

This is the Path | *Ajahn Dtun*







Tan Ajahn Dtun (Thiracitto)





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# **This is the Path**

## **By Ajahn Dtun**

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## Preface

Originally *This is the Path* was compiled and printed by Wat Buddha Dhamma commemorating Tan Ajahn Dtun's first visit to their monastery.

For this second edition, a certain amount of editing of the original text has been done. This was not due to any errors in the actual translation, but rather to correct any remaining spelling mistakes along with the re-arranging of personal pronouns and tenses. And so it is hoped that it will make for smoother reading without changing the meaning of the original text in any way.

Also an additional talk, *Developing the Brahma Vihāras*, has been included along with some question and answers. This balances the contents out to being two talks for lay people and two talks for monastics, although laypeople dedicated to Dhamma practice are sure to derive benefit all the same.

Translating extemporaneous Dhamma talks into a written form is often a difficult task of finding the right balance between literal consistency to the spoken word and grammatical correctness – readability. The translator has always felt obliged to stay close to the spoken word owing to his relative inexperience in Dhamma practice.

For any errors that may still remain in both text and translation, the translator accepts full responsibility and humbly begs the reader's forgiveness.

The translator  
Wat Boonyawad  
October 2554 (2011)



# Growing in Goodness and Virtue

Tan Ajahn Dtun (Thiracitto)  
2 January 2549 (2006)

Within the teachings of the Lord Buddha, the Buddha instructed the community of his disciples (monks, nuns, laymen and laywomen) to become acquainted with the truths of nature; that is, with regards to one's own body, the bodies of others and all material objects - all come into being and exist for a period of time before finally ceasing to be. The Buddha was teaching that we should know the nature of things as they truly are: once born, the natural course for all beings is that they must break apart – disintegrate. We must have the *sati-paññā* (mindfulness and wisdom) to know things as they really are by studying one's own body and mind, and by contemplating the *Dhamma*<sup>1</sup> so as to totally cleanse one's heart of the *kilesas* (defilements) of greed, anger and delusion. These impurities fill the hearts of all beings, bringing with them the endless suffering that comes from the wandering on through *saṃsāra* (the beginningless cycle of birth, death and rebirth).

Taking a human birth and meeting with the teachings of the Lord Buddha is something extremely hard to come by in this world. People, however are still heedless, deludedly taking pleasure in forms, sounds, odours, tastes and bodily sensations, along with material objects, with there being a never-ending search for wealth, honour and praise. Actually we have previously come across and known all of these things through countless lifetimes. However,

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1 Supreme truth: the right natural order underlying everything; the teaching of the Buddha

the *kilesas* within the heart of all beings are never satiated, never knowing enough. When we meet with old things, we think they are new, deludedly enjoying materiality which results in an endless succession of dying and being reborn in *saṃsāra*. Therefore, it is something very rare indeed that we should be born as humans and meet with the teachings of the Lord Buddha.

The human realm is truly an excellent realm for it is the realm in which all the Buddhas have attained enlightenment, hence making their hearts pure. Most of the *arahant* (fully enlightened being) disciples also purified their hearts here in this human realm. So why is it that, having taken this human birth, we still do not make the effort to work for the heart's purification here in this very lifetime? Why let time slip by unproductively when time is relentlessly passing by? One's life is continually diminishing, getting shorter and shorter. One who is heedful will, for this reason, put forth great effort to perform only good, virtuous deeds by observing *sīla* (moral precepts), practicing *samādhi* (concentration) and cultivating *paññā* (wisdom) within their heart, for this is the path of practice for the realization of Nibbāna - the complete ending of suffering.

All the Buddhas pointed to the path of *sīla*, *samādhi*, and *paññā*-virtue, concentration and wisdom - as being the path that will direct one's heart towards purity; that is, the complete absence of greed, anger and delusion, or in other words, the realization of Nibbāna within one's own heart.

When the time and opportunity is appropriate, we perform acts of goodness so as to develop *pāramī*<sup>2</sup> (spiritual perfections) within one's heart. Having correct or right view, we will wish to make offerings in order to increase our virtue and *pāramī*. When developing virtue and goodness, however, don't go delaying or

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2 10 spiritual perfections (*pāramī*) cultivated as a support for realizing enlightenment: 1) generosity; 2) morality; 3) renunciation; 4) wisdom; 5) effort; 6) patient endurance; 7) truthfulness - being true to one's word; 8) resolution; 9) loving kindness; 10) equanimity.

slowing down one's heart by doing acts that make us 'lose points'; that is, behaviour that obstructs the development of all that is virtuous. For example, when we do things which are immoral, or improper, this is called 'losing points'; for such actions interrupt one's continuing growth in goodness. Whenever we behave improperly or immorally, it will prevent us from performing virtuous acts such as observing moral precepts, developing concentration and cultivating wisdom within one's heart - for moral and immoral behaviour are mutually obstructive to each other.

When taking birth in each and every lifetime, all the Buddhas would re-establish or continue anew with their aspiration for Buddhahood. They gave up all that is unskillful, bad or immoral. In each lifetime, they cleansed their hearts by performing only good deeds until finally making the heart pure.

The arahant disciples also set their hearts upon building up the spiritual perfections in order to transcend *dukkha* (suffering, discontentment); namely, for the realization of Nibbāna. They had patience and endurance by not acting upon their *kilesas*, for doing anything immoral or unwholesome would be a cause for suffering both here in the present and also in the future. They accumulated only goodness by performing the meritorious acts of observing moral precepts, developing concentration and cultivating wisdom. As a result, their store of virtue and *pāramī* gradually grew until their hearts became strong and unshakeable. They had mindfulness and wisdom investigating, penetrating through to the truth regarding their body or personal condition, realizing that the bodies of all sentient beings are merely aggregates of earth, water, air and fire that come together only temporarily: once born, no-one can go beyond ageing; no-one can go beyond sickness, and so no-one can go beyond death. When there is birth, change then follows, until ultimately the body breaks apart.

If we understand clearly that once having come into being, all natural conditions and phenomena will go through change until

eventually disintegrating, and that the mind is unable to dictate that they be otherwise - stable or constant. As a consequence, we will make the effort to have *sati-paññā*, mindfulness and wisdom, seeing through things to what they truly are, not being heedless in one's life but rather attempting to progressively build up and increase one's spiritual perfections and virtue. *Sati-paññā* investigates any *dukkha*, or defilements, that are within one's heart - these being born of delusion, with greed, anger, satisfaction and dissatisfaction as their outcome. One must recognize that all emotions of discontentment or unsatisfactoriness are unfavorable and so must seek out the path that avoids or subdues this *dukkha*, hence bringing an end to the greed, anger and delusion that are within one's heart

We should all try, therefore, not to be negligent in our lives. Always have mindfulness and wisdom watching over and tending to the mind in each and every moment by striving to remove any *kilesas* and harmful thoughts from one's mind. One's thoughts do not arise from trees, houses, cars or one's personal wealth. Rather, all thoughts, or *dukkha*, originate from within one's mind. If we hold to incorrect or wrong views, our thinking will, as a result, be mistaken. If we do not have the *sati-paññā* to restrain our thoughts, we will speak or act in ways that are improper or harmful.

We must have mindfulness guarding over the mind, for the mind is the *kilesas'* place of birth. Patiently persevere with any unwholesome thoughts that arise by looking for skilful ways to reflect upon and discard - at that very moment - any greed, anger, satisfaction and dissatisfaction from one's heart, not keeping or holding to such adverse mental states. One has to know how to let go of one's attachment towards emotions and thoughts by not acting or speaking unskillfully. If we have mindfulness watching over the mind, staying in the present moment, we will be wise to any defiled emotions, recognizing that they are states of mind, naturally subject to arising and ceasing.

However, if one's mindfulness and wisdom are lacking in strength, not having the energy or the wisdom to reflect upon one's emotions or *kilesas* in order to remove them from the heart, we must then bring mindfulness to focus upon one's meditation object so as to establish concentration, thus cutting any adverse emotions out from the heart. Constantly recollect the Lord Buddha, or his teachings, by reciting the meditation word 'buddho, buddho, buddho...' silently within your mind so as to give rise to samadhi, the peacefulness and coolness of mind. The mind will be still and concentrated - all thoughts, both good and bad, will be absent from the mind.

Once the mind has firm, strong mindfulness, one will have the wisdom to continually reflect upon and abandon any *kilesas* from one's heart. Even if the gross *kilesas* of greed and anger arise, mindfulness and wisdom will be abreast of them. When more moderate or subtle defilements arise, *sati-paññā* will gradually become wise to them by having the skilful means to see the emotions for what they truly are: impermanent and without any self entity, thus releasing one's hold of them.

We make an effort, therefore, to remain focused upon growing in goodness and virtue, along with building up the spiritual perfections. What is important is that we don't go making any bad kamma by performing unwholesome or immoral deeds. We need to have patience and a commitment to following the teachings of the Lord Buddha by refraining from doing anything that is bad or immoral and by practicing only that which is good, for this is what cultivates one's heart to go beyond all suffering, bringing true, genuine happiness.

To experience true happiness, we must develop the mind by practicing according to the teachings of the Lord Buddha. Once we are familiar with practicing generosity, we can then cultivate the mind even further by keeping the five precepts. If one's mind grows in strength, we may, on occasion, keep the eight precepts, or even choose to observe them as one's normal manner of being.

When you have free time, try developing *samādhi* by practicing meditation. Most people, however, think they don't have the time to practice, being too busy with their external work and duties along with their family obligations. That people do not have the time to practice is because they don't see the use or benefit of meditation; consequently, they misguidedly take pleasure with the things of the world.

We practice meditation in order to develop strong mindfulness, wisdom so that it can discard all *dukkha* from the mind, hence curing one's heart of its suffering and discontent. Everyday, therefore, we should train and develop ourselves by giving ten or fifteen minutes to quieting the mind, or longer than this if one wishes; work at it, really develop it. We are our own refuge, so we must make an effort to train and develop ourselves, for if they can train elephants and dogs to be tame, or break horses of their wildness, then why can't we train our own heart to be good? We think that this mind is our own, yet as soon as the mind becomes troubled or distressed, why is it then that the mind only thinks of bad things - things bound up with *kilesas*? Why is there always *dukkha* burning within the heart?

For this reason, we must have mindfulness and wisdom rising up to overthrow the *kilesas* within one's heart. Look for ways to let go of the defilements, thus lessening and weakening them. We really have to train this mind: train it according to the teachings of Lord Buddha, for his path is the most excellent of ways which makes it possible for the hearts of all beings to be cleansed until purified.

And so, time is passing by. Last year has passed by according to conventional, mundane view or belief, now being considered as the 'old year'. Today is the second day of the New Year. The old year, along with all of our experiences - one's joys and one's sorrows - has passed by. Don't do again anything that proved not to be good; always regard these things as lessons that educate one's



heart. Anything that was good and wholesome should be gathered together to be further enhanced. The past has gone by; the future has yet to come. One should have mindfulness and wisdom tending to one's heart, so as to keep it established in virtue and goodness. Everyday, therefore practice only goodness, and one's heart will, as a consequence, be cool and calm - true happiness will arise.

All conventions and designations are merely mundane concepts or assumptions - that's all they are. The days are passing by: from days into months, from months into years, this is completely natural. However, months, years, 'New Years Day'... are all assumed names and concepts; nevertheless, the days and nights remain just the same as ever, but it's the mind that feels it has to change or improve on things by giving meaning and names to them.

In this that we have assumed to be the New Year, we will have to establish certain wholesome states, making goodness and virtue arise in our hearts. If we are accustomed to practicing generosity, and we desire to enhance this goodness even more, we must then observe the moral precepts. Once observing the moral precepts has become one's normal manner, and should we wish for an even greater kind of goodness, we then should train and develop the mind in meditation so as to give rise to the mindfulness and wisdom that will be able to see through to the truths regarding one's own body, the bodies of others, and all material objects: everything in this world comes into being, exists, and ultimately breaks apart.

When the body has broken apart, will one's mind go to a realm that is high and refined or to one that is low and coarse? Does the heart have a true refuge or not? Or do we only have our homes, our wealth and our possessions, believing these to be one's refuge? We can, however, only depend on these things temporarily. When the body breaks apart, the mind is completely incapable of taking one's wealth or one's physical body along with it. There is only the goodness and virtue that one has accumulated through the practice of *sīla*, *samādhi* and *paññā* that can go along with the mind. So, try

establishing correct or right view within one's heart in order to build up the spiritual perfections, thus effecting a lessening in the number of one's future lives until finally realizing Nibbāna here in one's own heart.

At present, you all have faith in this supreme dispensation of the Lord Buddha, routinely coming to make offerings (to the community of monks), even though it may not always be here at Wat Boonyawad. Normally, at the appropriate time and opportunity, you will go and give offerings at various monasteries, some being close and others being far from your homes, due to having practiced such generosity since past lives through into this present life. You have thus developed a strong tendency to further practice generosity and to build up the spiritual perfections. This can be considered to be one's deep-rooted conditioning, having faithfully practiced like this since the past, hence causing one to live life with right view in one's heart; and as such, one's virtue and goodness will continue to grow further.

And so, I would like to call upon the spiritual perfections of all the Buddhas and the greatness of their teaching, along with the spiritual perfections of all the arahant disciples; may their goodness and virtue be your highest object of recollection, together with the virtue of the Sangha, since the past until the present, as well as the goodness they will continue to cultivate in the future, and the goodness of all of you - ever since one's former lives until the present - so that you will aspire to further practice goodness in order to realize Nibbāna.

May all this goodness create the conditions for you all to experience growth and prosperity in your lives, realizing whatever you may wish for - provided it is within the bounds of correct morality.

May the vision of Dhamma arise in your practice and may you all realize Nibbāna.

May it be so.

# Developing the Brahma Vihāras

These teachings by Tan Ajahn Dtun were part of a meditation retreat for laypeople held in Australia in March 2005.

We have all come together here to keep precepts, to develop meditation and to cultivate wisdom in our hearts. This intention is something very hard to find in the minds of people in this present day. When we have mindfulness and wisdom, we can see the harm there is in acting in unskillful ways and doing things which transgress the precepts. In keeping the five precepts, always maintaining them in one's daily life, one will come to see the benefit of the precepts. Within the heart of each person there has to be a moral conscience, along with a fear and dread of the consequences of one's unwholesome actions. The maintaining of the five precepts is considered as being a quality of a consummate human being. People who do not keep the five precepts can be considered as not being truly human, since the least humans can do is to keep these precepts.

When we have this sense of moral conscience and a dread of the consequences of our actions, it truly elevates our minds – it is like having the mind of a *devata*, or a celestial being. And when we wish to further develop and cultivate our minds, we should then practice the *Brahma Vihāras*, or the four sublime states, nurturing them in our hearts: firstly, having *mettā* or loving kindness; secondly, *karunā* or compassion; thirdly, *muditā* or sympathetic joy;

fourthly, *upekkhā* or equanimity. All these are the states of mind or properties of a *Brahma*.<sup>1</sup>

Having **loving kindness, *mettā***, means that we have friendliness and kindness towards our friends as well as all living beings, not wishing to harm or hurt them, or to take the life of any being.

**Compassion, *karunā***, is the quality that arises when we see other people, animals or any kind of beings experiencing suffering. If we are able to help them, we try to do so with the best of our ability, according to our level of mindfulness and wisdom. This means that we have an attitude of kindness and the wish to help one another.

The quality of **sympathetic joy, *muditā***, means that if we see any person experiencing happiness, we as a consequence, are happy for them. We feel happy too, having no envy or jealousy for the happy person, because in reality we all wish for happiness and so when we see other people experiencing happiness, we are happy for them and feel pleasure too.

As for the quality of **equanimity, *upekkhā***, if we see other beings or animals experiencing suffering or hardship and we are unable to be of assistance, we must then let the mind rest with equanimity by feeling neither happy nor unhappy with the situation.

In our daily life, as we experience things, we can develop and cultivate these qualities of loving kindness, compassion, sympathetic joy and equanimity, as appropriate to the situation. These are the qualities that nourish the heart, bringing about continual peace, happiness, coolness and tranquility. This peacefulness and happiness will create the conditions for one to have the mindfulness and wisdom to clearly see the suffering in

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1 Heavenly beings composed of purest light. Their existence is more subtle than that of devatas (celestial beings that experience pleasure through the five senses) due to the refinement of their minds—being able to access states of mental absorption (*jhāna*), thus they abide in the highest heavens.

one's own life, and therefore look for the way and the practice that will enable one to let go of this suffering.

Therefore in observing the five precepts (the main quality of a human being), having this moral conscience and dread of the consequences of our bad actions (the property of a celestial being) and having these four *Bramha Vihāras*, (the state of mind of a Brahma god), all of these qualities when they are combined with our practice of developing *sīla*, *samādhi* and *pañña* (virtue, concentration and wisdom) will help us in developing correct view. As a consequence, when one dies, one's heart will not drop into a lower, unfortunate realm. There will only be continuous growth and development taking place in one's mind. Happiness and benefit will arise, as a result, both in this present life as well as in one's future lives.

Therefore I ask all of you to have the confidence to go about performing virtuous deeds.

If anybody has any questions, please feel free to ask.

***You have spoken a lot about training the mind and you have made some reference to the heart. How do the heart and the mind work together in meditation and in life?***

Actually these two words have the same meaning. The Pali word is *citta*. Sometimes we use the word 'mind' and sometimes the word 'heart'. We are just making use of conventional language. Some may use the word 'mind' and others the word 'heart', but they are talking about the same thing. Except for when we are talking about the contents of the mind, or the heart, then the heart and the mind are one thing, but their contents are another thing.

***Since ordaining, what and how much have you studied? How much reading and studying do you recommend for others?***

Since beginning the practice, I have mainly just studied this body and mind. As for reading, I have hardly done any and I do not recommend a lot of formal Dhamma study. It is not necessary, whereas *bhāvanā* (meditation practice) is necessary. If you can use reading as a means for making the mind peaceful, that is fine. For example, if the mind will not settle down, maybe reading a few pages of an appropriate book will help to make it calm. But then, go back to meditation. If you do too much theoretical study, this can become an obstacle for developing meditation. While sitting, the mind may start to wonder if this is *upacāra samādhi* (access concentration) or *jhāna* (meditative absorption). The mind tries to compare the present experience with what has been studied in the scriptures and this can hinder insight or prevent the mind from deepening in calmness.

However I do recommend reading the biographies of the Forest meditation masters, as it can be both inspirational and educational to see how they practiced and how they lived their lives.

***How essential is body contemplation? Didn't the Venerable Ajahn Chah teach 'letting go'?***

It is essential to investigate the body to see the mind clearly. Sometimes people take Luang Por Chah's teachings from the end of the path and forget about the instructions for the beginning. If one has not passed beyond all attachment to the body, it is impossible to clearly investigate the mind. The investigation of *citta* and *dhamma satipathānas* (the four foundations of mindfulness: the body, feelings, mind and *dhammas*) is the path of practice for *anāgāmis*. Before that, they can be investigated, but only superficially. Sometimes you hear people say, 'Kilesas are in the mind, not in the body, so it is the mind that should be contemplated.' But it is only by passing beyond attachment to the body that the other *khandhas* (the five physical and mental components of personality:

body, feeling, memory, thinking and consciousness) become clear. Without investigating the body as elements, as *asubha*, as thirty-two parts, one will not be able to realize *sotāpanna*. Even those with great *pāramī*, such as Luang Por Tate and Luang Ta Mahā Boowa, had to go through the body to realize the path.

It is important to note that in the higher ordination ceremony to become a Buddhist monk, the preceptor must instruct the candidate for ordination on the five principal objects of meditation: hair, body hair, nails, teeth and skin. To not give this instruction invalidates the whole ordination. And why? Because the Lord Buddha knew that by not instructing a candidate on such an essential topic would be the cause for those persons Holy-Life to be unfruitful, or more precisely, they will not realize the noble paths to awakening, their fruitions, nor Nibbāna.

***How deep can one go with the practice of being mindful  
in daily life?***

Being continuously aware of mental objects throughout the day is an essential support for one's meditation practice, but it is *samādhi* that gives *sati* (mindfulness) the strength to be firmly established. If we are mindful throughout the day, letting go of mental objects as they arise, then when we sit in meditation, the mind becomes deeply peaceful more easily. However, this kind of awareness and letting go is like trimming the branches of a tree: no matter how much you trim them, they keep growing again. To uproot the tree altogether, you have to uproot the attachment and identification with the body as 'me' or 'mine'. I experimented with simply watching mental objects for a while: one day attraction to sense objects would arise and I would focus my awareness upon it, causing the delight to cease. But the next day, there would be delight with other objects. There is no end to it. However, with body contemplation, it comes to an end.

*When I have recommended body contemplation to others, some answered: “That is only one valid way of practice, but other ways are equally good. To say that only one way will lead to path attainment is narrow-minded. Luang por Chah taught to practice more openly and broadly than that, using reflections such as ‘Don’t attach’ or ‘It’s not sure.’” How would you answer this, Ajahn?*

If I did not feel the people were open and receptive to being taught, I would not say much at all. It is easier to remove a mountain than to change people’s attachment to their views. In twenty or thirty years you can gradually blow up a huge mountain, but people’s views can remain steadfastly fixed for a lifetime, many lifetimes. Those who say body contemplation is a narrow path, are themselves trapped in narrow thinking. In truth, body contemplation is very broad and leads to great freedom due to true insight.

From my experience and from seeing the results of others in their practice, to realize Dhamma, to attain at least *sotāpanna*, is impossible without thoroughly and deeply uprooting the identification with the body. Even the likes of Luang Pu Tate and Luang Ta Mahā Boowa, monks with enormous *pāramī* and refined awareness throughout the day, had to go back and contemplate the body before they realized the Dhamma. It is not enough to do it just a few times either. The great Forest teachers had to contemplate over and over. They would then get results in accordance with their *pāramī* and effort. It is not enough simply to be aware of postures of the body. You must train yourself to be an expert at seeing the body as *asubha* (not beautiful). When one who has mastered this sees other people, especially someone of the opposite sex, the *asubha* perception is immediately brought up to counter any *kilesas* that appear. The body must be



repeatedly broken up into parts or deeply seen as impermanent for real insight to arise. It is possible to realize the first stage of the path through contemplating the death of one's own body. When mastered, body contemplation is amazing and wonderful in all sorts of ways – not narrow at all. Wherever Luang Pu Mun went, he would rely on body contemplation to keep his heart light and at ease

There are many monks with a lot of *pāramī* who claim that their mind is continually light and bright, that *kilesas* do not arise at all or only in subtle ways and that Dhamma is clear to them. They claim that they see everything arising and passing away and that they do not attach to any of it – so they do not see any need to investigate the body. However, this is just *samādhi*, being stuck in *samādhi*, being attached to a self-image of being enlightened, of being someone who understands Dhamma. But they are still stuck in *samsāra* without anything preventing them from falling into lower realms in the future. *Kilesas* are very tricky, very clever. If you look at the practice of truly enlightened people, you will see that they all followed the path of body contemplation.

Luang Por Chah himself practiced this way. He taught *asubha* practice – especially investigation of hair, body hair, nails, teeth and skin or seeing the body as a rotten corpse – but he would teach this more in private to specific individuals. Publicly he tended not to emphasize it as much as some of the other Forest teachers. I think this was because he saw that the majority of people were not ready for it. They still needed to work with general mindfulness as a base for developing *samādhi*, so he taught general 'letting go'. It is not correct to say that Luang Por Chah did not teach body contemplation.

If the mind is not concentrated, body contemplation will only be superficial. However, it is still necessary to become acquainted with it from the beginning. Then gradually *nimittas* (images and

perceptions of the *asubha*, *anicca*, *dukkha*, *anattā* nature of the body) will arise.

***When should one investigate one's own body and when the body of others?***

In the beginning, it is usually easier to contemplate the bodies of others because there is so much *upādāna* (clinging or attachment) bound up in our relationship with our own body. However, having become skilled with external contemplation (e.g. through looking at skeletons or seeing others as skeletons), you bring it back into your own body. If you already have *nimittas* (mental images/visions) of your own body, there is no need to look at the bodies of others. Going to an autopsy has much less impact on the mind than internal *nimittas*.

***How does one know when one has enough samādhi (concentration) for contemplating the body?***

*Samādhi* is the fundamental support upon which wisdom is developed. When developing concentration, bring your awareness to focus upon a meditation object that you feel comfortable with, without having any expectation or desire for results. Make the mind as calm as you can without having any thoughts as to what degree of concentration you have achieved: 'Is this the first or second *jhāna*...?' Believe me, there are no signs that come up and tell you, so don't look for any. If you are able to make your mind peaceful, then allow the mind to rest in that peace. When the mind starts to withdraw from this peaceful state, the thinking process will gradually resume. It is at this moment that we can take up the body for contemplation instead of allowing the mind to think aimlessly. Some meditators are not able to make their mind quite as peaceful as this, but still they are able to contemplate upon the body.

## Developing the Brahma Vihāras

Actually, the easiest way to see if you have sufficient concentration is by simply trying to contemplate. If your mindfulness is firm enough to keep the mind on its object of reflection, without it wandering away with any passing thoughts, then this shows one has sufficient concentration, or the strength of mind for the work of contemplating. If, however, the mind keeps straying off with all kinds of thoughts, then this clearly shows the mind is not yet strong enough to be put to work. One must then return to further developing concentration to help strengthen one's mindfulness.

Developing concentration is no different to an athlete that has to do weight training to make their body strong. They start off with light weights and as they become stronger gradually move up to heavier weights. Likewise, the meditator frequently practices sitting and walking meditation to develop strong mindfulness and concentration in order to have the strength of mind needed for contemplation.

Alternatively, you could compare developing concentration to the act of sharpening a kitchen knife. Having sharpened one's knife, one takes some vegetables or meat that requires cutting. If the knife cuts through the food with great ease and little effort, this tells one that the knife is sharp enough for the task at hand. But if cutting the food requires great effort, with many attempts, one will conclude that the knife isn't up to the task, and so one should re-sharpen it. Developing concentration is just the same. If one's *samādhi* is strong, it is comparable to a sharp knife. When one comes to contemplate the body, the mind will cut incisively into its object of contemplation, enabling the mind to clearly see and understand that object. However, if one's attempt at contemplating proves to be a difficult struggle due to the mind not accepting its given task, or there are still too many unrelated thoughts moving through the mind, then this clearly shows that one's mindfulness and concentration are lacking in strength. One must therefore

strengthen them by further developing concentration; that is, we sharpen the knife again. Always remember that if all you ever do is sharpen your knife but never use it, that knife is of no real use. However, if all you ever do is use your knife but never re-sharpen it, then ultimately that knife will also be of no use to you either.

***Could you please explain death contemplation, like how to do it and how often? Can one realize the Dhamma by death contemplation, and if so, up to what stage?***

Regarding the practice itself, we may consider death many times a day, depending upon the time and opportunity, but at the very least we should contemplate death once a day. This can even be done in daily life. For example, if we are traveling in a car and we seen an animal which has been run over, laying dead at the side of the road, we will see that it is made of flesh and bones and other different things and that it will eventually decompose and break apart. Then we can turn this contemplation inward to oneself, one's own body, realizing that we are of the very same nature. If a friend or relative were to die and one attended their funeral, we should not go thinking that it is a party where we will meet up with old friends. We should think of the life of this dead person, think of the course their life had taken and see that ultimately they have ended up in this state. They are going to be buried in the ground or burnt to ashes. Some people are older than we are, others are younger, and still they die. So we must come back and contemplate ourselves and realize that ultimately we will end up the same – awaiting burial or ready to be burnt.

We contemplate death so as to remember not to be heedless in our lives, therefore attempting to develop and practice virtue to its utmost for as long as we still have life. So, in the course of our practice of keeping precepts, developing virtue, meditation and wisdom in our minds, if we include death contemplation and

we give it a lot of emphasis, we shall be able to know and see the Dhamma to the level of *sotāpanna*, the first stage of enlightenment, without having to contemplate the thirty two parts of the body, the loathsomeness of the body, or the four elements of the body. However, if we wish to go on to a higher attainment, we must revert to contemplating either the thirty-two parts of the body, the loathsomeness of the body, or the four elements.

There was a time when I was still a layman, when I contemplated upon death. This actually hastened my coming to ordain. I thought that if I continued my studies and then started a career, if it happened that I should suddenly die, either due to sickness or accident, I would not have developed virtue and goodness to any real extent. There was this fear that if death came to me, I would not have done enough wholesome deeds, or cultivated enough virtue in my life. So finally, having reflected upon my life like this, and having previously given the possibility of future ordination some thought, it happened that all by coincidence, late one evening, I picked up a Dhamma book that opened at the last words of the Buddha. The Buddha said, 'Take heed monks, I caution you thus: all things that arise are of a nature to cease. Therefore, strive on ceaselessly, discerning and alert both for your own benefit and the benefit of others.' Reading this, and contemplating its meaning, I decided to renounce the lay life and come to ordain.

Once ordained I was very resolute, extremely determined in my practice. Everyday I would consider death, at least once. The contemplation of death and making this awareness very real within my mind was something that I firmly established. Sometimes in the morning when I awoke, I would think to myself, 'So I have still not died' and then just tell myself that I would only have life for this one day and one night. For example, if I was going to take my rest at 10 p.m., then that is when I would die - at 10 p.m.; or if I was going to take my rest at 11 p.m., then I would die at 11 p.m. This is something which really stimulates the mind to get energetic about

the practice. In those days at Wat Pah Pong they would ring the morning bell at three in the morning and we would have morning chanting at either 3.30 or 4 a.m. depending on whether we had sitting meditation before or after the chanting. And in the evenings there was a meeting that started at 7 p.m. However, I wished to profit from the situation, so I got up at 2 a.m. and I contemplated and focused upon death until there was a clear awareness of it present in my heart.

In those days I did not take a rest during the day. We came together in the mornings to sit in meditation as a group, but the time outside of that was free time for individual practice which, for myself, I would use by alternating between sitting and walking meditation. Normally I would take a rest at 10 p.m., just resting for four hours. Some days I rested at 11 p.m. and would wake up at 3 a.m. In those days at Wat Pah Pong, on the *Uposatha*<sup>2</sup> we would practice throughout the night, standing, walking or sitting in meditation, without lying down.

This is the way I used to practice meditation about eighty percent of the time. Another ten percent was when I was even more diligent in my practice, I would only take two or three hours rest at night. And the other ten percent was when, after keeping up a period of maybe five to ten days of strenuous practice, my body would feel tired and weak, so I would take a rest in the afternoon for maybe thirty to forty minutes.

The contemplation of death made me never want to think about tomorrow. Even though, when I first ordained, there were still thoughts about the future, there was always this awareness reminding my heart that I may die tonight, so what is the point of thinking about tomorrow? Such thoughts bring us back to the present moment. As a consequence, the mind's proliferation about

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2 Observance days of the moon: the full, new and half-moon nights, which occur once every seven or eight days.

the future – tomorrow, next week, next month and so on – gradually slows down and lessens till eventually we just have mindfulness firmly established in the present moment.

It could be compared to having a ball which we throw against a wall. When thrown, the ball does not penetrate the wall. In our case, when we allow the mind to keep thinking off into the future would be like the ball penetrating the wall and going on and on. But if we have a strong wall, that is, the awareness of death, once the ball hits it, it just comes back, and so the mind is always coming back to the present moment.

This was the cause of my being able to make my mind quiet very easily and it was peaceful nearly all the time. Therefore I ask of all of you to develop this practice of *maranānussati*, death contemplation. Give it some consideration each day. The contemplation of death is not done so as to give rise to fear, but to make us heedful. In doing so, we will no longer be lost in, or deluded by the world; we are no longer heedlessly caught up in the world.

***I told my mother that I would be with her, to help her when she is about to pass away. Can you please advise me as to how I can help her in her dying moments?***

At this moment, while she is still alive, you should be taking the best possible care of her. In doing so you would be repaying some of your debt of gratitude to her, for she has taken great care of you right from when you were in her womb and throughout your life up until adulthood. This debt of gratitude that we have to our parents is immense. Sometimes we may try to repay it for our whole life and still be unable to fully do so.

Before I ordained, I sometimes thought that I would work and then try to financially assist my father; however, I came and ordained and so I would sometimes think, ‘How will I ever repay my debt of gratitude to my father?’ I felt that even if I was to find

money, wealth and possessions to give him, I would still be unable to fully repay my debt to him. So I found a shortcut: I encouraged him to come and ordain, so that I would be able to take good care of him, meet his needs as he got older and also give advice on the Dhamma. I felt that if I could give him good advice about his Dhamma practice, this would be fully repaying my debt of gratitude to him. My father was a person who had wholesome views and a strong faith in the Buddha's teaching, so he ordained and lived with me for sixteen years. He died about two years ago and I was able to talk to him until the very last moments. I do feel that I was able to truly repay my debt to him.

If we look for material things and wealth to repay our debt to our parents, we cannot completely repay it. The way to do so is to give the Dhamma to our parents and to set them on the right course in Dhamma practice. This is the way to repay our debt of gratitude towards them.

If you feel a sense of gratitude towards your mother, this is very good. You should take the greatest care of her. Right now, you should teach her to practice meditation. If she shows strong attachment towards her body, teach her ways to gradually let go of this attachment. Teach her to contemplate the truth that these bodies of ours are not within our command, and that it is the elements of the body going out of balance that causes aging, sickness and death to occur. She should contemplate like this to make her mind quiet, practicing as time avails. When the moment of death comes, you should instruct her to use her mindfulness and wisdom to contemplate the body so as not to attach to it, but rather just let it go on its natural course. Having made the mind be at peace, she should then focus upon her meditation object.

All of us here in this room should be practicing this contemplation of death, not leaving it until the moment of death comes. Just look at boxers: they have to train before going up into the ring for the real fight, they do not just go up there unpracticed. Athletes also



must train before competing. The same goes for us: we have to practice and get an understanding of death before death actually comes to us. Consequently, we have to practice contemplating the body and death every day.

***Could you please explain all the stages of letting go of the kilesas? Also, can you please explain the state of mind of one who has attained to these stages of awakening, and what should the meditation object be for each of these stages?***

To explain all this would require a lot of time, so I will just do so briefly.

We say letting go of one portion of the *kilesas* is the attainment of *sotāpanna*, one who has entered the stream; letting go of the second portion is the attainment of *sakadāgāmi*, the once-returner; letting go of the third portion is the attainment of *anāgāmi*, the non-returner; and the letting go of the fourth, and final, portion of the *kilesas* is the attainment of *arahant*, a fully enlightened being.

Now for the second part of the question: ‘Explain the state of mind of one who has attained to these states.’ A *sotāpanna* is one who, to some extent, has let go of attachment to the body by clearly realizing that this body is not the mind and the mind is not the body. The *kilesa* of greed has been lessened to some extent by the fact that one’s actions and speech will always be within the bounds of the five precepts or, if one is a monastic, within the bounds of the eight, ten or 227 precepts. *Sotāpannas* are content with what they already have. That does not mean that they have no interest to do anything, but rather, that they will apply their mindfulness and wisdom towards any duties, work, or responsibilities that they may have by doing them to the best of their ability. The *kilesa* of anger is also weakened on account of its strongest properties, that of ill-will and vindictiveness, being completely let go of – never to return. For

the *sotāpanna* anger will manifest in the form of dissatisfaction or displeasure. This they can let go of very quickly due to there being no residue of anger's intensity, ill-will, remaining in their heart. Within the heart they are continually cultivating loving-kindness and forgiveness.

A *sotāpanna* has no fear of sickness or death for they have contemplated death before it actually comes to them. This is similar to what Ajahn Chah used to teach when he would say to see something as being broken before it actually breaks. For example, if somebody gives you a very nice cup, you have to realize that one day, sooner or later, this cup will eventually break. You know it is a very beautiful object, but at the same time you have the awareness that this cup will break someday. So you use this cup, you take good care of it, you clean it and so forth, but the day it breaks, you don't have any feelings of sadness or regret because you had conceived the cup breaking before it actually broke. The mindfulness and wisdom of a *sotāpanna* works in just the same way: it sees the breaking apart, or death of the body before death actually occurs.

Also a *sotāpanna* will not intentionally break any of the five precepts. Suppose somebody brought a chicken or a bird, put it down beside them and tried forcing them to kill it, saying 'If you don't kill this bird I am going to kill you.' The *sotāpanna* will choose not to kill the animal, but rather accept to be killed. This is one of the characteristics of a *sotāpanna*: the strong conviction that they will not do any unwholesome, immoral deeds, for they know the harm or danger that comes from performing unwholesome kamma. So this quality of keeping the five precepts is automatic or natural for them. The mental defilements that have been let go of do not come back. Laypeople can also attain to this level if they keep developing the path of virtue, concentration and wisdom. Monks have exactly the same practice: developing *śīla*, *samādhi* and *pañña* - virtue, concentration and wisdom.

To achieve the second level of attainment on the noble path to awakening; that is, *sakadāgāmiṃphala*, the fruition of once-returning, the path of practice is to further develop *sīla, samādhi and paññā* so as to let go of attachment to the body by another portion. To become a *sotāpanna* one may use the contemplation of death, but to realize the level of *sakadāgāmi* one's contemplation and investigation have to be more refined by either contemplating the thirty-two parts of the body or using the *asubha* reflections on the loathsomeness or unattractiveness of the body. At this second level of path development, one's mindfulness and wisdom need to see and understand the body more clearly so as to enable the mind to let go of a more refined degree of attachment and clinging towards one's self. For the *sakadāgāmi*, greed and anger have been further weakened. For example, anger will manifest in a subtle form of dissatisfaction. It will arise infrequently and can easily be let go of. Sometimes one may not have the time to contemplate this emotion due to it quickly ceasing all by itself. At other times, mindfulness and wisdom are able to contemplate this dissatisfaction at the very moment it arises, thus letting it go, putting it down quickly. In summary, at this second level of attainment, one has let go of one more portion of greed and anger, due to the lessening of one's deluded attachment to one's self. If one is to see or realize this for oneself, one must cultivate the path of *sīla, samādhi and paññā* to its respective degree.

To realize the third level of attainment, that of an *anāgāmi*, a non-returner, one must further develop the path of *sīla, samādhi and paññā*. At this third level of path development, *anāgāmiṃmagga*, one's contemplation of the body becomes even more refined, requiring one to contemplate on either the *asubha* reflections or upon the four elements. One's investigation probes so deeply and subtly that one's mindfulness and wisdom will eventually penetrate right through its meditation object to enter into the emptiness of the mind. Practicing in such a way, one's heart will begin to develop

a very thorough understanding about the nature of the body. One can now begin to let go of the final portion of attachment towards one's own body, for one clearly realizes that the body, be it one's own or that of others, is merely an aggregate of earth, water, air and fire coming together temporarily. These are the two themes of investigation: *asubha* and the four elements. The taking of them into emptiness is what we call *magga*, the path, or the course of practice leading to the attainment of *anāgāmiṭṭhala*, the fruition of non-returning. Through frequently seeing the true nature of the body in such a subtle way, one's heart will obtain a complete understanding about one's own body until there will be no doubts of any kind remaining within the heart as to the body's true nature. The body of the past is known to be merely elements; likewise, the body of the future when it breaks apart and one's present body are also known to be merely elements that conform to the laws of nature. The mind can now uproot all remaining attachment towards the body. The bodies of other people are seen to be just four elements that comply with nature. All material objects; that is, inanimate objects without consciousness, are even more readily seen to be just combinations of the four elements that bind together temporarily in conformance with nature.

The human mind is deluded into attaching to one's own body as being or belonging to oneself, into viewing the bodies of other people as being something beautiful or attractive, and also into considering material objects as having ownership. Consequently, greed, anger and delusion arise within one's mind. We are therefore obliged to contemplate one's own body so as to see its true nature of being merely the four elements that function in compliance with nature, and that the bodies of other people and all material objects are of the same exact nature. Thus all attraction and pleasure with the sensory world falls away. Greed and anger no longer exist. When the fires in one's heart have been extinguished, only coolness will remain. There is peacefulness and coolness all through the day

and night. The *kilesas* that have been let go of will never come back again. The mind moves down the middle, down the center, never moving to either side of attraction or aversion. The mind is not attached to anything at all in the world. Even if the world was to change into gold, or if it became a huge piece of diamond, the mind would not be moved or attracted by this, for the mind has realized the truth and knows that these things are merely the four elements. The mind is not attached to the conventions of conditioned reality. This is the state of mind of one who has attained to the level of *anāgāmi*.

However, an *anāgāmi* still has some subtle delusion remaining within the heart, in so much as they still attach to the subtle processes or modes of the mind; that is, the four mental *khandas*: feeling, memory, thinking and consciousness. So the practitioner must cultivate mindfulness and wisdom, to see these four *khandas* as being fleeting, a source of suffering or discontent, and that they are completely without any abiding essence that could be called a 'self'. When the mind fully accepts this it will let go of its attachment towards everything within it. Even the mental formations or the thinking processes are not the mind: that which thinks is not the mind; that which does not think is the mind. The purity of heart that has gradually increased, stage by stage, by eliminating all traces of greed, anger and delusion from within the mind, will at this point, completely and permanently suffuse the heart of the practitioner. Letting go of this final portion of the defilements is what is called *arahattaphala* or the attainment of *arahantship*.

It is only for the first three levels of attainment that one must contemplate the body. Body contemplation is a truly amazing practice. It can give rise to many marvelous natural phenomena or conditions arising within the mind. For example, sometimes seeing the whole body as just being a pile of earth (earth element), or seeing the whole body as being a flowing stream of water (water element). These natural phenomena may arise in the mind in many,

many forms. Those who have mindfulness and wisdom will be wise to the truths that these phenomena reveal.

When people start contemplating the body, some may have a natural inclination for contemplating the loathsomeness of the body. They may be able to see the people in this room as corpses in various stages of decomposition, or see everybody as skeletons. Sometimes when other people are seen, they will completely break apart, separating out into pieces, only then to reconstruct themselves back into their original form – before one’s very eyes. These are just some of the natural phenomena that arise within the mind of one who is cultivating the contemplation of the loathsomeness of the body.

For one whose practice is at the level of *arahattamagga*, the course of practice leading to *arahantship*, these amazing states will not arise because their practice is to cultivate a very refined degree of mindfulness and wisdom so as to give up the subtle delusion that still remains within the mind. We could compare one who has attained the third level of *anāgāmi* as having filtered dirty water to make it clean whereas the *arahant* filters clean water to make it pure. They have made their own heart pure. This is what the Buddha called the ‘Dhamma element’ – the absolute purity of mind. The Buddha said, ‘There is no happiness greater than peace’, meaning the peace experienced within a heart freed from all greed, anger and delusion.

Ok then, that’s probably enough for tonight.

# Not Veering Off to the Left or Right

Tan Ajahn Dtun (Thiracitto)  
Māgha Pūja 2546 (2003)

This evening we've come together for the *Uposatha* (the recitation of the monks' Pātimokkha rules). In the time of the Buddha, as we already know, Māgha Pūja was the day on which 1,250 arahants (fully enlightened beings) came together to hear a teaching of the Buddha without any prior notification or appointment. Such an extraordinary event happens only once in the lifetime of each Buddha, with the size of the gathering, whether it is greater or lesser in number, depending upon the *pāramī* (spiritual perfections) of each Buddha. That such a large number of arahants should come together without any prior appointment is something so extremely hard to find in this world.

In the past, those who gave up the household and family life, their work and responsibilities, left them behind so as to conduct themselves and practice in accordance with the teachings of the Buddha. The people of those times had a sense of purpose, practicing in order to go beyond suffering. Having put on the yellow robe, they had just one goal: to practice for the realization of Nibbāna within their own heart. They put their faith in the Lord Buddha and his teachings. Consequently, they have given rise to a lineage of arahant disciples, incalculable in number, extending into the present day.

There are those of us who still have *kilesas* (defilements or impurities) in our hearts, making it necessary to train and develop the mind - bringing about cleanliness and purity - by following the teachings of the Buddha. The Buddha said: 'When the *Tathāgata*

has passed on, the Dhamma (the teachings of the Lord Buddha) and the Vinaya (the monks' rules of discipline) will be your teacher.' Therefore, as sincere and determined practitioners of the Dhamma, we must hold to the principles of Dhamma-Vinaya as our model, our guideline, because all arahant disciples have practiced according to Dhamma-Vinaya with no veering off to the left or to the right, nor doing anything out of the ordinary. When we wish to go beyond suffering, or realize Nibbāna, then we must have faith in the practice. In truth, taking up this yellow robe isn't for seeking out wealth, respect or praise. Rather, it's for realizing Nibbāna.

Everyone knows of the suffering of birth; and what then follows is completely full of suffering. When there is birth, a whole range of suffering follows: sickness, ageing and death; plus many other kinds, all of which create suffering in one's heart, with no end to the journeying through *samsāra* (the perpetual cycle of rebirth, ageing and death). As a consequence, we must be heedful. The Lord Buddha once asked Ananda (his chief attendant) how many times a day he contemplated death, to which Ananda replied, 'seven times'. For some disciples it was more than this, for others less. However, the Buddha said he himself contemplated death with each inhalation and exhalation; that is, he had constant mindfulness of every in-and-out breath, thus making him one who is truly heedful. And so in the days and nights that have passed by, have you given any consideration to death or not? Or have the days been allowed to pass by unproductively?

Having come to ordain as monks or novices, sometimes, after several years, it may happen that we find things rather habitual and so we always have to prompt and motivate the mind by looking for means to bring up the faith to put forth effort so as to give rise to *sati* (mindfulness), *samādhi* (concentration), and *paññā* (wisdom) within our hearts. If we do little practice, the defilements will dominate the mind, making it disheartened or too discouraged to go about the practice. The defilements are namely: *lobha* (greed),



## Not Veering Off to the Left or Right

*dosa* (anger), and *moha* (delusion). They exist in the heart, making it distracted, causing it to think restlessly amongst a variety of worldly issues and affairs, all of which will harm the mind and keep one from being firm and secure in the robes. So we always have to create or look for ways to bring up faith and energy. Really the practice is, having given up the household life, family life, and our external work and duties, that one should have the determination to fight with the defilements. It's not that we go fighting with others or everything in general, but rather we contend with the defilements in our own heart by having patience and perseverance with all the moods and emotions that frequently arise in the mind.

We already know that greed, anger and ill-will are defilements, so we must try to abandon them, try to let these moods and emotions go from the mind without keeping or holding such adverse mental states in our hearts. Even though we have defilements within our hearts, if we don't have the mindfulness and wisdom to keep a watch over them, the heart will always fall slave to its emotions, being a servant to the defilements. The Lord Buddha, therefore, taught us to have mindfulness present so that we can remain within the bounds of Dhamma-Vinaya, having mindfulness watching over and tending to the heart right from the moment of waking. We endeavour to have mindfulness watching the mind, being present in every moment, knowing what the mind is thinking, whether it be good or bad.

Once we are aware that we are thinking about the past - things already experienced, no longer of any benefit - we then set up *sati* and establish *samādhi* so as to cut the thoughts off. When we have thoughts proliferating into the future - next month, next year - which are of no benefit, then we bring up mindfulness and develop concentration, cutting those thoughts out from the mind. When the mind is restless, distracted by all kinds of emotions and thoughts, it's just the same; we bring up mindfulness and develop concentration to cut them off. We make our hearts have firm, solid

mindfulness in the present moment; that is, to see the mind, its moods and emotions, and the objects of its awareness. If we don't have mindfulness guarding over the mind, our thoughts will proliferate out to matters of no good, not giving rise to any benefit. The mind will dart off following the objects of its awareness, unable to see *dukkha* (suffering, discontent), *dukkha's* cause, its cessation, or know the path of practice that leads to *dukkha's* cessation.

The Buddha, therefore, taught us to practice *sīla* (virtue or correct morality), *samādhi* and *paññā*. We have Dhamma-Vinaya as our boundary. If we have restraint within the discipline, without transgressing or doing any wrong - not even in the minor offences - then this will be a cause of mindfulness becoming more constant. Our only duty is to watch the emotions and thoughts within the mind. When there's free time, go and walk or sit in meditation, always developing *samādhi*. Know how to go against the defilements and how to endure things like the cold, the heat and all other forms of *dukkha*. We have to know how to go against our will when practicing. Just as Ajahn Chah would frequently say, 'When you're diligent, put forth effort; when you're lazy, resist it with constant effort in the practice.' So when we feel discouraged and slacken in our effort, we must look for ways to bring about faith and effort. Resolve to walk and sit in meditation everyday without fail. Have mindfulness and wisdom searching for any faults in our hearts, asking: 'Why can't I make my mind peaceful? When they can train monkeys to be tame, subdue the wildness in horses and elephants, why can't I train my own mind to be peaceful?' If we have mindfulness always attempting to take care of the mind, looking for ways to reflect upon any adverse mental states in order to remove them from the heart in each and every moment that *dukkha* arises, then the mind will, as a consequence, have firm, unflinching mindfulness in the present moment.

When one has free time one should always practice *samādhi* (concentration); work at it, really develop it. Then the peace of

*samādhi* will arise in the mind. When we have sustained *sati* and *samādhi*, the mind will be quiet, concentrated, thus giving rise to joy and happiness. The equanimity of *samādhi* will arise, being free from emotions and thoughts of the past and future. Mindfulness is rooted in the present; there is peace and equanimity in the heart.

Outside of formal meditation, when the eyes see a form, be it animate or inanimate, it will give rise to feeling – sometimes of satisfaction, sometimes of dissatisfaction. We must have *sati-paññā*, mindfulness and wisdom, contemplating and seeing the impermanence of such emotions in order to make the mind impartial, centred in the present moment. Every moment that defilements arise, be it liking or disliking forms, sounds, odours, tastes, or bodily sensations – everything – we have mindfulness observing the emotions, perceiving whatever is present in the mind. We have to look for skilful means to contemplate and let the emotions of both satisfaction and dissatisfaction go from the heart, being impartial with *sati* established in the present moment. If we continually practice like this, our *sati* and *samādhi* will be sustained. For *paññā* to contemplate and let go of these emotions, we must bring the mind to a point of centre, to neutrality; make it peaceful due to *samādhi* and *paññā*.

Even though we contemplate like this, we're not able to cut all the emotions and mental impressions off from the mind because today we see a form or hear a sound, giving rise to satisfaction or dissatisfaction; we contemplate this emotion, putting it aside or we can cut it off with *samādhi*. Tomorrow, however, we see a new form or hear a new sound, again giving rise to satisfaction or dissatisfaction. Therefore we must work at it every day to have the mindfulness and wisdom to reflect upon and remove these emotions from the heart, every day having mindfulness attending to the heart. Even so, all the emotions and mental impressions can't be completely rooted out from the mind, only cut off temporarily. It's like a tree and its branches. We take a knife and on Monday we cut

one branch, Tuesday another. Wednesday we cut off another and so on until Sunday. Come Monday again, the branch we previously cut has sprouted again. Likewise with Tuesday's branch and so on. If we don't uproot the tree it won't die.

The emotions within our hearts are just the same. No matter if we have mindfulness contemplating, letting go of the emotions and the mind's objects in every instant, tomorrow we will meet with forms again, hear sounds again, smell odours again, taste flavours again, the body will contact cold, heat, softness and hardness again. There will always be *vedanā* (feeling) arising in the heart. Consequently, the Buddha taught us to come back to contemplating in a way that destroys attachment and clinging to one's body, for this is the cause, the origin of the greed and anger that arises in one's heart. In meditation, therefore, once the mind is calm enough to be a base for contemplation, it's essential that we take up the body for reflection. Sometimes in meditation, as soon as there is a degree of calmness, we may become aware of a variety of external things. We may have knowledge into past or future events, or happenings in the present, whatever, but it's just peripheral knowledge; it's not knowledge that will end the suffering in our hearts. So, sometimes, through meditation, we are able to perceive different things, but what's of most importance is that we practice meditation in order to make the mind peaceful so that it gives rise to *sati-paññā*, the mindfulness and wisdom that can contemplate and abandon the defilements from the mind.

Sometimes, when the mind is quiet, we may see *nimittas* (mental images) that reveal the unattractiveness of the body, seeing visions of our body rotting, disintegrating, breaking into pieces; or maybe we see somebody else's body in various stages of decomposition. If we see images of such a kind, we must have *sati* noting and contemplating them, seeing the impermanence and selflessness of our body or the bodies of others. Doing so will give rise to *paññā*, wisdom that sees the truth. It penetrates to the truth of one's own

body and that of others; seeing that they are impermanent and not self. Therefore, in meditation, once the mind is reasonably quiet, we then turn to investigating one's own body. One can contemplate the thirty-two parts of the body, or the unattractiveness of the body, or maybe contemplate the four elements of earth, water, air and fire. Contemplate to see *anicca, dukkha, anattā*, the impermanence, unsatisfactoriness and selflessness of the body; it is born, exists, and then ultimately breaks apart. This we must reflect on, over and over, making it clear in the heart. As a result, the mind lets go of its attachment to the body. If the mind doesn't see the impermanence and selflessness of the body, it is unable to uproot its attachment towards the body.

Once the mind has been made peaceful, we then allow the mind to rest for some time in this calm state. Once it begins to think and proliferate again, we then take up the body for contemplation. Sometimes dispassion and rapture arise, or the mind may unify in *samādhi*. Contemplation and *samādhi* are practiced in alternation like this. Sometimes, having concentrated the mind, we then take up the body for contemplation; that is, we use *samādhi* to develop wisdom. Or sometimes when we determine to sit in meditation, we apply wisdom by taking up the body for contemplation in order to realize the truth; that is, using wisdom to develop *samādhi*: when we reflect and see the truth of our body, seeing that it is impermanent and without self, the mind may converge, becoming concentrated. This is what's called applying wisdom to develop concentration, *paññā* to develop *samādhi*. These two approaches can be alternated depending upon each individual's character. As a result, this *samādhi* will serve as a basis for *sati* and *paññā* while contemplating our own body, the bodies of others, and all material objects, seeing the impermanence and absence of self in everything.

*Samādhi* is also the basis for *sati-paññā* to contemplate the emotions within the heart. The mood may be one of greed or anger,

attraction or aversion towards forms, sounds, odours, tastes and bodily sensations.

*Sati* and *paññā* contemplate, letting go of any attachment and clinging in the mind, little by little. In the beginning, a more coarse defilement that can be readily perceived is that of satisfaction: the taking pleasure in forms, sounds, odours, tastes and bodily sensations. *Sati-paññā* must contemplate and investigate any moods and emotions so as to free the heart from them. We then step up the practice of developing *samādhi* in order to have mindfulness and wisdom investigate within the body, seeing it more and more clearly.

With regards to greed, as monks we have already given up our external material objects. Actually, there's not much to it, there just remains a more subtle greed towards the four requisites of a monk: robes, alms food, dwelling place, and medicines for sickness. While we still have this body, as monks we must depend upon these four requisites in order to go about the practice. *Sati-paññā* must reflect, seeing the truth that the robe is just the four elements - earth, water, air and fire - that come together for a short time only. The user's body is just the same, comprised of the four elements. Likewise with alms-food, one's dwelling place and medicines, they are just the four elements. Both the user and all four requisites are merely elements according to nature. We reflect like this so as to prevent the arising of defilements, not allowing desire for the four requisites - everything we depend on - to arise. All the arahants at the time of the Buddha, and the lineage of esteemed teachers that have passed down since then, all practiced without any concern for the four requisites. The requisites weren't always in abundance. Sometimes there was only a small amount or even shortages, yet they only depended upon them for going about the practice. In the past, sometimes, there was little cloth. They would use discarded cloth, having no ambition to wear fine, delicate materials. They would make use of shrouds found in cremation grounds or thrown-

out rags; taking the cloth, washing it, then sewing and patching it into a robe used solely for practicing Dhamma - just to cover the body. For alms they relied on three or four houses, getting just enough to eat for one day so as to practice Dhamma. They didn't eat in order to have a bright complexion or a big, strong body. When making use of a dwelling, sometimes they would live under cliff overhangs, in caves, at the foot of large trees, or in simple grass-roofed huts - just that much. Their dwelling was solely for protection against storms, wind, rain, and sun. All the arahants say that any dwelling that offers enough shelter so that in a storm one doesn't get wet knees while sitting in meditation, then this should be considered a good, even excellent dwelling. The lodgings were used only for meditation and protection against the elements. They didn't need a dwelling that was great in any way. Sometimes, the Kroobā Ajahns, the forest masters, in the course of their practice, gave no concern for medicines. They went and practiced in the forests, the mountains and caves. They were sometimes troubled by illness or the bodily elements were out of balance, so they would use their Dhamma practice as medicine by contemplating the painful feelings that had arisen. Using *samādhi* along with mindfulness and wisdom, they contemplated and analyzed the body, seeing that it was just merely elements of earth, water, air and fire. They contemplated to see that feelings are just a condition of the mind, but not the mind itself. The mind is one thing, the body another, and feelings yet another; they are separate, not interacting (this can be directly seen while in *samādhi*). The Dhamma medicine was all that they had.

In the past they didn't have any abundance of the four requisites, yet our esteemed teachers could practice to make their minds know and see the Dhamma, or be the Dhamma, owing to their total determination and dedication. They sacrificed everything, even their own life, for their longing to know and see the Dhamma. We, as a consequence, should endeavor to have determination

in the practice, abandoning greed from the heart. Once we have such determination we won't have any worries or concerns, only using the four requisites with moderation, stepping up the practice of working to refine the heart, lightening and relieving it from greed, anger, and delusion. Then it is important to bring into our practice any general daily practices or any of the *dhutangas* (austere practices) that are suited to our character and of use in going against the defilements in the heart, so as to destroy these defilements.

When the heart still has anger, vengeance, ill will and displeasure within it, then everyday, we monks must cultivate *mettā*, a boundless loving-kindness towards all creatures. We develop the feeling that we will destroy this anger and displeasure, ridding the mind of it and not keeping hold of it, for this is a cause of suffering. If we have mindfulness and wisdom, and the intention to wipe out or abandon the defilements from the heart, then we will see that any defilement that has arisen in the heart is merely a cause for more suffering. And so we will look for a way to find the source of this suffering. We already know that anger is suffering, so we must cultivate kindness and forgiveness towards one another, not allowing anger to arise in the mind. Even though moods of anger and dissatisfaction will arise, it is our task to find a way to eliminate them or let them go from the heart as quickly as possible. Therefore, we must always be cultivating kindness and forgiveness towards one another. It's important that we try to care for our own heart; there's no need to go attending to the hearts of others. We just take care of our own, relieving it from greed and hatred, weakening the delusion toward the physical body and all the emotions that come into the heart. If we have *sati-paññā*, mindfulness and wisdom, frequently contemplating like this, then any thoughts or emotions will subside and weaken.

Once the mind is free from thoughts and emotions, we then develop *samādhi*. With continual practice, calmness will arise while



## Not Veering Off to the Left or Right

in sitting meditation. When we break from sitting meditation, regardless of whether we're standing, walking, sitting or doing some other activity, we maintain *sati* while performing our external duties. When we come to walk in meditation, the mind will be calm and concentrated due to having mindfulness and wisdom continually contemplating, removing any unwholesome or defiled emotions from the heart. When we're finished walking meditation, whether we stand, walk, sit, or do something else, we have mindfulness caring for the heart. When we come to sit again in meditation, taking up one's meditation object, the mind is empty of any emotions due to constant contemplation with mindfulness and wisdom. When we establish mindfulness upon the in-and-out breath, the mind will be calmed. Or when we bring mindfulness to the meditation word '*buddho*', the mind will have firm, unwavering mindfulness and concentration. Every day we practice like this, no matter whether we are standing, walking, sitting, lying down, or doing something else; mindfulness and wisdom will arise in one's heart in every posture. From the peacefulness of sitting meditation we continue making the mind peaceful while in walking meditation, or peacefulness may arise outside of formal meditation regardless of one's posture or activity. Peacefulness will always be present in the mind. Mindfulness will see the emotions in the heart, enabling it to reflect upon them, constantly wiping them out or letting them go from the heart in each and every moment.

While contemplating the body - seeing its impermanence and lack of self - we must depend upon a foundation of *samādhi*, concentration. When the mind is unable to reflect and see the body as being foul, unattractive or consisting of elements, then we should establish *sati* and develop *samādhi*; every day really work at it, cultivate it in order to have the strength to calm the mind. Once the mind is quiet, then again try reflecting upon the body. If mindfulness and wisdom gradually see the body more and more clearly, then the mind will slowly let go of its attachment

to one's own body: greed and anger will diminish and delusion towards one's own body will gradually weaken. Contemplation is alternated with developing *samādhi*, gradually removing attachment to one's body, little by little, until one sees clearly that the body is only elements in accordance with nature. We see the body of the past, or that of the future, as being a natural condition: that having come into being it must ultimately break apart. We must have mindfulness knowing the present moment: knowing that the body is merely elements according to nature, thus letting any attachment go from the mind. When the mind relinquishes all attachment toward the body, then greed and anger will cease. Any delusion regarding the body and all material objects - that are merely elements in compliance with nature - will also cease. When seeing a form, it's just a form. When hearing a sound, it's just a sound. All phenomena are merely elements following nature: having come into being, they change and ultimately break apart - completely devoid of any self. The mind as a consequence, will be centered, without swaying to either extreme of attraction or aversion.

Once the heart lets go of its attachment toward one's own body, the bodies of others and also all material objects, then peacefulness and tranquility will arise. This is happiness - true happiness - coming forth from the peace and calm of *paññā*, wisdom that has relinquished defilement in the initial stages: namely having ceded all attachment toward the body.

There are, however, defilements stemming from the subtle delusion that still remains in the heart. This is delusion towards: *vedanā* - feelings in the mind; *saññā* - memory; *sankhārā* - mental formations, involving thinking and imagination within the mind; and *viññāna* - consciousness or deluded clinging to the mind's "knowing" as being the mind. To deal with defilements on this subtle level, it first requires that one has relinquished all attachments to materiality and form. In other words, one has relinquished all

attachment to the body, enabling one to walk this stage of the path and further continue one's contemplation. In truth, this stage of the practice is *Arahatta-magga*: contemplating the mind and Dhamma at the most refined level.

Once material form and the body have been let go of, all that remains is the subtle stage regarding the *citta* (the heart/mind) and the *dhammas* that arise within it. When delusion is still present in the mind, we must have mindfulness and wisdom contemplating its subtle emotions. The mind still has attachment for *vedanā* of the mind. Though there is happiness, with only a speck of *dukkha*, it's all being experienced right here in this heart. The happiness in the heart is immense, while *dukkha* is almost imperceptible due to the mind having abandoned the more gross defilements. *Sati-pannā* must then contemplate the remaining refined defilements, seeing the impermanence of this happiness, or the *dukkha* of still having defilements in the heart. As for one's memory, the mind deludedly clings to it as being the mind. Likewise with thoughts, the mind attaches to them, be they productive or not; there is thinking and conceptualizing about a variety of wholesome things, believing them all to be the mind.

The Buddha therefore taught us to contemplate the *vedanā* of the mind, seeing that it's impermanent and devoid of self. Or we have mindfulness and wisdom contemplating: memory - seeing its impermanence and lack of any self; mental formations - seeing the fleeting nature of our thinking and conceptualizing, recognizing it's all without any self; consciousness or knowing - seeing that it's only a mode of the *citta*, but not the *citta* itself. Those who are practicing at this stage of the path use mindfulness and wisdom in their contemplation, gaining a broad understanding into the nature of feelings, memory, mental formations and consciousness. All the wise sages say that once contemplation has brought about this deep understanding, then one should turn the contemplation and investigation onto one's own mind for it still has *avijjā*

(fundamental ignorance)<sup>1</sup> residing within it. Contemplate so as to destroy the mind's attachment to its thoughts, for the mind will, as a rule, mistakenly cling to them believing that the formations that come out of the mind is the mind itself. The wise ones, therefore, teach us to destroy attachment within the heart - everything - with no remainder, keeping nothing in reserve. Contemplate so as to destroy the *citta*. Even the very thing that we cling to as being the *citta*, one's heart or mind, must be scrutinized to see its impermanence and absence of any self. Contemplating the mind and contemplating the Dhamma are therefore subtle things.

When contemplating Dhamma, all *dhammas* that we know and perceive should be reflected upon, seeing that they are *anattā* - devoid of any self. '*Sabbe Dhamma anattā'ti*' - all *dhammas* are not self. With contemplation and investigation, remove all attachment - everything - from the heart, hence giving rise to purity.

Therefore, in the beginning, all practitioners must practice Dhamma by staying within the limits of Dhamma-Vinaya. By holding to the fundamental ways of practice of the Buddha and all the arahant disciples as our role model, we won't go straying off to the left or the right. If we practice in accordance with the Dhamma-Vinaya, following the teachings of the Buddha, then we will have no wish or expectation for material gain or veneration, nor for any of a host of external things available. Instead, we are resolute in our aspiration, giving up everything in the quest to go beyond suffering: the realization of Nibbāna. We are prepared to sacrifice our very lives in order to know and see the Dhamma, to have the heart be one with the Dhamma. All of our esteemed teachers have had hearts unwavering and resolute, not lax or discouraged with

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1 *Avijjā* : Fundamental ignorance, the delusion about the true nature of one-self. This ignorance is also the essential factor binding living beings to the cycle of rebirth. It is the seed of being and birth, the very nucleus of all existence. It is also the root from which all other mental defilements (*kilesas*) arise.

the practice like we are. We therefore have to constantly turn the mind around so as to give rise to faith and effort. Even though we are discouraged and struggling, we must have the determination to someday triumph over the defilements.

Actually, for those intent on the practice, there's no need to go doing a great deal, just give your life to practicing Dhamma. If there is still breath and sensations in this body, then we will practice right until the very end without being disheartened. We give up our wealth, our life - everything - in order to know and see the Dhamma. Really the practice isn't so difficult; it's not beyond human capability. If it were something so difficult, the Buddha probably wouldn't have taught us to develop ourselves in *sīla*, *samādhi* and *paññā* (virtue, concentration and wisdom), in order to gain clear insight and the realization of Nibbāna, thus bringing a final end to the greed, anger and delusion in our minds.

As a consequence, we should resolve to practice Dhamma every day. Don't be discouraged or lazy. Even though there may be discouragement or laziness, we must go against this tendency and do the practice, for we depend upon the four requisites given by the laity. There has to be the awareness in one's heart that we must apply ourselves to the practice, for our lives are unpredictable: once born, it's not long before the body must break apart. Therefore, every day and night, we should resolve to practice the Dhamma, always having mindfulness and wisdom taking care of the heart, thus bringing about the peacefulness, tranquility and happiness that comes from *sīla*, *samādhi* and *paññā*.



# This is The Path

Tan Ajahn Dtun (Thiracitto)  
18 May 2547 (2004)

Born into this human realm are all Buddhas. They are men of amazing qualities, truly phenomenal, or they could even be called 'Great Men', for every Buddha had to build up a tremendous amount of *pāramī* (spiritual perfections) before finally attaining enlightenment, thus becoming a Buddha. Such a being is so extremely hard to find in this world. Second to the Buddha were his arahant (fully enlightened being) disciples who were also truly very rare. If we try considering the life or practice of the Buddha, or the arahants, we will see that their lives were lived out with integrity and virtue. They staked their very lives in the course of the practice. Within their hearts, they gambled their life - their all - for the perfecting of the *pāramīs*. Having made the aspiration to be either a Buddha, or an arahant disciple, they never relented in their effort as long as the Dhamma had not yet been seen or realized by them. The practice of the Lord Buddha or the arahant disciples can therefore serve as a beautiful role model by which to direct our Dhamma practice.

The Buddha lay down the principles of the Dhamma (the teachings of the Lord Buddha) and the Vinaya (the monks' rules of discipline), being that which steers the heart towards peace and coolness. The *dhutangas* (austere practices) were also set down by the Buddha as tools for wearing away at the *kilesas* (defilements or impurities), making us put up a fight in order to conquer the *kilesas* within one's own heart. We must persevere and endure everything, such as the heat and the cold, for our esteemed teachers from

Tan Ajahn Mun down through to the present day, all had to endure and go against everything. They developed their practice in the solitude of the forests and mountains, or in the silence of caves. They made every effort to seclude themselves by seeking out suitable places to develop and cultivate their minds (*citta bhāvanā*) so as to do battle with the *kilesas* of greed, anger and delusion that existed within their hearts, until subduing them, bringing their presence to an end.

If we look within our lineage of Kroobā Ajahns, meditation masters, their biographies tell of how each one practiced with complete single mindedness. They sacrificed everything so as to know and see the Dhamma - being one with the Dhamma. We should recollect the Lord Buddha and his arahant disciples, or the Kroobā Ajahns as our ideal, recalling how they applied their minds, hence realizing the Dhamma. Therefore, always resolve that if we haven't brought an end to the defilements within the heart, we will not ease off in our effort of practicing *sīla*, *samādhi* and *paññā* (virtue, concentration and wisdom) for the burning up of the heart's impurities. One must be patient and persevering in doing the routine duties and practices, for this goes against the *kilesas*. Doing so allows the heart to have some victories over the defilements, for it has been their slave for countless lifetimes.

In this present life, we have this good opportunity to come and take up the brown robe, ordaining as disciples of the Lord Buddha within his teaching and dispensation; thus, we must make ourselves worthy of our teacher. We each adamantly resolve to conquer the *kilesas* within one's own heart. Even though at times we may feel disheartened, beaten by the *kilesas*, we still have to constantly find the mindfulness and wisdom (*sati* and *paññā*) to contemplate in order to give rise to faith and energy within the mind. Sometimes our body may feel weak, so we rest to regain our strength. Sometimes the mind is lacking in strength: *sati* and *paññā* cannot keep pace with all the mental and emotional activity, being



too slow for the *kilesas*. Whoever wishes to eliminate the *kilesas*, ridding them from the mind, must have the mindfulness and wisdom to detect them, recognizing one's thoughts and emotions as being the heart's enemy. We must therefore resist and endure, being determined that we will defeat the *kilesas*. Today we lose. However, tomorrow we must win.

We have to build up and strengthen the mind by developing *samādhi bhāvāna* (meditation and concentration) - just as we monks normally do. Even if we have spells of being too easy with the monastic routine, observances, and with one's personal practice, being too relaxed in our effort, nevertheless we must always be building up the confidence and the faith to put forth the effort that will take up the fight with the *kilesas*. Don't be daunted or lose heart. Always remember the resoluteness of the Kroobā Ajahns and the extent to which they sacrificed their lives so as to know and see the Dhamma. In practicing the Dhamma, we can't be forever lax, slack in our effort; it may be so only during some periods when the heart is unable to fight with the *kilesas*. However, when there is a chance, an opportunity to get the better of the *kilesas*, we bring mindfulness and wisdom to do battle with them. We must train the mind, making *sati* and *samādhi* arise so that *paññā* can contemplate to see the true nature of the defilements that are within one's heart.

Ajahn Chah would always say that in practicing the Dhamma, there isn't anything much at all: there is only the contemplation and investigation of this very body to see that it is impermanent and without self, together with the contemplation of the *citta* (heart/mind) - contemplating the emotions and thoughts within the mind to see the impermanence and selflessness of this mind that we cling and attach to along with everything within it. There are only these two topics to be investigated: the body and the mind. To narrow this down even further, we contemplate the mind only, for this is where greed, anger and delusion are born - thus being the very place where they must be destroyed or abandoned.

To contemplate something as subtle as the mind, however, we must first start by contemplating something that's more gross, such as the physical body, because the mind is forever clinging to the body as being oneself, one's own. As a result, greed, anger and delusion arise within the mind. Therefore, once we have settled the mind, having firm, grounded mindfulness, we take up the body as our object of investigation. Contemplation probes to see the impermanence of the body and its absence of self. One may investigate the thirty-two parts of the body, examining any part, or use any of the *asubha* contemplations for reflecting upon the unattractiveness of the body. Alternatively, one can investigate any of the four elements to realize the impermanence and selflessness of this body. *Anicca, dukkha, anatta* - impermanence, unsatisfactoriness and not self are its true nature. We always have *sati-paññā* contemplating to make the mind see this more clearly. Once seen, even if only briefly, the mind will temporarily put down its attachment towards the physical body and the mind will enter and rest in *samādhi*, concentration. Once the mind withdraws from this peaceful state, it will have the strength and energy to further contemplate the emotions within the heart.

When outside of formal meditation, regardless of whether one is standing, walking, sitting, lying down or doing some other activity, we have *sati* observing the mind and its emotions - knowing whatever arises within the mind. When mindfulness perceives emotions, be it greed or anger, satisfaction or dissatisfaction, then *paññā* (wisdom) takes up the task of investigating to see the impermanence and selflessness of that emotion; always using skilful ways and means to abandon the emotions - which are *kilesas* - from the mind. The mind will, at that time, be empty and free of emotions. When *paññā* sees the impermanence of emotions and that they are *anattā*, without any entity that could be called one's self, the mind will have a foundation of *sati* and *samādhi* firmly established here in the present moment - even if only temporarily.

*Sati-paññā* will always be investigating and contemplating the coarse emotions, or defilements, of greed and anger - pleasure and displeasure towards forms, tastes, odours, sounds and bodily sensations as they rise so as to let them go from the heart. As a result, there will be equanimity of mind. When we contemplate like this, over and over, the mind will gradually put down its grasping and attachment for forms, tastes, odours, sounds and bodily sensations. Even if it only puts them down temporarily, it's still good. *Sati*, *samādhi* and *paññā* are firmly established in the here and now due to one's frequent contemplation, laying down the more coarse emotions. Mindfulness and wisdom probe into the physical body, seeing it more clearly, repeatedly investigating within the range of the body.

Once the mind has settled, we then take up the body for reflection to see the impermanence and selflessness of the body until the mind unifies again in concentration. When the mind withdraws from *samādhi*, and we wish to practice further, we then take up the body for further investigation. Contemplation alternates between the body and the emotions within the heart, hence weakening them. Greed and anger will ease off due to the arising of skilful means within the mind. The skilful means and methods used will, however, vary from person to person. We must find ways and means to contemplate that will free the heart of greed and anger - satisfaction and dissatisfaction - every time that these emotions arise. We have to destroy the *kilesas*, destroy any emotions: in other words, we let them go.

Practice like this in each and every moment that *kilesas* arise. If there are no defilements present and the mind is free of emotions, then bring up the body for investigation until seeing each part clearly. For example, head hair is clearly seen as something that is inherently dirty, so the mind lets go of any attachment towards it. As for skin, we reflect upon it so as to remove or let go of any doubts about its true nature. Teeth and bones are investigated by

*sati-paññā*, they too being let go of once clearly seen and understood: what has been let go, falls away. If any doubts still remain regarding the body, then mindfulness and wisdom must further investigate on a more refined level, requiring the breaking down of the body into the elements of earth, water, air and fire, or taking the contemplation further on into the body's innate emptiness. When the mind sees the unattractiveness of the body and that it's comprised merely of elements, it will gather in *samādhi*. The heart will be free of attachment and clinging towards the body, even if only temporarily.

It becomes apparent to the heart that this is the path, the way leading to the realization of the Dhamma, for it enables one to let go of all attachment and clinging from one's heart. Therefore when *sīla*, *samādhi* and *paññā* coalesce into a single force, there will be the seeing of one's own body as being impermanent and without self. One will also start to see that all material objects are inconstant: having come into existence, they must, as a consequence, break apart. The mind gives up attachment to its conventional view of reality. Dhamma of the first level thus arises. The *kilesas* are being cleansed away, little by little.

One constantly contemplates the body and the emotions of one's mind until the body is truly understood. If one's own body and those of others are truly seen as merely being elements complying with nature, then the heart will completely let go: putting down its attachment for one's own body, the bodies of others and for all forms and materiality by recognizing that they are just elements according to nature. Everything in this world, whether it be the lives of humans, other sentient beings, or material objects, all will be viewed objectively, with equanimity. That is to say, the mind looks upon them as being mere elements in compliance with nature - all broken up and scattered in pieces. Regardless of whether it is one's own body, those of others or all other material objects, all without exception come into being,

exist, then break apart, being merely elements of earth, water, air and fire. Within the heart it is seen vividly, in its entirety. The heart lets go: in seeing, it just sees; in hearing, it just hears. Greed and anger cease, delusion towards the body ceases; lust and sensual pleasure have come to a final end. This is the first stage in giving up *upādāna*<sup>1</sup> - attachment and clinging towards the body. Throughout the day and night, the mind has only peace and tranquillity.

No longer remaining is the suffering that arises from greed. Gone is the suffering that stems from anger. Sensual attraction causes suffering no more because it's finished - exhausted. Such a mind is free - free from attachment to one's own body, the bodies of others and all material forms. In the heart there is peace, happiness and tranquillity owing to the absence of any *dukkha* (suffering, unsatisfactoriness) that would normally arise due to one's attachment to the physical body and material objects. The mind is now free from the human realm, the *deva* (celestial being) worlds, or from the lower Brahma worlds<sup>2</sup>. The mind will never be reborn into in these realms again, for there is no longer any home (body) for it to again take birth into.

There is a more refined type of becoming (wishing for existence) still remaining in the heart: that of the *citta* (mind/heart) deludedly clinging to the more subtle activities of the mind; they being, *vedanā*

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1 The second and final stage that still remains to be abandoned is the *upādāna* one has towards the modes of the mind - feelings, memory, thought, and sense-consciousness.

2 This sentence refers to the mind of one attained to the level of *anāgāmi*, the non-returner. Upon the death of the body, if they have not brought their mental or spiritual development to its completion (Arahant, fully enlightened being), their mind will take rebirth into a higher Brahma world called the *Suddhāvāsa* realms, or pure abodes. Here the mind will ultimately attain to Arahantship and enter Nibbāna without ever taking rebirth in a physical realm on account of all deluded attachment for the body and material objects having already been completely cut away.

(feeling); *saññā* (memory); *sankhārā* (mental formations); *vinñāna* (sense-consciousness). All these are just conventional names for the mind's activities.

*Sati* and *samādhi* are now automatic, being firmly grounded in the present moment. Even so, there are *kilesas* still present within the mind due to the *citta* grasping at whatever is present in the mind as being the mind itself; thus, it is stuck, deluded in the present moment due to mindfulness and wisdom not yet being refined enough to perceive the *kilesas*. Even though one has put down all thoughts and emotions regarding the past and future, the mind, however, is fooled by the present moment, clinging to it as being the mind.

Sometimes *kilesas* - the villain - can't be detected because the mind is so calm and tranquil. Any sign of *dukkha* (discontent), albeit minute, rarely manifests due to its subtlety. *Sati-paññā* must again analyse and probe even further into the delicate workings of the *citta*, namely:

*Vedanā* - feelings of the mind, be it happiness, *dukkha* (of which there is extremely little) or indifference. One must see that they are impermanent and devoid of self by having *sati-paññā* contemplating *vedanā* so as to let it go from the mind.

*Saññā* - memory. The *citta* clings to and takes it for being the mind. When remembering or recognizing things, we understand and believe it to be 'our' memory, 'our' *citta*. *Sati* and *paññā* are naturally refined and will by their nature contemplate to see the impermanence and selflessness of memory; it arises and ceases and is not the mind. When this is seen clearly and constantly, it will be gradually let go off.

*Sankhārā* - thinking and imagination. *Sati-paññā* recognizes that we have thoughts about a variety of good, wholesome topics and that they are merely conditions or states of mind. Mindfulness and wisdom investigate seeing more clearly that *sankhārās* are fleeting and without self.

*Viññānā* - awareness or sense-consciousness. *Sati-paññā* begins to see more clearly being aware of happiness, dukkha and other objects of one's awareness - by recognizing that this knowing or consciousness still has a 'self' present and that the 'knower' of one's sensory consciousness still has *kilesas*. *Sati-paññā* must investigate the subtleties of *viññānā* to see its impermanence and absence of self.

Taken together, we reflect upon *vedanā*, *saññā*, *sankhārā* and *viññānā* to see the *ti-lakkhaṇa* (three universal characteristics of all conditioned phenomena, i.e. impermanence, unsatisfactoriness and not self), reflecting upon them in all their subtle details. Finally, we turn the investigation back onto one's own mind - the mind that grasps to the belief that it is the true, genuine mind, or that it is 'the knower'. The teaching of the Buddha has us investigate, probing to destroy this 'knower' because this 'one who knows' is still defiled - 'the knower' being no other than *avijjā*, or fundamental ignorance itself. *Kilesas* preside over the mind by letting *moha* (delusion) manipulate the mind into grasping its emotions and thoughts as being the mind itself.

The Buddha therefore taught us to come back to having mindfulness and wisdom reflecting to see the impermanence and non-existence of self in everything, removing from the heart that which we deludedly hold and cling to; namely, the emotions, thoughts and conceptualizations which the mind mistakes for being the mind itself. *Sati-paññā* reverts to investigating and probing into this delusion by seeing its impermanence and absence of self until destroying it - giving it up so that pure knowing can arise.

All the Kroobā Ajahns, the forest meditation masters, conducted themselves and practiced for the purification of this very heart. The Dhamma practitioner, as a consequence, must work at the practice until attachment towards the physical body has been put down, along with attachment towards the emotions and thoughts within the mind until there is no holding or clinging to anything at all.

Even though these matters are subtle, being beyond speculation or guesswork, we all should try to have an adequate enough understanding of the way or direction of practice: we must conduct ourselves and practice in *sīla*, *samādhi* and *paññā*, so that the heart will have the mindfulness and wisdom to investigate this body and mind, seeing their impermanence and absence of self, for we've always clung to both of these as being 'oneself'. This is the path of practice for the destroying or the abandoning of the *kilesas* from the heart. Therefore, the fundamental way of practice - that is direct and certain - is that which has been practiced by the Lord Buddha and his arahant disciples. If we stray from this path, the path of our esteemed teachers, it will be to our harm and detriment, for it will not be the path of practice for the knowing and seeing of the Dhamma - the transcendence of all suffering.

The various daily practices and observances, or any of the *dhutanga* practices, are therefore, the things that wear away at the *kilesas*. We must restrain the mind, always keeping it within the bounds of Dhamma-Vinaya in order for one's body, speech and mind to have a degree of calmness. We then must press on with our efforts to develop *samādhi* because one's *sati-paññā* is not yet able to see the defilements that are still remaining within one's heart. Hence, we must develop *samadhi-bhāvanā* so as to make the mind peaceful. As peacefulness arises within the mind, *sati* will perceive the mind's emotions - seeing the *kilesas* that manifest within the heart. It is essential that *sati-paññā* investigates and contemplates the defilements in order to eliminate them, successively from the gross to the moderate until finally uncovering and removing the subtle *kilesas*.

Consequently, we haven't come here to live and practice complacently. Each day and night is passing by so we must be giving our total effort. When tired, take a rest - resting in order to fight again. Once the body is energetic and strong, and with the heart firmly established, we again take up the fight with the *kilesas*



in one's heart. Wearing this brown robe – the arahants' flag of victory – puts us in a favourable position. We must have the aim and expectation of conquering the *kilesas* – which will require *sati* and *paññā* to defeat the greed, anger and delusion within one's heart. As long as we still have breath, mindfulness and wisdom, we will never give up trying to conquer the *kilesas*. Today we may be discouraged, so we have to contemplate, searching for ways to give rise to the confidence and effort that can one day defeat the *kilesas*. Take the practice of the Lord Buddha and the *Arahant* disciples for example – they gave up everything. They retreated to meditate in the forests, the mountains and caves, never seeking out any material gain or veneration, only making use of the eight personal requisites of a monk (set of three robes, bowl, waist-belt, razor, needle and water filter) and the four general requisites (robes, almsfood, dwelling place and medicines for sickness) so as to go about their practice for one day and one night.

All of us, therefore, are presently living off the legacy of the Lord Buddha. We have a comfortable existence, being dependent upon the laity who have faith in the Buddha, the Dhamma and the Sangha – supporting and maintaining this supreme dispensation of the Lord Buddha. In one's heart, therefore, one should never forget why one came to ordain. We depend upon the four requisites offered by the laity for practicing Dhamma, so we must practice, as is befitting, for the transcendence of all suffering. In each day and night we should put forth effort to the fullest. When tired, take a rest in order to go on to defeat the *kilesas* – that's all. If one does this everyday, relentless in one's effort, the knowing of Dhamma will arise within one's own heart.

Normally, with regards to knowledge, we've heard and listened to a lot, and studied a lot. This is called knowledge or understanding but it isn't the understanding or seeing within one's heart. From this knowledge we bring about the seeing within one's heart by practicing in *sīla*, *samādhi* and *paññā*. The heart's knowing will

arise when we have mindfulness and wisdom contemplating one's own physical body to see that it's impermanent and devoid of self, together with contemplating the thoughts and emotions within one's heart, recognizing that they are fleeting and without self - each one arises and passes away.

*Sati-paññā* contemplates viewing things like this - constantly seeing impermanence and the non-existence of self - for it to be called 'seeing'; that is, the seeing or knowing within one's heart. Once seen, disenchantment will arise, joy will arise; there is letting go. This is called knowing within one's heart. *Sati-paññā* probes and sees this frequently, until clear realization arises in the heart. This is how it has to be for the arising of the Dhamma that has gradually, little by little and stage by stage, abandoned the defilements.

That which we call the Dhamma is, at the first stage, the fruition of stream entry; at the second stage, the fruition of once-returning; at the third stage, the fruition of non-returning, and at the fourth stage, the attainment of arahantship. This is the arising of the Dhamma. If it is arahantship, it is the Dhamma in its complete, perfect wholeness. The heart is pure, free of greed, anger and delusion - the absolute extinction of the *kilesas*. It is supreme happiness, just as the Lord Buddha said: 'There is no happiness greater than peace', meaning the peace of there being no defilements within the heart.

We all, therefore, should endeavour to put forth effort. We have heard and studied the Dhamma, as well as the texts, quite enough already. We know the way of practice, so practice for the knowing and seeing of the Dhamma, following in the footsteps of the Lord Buddha and his arahant disciples.

For tonight I offer just this much for you to reflect upon.

## A Short Biography of Venerable Ajahn Dtun

Venerable Ajahn Dtun (*Thiracitto*) was born in the province of Ayutthaya, Thailand, in 1955. At the age of six his family moved to Bangkok and he remained living there until June 1978.

From a young age he was a boy whose heart naturally inclined towards having a foundation in moral discipline. By the time he was a teenager and on into his university years there would be many small incidents that would fashion his life and gradually steer him away from the ways of the world towards wishing to live the Holy Life.

After graduating in March 1978 with a Bachelors degree in Economics, he was accepted into a Masters Degree course in Town Planning at the University of Colorado, USA. However, in the period that he was preparing himself to travel abroad many small insights would amalgamate in force and change his way of thinking from wishing to take his studies as far as he could and then lead a family life, to thinking that after graduating he would remain single and work with the aim of financially assisting his father until the time was right for him to ordain as a monk. One evening he happened to pick up a Dhamma book belonging to his father which opened, by chance, at the last words of the Buddha: 'Now take heed, monks, I caution you thus: Decline and disappearance is the nature of all conditions. Therefore strive on ceaselessly, discerning and alert!' Reading over this a second and then a third time, the words resonated deeply within his heart causing him to feel that the time had now come to ordain, knowing this was the only thing that would bring any true benefit to him. He resolutely decided

that within two months he would ordain as a monk and that his ordaining would be for life.

In June 1978, he travelled to the north eastern province of Ubon Ratchathani to ordain with the Venerable Ajahn Chah at Wat Nong Pah Pong. Resolute by nature and determined in his practice he was to meet with steady progress regardless of whether he was living with Ajahn Chah or away at any of Wat Nong Pah Pong's branch monasteries. In 1981, he returned to central Thailand to spend the Rains Retreat at Wat Fah Krahm (near Bangkok) together with Venerable Ajahn Piak and Venerable Ajahn Anan. The three remained living and practicing together at Wat Fah Krahm until late 1984. At this time Venerable Ajahn Anan and Venerable Ajahn Dtun were invited to take up residence on a small piece of forest in the province of Rayong in Eastern Thailand. Seeing the land was unsuitable for long term residence, Ajahn Dtun chose another piece of land that was made available to them - a forested mountain that would later become the present day Wat Marp Jan.

After spending five years assisting Venerable Ajahn Anan in the establishing of Wat Marp Jan, he decided it was time to seek out a period of solitude so as to intensify his practice, knowing this to be necessary if he were to finally bring the practice of Dhamma to its completion. He was invited to practice on an eighty-acre piece of dense forest in the province of Chonburi and remained in comparative isolation for two years until 1992 when he eventually decided to accept the offering of land for the establishing of a monastery - Wat Boonyawad. Presently, the monastery spreads over 160 acres of land, all kindly given by the faith and generosity of Mr and Mrs. Boon and Seem Jenjirawatana and family.

Since allowing monks to come and live with him in 1993, the Venerable Ajahn has developed a growing reputation as a prominent teacher within the Thai Forest Tradition, attracting between forty to fifty monks to come and live, and practice, under his guidance.



