the sutta within that particular collection.

This system of reference replaces the system that uses the page numbers of the Pali Text Society’s texts. I hope that it makes cross-referencing easier.

Where There’s A Will, There’s A Way

1 The Buddha emphasised that everything we experience is not specifically related to our previous actions:

‘...some feelings arise based on phlegm... based on internal winds... based on an imbalance of bodily humours... from

the change of the seasons... from uneven care of the body... from assaults... from the result of kamma. That some feelings arise from the result of kamma one can know for oneself, and everyone understands that to be true. Now any contemplatives or sages who are of the doctrine and view that whatever an individual feels – pleasure, pain, neither pleasure-nor-pain – is entirely caused by what was done before – overstep what they themselves know, and what is agreed on by people in general. Therefore I say that those contemplatives or sages are wrong.’ S.36:21 see also: M.136

2 Intention/volition is kamma: e.g. A.Sixes 63. It’s important to recognize that ‘intention’ here does not necessarily require deliberation. Cetana refers to the ‘bent’ or the ‘intent’ of the heart, which underlies thinking and powers emotion.

3 Mental kamma is the strongest. This is the subject of a debate, recorded in M.56, in which the Buddha convincingly explains:

‘Of these three kinds of action... I describe mental action as the most reprehensible for the performance of evil action, and not so much bodily or verbal action.’

4 Dark, bright, both and the kamma that leads to the end of kamma:

‘And what is kamma that is neither dark nor bright with neither dark nor bright result, leading to the ending of kamma? The intention right there to abandon this kamma that is dark with dark result... bright with bright result... dark and bright with dark and bright result.’ A.Fours 232; see also: M.57.7-11

5 M.135 and M.136 both point to sundry destinations in heaven or hell realms as a result of deeds in this life.

6 According to A.Fours 77, the exact working out of kamma is one of the four ‘imponderables,’ the pondering of which would lead to ‘madness or vexation.’ The others are: the range of the power of a Buddha; the range of

- powers available to one in a state of absorption (*jhana*); and the origin of the world.
- 7 Right View is considered paramount in many suttas, and is described as:
‘There is what is given and what is offered and what is sacrificed; there is fruit and result of good and bad actions; there is this world and the other world; there is mother and father; there are beings who are reborn spontaneously; there are in this world good and virtuous contemplatives and sages who have realised for themselves by direct knowledge and declare this world and the other world.’ M.117.5
‘Right aim is an aim that is devoid of, or turns away from, harming, cruelty and sensual desire.’ M19
- 8 That is, the cultivator makes positive states such as calm or kindness come to be. Such a one has:
‘accomplishment in virtue; in desire; in self; in diligence; in careful attention.’ S.45:71.
- 9 According to M57.7-11, of the four kinds of kamma, bright, dark and a mix of bright and dark originate and give rise to a sense of self:
‘Thus a being’s appearance is due to a being.’ However, the kamma that ends kamma is described simply as
‘action that leads to the end of action.’

Bright Kamma

- 10 ‘...whatever a bhikkhu frequently thinks and ponders upon, that will become the inclination of his mind. If he frequently thinks and ponders upon thoughts of renunciation, non-ill will... non-cruelty then his mind inclines to thoughts of renunciation... non-ill will... non-cruelty.’ M.19.8
- 11 ‘And what are things fit for attention that he attends to? They are things such that when he attends to them the unarisen taint of sensual desire does not arise and the arisen taint of sensual desire is abandoned, the unarisen taint of becoming does not arise..and the arisen... is

abandoned, the unarisen taint of ignorance does not arise... and the arisen is abandoned.’ M.2.10

Kamma of Meditation

12 Three kinds of *sankhara*:

‘There are the three formations...: the bodily formation, the verbal formation and the mental formation...’

‘In-breathing and out-breathing... are the bodily formation; applied thought and sustained thought are the verbal formation; perception and feeling are the mental formation.’ M.44.13-15

13 Too much thinking tires the body:

‘But with excessive thinking and pondering I might tire the body, and when the body is tired, the mind becomes strained, and when the mind is strained it is far from concentration.’ M.19.8

14 To quote from the Anapanasati sutta:

‘Breathing in long, he understands “I breathe in long;” or breathing out long, he understands: “I breathe out long.”’ M.118.18

Here the word ‘understand’ (*pajanati*) is close to the word *sampajano* and implies a full awareness of the experience, rather than thinking about the experience.

Kamma and Memory

15 The two forms of contact are expounded at D.15.20

16 As in M18.18:

‘When there is no eye, no form, and no eye-consciousness, it is impossible to point out the manifestation of contact. When there is no manifestation of contact, it is impossible to point out the manifestation of feeling. When there is no... feeling, it is impossible to point out... perception... no... perception, it is impossible to point out the manifestation of thinking... no thinking, it is impossible to point out the manifestation of being beset by perceptions and notions tinged with mental proliferation.’

17 Conch blower: S. 42:8

18 Great heart:

‘Formerly my mind was narrow and undeveloped; but now my mind is measureless and well-developed. No measurable kamma will remain in it, none will persist there.’ A.Tens, 208.

N.B. The classic example of turning kamma around is Angulimala, who appears in the suttas as a murderer who had killed 999 people before encountering the Buddha. After receiving the teachings, his practice bore fruit in complete Awakening. See M.86

Regarding the world

19 ‘That in the world by which one is a perceiver of the world, a conceiver of the world – this is called the world in the Noble One’s Discipline. And what, friends, is that in the world by which one is a perceiver of the world, a conceiver of the world? The eye is that in the world by which one is a perceiver of the world, a conceiver of the world. The ear... The nose... The tongue... The body... The mind is that in the world by which one is a perceiver of the world, a conceiver of the world. That in the world by which one is a perceiver of the world, a conceiver of the world – this is called the world in the Noble One’s Discipline.’ S.35:116

20 “Name,” or “mentality” is made up of feeling (*vedana*), perception (*sañña*), intention/volition (*cetana*), impression (*phassa*), attention (*manasikara*).’ M.9.54; S.12:2

21 The origin and ceasing of the world:

‘And what, bhikkhus, is the origin of the world? In dependence on the eye and forms, eye-consciousness arises. The meeting of the three is contact. With contact as condition, feeling; with feeling as condition, craving; with craving as condition, clinging; with clinging as condition, existence (becoming); with existence as

condition birth; with birth as condition, ageing-and-death, sorrow, lamentation, pain, displeasure, and despair come to be. This, bhikkhus, is the origin of the world.’ [And the same for the other senses, including mind.

The ceasing of the world follows the same sequence up to craving, then:]

‘with the remainderless fading away and ceasing of that same craving comes cessation of clinging... [through to] cessation of birth, ageing-and-death, sorrow, lamentation, pain, displeasure, and despair cease.’ S.12:44

The fact that birth can cease in this lifetime suggests that ‘birth’ is more than a historical event in the past – it is a here and now drive that seeks states of being.

22 ...don’t get to the end of your own upheavals until you’ve reached the end of the world...

‘...I say that without having reached the end of the world there is no making an end to suffering. It is, friend, in just this fathom-long body endowed with perception and mind that I make known the world, the origin of the world, the cessation of the world and the way leading to the cessation of the world.’ S.2:26; A.Fours,45

23 There is no place where the Buddha in the early texts of the Pali Canon talks about these *parami*. Reference to them comes in the later books of the Canon – such as the Jataka – and in the classic commentary Visuddhimagga. There are however plenty of examples of the Buddha and his disciples practising morality, renunciation, persistence and the rest. The Mahayana texts and tradition refer to six *paramita*: generosity, morality, patience, energy, meditation and wisdom, and make much of these as essential Bodhisattva practices. That they occur in both Theravada and Mahayana seems to suggest that they were formulated when the early Buddhism out of which they both evolved was developing in India.

24 These four bases of clinging are the topic of M.11.

- 25 '...a young tender infant lying prone does not even have the notion 'personality,' so how could personality view arise in him? Yet the underlying tendency to personality view (*sakkayaditthi-anusaya*) lies within him.' M.64.3
- 26 These factors of Awakening are themselves a form of kamma:
'And what is kamma that is neither dark nor bright with neither dark nor bright result, leading to the ending of kamma? Mindfulness as a factor for Awakening, investigation of qualities... persistence... rapture... tranquillity... concentration... equanimity as a factor for Awakening.' A.Fours.238
- 27 An example of *dbammata* is at A.Elevens.2, where the Buddha outlines a sequence of practices beginning with moral training and culminating in Awakening. Moral conscience and concern also begin the causal sequence of factors leading to liberation at A.Sevens.61
Also see: A.Eights.81; A.Tens.1-4

The Kamma of Relationship

- 28 The role of proliferation as a source of suffering is referred to in M.18 and also D.21.2.2
It is the central topic of 'Concept and Reality in Early Buddhist Thought' by Ven Nyanananda (Buddhist Publication Society).
- 29 This refrain is one of the recommended daily recollections for a practising Buddhist. The text in full is:
'I am the owner of my kamma, heir to my kamma, born of my kamma, related to my kamma, abide supported by my kamma; whatever kamma I shall do, for good or for ill – of that I will be the heir.' A.Fives.57
- 30 The metaphor of kamma as a field is borrowed from A.Threes.76:
'Ananda, if there were no action, ripening in the domain of sensuality, would becoming in the domain of sensuality be known?

Certainly not, sir.

In that way, Ananda, action is a field, consciousness a seed, and craving the moisture for the consciousness of beings hindered by ignorance and fettered by craving to be established on a lower level [or of subtle form, or one of formlessness] So further becoming and return are effected in the future. Thus, Ananda, there is becoming.'

31 see: Millenium; David Maybury-Lewis. (Viking Penguin 1992) The Buddha considered spiritual friendship to be an essential support for Awakening as in the famous quote:

'spiritual friendship is the whole of the holy life.' S.45.2

And also :

'If wanderers who are members of other sects should ask you, "What, friend, are the prerequisites for the development of the supports for Awakening?" you should answer, "There is the case where a monk has admirable people as friends, companions, and colleagues. This is the first prerequisite for the development of the supports for Awakening.'" A.Nines.1

Also see: A.Nines.3 and Eights.54 for details.

Is There An End?

32 'Whatever recluses and brahmins have said that freedom from becoming comes about through some kind of becoming, none of them, I say, are freed from becoming. And whatever recluses and brahmins have said that escape from becoming comes about through some non-becoming, none of them, I say, have escaped from becoming. This suffering depends on clinging. With the ending of all clinging, no suffering is produced.' Udana 3.10

33 The four noble truths are expounded at S.56.11

34 'So, by knowing in what way, seeing in what way, can one immediately put an end to the outflows? There is the case where an uninstructed, ordinary person... assumes the body & form to be self. That assumption is a *sankhara*...

Or they do not assume the body and form to be the self, but they assume the self possesses form... form as in the self... self as in form... or feeling to be the self... the self as possessing feeling... feeling as in the self... self as in feeling... or perception to be the self... the self as possessing perception... perception as in the self... self as in perception... or *sankhara* to be the self... the self as possessing *sankhara*... *sankhara* as in the self... self as in *sankhara*... or consciousness to be the self... the self as possessing consciousness... consciousness as in the self... self as in consciousness. That assumption is a *sankhara*...

Or... they may have a view such as this: "This self is the same as the universe. Thus after death I will be constant, lasting, eternal not subject to change." This eternalist view is a *sankhara*... Or... they may have a view such as this: "I might not be, and neither might there be what is mine. I will not be, neither will there be what is mine." This annihilationist view is a *sankhara*... Or... they may be perplexed, doubtful and indecisive with regard to the true Dhamma. That perplexity, doubtfulness and indecisiveness is a *sankhara*.

Now what is the cause, what is the origination of that *sankhara*, from what is it born and produced? When an uninstructed, ordinary person is touched by a feeling born of contact accompanied by ignorance, craving arises. That (all the above) *sankhara* is born of that.

So that *sankhara*, bhikkhus, is impermanent, conditioned, dependently arisen. That craving... That feeling... That contact... That ignorance is impermanent, conditioned, dependently arisen. When one knows and sees thus the outflows are immediately brought to an end.' S.22.81

Glossary

In the list below, the English words I have used to render classic Buddhist terminology are followed by their Pali equivalents and alternative English renditions (that I am aware of) that you may come across.

absorption: *jhana*

action: *kamma* – cause; karma

aggregates, five: *khandha* – heaps

appreciative joy: *mudita* – sympathetic joy; appreciation

becoming: *bhava* – being; existence

outflow: *asava* – canker; corruption; inflow; taint

bodily program: *kaya-sankhara* – body-fabrication; bodily formation

bringing to mind: *vitakka* – directed thought; initial thought; thinking

calming: *samatha*

compassion: *karuna*

concentration: *samadhi* – collectedness

consciousness: *viññana*

designation-contact: *adbhivacana-phassa*

dispassion: *viraga* – fading

disturbance-contact: *patigha-phassa* – resistance impression

ease: *sukha* – happiness; pleasure

effect: *vipaka* – result; old kamma

equanimity: *upekkha*

evaluation: *vicara* – sustained thought; pondering; considering

factors of Awakening: *bojjhanga* – factors of Enlightenment

fathoming attention: *yoniso manasikara* – wise attention; appropriate attention; systematic attention

felt meanings: *sañña* – perception

full awareness: *sampajañña*

ignorance: *avijja* – unknowing
insight: *vipassana*
intention/volition: *cetana*
latent tendencies: *anusaya* – obsessions
life-force: *ayusankhara*
loving-kindness: *metta* – kindness; good will; friendliness
mental/emotional program: *citta-sankhara* – mental
formation
mind-base: *citta* – mind; heart
mindfulness: *sati*
mindfulness of breathing: *anapanasati*
mind-organ: *mano* – mind; intellect
motivation: *chanda* – desire
name: *nama* – mentality
non-involvement: *viveka* – non-attachment; detachment
perfections: *parami/paramita*
programs/patterns: *sankhara* – fabrications; formations:
mental formations; volitional formations
proliferate/proliferation: *papañca* – diffusiveness;
complication; worldliness
rapture: *piti* – zest
rational program: *vaci-sankhara* – thought-fabrication;
verbal formation
relinquishment: *vossagga* – letting go; self-surrender; release;
stopping: *nirodha* – ceasing; cessation
suffering and stress: *dukkha* – dis-ease; unsatisfactoriness
thirst (psychological): *tanha* – craving
Unprogrammed: *asankhata* – Unconditioned
value: *puñña* – merit
wandering on: *samsara* – endless wandering; rolling on

