THE GIFT OF WELL-BEING

Joy, Sorrow and Renunciation on the Buddha's Way

AJAHN MUNINDO

CONSECRATION

The Buddha

"Just as if one faring through the forest,
through the great wood, should see an ancient path,
an ancient road traversed by people of former times,
and this path should lead to an ancient city
with beautiful gardens, pools and groves;
even so have I seen an ancient path,
an ancient road traversed by
the rightly enlightened ones
of former times.

And what is this ancient path?
It is the noble eightfold path, that is:
right view, right intention,
right speech, right action, right livelihood,
right effort, right mindfulness, right concentration.
Having fully come to know this path,
I have established this way of Well-being for the welfare of all."

Samyutta-Nikaya II, p.74

THE GIFT OF WELL-BEING

Six talks by

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Preface by

BANI SHORTER

With an Introduction by

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Sabbadanam dhammadanam jinati
'The gift of Dhamma surpasses all other gifts.'

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PREFACE

by Bani Shorter

Among the many books about Buddhism that have recently been brought to my attention this one is unique. It is not a text; it neither exhorts, compares nor expounds. Quite simply, it opens a way through the landscape of life, ageing and death. Reading, one joins the author on the Way. It is vivid; it is honest; it is profound. All, all flows naturally, revealing a terrain of trust.

The author is a Buddhist monk of some twenty years' experience in the Theravadin tradition of the forest monks of Thailand. Though originally from New Zealand he is now abbot of Ratanagiri, a monastery located at Harnham in Northumberland, England. But what he writes carries no connotation of something acquired or learned. It resonates with the power of authenticity. He appears to be one with the fabric of that which he expresses. He intervenes with his presence without having to overstate it. The thread of his text subsides into an untimed sequence and although, undoubtedly, it is the product of sustained attention, it conveys a refreshing spontaneity, directness and compassion.

Compassion, that is, which is focused upon the dilemma of being human and being face to face with realities affecting us here and now. There is no avoidance or escape into the mists of exotic and esoteric practice. Rather, the author speaks of ancient truths in the language of *now* affirmed and reinforced by personal experience. So the message of the book is equally relevant to monks, nuns, lay Buddhists and other companions of the Way from whatever spiritual traditions they come. The simplicity in which it is expressed attests to its availability.

The book is not intended as a beginner's manual, however. Here there is no attempt to update a tradition thousands of years old by equating it either explicitly or symbolically with modern teachings, technical or scientific. Neither is the aim to proselytise any more than to substitute a methodology for original insight. Instead, with seemingly artless invention and without guile, the speaker invites us to see and claim that of the Buddha's wisdom and perceptions recognisable in each of us. Yet, although these are the words of an elder monk, abbot and teacher, speaking from the perspective of a Jungian analyst, I find there is nothing here which is inconsistent with the findings of Depth Psychology. He has managed to surmount the difficult barrier of language and theoretical comparison by integration rather than an attempt to dissect and analyse what is experienced as an inherent unity of the person.

It might have been easier, as it appears to have been for many others, to differentiate, instruct or advise. But Dhamma talks, such as these originally were, are given in an atmosphere suggesting we're all in it together. The aim of a speaker at such a time is to awaken awareness for possibilities of knowing and a collection of such talks should always carry the resonant sound of a message waiting to be heard. Reading these pages, the reader hears this; apposite words resonate and take root in conscious process.

So one can open these pages with excitement and feel anticipation of inner discovery. Here emphasis is placed upon journeying rather than arrival. Whether the one who journeys be old or young, he or she will not be admonished to take the Way or be made to feel ashamed of having stepped aside from the Way but, quite simply, the challenge is to approach the Way and recognise the possibility that it has parallels with one's own. Yet, this would not be possible without Ajahn Munindo's communication of his own evident respect for the Way. With a sense of wonder so deep as to be engaging and ever-transitional, he beckons us to being. He speaks directly and matter-of-factly to persons in a manner that is mindful of the path each has tried

and the suffering that has entailed. Trials are not trivialised; instead, they are dignified through acknowledgement of their relevance.

There is something incorruptible about what is contained here, a wisdom of enduring value presented so quietly, so directly so as to be available to any of us. For some it becomes a summons to practice; for others it amplifies insights already intuitively grasped. For still others it offers an introduction to process. There is a solidity about the book that engenders trust. It addresses live and decisive moments on the journey of an individual. Such wisdom is not enduring because it is Buddhist. It becomes enduring because it speaks of day-to-day existence and its connection with the emergence of meaning.

Bani Shorter

Edinburgh
December 1997

Bani Shorter is a senior analyst who lives in Edinburgh. She was trained at the C.G. Jung Institute in Zurich, Switzerland and in addition to working as a consultant she also lectures and writes. Her most recent book is entitled Susceptible to the Sacred.

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INTRODUCTION
by Kittisaro

I feel honoured and delighted to write an introduction for this valuable book, The Gift of Well-Being. Ajahn Munindo and I have known each other for almost 22 years. We met in North-east Thailand at Wat Nanachat, a forest monastery established for Westerners following the teachings of the renowned meditation master Venerable Ajahn Chah. When I arrived there, I found a small group of dedicated Buddhist monks practising the Way of Awakening under the guidance of Ajahn Sumedho, the senior western disciple of Ajahn Chah.

I remember thinking that when I first met Munindo he looked very thin. I was touched by his willingness to endure great hardship for the sake of realising a deeper understanding of 'the way things are'. His enthusiasm for contemplation and the wonderful potential of inner transformation helped to fire my own aspiration and commitment to energetically cultivate the Way. In retrospect though I think I was most touched by his friendliness and capacity for empathy in the midst of his own difficult struggle. Soon, I too undertook the training, and as junior monks at the end of the line, we became friends.

There were many challenges in adapting to the austere lifestyle of the forest monk. We ate one meal a day, a diet of often coarse and extremely spicy food. The rigorous schedule of getting up every morning at 3 am, the barefoot alms rounds into the local villages, the cracked and sensitive feet we frequently found ourselves with, the weekly all night meditation sessions, the

ubiquitous diarrhoea and various tropical fevers and infections, the heat, the damp, the endless hours of sitting cross-legged on hard concrete floors, the poor complaining knees that weren't trained for this in our culture (Munindo had both knees operated on in Thailand), the ever present creepy-crawlies of the forest that bit, stung, nibbled or invaded our huts, all these conditions and more generated a formidable array of difficulties just on the physical plane. Learning to live in community with many different personalities within the rigorous monastic discipline was not easy. The human mind is capable of rebelling in so many tantalising and exasperating ways, and believe me it did.

One might naturally ask why anyone would persevere with this seemingly alien and uncomfortable way of life far away from home and all that is familiar. In the midst of what might look crazy and hellish arose many moments of joy, a powerful bond of spiritual friendship with one's fellow seekers, and a deepening trust in the value of living simply, heartfully, with awareness. For a while in those early days Ajahn Munindo and I were responsible for ringing the morning gong, and we then slept in the meditation hall to be close by. Late into the night we had many opportunities to share in the hopes and disappointments, the joys and the despairs of our quest. The Buddha once said wholesome friendship is the whole of the Holy Life, and I appreciated then as I do now the immense value of a good friend to help remind us of our potential for realising genuine well-being.

Let me suggest to the reader that you remember this is not really a written book. It is a collection of talks. As you read allow yourself to be open and hear the phrases, the life stories, the situations, the scriptural references, the pregnant silences. This was very much Ajahn Chah's style of teaching. Ajahn Munindo is following in this beautiful tradition of induction. As we listen it is not important to remember or understand everything. We allow ourselves to be touched, listening inwardly to the words and the spaces in between. Just keep reading and listening.

As I hear these talks I feel many moments of recognition resonating deeply in my heart, reaffirming that timeless sense of ease and knowing that is the essence of awareness. There are many treasures here. Essentially Ajahn Munindo is introducing us to the limitless resources of the inner realm of contemplation. He reminds us that in never having met someone who fully trusted themselves, we can become disabled. We then misguidedly seek security in the various conditioned tendencies of our minds, often identifying with the powerful process of judging, that deeply destructive obsession with 'getting it right', robbing us of ever really appreciating how it is. This is contrasted with what we might call the spiritual path of finding well-being and identity in awareness itself.

Meeting someone like Ajahn Chah who was completely at ease with the world triggered something in those who met him, introducing us to the possibility of that well-being within our own heart. Ajahn Munindo insightfully observes that we yearn for this "induction into that place within ourselves that is genuinely trusting and trustworthy." Having received that marvellous gift from our teacher, he is now celebrating the privilege of offering it through his own life.

I am reminded of a time 20 years ago when I was very depressed and discouraged, and I went to see Ajahn Chah. My meditation practice seemed like a complete failure. I was sick, weak, filled with rampant desires, and riddled with doubts. Ajahn Chah said I reminded him of a certain donkey that was enamoured with the beautiful sounds that the crickets made. Wanting to make that lovely music himself, he diligently studied the habits of crickets. He saw that they ate dew drops. Excitedly, having discovered the secret, the donkey began licking dewdrops, by the hundreds. Having worked for quite a while consuming countless dew drops, he figured he could make real music now. So he opened his mouth, took in a deep breath – anticipating the wonderful result – and out it came.

Well, we know what happened. The poor donkey was so discouraged. Blindly wanting and not wanting, we miss the magic of turning within to the nature of our own body/mind, just as it is. The teachings presented here skilfully empower us to trust our own sound, to listen and learn to respect our own voice. They invite us to compassionately hold the struggle, the joys and the sorrows, with a non-judgmental awareness. The transformation that follows is a mystery.

> "We already knew we were suffering, but had some idea it was an indictment against us. As the insight of non-resistance to 'struggle' begins to sink in, our whole life changes and frustrations take on a different appearance. They are no longer enemies to be conquered; they are entranceways into an Ancient Path."

May you enjoy this book and discover the treasures of your own heart.

Kittisaro
January 1988

The Buddhist Retreat Centre
Ixopo
Kwa-Zulu Natal
South Africa.

Heart Matters

Heart Matters

What we are calling heart-matters are real *matters; they are universal and personal concerns. We can learn about these matters by listening to ancient teachings and we can also learn from listening to ourselves. I suggest that these two must go together.*

Thank you for the few minutes we have just spent being quiet together. I am pleased that we have this chance to meet and I am happy that we can begin our meeting in silence. When I'm in an unfamiliar situation with people that I don't know, it's helpful to have a few moments to feel where I am, to acknowledge that you're here too, and generally to become aware that we're in this together.

This evening I hope to be able to offer a very practical reflection on the essential aspects of the Buddhist Way. Regrettably, much of what is presented as religion ends up applying only to a very small part of our lives. However, the example of the Buddha and of those who have followed this path demonstrate that the essential aspects of this teaching apply in practical ways to the whole of our lives.

I would like to begin by acknowledging that often we are not even aware that there are profoundly important matters in life. The way we live sometimes causes us to forget that we really do care about certain things. What, then, are the things that we care about most? This is the question I would like to ask.

Based on a talk given at Edinburgh University, October 1996

What matters most and is truly worthy of our attention? While much in life sort of matters and many people tell us what they think really matters, I feel we need to make an attempt for ourselves to find out for sure what really matters. The guidance given in the Buddha's Teachings supports this kind of inquiry.

It may come as a surprise to hear that the path that led to liberation for the human being known as the Buddha came as a result of personal life failures and disappointments, possibly not a lot different from what many of us experience. His investigations took place within the context of an elaborate culture with a vast array of proliferations on the theme of truth. It was similar to the context in which we live – where there is a tremendous proliferation of ideas, opinions and views about what religion is, what truth is, or as I prefer to say, about what really matters.

When I lead meditation retreats, I ask people early on to enter into a contemplation imagining that they are nearing the ends of their lives. I ask them to suppose that somebody they love dearly comes to them and says: "There's so much in life that appears to be important; now that you've lived your life, can you please tell me what *really* matters, more than anything else?" The aim of introducing this question is not to have people find a 'right' answer, or remember something they've read in the scriptures, but rather to guide them to a place where they already have a felt sense of truly significant matters. I'm suggesting that we have a dimension within ourselves that already knows that some things do profoundly matter. This dimension is a place into which our religious guides and good friends can lead us.

In the Buddhist tradition there are three things that are said to really matter. We could call them 'heart-matters', as they are said to constitute "the Heart of the Buddha". The first is wisdom, the second, compassion, and the third, purity. From

the Buddhist perspective these qualities really matter and are worthy of our attention. Initially I'd like to talk about the qualities of wisdom and compassion, and then consider how further contemplation of the heart-matter of purity allows us to bring these other two qualities to maturity.

Wisdom

The Function of Wisdom

What then is wisdom? It's a word that perhaps appeals to us because it's got something to do with our heads, where we like to spend time, where we feel comfortable. We have been taught at school that we gain credentials by knowing how to be clever at moving around up there. Mental agility can get us lots of points, so perhaps we think wisdom is a virtuous way of being up in our heads. That's one way of approaching wisdom. But what is wisdom really about? Wisdom is something that we still respect. What is it that we respect? In approaching these questions I'd suggest that we begin by asking, how does wisdom function?

Firstly, I would say that wisdom functions by *seeing through* the way things appear to be to the way things actually are. In the Buddhist Way, wisdom is a matter of insight, a 'seeing into' how things really are. In the daily chanting at our monastery, we recite some verses about the qualities of the Buddha, and one of the words we use (in the Pali language) is *lokavidu. Loka* means 'the world' and *vidu* means 'seeing through'. It's usually translated as 'knower of the worlds', but that's not quite it. By 'world' here, we do not mean the planet. In the Buddhist understanding of 'world', the important thing is the inner world, the psychological world, the world we construct in our minds, the subjective world we live in.

So one thing that we could say about wisdom is that it involves seeing through the way things appear to be in the

world we have constructed in our minds, to the way things actually are. I would say this really matters. It really matters because we are so easily fooled by apparent reality. Some everyday situations seem difficult because we don't see clearly yet these difficulties can lead to an understanding of truth. The legend of the Buddha's own life is a powerful example of this.

The traditional texts tell a story of how, up until the age of twenty nine, the Bodhisatta (Buddha-to-be) was protected by his father and prevented from encountering anything seriously unpleasant. Prince Siddhattha, as he was known, lived then secluded from the harsher realities of life, amidst wealth and privilege with unlimited resources for pleasure. With several palaces, a devoted family, fine clothes, skill in the arts and appreciation of beauty it was hoped that he would remain contented with royal life and follow his father in service to the realm. But as the prince approached thirty something happened; for the first time he came face to face with the painful side of being human. On one of his journeys outside the palace walls he saw a crippled old man. And on subsequent occasions he saw someone who was sick and then a dead person.

In our world today, interconnected as it is by networks of travel and instant communication it is difficult to imagine the possibility let alone the consequences of being so cut off in a world set apart, protected from and, in effect ignorant of the realities that all human beings must confront. It was the shock of this awakening that caused the Buddha to later say that when a naive, ordinary man sees another who is aged, sick or dead he is shocked, humiliated and disgusted for he has forgotten that he himself is no exception.

Such a sudden realisation of the unavoidable suffering that accompanies human life raised questions in the young prince, as it does for us all at some point – questions such as, "Why

bother? What's the point of it all if I am only going to get sick, old and die anyway?" Finding no answers for himself the Buddha-to-be lost perspective and gave in to despair.

But the story goes on; one day he also saw a renunciant, a monk or truth-seeker, one who wore the ochre robe, the classical Indian garb of renunciation. When the prince asked his companion, "Who's this? What's he up to?" his friend replied, "This person is in the same state as you are in. He is disillusioned with life and he can't find answers to his questions. But since he can't find answers outwardly in the world around him he has dedicated himself to looking within."

The example of the man in the ochre robe impressed the unhappy prince. And it was then that he made the gesture called 'going forth' which has come to be known as the Great Renunciation. He left his palaces, his possessions and his family to begin the pursuit of truth. His experiences with suffering had aroused in him the intuition that there might be something more beyond the way things appeared to be. Enthusiastically he then set out on his own search for a path that would lead beyond feelings of frustration and despair.

We could speak of what then arose in him as an inclination or intuition of wisdom. But it is noteworthy that this inclination arose by way of suffering. That is an important part of the story. This was more than an intellectual conclusion that he had reached. When he renounced life as it had been lived both his mind and his heart were involved. His inclination was toward a deeper way.

So he travelled and studied with the great teachers of his time. He became an outstanding student of what they taught. But for all his labours and theirs, he didn't find what he was seeking. There was no release from his suffering.

Through ascetic practices, eating little and extreme fasting he became emaciated and was dangerously weak when he eventually arrived at the insight that "this path of practice too is not balanced." Once more his intuition of wisdom drew him away, this time from any dependence at all on others, on any particular teacher or technique. He had initially left the path of indulgence in sensual pleasure and pursuit of the gratification of desire; then he had adopted the denial of pleasure and self-mortification, so this time that also had to be put aside. The intuition and urging towards wisdom brought him to what he could recognise and later refer to as the Middle Way.

Cultivating Wisdom

I am considering wisdom as that capacity for clear seeing, for seeing through the way things appear to be to a reality that lies beyond subjective opinion. This is the function of wisdom. And this wisdom can be cultivated by contemplating the truths passed down to us in the Buddha's Teachings. One of the things the Buddha taught was that there are many 'truths' which, if you contemplate them, are not actually going to take you to the realisation that you are seeking. This is one of the problems with religion, with speculation: that there are all sorts of fascinating ideas to which we can pay attention in this human realm, but there are only a handful to which we really need to pay attention if we're going to undo the tangles caused by our false seeing. This handful is what in Buddhism we call Dhamma: the Teachings which lead to the realisation for which we're searching.

Once when the Buddha was in the forest with some of his closest disciples, they were remarking on the vast proliferation of things one could be engaged in trying to understand. The Buddha instructed: "You've got to be very disciplined about all this. You need to pay attention to the right things." Then he picked up a bunch of leaves from the floor of the forest and

said, "Tell me, which is greater, all the leaves on all the trees in this forest, or this handful of leaves in my hand?" Of course the disciples replied, "The handful of leaves is much fewer and the leaves on all the trees are much greater." The Buddha continued, "Well, so it is with the truths of existence. They are much more than what I've taught, but what I've taught you is what you need to pay attention to if you want to arrive at what really matters."

Briefly, let's recall a familiar example of one of the fundamental truths that is beyond opinion, and that is worthy of attention – namely, that all conditioned phenomena are impermanent. Everything that is conditioned, programmed, born, made or constructed will deconstruct or die. All that arises will cease, is unstable. This is given as a teaching, a wisdom teaching, as an encouragement for contemplation. A teacher says, "Stop and consider impermanence." You stop, you look around and you can see that things are impermanent outwardly, things are impermanent inwardly. The perception of impermanence can stimulate meaningful investigation of our experience, and this is one way of cultivating wisdom.

Learning to Exercise Attention

Another aspect of our cultivation is the discipline of attention. This means relinquishing the proliferation of thoughts, the temptation to follow just anything that happens to come into the mind. If we're interested in arriving at this heart-matter of wisdom, of seeing through the way things appear to be to the way things actually are, it calls for precision in the application of attention. Our cultivation of wisdom involves contemplating such things as impermanence, but it also involves working directly with our ability to attend. The idea that attention is something we can train is a fundamental and basic teaching. It's well known in all the ancient religions of the world that you can exercise and concentrate attention. This is the same as concentrating light; everyday light is useful, but

if you concentrate it, you get laser light, which is useful in other ways. The common or garden variety of attention is likewise fine for shopping or reading a book, but if we want to penetrate through the way things appear to be we need to focus attention.

Sometimes we come across heavy inner conditioning and we know we must go into it. To go through to the way things actually are – not for the sake of mere speculation, but for realisation – requires us to exercise trained, focused attention. Learning this skill is an important part of meditation. If we're working only with an everyday quality of attention, it's no wonder that we don't understand a lot of things about life. It's like having a torch with weak batteries – no wonder we can't see the way. If we have good batteries, we can see more clearly – likewise with the quality of attention.

I'm reminded of once walking with a friend, from our monastery in Northumberland over the Cheviot Hills to Coldstream, hoping for sunshine and pleasant walking. But the weather was terrible, the walking was boggy, my socks and gaiters were wet, and I just wanted to get there as quickly as I could. I became intensely focused on walking.

Towards the end, as we were approaching the bridge which connects England and Scotland, I was struck by something on the pavement: a dandelion coming up through it. Normally, I wouldn't have noticed it, but because of the heightened state of awareness I was in at that moment, the dandelion seemed to jump up at me. I thought, "How did that dandelion get through the tarmac? Dandelions are so small." It struck me that, if it could think when it was underneath the asphalt that dandelion would have thought, "My goodness, this is not possible, it's too black and dense to even try!", because that was the apparent nature of things.

Fortunately, however, a dandelion doesn't think like this. It's in the nature of the dandelion to penetrate through the tarmac and to blossom. That's the way of the dandelion. It also happens to be the way of the human heart. Even when the apparent nature of things is so black and thick that it appears impenetrable, if we're present for life with concentrated attention, and not continually caught in our thinking, the heart will find its way through.

Wisdom – clear seeing – and its precursor, faith – the intuition towards wisdom – are what enable us to stay with life and to accord with our true nature, which is to penetrate through the apparent nature of things to that which *is.*

Compassion

A Way of 'Feeling with'

Like wisdom, from one perspective compassion is just another word. Some groups hold it up as a banner and claim to have a monopoly on it. But nobody owns compassion. We could talk a lot about compassion, but the mere conceptual understanding of these issues doesn't take us very far. Concepts alone don't serve our true needs. We need to know this quality of compassion for ourselves, not just have ideas about it and assume that we know it because we talk about it. The Buddha himself said about the teachings that he gave: "All I can do is point the way. I can't become enlightened for you. I can't give it to you." I'm sure he would have also said, "I would if I could but I can't." In approaching this heart-matter of compassion then, let's consider it practically and see if we can move towards realising it for ourselves.

In this consideration, it is essential that we *feel* for what is being addressed – we need to feel for how compassion functions. We can look at the Latin roots of the word

'compassion' to give us a hint: *passion* means 'feeling', *com* means 'with', so 'compassion' suggests 'feeling with'. Compassion means feeling with life, particularly feeling with suffering. "If you want to know what compassion is," the Buddha said, "well, you see what's in a mother's eyes when her child is sick." The quality you observe says, "May you be free from suffering." Compassion is a feeling of empathetic relationship in the context of suffering. It means feeling the suffering of others, with no judgement, no barrier.

From one point of view, the capacity to judge is an aspect of intelligence. But sadly, when we judge heedlessly compassion is excluded, and effectively we bring down the shutters: "I don't want to feel what you're feeling, so I'll judge it. You're wrong for suffering." When there is this kind of judgement, empathetic relationship is impossible; all that is left of compassion is the word.

Unitive Intelligence

The function of compassion is to feel with the suffering of beings and it's useful to know how this and wisdom go together. Wisdom is seeing through, and with this wisdom there's an appreciation and use of *discriminative intelligence* – the capacity to identify and to analyse and compare. With compassion, on the other hand, a mother does not necessarily analyse the child's suffering. She responds. Analysis is not the essence of compassion.

What is the quality of compassion? It's a feeling-appreciation of where the other person is at, with an intelligence that is different from wisdom. It has a distinctly different tone to it; it's a *unitive intelligence.* Sometimes compassion doesn't understand anything in itself. That's not its function; that's the function of wisdom. Compassion doesn't *have* to understand. Compassion feels, holds and receives the situation.

We Western Buddhists are good at conceptualising things. Maybe some of you have suffered the misfortune that I have, and may even have perpetrated the same mistake that I have. When somebody comes to us in suffering the important thing is that they know they are received. They don't need us telling them how we understand their problem, talking about *anicca* or something. Coming out with some kind of impressive presentation of *paticca-samuppada,* (the dependent origination teachings) is probably not what's called for. If all we come up with is a clever interpretation of somebody's suffering, it is doubtful that they will feel as if we have offered them anything at all. We haven't met that person on a level that matters. Surely meeting on such a level is what religion can offer us: if we can't find an enhanced capacity for receiving suffering, our own and others', then what's the point of our religion?

Let's try and be clear then about the particular functions of wisdom and compassion. It is vital to recognise that there is a profound form of intelligence associated with the capacity to receive and empathise with the suffering of living beings. This recognition can bring into focus both the usefulness and the limitations of discriminative understanding, which for many of us is the kind of understanding with which we're more familiar.

I hesitate to use this as an illustration because it's very painful, but I heard a leader of the Christian Church here in Scotland speaking on the radio shortly after the Dunblane massacre. The interviewer asked, "How do you *explain* this massacre? You're a religious leader and many people feel they need an explanation." We all suffer from the painful longing for explanations – it is one of our most immediate tendencies. But the man who was questioned responded profoundly: "To try to explain this event is not the way; this is not the time for trying to understand something of this order." Understanding might emerge; but the way to understanding in this case is to

hold the pain with those who have suffered so much. The function of compassion is the holding of the pain. It is that capacity or dimension within ourselves that is able to hold pain without judgement, even without being able to explain anything at all.

The Cultivation of Compassion

As in all the great religious disciplines, Buddhism teaches that compassion can be cultivated by way of formal meditation; accordingly there are techniques for holding in mind images which bring about its direct personal experience. I won't go into these here, because there are so many possibilities, but an important point I'd like to make is that it is *possible* to cultivate compassion, as with attention and insight.

Sometimes we can think, yes, compassion is a wonderful thing and I should have more of it. But then, watching the news on TV, maybe we think, "But how do I handle this?" Some of you young people are probably at the stage in life where you can feel yourselves starting to cut off, because it's too much, it's too awful. I can remember at times finding that the news was too painful. I didn't want to know about it. I was sometimes quite dishonest about not wanting to know about it, and I would distract myself in heedless ways, as maybe some of you are doing. But if we're really honest, we can come back and ask, "What are we not wanting to know about?" Then we may find that it's not actually the pain of life that we are avoiding, but that we are afraid of not being able to handle our reaction to the pain.

We need to acknowledge for ourselves our blind and habitual rejection of fear, because it's fear we're really afraid of, not the pain of the world. We already know that pain is a part of life. None of us is now naive enough to think that we're going to totally avoid pain; we all know pain is part of this package. What we're actually afraid of, and what we're turning away

from, is our sense of a lack of capacity to receive it, to bear with pain in a sane way. In his Middle Way the Buddha discovered that pain *just is,* and pleasure *just is.* Pleasure and pain are not right or wrong. But while we don't usually have a problem with pleasure, except that sometimes we forget ourselves with it, we do have a big problem with pain. It motivates us to do all sorts of things that become addictions or other avoidance strategies, which are very wasteful of energy, both inwardly and outwardly.

So the point to register is that compassion can be cultivated. It isn't helpful to approach compassion or any of these heart-matters, with the idea of having or not-having it; compassion is a potential in all of us. But it needs to be cultivated, and there are techniques, suggestions and encouragements for this.

One of the best encouragements, I suggest, is to *intentionally witness* compassionate beings. One of the most inspiring people around at the moment is His Holiness the Dalai Lama. Here is a man who has every reason to be indignant, every reason to be upset, and every reason to try and avoid his responsibilities. And yet he doesn't avoid responsibility. He meets it. Over and over again, everywhere he goes on the planet, he meets it. Even with the troubles inside his own tradition, he meets his responsibilities. And he does so with a particular quality of heart, which, if you witness it, you can't help but be touched. One way, then, to cultivate compassion would be to find a way of observing the Dalai Lama as often as we are able and to become aware of what impresses us. These days one doesn't have to go to India or Tibet to do this. With the advantage of current technology we can have the opportunity to view people like His Holiness on video or television and if we apply mindfulness to our viewing this can be a great blessing.

Inner Co-operation

Just as our individual characters are unique, so our pathways into realisation of these heart-qualities will vary. For some it may be the case that the heart-quality of compassion leads to insight, or wisdom; whilst for others a mature understanding can be the gateway into an experience of selfless compassion.

A couple of weeks ago I was speaking to a gathering of people who came to our monastery for a Practice Day. One of the questions that was asked at the end was: "It seems to me that compassionate people are just taken advantage of or dismissed, so what's the point of cultivating it?" When I heard this question, I thought, "This person has never seen a truly compassionate being." If you've witnessed a truly compassionate being you've also seen a truly wise being and a wise being isn't going to be taken advantage of. Wisdom and compassion are the qualities which command authentic respect.

Wisdom and compassion are like the front and the back of a hand: they go together. When we have an accurate, non-judgemental sensitivity to the suffering of living beings, we also have an understanding of the actuality of life – that this is not *my* suffering, this is just suffering. This is life – not mine, not yours. When we meet and share in this life together truly, we experience the benefit of wisdom functioning as it penetrates into what Buddhists call the non-self nature of existence.

This is utterly extraordinary, and this uniting of wisdom and compassion is not something one can fake. On an abstract level we can get an impression of the Buddha's Teachings; we can be impressed by them. An impression is made, and perhaps an alteration occurs, but that's only the first stage and not yet real transformation. We can be altered momentarily – just as taking drugs alters something – but we aren't

transformed. The transformation occurs when wisdom and compassion come together in direct experience, when the discriminative and the unitive intelligence are both functioning together.

I have said that the Heart of the Buddha is made up of wisdom, compassion and purity – three different qualities. This Heart is one, but with three dimensions to it, or three ways of talking about it. We have to feel for how these dimensions relate to each other.

Purity

Early on during my time in Thailand I was accompanied by another Western monk. He was very good at the meditation practice set for him – brilliant at deep concentration. He was much better at it than I was, and received all the praise. One day, after an interview with the teacher, my friend came away feeling extremely pleased with himself because the teacher had told him how good he was. However, the next day he fell into hell. He came to see me and told me what had happened. After he had been praised by our teacher he went away and sat in meditation again, and again got into feeling really pleased with himself. But then he saw it, the conceit that had all the time been growing. When he felt the pain of this conceit he found it intolerable, it hurt so much.

In this consideration of the three heart-matters – wisdom, compassion and purity – I'd like to suggest that what purity refers to is the absence of the conceit that 'this is mine' in one's experience. There must be many other ways of explaining purity, but one way is to say that even wisdom, even compassion, are impure when there is a sense that 'this is mine.' One can read a lot of teachings and do a lot of retreats; one can enter into therapy and put energy into one's 'process'. All this can be perfectly well-motivated, and one can come a

long way; nevertheless, when we hold our achievements possessively, they become impure. This becomes abundantly clear if we meet somebody who is really free: one thing that we are likely to feel in their company is the 'taint' or the pain of our own selfishness, our grasped-at perception of 'mine'. Even when there's wisdom and compassion, there can still be this taint. The Buddha called it a 'stench', the foulest stench in all of existence. And if you can smell this stench in somebody, you will want to get away from it. The same applies to oneself.

Directly feeling the pain of selfishness is a powerful motivation for going beyond it. We can't be with it just through philosophising, speculating or moralising about how bad it is to be selfish. To actually and personally feel the agony of the contraction of selfishness motivates us to investigate what's really going on. What is this holding, this grasping, this limitation of being, that we impose upon ourselves or that we identify with? What is it? If we can feel this pain, then little by little we can learn to release it. If wisdom and compassion are pure in the Buddhist sense, then any tendency to grasp at them as being 'mine' will be recognised and released. And so I would suggest that we see wisdom and compassion as aspects of nature and not as personal possessions.

Thank you for your attention.

Questioner: You mentioned earlier about according with my true nature and not getting caught up in thinking. I've often asked myself, "How did I lose sight of my true nature, if it is in fact already my true nature?" Can you help me?

Ajahn Munindo: Well, I'd be very happy if I could help you because I know the pain of feeling alienation from the intuition for awakening. If we see that impulse to realisation alive in somebody, we can feel the lack of it in ourselves. So this is an important question to ask ourselves. I think there are a lot of things about our lifestyle that obstruct the intuition for awakening, and it is quite difficult to take on board the consequences of that. We are intensely complicated materially and psychologically; this makes our minds very busy, and the busier our minds are, the less we feel the heart's natural impulse to awaken.

I think that it's faith you're asking about. Faith is a quality that sustains us, and when we know it's alive within us, it radiates an energy that keeps us going. To feel for this faith is so important. For me, faith is the capacity to *hold* doubt. Many of us don't know that capacity, and therefore get crushed by doubts. We try then to understand these doubts, try to think our way out of them. One of the reasons for this, perhaps, is that our environment makes us so busy that we think, think, think all the time. We're watching television and eating food so much that it all becomes mechanical. Our senses are so stimulated we go into automatic, and lose a lot of sensitivity.

I also feel there is a problem with education, with the views that we've been taught. If we have been given views that we deeply reject because they do not accord with our experience, then an over-reaction can set in, whereby we then dismiss the dimension of faith altogether, even when to do so creates a disadvantage for us. For instance, we may not rationally decide to reject the Buddhist path, but as an emotional over-reaction we say, "There isn't really a religious path." In other

words, we don't have faith in anything anymore. This may originate with a sense of betrayal. If we get a bad religious education – and this is not to blame anybody, but to recognise the law of cause and effect – if we're given religious beliefs and we're taught "this is true, that is true," and none of it accords with our experience of reality, then the heart can just switch off and reject everything. This over-reaction needs to be recognised because faith is essential. Remember the dandelion!

Faith is sometimes all we have – we feel like we haven't got enough wisdom and like we haven't even any compassion. We can feel as if we have nothing left anymore. But if we know how to *be* in *faith,* we can hold the doubts that arise, and we're not crushed by them. Re-educating ourselves, asking the right questions, going to meet someone who spends their life contemplating what really matters – these are ways to remember our essential nature. Find someone who is committed, visit a holy man or holy woman – that's what people used to do. In older times, you would have gone to find a renunciant somewhere to talk to about these things; that was the traditional way of dealing with such questions. Now, unfortunately, such people are hard to find. We should realise what a tremendous misfortune that is: it's bad news. It's a problem for us that we don't have wise mentors who can trigger faith in us. Even if our faith was triggered at some point, the momentum of our commitment to doubt could obscure it again.

Q: Can you say something about mindfulness meditation, about how to cultivate mindfulness?

A. M.: Actually, I've only just got around to letting myself use the word 'mindfulness', because I feel that the word automatically starts taking us up into our heads which causes us to lose touch with our bodies. It's a translation of a word

in Pali, *sati,* which I prefer to be translated as 'awareness'. The first point is that it *can* be cultivated; we must be quite conscious of that. In fact, one of the things that we encourage ourselves to do in the cultivation of awareness is to see what happens when we don't have it, when we blow it and get heedless; we need to feel deeply the consequences. We shouldn't moralise and say, "Oh, that was terrible. I'm a really hopeless Buddhist. I'm not very mindful." This is actually avoidance. We should say, "I'm really interested in this. I'm really interested in the quality of my life, and this is what it's like." We should let it sink into our bones: so much of our experience is a consequence of heedlessness. Judging – inwardly and outwardly – only obstructs awareness. To be able to bring a quality of *non-judgmental attention* to the very experience of the consequences of heedlessness is a primary means of cultivating mindfulness.

I hesitate to talk about meditation techniques, because there's an aspect of our minds that just wants to get something to 'fix ourselves', so that we can become how we want to be. But technique isn't going to fix us. If anything can help us it is following our own thoroughly investigated inclination towards the realisation of what really matters. From that understanding of ourselves we can really *want* to meditate: not because some clever person or popular religion or book said it was a good idea but because we want to be in the centre of our life, present for every experience, moment by moment. Meditation is not about preparing for the future with fearful manipulation, but about wanting to live with presence. If we can feel the point of this, and happen to discover an inspiration to meditate, we'll meditate successfully. But it has got to come from that sort of motivation.

If we don't exercise our minds, then just as with a physical limb, atrophy sets in. If you have had a broken leg and it's been in plaster for a month or two you will know how, when they take off the cast, there's just a withered thing. When you

want to do something with it, it won't function. Even though your head tells you this limb should do such and such, and you want to do it, it won't do it through lack of exercise. Similarly, if we don't exercise the discipline of attention that engages the limb of mindfulness, it atrophies.

Counting the breath is one basic, simple exercise that you can practice to cultivate mindfulness. When I teach people to count the breath as a meditation technique, I always try to encourage them to do it with a sense of humour, as a kind of game, because the last thing we need is for meditation to become another aspect of the compulsive part of ourselves. We count the out-breaths, from one up to ten and back to one. It's fine to sit in a chair; you don't have to get all 'yogic' about it, although it's good if you can. We count, and get lost, and begin again; we find all kinds of feelings arising which we just notice. We can contemplate them: are these aspects of ourselves obligations, or are they choices? Little by little, we'll see how much our preoccupations are a matter of choice. We have a choice, we can choose to follow or not to follow certain ways. This is how we find our own centre. You'll be very pleased when that happens.

This is only one way of using the meditation on breath, and there are other ways of doing it. But whichever mindfulness practice you take up, please remember to be relaxed about it – otherwise you may compound things that don't need compounding.

Q: What is the place of physical exercise in the Theravada tradition?

A. M.: Practice that is based in the body is important throughout the training, from beginning to end. Traditionally, in Theravada, physical exercise and practice go together in the

form of walking. One teacher I visited used to do three, three-hour periods of walking meditation every day. Another teacher became so used to his walking meditation track that even when in his nineties, disabled and in a wheelchair, he would have his attendant-monk wheel him up and down the track. Ajahn Chah used to tell us he went around checking to see how deep the meditation tracks were by each monk's hut to find out how diligent we were. Every day the monks in our monastery in Thailand start by walking several miles on alms-round. Here in Britain many of the monks and nuns have developed their own routine of doing yoga or t'ai chi. But nevertheless here in the West I think we might be developing a problem. Walking practice, where we are 'in the body', is very important, but it is difficult to feel good pacing up and down on a meditation track covered in snow and mud. We have to look into this.

An Invitation to Trust

An Invitation to Trust

Hearing these teachings is like receiving an invitation from the Buddha. This invitation is given freely and we are each free to respond in our own ways.

Tonight's talk has been announced as: 'A Buddhist Perspective on Faith, Hope and Despair'. We have called it 'a' perspective because there are as many different perspectives on this as there are Buddhists. And the talk is to be about 'faith, hope and despair' because these are concerns that are important to all of us, regardless of what our beliefs might be.

I would like to present to you this evening the idea that for us to engage hope with any degree of enthusiasm we must have a sure foundation of faith in our lives. Without real faith we feel like we can't afford to really hope for anything, out of fear of being disappointed; and that is a great pity – it feels hopeless.

And as for despair, it comes to all of us at some time or other. I'm sure many of us are already aware of the serious consequences of denying its existence. We need to find a way to meet despair so that the message it carries can get through without our being crushed by it.

Based on a talk given at Strathclyde University, Glasgow, April 1997

FAITH

What is Faith?

To begin with I'd like to talk not so much about what we have faith *in*, but what faith is. What actually *is* faith? We are not considering who has the 'right' faith or whether my faith is better than yours, but rather the reality of faith as a dimension of our lives.

First, how might we recognise the presence of faith? There is much that has been said about faith from an abstract perspective, that is, philosophically or theologically, but we might gain more by investigating it from an experiential perspective. In fact we lose a lot by not doing so. If direct personal experience as well as speculative thought informs our understanding then we find that we have our feet firmly on the ground. There is no need to defend our faith; rather, we find what emerges is a way for that faith to defend us, without any struggle.

If we consider this matter by exploring the functioning of faith, one of the first things we notice is that it enables trust. Remember, we are not yet saying anything about what we trust *in*; we are looking at the very activity of trusting. What are the consequences of trusting and not-trusting? What happens if we feel unable to trust? Taking the example of relationships in our outer life, many people experience the difficulty and struggle of dealing with a damaged capacity to trust – the possibility of entering into meaningful caring relationship with others is simply not available. There are genuinely-felt limitations regarding participation and co-operation.

But, thankfully, demanding as it may be, this hurt can be addressed. As it is regarding relationships with others, so it is inwardly with ourselves: it is important that we find how to

enter into a relationship with ourselves wherein we are able to simply trust; not necessarily be sure, but trust.

To bring this contemplation alive, imagine swimming in the ocean. Can you recall the experience of attempting to just float on the surface? As we relax and trust, we sense that the water will support us; we don't have to hold ourselves up. Faith feels like that. We trust in it by surrendering to it and allowing it to carry us.

Learning and Un-learning

Many people, maybe even most these days, have never enjoyed the benefit of the company of another human being who fully trusts him or herself. The consequence of this is that they have never been introduced to that possibility within themselves. It is more than an introduction; it is an induction that hasn't taken place and should have. Often we don't even realise how disabled we are as a result. Maybe we don't suspect that such an experience of well-being exists. Have you ever wondered why so many people flock to be near Asian teachers when they visit the West? It is as if we are starving. One reason is that at some level we recognise these teachers have something, something we have not had before; and we want it. I'm suggesting that what we want is an induction into that place within ourselves that is genuinely trusting and trustworthy.

It's unfortunate if we confuse the capacity to live in faith with the holding to mere beliefs. In our early lives, many of us were introduced to beliefs that we might now consider spurious; that is, we were taught to go along unquestioningly with what someone else told us. Their instruction may have been backed with the force of tradition and popularity; it may have been the generally accepted view of the society we were born into; it may have convinced us because of a charismatic presentation or appeared attractive because of its impressive

logic. From the Buddha's perspective none of these provide us with a sufficient foundation for genuine faith.

In the well-known *Kalama Sutta,* it is related how a group of villagers at the time of the Buddha had become confused and disheartened because so many gurus of various traditions had come by, each saying he had the only answer to questions concerning the mystery of life. Because of this, these villagers had become cynical. They listened to the Buddha's teachings and then said to him something like: "This whole affair is very confusing. Why should we believe what you say?" The Buddha replied, "That is very good. It is no surprise that you are confused about all these views and there is no reason why you should believe me just because I say something is true. However, if you pick up what I say and examine it for yourselves, take it inwardly and inquire until you are able to see with your own eyes whether these teachings accord with your experience, then any faith that arises will be sound; it will be based on mindfulness and investigation."

As we make our investigations, let's not rush to find answers. For instance, the question, "How do I find this faith if I don't have it?" doesn't necessarily demand an immediate answer. If we hold the 'not-knowing' carefully, it can elicit a clear connection with a quietly felt interest in the matter. Grasping at solutions too quickly deprives us of the chance for a possible deepening. Because we do care about truth, we move gradually. As we reconsider conditioning that has taken place in the past, we take care not to throw things out just because they appear useless. Further inspection might show us how to recycle some of it. And likewise we take care to notice where we are holding on out of attachment to familiarity, resisting the growing sense that it is time to firmly put something aside.

Taking up a different religious path from that into which we were conditioned can be likened to starting a new relationship after having felt badly betrayed by the last one. We learn from

feeling how it feels as we gently move forward, giving it time. In developing Buddhist faith, we meet ourselves where we find ourselves, acknowledging our distrust or unwillingness as part of finding our way. Progress on this path occurs when we appreciate afresh that which we already have, however undeveloped it may appear. Reliable faith grows out of the faith, or lack of it, that we already have. It is worth pondering on the fact that, if we had no faith at all, we wouldn't be at a meeting like this.

On this point of what faith is, there is a story from Japan of a meditation master who asked the question: "What is the heart of faith?" He followed on, saying, "The heart is that which asked the question and faith inspired the asking." For me, this speaks very loudly of what faith is, or at least how it manifests. It offers direct appreciation of how faith is a dimension of our own hearts out of which we can live.

Focusing Faith

No Quick Fix

Now what is it that we have faith *in*? This is not easy to talk about. The difficulty lies in our wanting to 'get the right answer'. We tend towards thinking there is some 'thing' out there that, if we can 'get it', will make us safe. It's similar to how I used to think there must be, somewhere, a perfect monastery where I would perfectly fit. For people living the householder's life, it may be the case that you believe there must be the right partner somewhere, who would make you feel good for ever.

The inquiry into finding a truly suitable object of faith is difficult because of the attitude with which we approach it. We tend to be looking for something which guarantees our safety: we want to be sure. I am not saying there is anything wrong with this approach, just that we need to be aware of it.

We need to know on what assumptions our investigations are based. In this case, we readily assume that there is actually some 'thing' that will do the trick for us – even take responsibility for us – and in Buddhism this is not on offer. In Buddhist practice, we don't have faith in any 'thing'. As I said previously, faith is a dimension out of which we live, it is not an object which we stand on or even stand by. It is simply not a thing in any case.

To attempt to understand faith by thinking about it is like trying to appreciate the fragrance of a flower by grasping for it – we wouldn't do that. Faith is a heart fragrance, so let us try approaching our inquiry with this image. At the beginning of Evening Chanting, as I offer the incense at the shrine, I silently reflect: "May the fragrance of truth permeate my entire being – my action of body, action of speech and action of mind." Faith is that inner dimension that gives shape and hue to all of our character.

The Buddha's Way

In his wisdom, the Buddha emphasised how all things are impermanent. Although this observation can be difficult, it is also very helpful and needs to be applied in our investigation of faith. Saying that there is no-thing that will make us secure and no-thing that we direct our faith towards doesn't mean we are left with nothing. What we are offered in Buddhist teaching is a 'Way'.

A 'way' is about movement through life; a 'thing' is what we own or have. We all know how much we like to have things and the feeling of self-esteem or self-value that can grow as we get more things. We assume that the more 'I' have, the better 'I' am. Intellectually we can accept that this is false thinking, but it is still there in our minds and we must be careful that this view doesn't creep into our contemplation.

So the Buddha isn't giving us a faith to grasp and set up against other faiths. Speaking about his Awakening, he said, "I rediscovered an ancient Way that many others have walked before . . . ." Nobody had been down this Way for a long time, so there were a lot of lost people around. The Pali word the Buddha used in talking about his discovery was *magga*, which literally means 'way' or 'path' and this refers to the Noble Eight-fold Path.

Traditionally this Way is spoken of as having three aspects: morality or discipline (*sila*), collectedness or tranquillity (*samadhi*), and wisdom or discernment (*paññña*). These three aspects should not be seen at all sequentially – they proceed together. However, for the sake of our discussion we can consider them separately.

Sila Samadhi Paññña

Integrity

So what is *sila*? In Asian Buddhist culture it is recognised that someone 'with *sila*' has a particular quality to their life. This quality has a feeling tone to it. It's automatically understood that to meet such a person immediately elicits a sense of respect. Whilst the usual words for translating *sila* – morality and discipline – both apply, the term that I find approximates this quality most closely is 'integrity'. A life lived with *sila* is a life lived with integrity. And it is always said that in Buddhist practice this is what provides the foundation for the spiritual life.

Maybe you will have noticed that Buddha images usually show the Buddha seated on a lotus flower. The lotus is a symbol for purity of action of body and speech. But anybody who has spent time in the East may have seen lotuses growing in smelly, swampy ponds. Where I lived in Northeast Thailand, jute was one of the main cash crops for the

villagers. Once harvested the plant had to be soaked for a few weeks in any low-lying water that could be found before it could be processed. And that water really stank. Yet out of that same water a beautiful white lotus would grow up and open – totally unspoiled by the filth out of which it rose.

Similarly with a life lived with *sila*, even though our circumstances in the world may be messy, a beauty radiates from the heart of one whose life is characterised by integrity. And the Buddha, a symbol for our potential to awaken, sits well-balanced with this as his foundation. Without this foundation the Buddha sinks into the swamp where we can't see him. He doesn't disappear but we might think he has. This is how it can feel at times.

With *sila*, or integrity, as the foundation of the Way in which we have faith, we are encouraged to see how it applies to all aspects of our lives: our professions, our relationships, all our activities. We should notice very clearly the effects when integrity is compromised. It doesn't take very much lying or cheating in a business before tensions caused by distrust undermine the operations of that enterprise. It may be that the majority of problems in companies can be traced to difficulties in this area. We need to be willing to look at this. I am not saying that you should agree with me but I'm asking that you investigate to see whether this is the case or not. See how a small thing can breed distrust and notice what effect that has.

Noticing this in our outer life, we can also look inward and find that the same process applies. How do we feel when we know we have compromised ourselves? It is as simple as recognising how our attitude to someone changes when we discover that they are dishonest. We feel just the same towards ourselves if we know we are not meeting the mark when it comes to integrity.

When Ajahn Chah visited America at the invitation of various Buddhist groups there, he listened to a lot of 'yogis' (meditation students), each telling a personal story and talking about the struggles they had. After hearing a few, he started shaking his head in disbelief. He told them, "Many of you folk are like criminals going around committing crimes all over the place until you get caught and put in prison. The prison is this retreat centre; you are asking me to be your solicitor and get you out. The trouble is, when you get out I know that you'll just go back to your old ways again. You will carry on committing crimes, get caught again and ask some other smart solicitor to get you out." He said Westerners had to 'clean up their act' if they wanted their practice to bear good fruit and that this was a very basic matter. It's not anything subtle or sophisticated. It's about not lying, not misappropriating things, considering carefully what responsible sexuality means, stopping all killing, giving up drink and drugs. These are the five basic moral precepts of a Buddhist. If we heed the encouragement to examine our personal attitude in these areas we can find ourselves living with more complete trust in ourselves. On this foundation real practice and well-being prospers.

Another helpful connotation that this word integrity carries with it is that of cohesion. In a community where there is a firm basis of openness and honesty there is invariably also a tangible sense of some force holding things together. It is said in Buddhist Teachings that when a group of individuals live together observing what is called the 'Human Standards' (*manussa dhamma*) – these are the five precepts – then there is a real possibility of that group's living with concord and harmony.

Regardless of opinion on the matter, if these principles are not accorded with then there is no possibility of lasting concord. Lack of integrity is the same as lack of cohesion. Once again this applies outwardly and inwardly. On the

psychological level, compromising standards of integrity undermines self-respect and leads to a loss of cohesion or co-operation of inner structures which in turn generates confusion.

Finally, when dealing with these particular aspects of the Way it is very helpful to take note of how this practice of *sila* creates a sense of containment. If you and I were to get to know each other to the stage where we felt we were able to trust completely, we would experience a feeling of safety in each other's company. This feeling of reliability or safe containment is indeed precious and crucial in the foundation of our practice.

I think the best metaphor I've ever heard for demonstrating how this principle of containment works as an essential element of the Way is one that was given to me by a highly respected teacher and good friend, the Venerable Myokyo Ni. Prior to her ten years of training in Japan and eventual appointment as Abbess of the Rinzai Zen Centre in London, she had obtained a Doctorate in Geology from an Austrian university. Drawing on the experience of that earlier training, she related to me how, as a student she had been taught to make industrial diamonds out of graphite in their laboratory. The raw material, a pile of carbon dust, was subjected to tremendous pressure and high temperature at the same time. Besides pressure and heat, what the transformation of that coarse black matter into pristine diamonds depended on was the strength of the container. If there was any weakness, she explained, one would end up with an awful mess.

Sadly, this can happen amongst spiritual practitioners, if they confront their wild animal passions while there are still cracks in their container of self-respect. Self-respect or self-trust *is* the container. This quality grows naturally out of appropriate action of body and speech. And we do come under considerable stress during times of intensity, whether such

times arise from intentional formal practice or from everyday life.

Using this image, we can see how strength of containment is a requirement, not simply an option, before we allow a build-up of heat and pressure. This basic structure of *sila* means we can proceed with increasing safety and a well-founded sense of confidence.

Collectedness

Now let's talk about *samadhi.* This particular aspect of the Way is traditionally spoken of as 'concentration', but I prefer to contemplate it using the words 'collectedness' or 'tranquillity'. It is characterised by clarity and energy – a fullness of energy. (We should note at this point that underlying delusions could still be operating and the work of dealing with such tendencies is the domain of discernment.)

We have all experienced this state of collectedness at times; it is not necessary to sit in meditation for it to occur. It happens when the body, the heart and the mind all come together; it is also referred to as 'one-pointedness'. This coming together is experienced as a joyous fullness, bliss. It is true that, from a Buddhist perspective, not all the means that can take us to such an elevated state are considered wholesome and we do need to ponder on this. But it is also important that we recognise the condition of one-pointedness as a normal human phenomenon – it is not something special. It is unfortunate how much misunderstanding and mystique have evolved around the subject of altered mind states. I hope we can learn to see the cultivation of this dimension of ourselves as thoroughly natural. I think we can, if we are interested in discovering what reliable faith is about.

The calm and ease found in this integrated state is natural. With one-pointedness established, a pleasant form of

peacefulness arises. We don't have to force our minds to become peaceful; we don't have to strain to think clearly. When there is collectedness then clarity is there also. As it has often been observed, when the winds stop and the waves on the water cease, a reflection appears in the surface of the lake. We benefit enormously if we come to know that the work of generating clarity and fullness of energy is something that we can actually do. Through not understanding this we might assume that we are helpless in the face of our poor quality of attention. It might appear that we are somehow obliged to distract ourselves from difficulties by watching television and going along with the mediocrity of our casual culture. But from the perspective of the experience of regular practice we find that following such activity is a choice, not an obligation at all. We could also choose to sit meditation regularly. We could decide to bring awareness to the consequences of our low-grade attention span. There *is* something we can do about it.

Discernment

The third aspect of the Buddhist Way is referred to in Pali as *paññā.* This usually translates as 'wisdom'. I find the word 'discernment' is also helpful. Depending on how precise we are in applying attention to our experience, and how present we are, we can discern accurately or falsely. The teachings on discernment are aimed directly at showing us that we have this potential to *see deeply* beyond the apparent world. The Buddha wanted us to recognise for ourselves the ability to see into and beyond the way things appear to be. Discernment or insight is a power that both introduces us to this ability and supports us in exercising it.

Examining our outer life, we can readily recognise the consequences of a lack of discernment. At present here in Britain there is a General Election taking place. Very

impressive speakers are each attempting to convince the population that they have all the answers. Without discernment we can easily become cynical or frustrated, thinking, "They are all the same. They all lie!" But such observations are simplistic. In reality we just don't know whom to believe. The truth is we are uncertain, just like the *Kalamas* were. And the Buddha told them they were right to feel uncertain; that is a suitable reaction in an uncertain circumstance.

So what do we do in this circumstance? If someone is trying to sell us their product and we don't know ourselves well enough to trust our response, where does this leave us? It leaves us with a clear indication of what our work is. We have to fully accept that we need to train our faculty of seeing beyond the apparent to what is real. In this way we will be able to exercise discernment accurately in the midst of confusion. Furthermore it will be wisdom itself that we'll engage by acknowledging the need to train this faculty.

Once again taking an example from our experience of human relationships, suppose someone visits us and asks that we hear them talk about the pain in their life. Maybe from their perspective the pain is too much. They are convinced that they can't handle it any longer. If we listen from one place within ourselves we only hear what they believe. But by relaxing our attention and feeling for a deeper place from which to listen, a place that doesn't habitually reject uncertainty, we can hear beyond the surface appearance. Their presentation of their predicament is probably full of the judgement, "This really is too much for me." If we go to a place within ourselves that, through insight, is freed from compulsively grasping at evaluations, we receive a different impression. And if we have the skill to reflect this impression back to them then they might meet themselves in that place where there are many more possibilities than those they already know.

This is training our hearts to listen *truly.* We abide in an awareness that is freed from being driven to know the answer to the existential questions of life as they're happening in front of us. We are not saying that the way things appear is right or wrong; we simply hold the 'not sure'. In our example the person talking with us feels sure about the limitations of the situation and that contributes significantly to creating the problem. With skilful intention we can discover the ability to hear deeply, beyond the apparent. Feeling beyond the obvious, we arrive at a new way of seeing altogether.

The Radiance of Faith

These three aspects of the Way that I've been presenting as integrity, collectedness and discernment are what we as Buddhists look towards in faith. Hopefully, you can see this is not a blind form of faith but a considered response to the actual uncertainty of life. We choose to trust that actions based on these well-considered principles will guide us towards responsible living. And from the confidence that grows out of this felt sense of personal responsibility we find the strength that supports daring. If we can afford to be daring, then we can really hope.

Hope is a natural radiance that emanates from faith. When we realise this, then we can dare to engage hope enthusiastically. And, as we do so, the daring releases a potential for extraordinary creativity – a wonderfully constructive and agile mind is already waiting to be uncovered within faith. Where do you think Nelson Mandala or Mother Theresa found inspiration? It wasn't in the lovely scenery around them. It was in the same place inside them that was able to receive, free from evaluation, feelings of hopelessness and despair. If they were not familiar with that place of faith, despair would have been denied and all hope, with its faculty for limitless imagination and its possibility for resolution, would have lain unrecognised.

This variety of daring doesn't necessarily mean being bold or heroic. It means having freedom from fear of uncertainty; freedom to discover something new. It means engaging creative investigation without needing to know where we'll end up. Because of an inner attitude of trusting in reality we are able to adjust and accord with what is immediately in front of us.

To give one last example, at present I am involved in helping to build a monastery in Northumberland. It is a risk to attempt to establish a celibate renunciant community based on an ancient tradition, in Britain at the end of the 20th century. There is a large investment of time and energy and of course that carries responsibility so we have to look closely at what we are doing. Robes, alms-bowls and shaven heads fitted comfortably in an agrarian society and one wonders how they will cope as they encounter the Internet. This is definitely an uncertain affair. But there is nothing wrong with uncertainty. Uncertainty is the fact.

For the past four years, the trustees of Ratanagiri have been dealing with a legal dispute that arose over a neighbour accusing us of stealing his land. Whilst there is no foundation in reality for such accusations, the nature of the legal system and of culture-clash have meant a huge expenditure of monastery funds on something with which I would never have imagined becoming involved. In the beginning, some mornings I would wake with a sick feeling in my stomach and I would start wondering if it was worth all the struggle. I've not attained to the stage of being able to remain perfectly passive in the face of such an unpleasant attack. However, without considerable faith and the tolerance it affords, I know I would have found the complexity of the situation overwhelmingly hopeless. I couldn't have dared to believe that the whole thing would be amicably resolved. Now I'm pleased to have been able to stay with it and come to see the doubts and fears for what they are: apparitions of despair that

challenge faith in true principle. They are not what they appear to be. But such challenges seem real in their appearance – there should be no mistake about that.

As the monks and nuns of the Chinese Ch'an tradition have put it, our task is to "Accord with conditions without compromising true principle." To be able to accord with what is happening in our lives now without losing ourselves is the point. To live our lives in this manner is blameless, regardless of what the world might say. And in this blamelessness we are free. Our imagination and creativity can blossom in the service of reality. It is our faith in true, considered principles that has brought this about.

Without firm inner grounding, the outer conditions of change disturb us excessively. Hence the encouragement to contemplate. Joyously, when we reconnect with the ability to engage our life in hope, we find that a heart of faith is already there to guide us.

I wish you well in your daring.

The Freedom to Suffer

The Freedom to Suffer

Enlightenment is a wonderful idea. This is the seed out of which grows our dedication to a whole body/mind training.

It can take a long time before we find out what the real point of Buddhist practice is. There are innumerable doctrines, beliefs and techniques in this Way, but none of them is an end in itself. All of them are included in an overall training which is called *cittabhavana*, or 'the training of the heart'. The word *citta* is variously rendered in translation as 'heart', 'awareness', and sometimes as 'consciousness'. *Bhavana* literally means 'to bring into being'. So *cittabhavana* can also be translated as 'cultivation of awareness'. This subject is obviously central both to what you are doing here as psychotherapists and to what we are doing in our monastic training, so I am glad that we have this opportunity to consider it together.

It is easy, as I said, for us to take quite some time before we get the core message that awareness itself is what we are working on. It is very important that we do come to see that all the different skilful means offered in Buddhism are in reference to this.

Back in the 1960s and '70s many of us were out in Asia looking for something that we hoped would fill up an emptiness we felt we had inside – an inner sense of lacking.

Based on a talk given at The Karuna Institute (Psychotherapy Training Centre), Devon, April 1997

In keeping with our expectations, we found a large variety of systems and substances, some more helpful than others. Buddhist monasteries and teachers were amongst what we came across. What we thought they were offering was this wonderful idea of enlightenment.

We were tremendously inspired and believed this meant that if at some time in the future we fully grasped this idea, then we would be free from any sense of lacking for ever more; we would be free from suffering altogether. We were tending to approach what we found there in the same way that we approached our everyday life, that is, as consumers: "How can I *become* enlightened? What must I do to *get* this freedom from suffering?"

I heard a story of a young Westerner travelling around Southeast Asia who was particularly concerned that he didn't join up with anything but the best tradition and so he proceeded to go from teacher to teacher conducting interviews with them. He asked each one in turn the question, "What was the Buddha doing under the Bodhi tree?" I imagine he planned to compare all the answers and then make his choice. Each teacher naturally replied from their own perspective. The first, a Japanese teacher living in Bodhgaya, said, "Oh, the Buddha was doing *shikantaza*." Then another teacher said, "The Buddha was definitely practising *anapanasati*." Another replied, "The Buddha was doing *dzogchen*." And further, "The Buddha was sitting in *vipassana* meditation." When this seeker visited Thailand and asked Ajahn Chah what the Buddha was doing under the Bodhi tree, Ajahn Chah replied: "Everywhere the Buddha went he was under the Bodhi tree. The Bodhi tree was a symbol for his Right View."

Whenever I recall this story, I like what it does to me. There is a turning around of attention and a remembering of the essential point of our practice. I find myself returning to the

heart of the matter, or to the only place where I can make the kind of effort that brings about a difference.

Of course it is understandable that we don't get it altogether right in the beginning and spend energy holding on to an initial idea about becoming enlightened. These ideas are the seeds which grow into a fuller way of practice. However, we do need to recognise that what is on offer in this Way is a complete training in awareness – not just an idea. We take up the training as we would take up an invitation; in this case an invitation to assume our own true place within our body/minds. The Buddha's path of training isn't a mere conditioning aimed at fitting us into anybody else's form or anybody else's understanding.

Awareness

Awareness as Capacity

The model I find helpful in contemplating our training is that of awareness as capacity. Our experiences are all received into awareness. How well or how freely we receive life is dependent on our hearts' capacity; or, we could say, on the degree of awareness we are living *as.* With this model, we can examine exactly how, where and when we set the limitations on our capacity to receive experience, what the limitations we place on awareness are, and what this feels like.

Limitless

One of the chants which we regularly recite in the monastery says: *appamano Buddho, appamano Dhammo, appamano Sangho.* The word *appamana* translates as 'without measure'. So this verse means: "Limitless is the Buddha, limitless is the Dhamma, limitless is the Sangha." One way of seeing what was unlimited about the Buddha is to look at his quality of awareness. The Buddha's heart capacity was boundless and accordingly he could accommodate unlimited experience

without the slightest stress. He went beyond any compulsive tendency to set limitations on awareness and so was untroubled by anything that passed through his awareness. Hence we say, "I go for refuge to the Buddha"; or we orient all our conscious effort towards the possibility of limitless awareness.

We know we need to do this if we want to awaken out of the agonising sense of limited being. It is because we come up against the humiliating experience of "This is just too much – I can't take any more" that we have to train ourselves. We must understand what this 'I' is that finds it all too much. Our experience of the present moment is not too much for reality; reality is what's happening. The painful constriction we feel is the symptom of the limitations we place on awareness. This pain is the appropriate consequence of our habitual grasping.

Seeing it from this perspective, we realise that placing limitations is something we are responsible for *doing.* Our cramped hearts are not imposed on us. We come to see that we are not helpless victims of our conditioning. I'm always surprised when people tell me, "This is just the way I'm made," as if it's somebody else's fault for getting the design wrong. Working with a model of awareness as capacity, we discover (literally, 'un-cover') potential for change. With constant careful attention in this area there begins to dawn a quiet confidence in a way that we can cultivate.

Paying Attention

In the world of sights, sounds, smells, tastes, sensations and mental impressions we have no choice but to receive sense-impingement. Regardless of our lifestyle, be it as monk or nun or psychotherapist or any other occupation, we are all touched by the world of the senses. And these impressions are either received or not received. If we are rigid in our holding to the perception of ourselves as inherently limited in our ability to

receive, then we feel put upon by the struggle; we feel obstructed. But to contemplate the possibility of opening and expanding our heart's capacity takes us beyond the feeling of being obliged to suffer.

If we make a discipline of paying attention to the very feeling of being obliged to suffer, then we are being mindful of the dynamic that actually creates the suffering. We are putting ourselves in the place where we can undo the cause of the feeling of limitation. Our untrained attention easily and understandably flows in the direction of being interested in maximising on possibilities for pleasure. It is natural for the sensual side of our character to want to follow what the senses appear to tell us is the best way to increased well-being – that is, if it feels good then take it; if it feels bad, reject it. But from our life experience we know that we need to look deeper than that. This is not to pass judgement but to accord with reality. Nobody is forcing us to look deeper, but if we don't then we remain more troubled by life's struggles than we have to be.

Here we see why there is an emphasis on suffering in Buddhism. Right attention paid at the right time and place shows what it is we are *doing* to maintain the felt perception of limited being. If we realise that we are responsible for doing this then we also realise we can choose to not-do it. What a relief!

So how we approach our struggles is our own choice. For example, in regard to body, suppose one day one of us discovers a painful, sensitive lump beneath an armpit. It is likely that to some degree we would rather not know about it. But we are all aware of the dangerous consequences of avoiding that kind of sign. Something within knows that pain is an organismic message calling for attention. If we offer it the suitable response of interest then further damage might be

avoided. If we don't, then maybe the volume of the message will have to increase.

In our practice of training for awareness we learn to read heart-pain in the same way as we would interpret bodily symptoms. Heart-pain indicates that there is something which for some reason we are avoiding and to which we are not paying proper attention. Later it may be seen as a nudge towards awareness, but it begins in shock and suffering. Remember how it was for the Buddha when he first encountered old age, sickness and death.

Heeding this summons to attention and feeling inwardly, not turning away from the pain that is involved, we are able to witness the resistance we have. When we recognise what it is that we are doing we come to *see* the suffering for what it is. If our attention is careful, caring and well-informed enough, an easing of the holding to limited capacity occurs and a new understanding appears in its place. We then receive an unexpected affirmation which says that, *for every increase in our capacity to receive life, there is a corresponding increase in discernment itself.*

The ability to see clearly and feel accurately is already there in our open-heartedness. It is only the compulsive setting up and maintaining of restrictions on ourselves that creates obstructions. The larger capacity of heart already has within it what we are looking for. Our difficulty is that we prefer not to have to go through the doorway of fear and struggle to enter that larger reality. Yet all our efforts to become wise and compassionate by merely reading and strategising our lives leave us feeling self-centred and frustrated. Hence, there is great value in the encouragement we give each other in applying ourselves to the careful cultivation of this kind of training.

Judgement-free Awareness

In working to go beyond habitual or ignorant existence, we will at some stage be called to look at just how it is that we find a personal sense of security – our identity. For all of us this arises to some degree by taking a position for or against what is happening. We recognise this as feeling safe when we know where we stand in relation to an experience we are having or some issue that is presented to us. This ability to secure ourselves by discriminating is a normal disposition for us, but only suitable up to a certain point. When this discriminating faculty takes over and becomes who and what we are, we have a big problem. It means we can never be free from taking sides, from agreeing and disagreeing even in subtle ways, and that keeps our minds busy. Accordingly, we are never simply aware of the activity of our minds. Our wish to abide in quiet investigation ends up as a struggle with resistance and confusion.

We can find help in this area if we consider the consequences of the kind of messages we were given early on in life about what represents Ultimate Reality. For instance, what is the effect if the idea didn't get through that God is love, that the ultimate reality in all existence is all-pervading, all-inclusive caring, but instead we got the idea that God is a Being who eternally accepts and rejects according to some agenda that we have no say in – that there is an Omnipotent Being who is taking some up and sending some down – for ever? The effect is that the highest aspect of our psyche is continuously discriminating and we are effectively locked into a process that is inherently frustrating. We are in a state of chronic stress.

There is no possibility of freedom in such a conditioned view. It is very important to examine this. Imagine what happens, for example, if we are tired or unwell and not in touch with much compassion. If an habitual taking sides for good and

against bad is dominating then we can't receive ourselves in that state. All we do is act out of a chronically judging mind: "I shouldn't be this way." Habitually seeking an identity by holding a view for or against keeps us locked into or bonded to an imaginary programme that is ultimately right. But what is right about it?

Finding identity by seeking security in the conditioned activity of our minds can be contrasted with the spiritual path of finding well-being and identity in awareness itself. Those who are committed to awakening move beyond a search for security in a personal identity born out of fixed views and opinions; they move through the insecure and unfamiliar world of not knowing where they stand, and eventually reach non-judgemental awareness. If we don't have to know who we are or be assured we are right, but can rather receive, in freedom of awareness, how this moment is manifesting, we leave behind our addiction to certainty, with its predictability and limited possibility. Our lives enter a different mode altogether. We don't have to have guarantees that our group is the best or that everything will turn out all right. We can tolerate uncertainty – and that is wonderfully liberating. We find the possibility of being able to accord with all the activity of our totally uncertain world without being driven heedlessly into taking sides. The discovery is a welcome one.

Awareness and its Activity

As our investigation continues, we arrive at a point of seeing how all the picking and choosing activity going on is simply activity taking place *in* awareness. During the first interview I had with my first teacher in Thailand, the Venerable Ajahn Thate, I was told that my task was to learn to see the difference between the activity taking place in awareness and awareness itself. End of interview!

This instruction still underlies all my practice. I feel very fortunate to have had such clear, simple guidance. The suggestion this teaching gives us lifts us out of believing we *are* the activity that is taking place. We can grow into seeing all the content of our minds, including the picking and choosing and evaluating and so on, as the natural waves that pass across the ocean of awareness that is our life. We are positively disinclined to struggle with what arises within us. Instead, we know that the judging mind is *just so.* It is natural activity – no blame; no taking a position for or against the judging mind or any activity. If we are aware of the inclination to grasp onto a view about what we see, we remember, 'no judging the judging mind'. We have to get quite subtle about it.

Abiding *as* awareness, wise reflection is energised and inspired. And it is this very awareness which in turn gradually dissolves our false identity as inherently limited, conditioned beings. In terms of training, we commit ourselves to a practice of mindfulness of the felt perception of 'struggle'. If we can remember to be conscious of the struggle that is taking place in any given moment and then further remember to not-judge the struggle, we find ourselves elevated into an awareness that already has in it the understanding and sensitivity that brings about letting go. Letting go happens; it is not something we do. Rather, it is conditioned by our not-doing – our not taking a position for or against. The way forward then becomes clear.

In my opinion, we don't get very far in practice as meditators or as psychotherapists until we are well-acquainted with the reality of not-judging. Without access to it we simply won't have the inner space to hold the intensity of dilemma with which a life committed to transformation will most certainly challenge us. If we do know the non-judgmental mind, then we know the place of resolution, the place of spontaneity, of creativity, of intelligence. This is where what we are looking

for already exists. Until we enter this dimension, all our wise words will be mere imitation. When we speak we will always be quoting others.

The Factor of Agility

As we continue our cultivation of the Way there will be times when we become unduly comfortable with a particular orientation to practice. If we are not sufficiently alert to notice how this is happening we could fall into a feeling of mediocrity; we become bored. So we are encouraged to develop the agility of attention to be able to move in and out of contrasting environments. We avoid staying only in areas in which we know we can operate well. This applies equally to our inner world and our outer life.

One way of understanding how the principle of contrast brings deepening is to observe how children learn and develop. Parents give their children contrasting experiences, colours and objects which stimulate the growth of intelligence. Without an appropriate input of contrasting experience, children lose their propensity for imagination through repetition and the blandness of familiar routines: they are likely to become dull.

We could also ponder on what the conventional wisdom contained in the saying 'a change is as good as a rest' might be. The feeling of being refreshed from significantly changing what we are doing – even if it isn't to something we particularly like – arises because we break out of the mode of predictability that we had become used to. When we change what we are doing, we are energised by our own interest and natural enthusiasm. We already have plenty of energy – flare-ups of passion show us that – but because we become overly familiar with the patterns of our lives rigidity sets in and we lose contact with our energy source. Submitting ourselves to contrasting influences gives us new access to our natural

energy. If we don't understand this dynamic we may believe that we are actually lacking, and go endlessly looking for new stimulation.

We need to contemplate our own condition until we find for ourselves how interest and vitality are generated. In our monastery recently, a photographer friend came to take pictures for next year's calendar. His work is beautiful and very much admired for the richness and depth he manages to produce. The primary element for bringing about that richness is contrast.

If we follow our usual tendencies to stay where we feel safe and avoid challenges out of a suspicion of inadequacy, mediocrity is inevitable. Even if we try treating ourselves to stimulations and distractions for a while, we know that this is not the Way. By contemplating the principle of contrast in practice we encourage ourselves to go into situations where we don't feel safe because we are interested and we want to be awake.

I heard a well-known English judo master speak once about how he was given instruction by his teacher. The teacher noticed that his student was winning all the tournaments by executing a particular throw and that he always used his right side. So the teacher told him he had to stop using his right side for one year. A series of humiliating defeats followed but eventually the student developed the skill of performing his winning throw using his left side. At this point the wisdom of the teacher was recognised. So long as he could only throw from the right he was vulnerable and it was just a matter of time before someone else discovered his weakness and caught him out; but now, with the agility of being able to come from either side, he was unbeatable.

Most of us don't have the good fortune to live with a watchful master who observes our tendencies to become

imbalanced by our emphasis on our good sides, so we have to observe ourselves. And this is where we need the skill of inner agility. The formal Buddhist Teaching in this area is known as The Four Foundations of Mindfulness (*Satipatthana*). Without going into these teachings thoroughly at this time, it is good to refer to them. The instruction presented is a detailed description of the techniques and benefits of establishing mindfulness in four areas: mindfulness of body (*kayanupasanna*); mindfulness of feeling (*vedananupasanna*); mindfulness of the mind or heart itself (*cittanupasanna*); mindfulness regarding the laws or patterns of reality that pertain to the Way of Awakening (*dhammanupasanna*). The discourses given by the Buddha on this subject form the foundation of all the teachings in the meditation tradition of the Theravada school of Buddhism. Agility of attention, inner and outer, is held in the highest position in the hierarchy of skills to be developed.

Training

Training as 'According with'

Now let's turn to talking specifically about training. I use this word not in the sense, for instance, of training a parrot to talk, which is better considered as conditioning, but in the way of giving a direction to something that is moving. At the centre of the cluster of buildings that comprise our monastery, there is a garden dedicated to the memory of the late Venerable Ajahn Chah. In the centre of the garden there is a *stupa* (reliquary) containing relics of our teacher, and this *stupa* sits in a beautiful small pond. To keep the pond fresh and filled up, the rain water from the roof of the adjacent Meditation Hall is gathered and 'trained' to flow towards the *stupa.* Behind the *stupa* there is a variegated ivy growing and I am trying to train it to climb the wall. Anyone who does gardening knows that this kind of training can only work if it

is in the nature of the plant to go that way. Right training must accord with the true nature of that which is being trained. And this training does most definitely mean going against our unruly nature. Some gardeners might prefer wildness, which I understand. But if we follow the way of undirected, untrained wildness in the area of human passions, we cause a lot of suffering for ourselves and others. So we willingly give ourselves into a training.

Whole-Being Training

If it is Buddhist training it must involve body, speech and mind. When we look at our present quality of life, we should see it as the result of our past actions (*kamma*). Our being is conditioned by actions of body (*kayakamma*), actions of speech (*vacikamma*) and actions of mind (*manokamma*). Bringing our passionate nature into line with the path of realisation must involve all of our being. Many of our formal rituals are aimed at elevating awareness of these three dimensions. As we bow in front of the Buddha image we are lowering our bodily form in an acknowledgement of our experience of limitation. With our body we are saying 'I', as separate ego, willingly submit myself to the 'way of what is', in contrast to the stiff-necked "I can handle it, I don't need anybody" kind of attitude. And as we offer candles and incense to the Triple Gem, we perform with our body gestures of respect and gratitude, which bring into relief the self-oriented activity of our lives that is always taking from the world for 'me'. Similarly, as we recite the morning and evening chanting, we utter words that resonate with the deepest aspects of our hearts. By intentionally acting with body and speech in the form of regular ritual, we are reminded of where the real responsibility for our actions lies.

Mindfully engaging each other in dialogue on matters of truth also serves to cultivate a felt sense of the significance of

training. It is encouraging to see that more and more people are wanting to meet to support each other in this way.

If we don't train, then, like the water off the roof that never reaches the pond but merely seeps away, so the precious passion of our hearts fails to enliven our commitment to the Way.

Wanting to Train

If training accords with the true nature of that which is being trained, there is an ease, even if at times we feel challenged. Training is challenging because it is not what 'I' want. But then, when does 'I' ever truly get what it wants? Is it possible for this separate 'I' to be genuinely contented? No! Because, by being identified *as* the activity of wanting and not as awareness itself, we are compelled to feel always busy. When we understand this then we start wanting to train. And such wanting is essential. The meditation master Venerable Ajahn Mahabua, when asked, "What is the place of desire for liberation in this Way?", replied that it *is* the Way. When we fully want to submit ourselves to a training because we long to go beyond a sense of cramped limitation, then the interest and creativity that we will need for the task ahead becomes available to us.

If hearing talks or reading books about practice inspires us to take up training, then that is good. But we need to know that we are doing it because we want to do it. It is only from this perspective that we can learn from what our own discernment faculty has to tell us. If we are imitating someone else's practice, then we are compromising this faculty. We need to assess, as we proceed, if this way is *our* way. Entering into training is like entering a mountain stream to bathe: we wouldn't just dive in because it looks attractive. Maybe it's only a foot deep and we would be badly hurt. It's better to go

carefully, feeling our way until we are confident about what we are getting ourselves into.

Sometimes people have a problem in this area of wholeheartedly wanting to progress in their training, because Buddhist Teachings so insistently call attention to the fact that suffering is rooted in desire. Such people jump to the conclusion that to want anything at all is not the Way. This is very unfortunate. As we know, where there is desire there is energy. If because of some ill-informed assumptions about desire we disown this energy, then who is taking responsibility for it? Who is taking care of it if we aren't? It doesn't just go away because we don't think it's a good idea. The last thing that the world needs is for more heedlessness around desire. What does help, though, is to know what we want more than anything else. I am suggesting the reason that we take up this training is because we want to find out what this is.

At Ratanagiri Monastery, we have a regular meeting on Sunday nights at which the local Buddhists like to gather for chanting, meditation and discussion. We begin with the recitation of the Three Refuges and Five Precepts. For a long time this took place with very little volume, until one day it occurred to mé that they sounded embarrassed about doing it. I asked if we should stop; but no, they wanted to continue with it. So I suggested that unless the group were feeling apologetic about wanting to do it, we should shout the recitation out. These days we don't exactly shout, but there is a good strong communal voice resonating around the Hall, reaffirming our determination to offer ourselves into the training.

The need to know that we are doing our own practice stays with us. We can easily become habituated to the training forms that we have acquired and because of this they cease to work for us. However, if these forms are rightly grasped then they enthuse and energise us. So we keep checking to see if

we are doing it because we want to. When we reach a point of genuinely wanting to train, we can enjoy practice much more.

Obviously, there will be times when we feel like we don't want to do it anymore. If we have cultivated the skilful habit of inquiring of ourselves, with interest, as to what motivates our actions, when this feeling of not-wanting arises we will be in the best place to find out whether or not we *really* don't want to do it. Superficially, our desires come and go, conditioned by many different casual concerns; but at the deepest level, as Buddhism sees it, all beings want to be free. So if we look long enough, we will penetrate beyond the not-wanting and remember what we are in this for.

A Long-Enduring Mind

Having a thoroughly conscious commitment to the training is also very important. As with anything, cultivation of the Way takes time. In the Chinese Buddhist tradition they have a teaching that says there are three requisites for the Way to prosper: Great Faith, Great Doubt and a Long-Enduring Mind. Living with an underlying faith that is highlighted by an ever-changing and challenging counterpoint of doubt generates the energy that undoes our rigid habits. But if our practice is tainted by wrongly-held expectations based on getting what 'I' want, then the very same energy that has been liberated can feed the ego-rigidity making it even less workable – we end up worse off than if we had never begun practice. So the Chinese Buddhists take a vow to continue the same path of practice, without alteration, for however many lifetimes it takes them to awaken. For someone who firmly believes in the life-after-life transmigration through the six realms of existence*, this vow effectively relaxes expectations. As long as we are demanding that we get what 'I' want out of

* Six realms of existence: heaven, fighting gods, human, animal, hungry ghosts, hell.

the training, we strengthen the obstructions. Just to contemplate this will help us change how we relate to the expectations that we have clung to so dearly for so long. Real training supports us in releasing expectations and refreshing our effort continually.

We all have a problem with keeping effort fresh. Simply going through the routine of doing formal practice is not enough. A few decades ago out in Asia we were quick to criticise what we saw as pointless superstitious carry-on, like the waving of incense in front of golden Buddhas. Yet our sitting meditation can be the same. If we aren't doing it with freshness it becomes pointless carry-on; in fact, it's worse than pointless. If we are not fully involved with all our body, heart and mind in meditation, then we can be compounding the already established patterns of limitation. How unfortunate!

For it to be the profound and radical ritual that meditation can truly be, we need to remember what we have to do to keep our effort fresh and alive. Whilst formal sitting is one valid way, there are other ways; we need to re-examine the whole area of devotion and what it means to us. It is almost certain that to imitate Asian devotional practices will not work, but it is vitally important to find out what does work. Actually, in my experience, developing a devotional practice of a daily offering of incense to the shrine is tremendously helpful in sustaining spiritual aliveness. I might not sit meditation on some days but I almost never omit my devotional efforts.

Free to Suffer

It is by remembering what brought us to training, and remembering to rediscover right effort moment by moment, that clear understanding of the functioning of awareness dawns on us. With this new dawning of the inherent value

and beauty of awareness, a new letting go of the security of old familiar identities occurs; even letting go of the idea of becoming better or developing ourselves – even letting go of the idea of enlightenment. We now value this clear-seeing so highly that we are positively disinclined to settle for anything less.

There can even be a letting go of the preoccupation with the idea of becoming free from suffering. We are more interested now in how accurately we are meeting any suffering in this moment. We begin to find our security and well-being in the freedom *to* suffer: "Can I suffer *and* remain free at the same time?" Our interest in cultivating awareness has brought us full circle to discover not freedom *from* suffering but a vast capacity *to* suffer. This vast capacity to suffer is the vast compassion we are all looking for. How fortunate it would be for the world if there were more beings around with such compassion.

Thank you for the opportunity to look into these matters.

Questioner: I tend to become uncomfortably self-conscious when I make an effort to be aware. Presumably this becomes less as one progresses.

Ajahn Munindo: Even when what we give ourselves into is wholesome and suitable, we end up struggling because of our compulsive trying. It can be helpful to see the extent to which our Western-style will-power is disfigured and disfiguring. Whatever we wilfully attempt is distorted; it is interfered with by our trying too hard. There is nothing wrong with this, it just hurts, that's all. And to find the way to transform that

hurt into genuine well-being I always turn to the power of non-judgemental awareness. If we are able to receive freely the pain of our self-consciousness, that is, without taking sides and following ideas of how things should and shouldn't be regarding this felt pain, we do arrive at a larger reality. In that openness is the understanding of how to proceed with a purified quality of effort.

Actually, if our suffering is intense enough and our commitment to the Way whole-bodied and wholehearted enough, we might have the good fortune of sinking deeply into despair, and at that place remembering what we have been talking about today; that is, how the judging-mind is complicit in what is happening. We enquire, "Where am I finding identity? Am I still taking a position for or against, or am I free to feel what I feel in this moment?" I say this is good fortune, because if we do remember this deeply at the level of intensity to which were brought by despair, the silent understanding that arises at that depth will serve to undermine a lot of our false thinking and holding.

Q: My problem is that sometimes when relating with others a tension seems to develop from trying to stay aware within myself at the same time as attending to that which is happening on the outside.

A. M.: If someone comes to us in a state of distress asking for our attention then, obviously, if we are able to offer attention we should. If we still don't trust ourselves not to get caught up in our own inner reactions, we have to acknowledge that that is the case. And we must know that that means we have some work to do on ourselves. However, the time of attending to another is not the best time to do the work on ourselves. Yes, in some sense these two go together, but it is a matter of degree.

A regular, daily, formal practice of meditation, or whatever one wants to call the exercise of conscious remembering, can also support us in this. As Buddhists we recognise the value of regularity in both formal and daily-life practice. What we are called to attend to in our daily activity is varied and complex, but a formal daily sitting dedicated to doing nothing – except releasing out of all tendencies to take sides – has profound benefit. As we sensitively look into the very movement of preference as it is taking place, we begin to see beyond it. Whatever compulsive judging is mixed up with the activity, regardless of what the content of that activity might be, we simply notice it and remember, "No judging the judging-mind." If there is still judging, then we apply our contemplation to that, and keep falling back into freer and freer perspectives. We continue releasing, releasing, releasing our identification with the judgement, until there is just the activity of the mind simply as it is; or maybe there is no activity at all. But without a regular effort to sit still, ideally at about the same time each day, I feel we might be disadvantaged in finding the kind of totally trusting relationship with ourselves that we hope for; a relationship whereby we can forget ourselves and simply attend.

Q: You have talked about being opened up by suffering. I have heard that in the Buddhist Teachings there are two ways: this way and the way of bliss or ecstasy. The latter, I'm told, makes more use of celebration and joy.

A. M.: Yes, I have heard about the idea of two ways as well. This might be true, but I haven't seen any evidence of it myself. Deep opening does involve both suffering and joy but I'm not sure they are separate ways. The doorways we must go through always look to me to be daunting and they always involve suffering. To approach these doorways definitely requires a strong sense of well-being and a balanced confidence, but grasping the handle is frightening.

Once we actually begin to move out of the room of limited possibility, through the narrow doorway, *then* we experience bliss and we enter upon a larger awareness which is our new life. At this time we feel relieved and have a wonderful sense that this will do us fine. We are pleased with ourselves – at least for a while. Then our commitment to a training of body, speech and mind prompts us to recall our deepest interest in the possibility of *limitless* awareness; not just somewhat expanded awareness. We keep going for refuge to Reality and this leads us to finding another doorway and another and another; and we keep going through the trepidation over and over again. In my experience, what changes is an increased willingness to go through with it. Right training is about finding this increased willingness.

Giving Up Nothing

Giving up Nothing

I hear there are people spreading the story that samsara is to blame for our suffering: this is not true. In reality we are to blame for samsara.

Each year when *Asalha* Puja arrives we take time to consider anew the foundation teachings of our tradition; that is, the Four Noble Truths. On this day, the full moon of the seventh month, known as *Asalha*, we recollect how the Buddha gave the 'Discourse on the Turning of the Wheel of Dhamma'. This monumental event took place at the conclusion of several weeks spent dwelling in the bliss of the liberation that he had attained as he sat under the Bodhi tree in Bodhagaya.

Immediately following his awakening, the Buddha thought, "This understanding of Truth that I have arrived at is too profound for beings caught in the confusion of sense desire. It would be pointless to attempt to communicate this to anyone." Maybe during those weeks of bliss he had pondered on the predicament of countless beings suffering from a lack of clear direction in their lives because, by the time he was ready to start talking again, he had decided that he would teach what he had seen.

But whatever his motivation, we are fortunate that he was inspired to 'turn the wheel' and offer to his close friends, the *pancavaggiya bhikkhus*, the fruits of his radical awakening. Here we are, more than two thousand five hundred years later, and

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the vehicle he set in motion is still carrying beings along the Way. This evening, I hope our contemplation on these timeless Truths will deepen our personal appreciation of how to apply them in our lives.

Before looking in detail at particular aspects of these Truths, let's first consider an overview. Notice how the Discourse is presented in the form of a diagnosis. This fits with what we know about the Buddha's style of teaching and one of the names he was given, The Great Physician. In keeping with the classical formula used by doctors in India at the time he presented his analysis in four parts: *dukkha* – he first identified the illness as suffering, or struggle; *samudaya* – he then pointed out the cause, in this case craving; *nirodha* – he indicated the possibility of freedom from the illness, or liberation; and finally, *magga* – he prescribed the way of arriving at that freedom, the Noble Eightfold Path.

The pattern of presenting the condition as a disease was noticed by the earliest Western scholars and translators of Buddhism; however, this doesn't mean to say that the medicine was actually applied. And as with any remedy, if it isn't taken then the benefit doesn't manifest. Accordingly, although this teaching has been heard by many people over a long period of time, there is still a lot of confusion about it. But there are also many who have recovered from their disease. Our careful investigation of these Truths tonight is one way of taking the medicine.

Let's also remember the situation in which the Buddha's offering was made. Clearly the Discourse on the Turning of the Wheel of the Timeless Law wasn't just a casual conversation that happened to take place one afternoon over tea. When he first decided that he would teach he sought out those who had previously taught him. It is noteworthy that foremost in his heart was a sense of gratitude towards his previous mentors. Compare this with tendencies we might

have to reject some of those who supported our initial attempts to seek awakening. The Buddha's example inspires us to hold dear *all* our teachers, therapists, guides and companions.

Informed by his penetrating wisdom, the Buddha eventually selected a particular group of monk friends because he knew they were ready to hear what he had to say. They were *ripe* to receive this direct and uncompromising presentation of reality.

In our scriptures there are many recorded instances of these particular teachings being given and they always took place when the time was right and the listener ready. Often teachings encouraging generosity or instruction on right livelihood or advice on how to find a sense of personal well-being were given before imparting the teachings on the Four Noble Truths. This demonstrates that to address the most fundamental matter of an individual's relationship to suffering, the right conditions must be in place. We need to be feeling confident already about our aspirations on the Way; we need to already be feeling good about ourselves.

Another point worth noticing is how, prior to written material being mechanically produced, words carried more power than we are used to these days. A *sacca vacca* was a 'truth statement' or an 'utterance of truth', and when this kind of utterance was made by a wise being it carried, or channelled, tremendous energy. To hear such an utterance could in itself be empowering – even liberating. The Buddha's declaration about the true nature of life did in reality re-open the great Way to freedom. And right mindfulness of suffering (*dukkha*) is this Way.

It should not be thought that, because this teaching focuses intensely on *dukkha,* there can be any justification for assuming a negative disposition towards life. Exactly the

opposite is the case. In summarising his teaching, the Buddha said, "I teach two things: struggle and the complete ending of struggle." He is pointing out a Way of realistic aspiration towards freedom. This is a Way of meaningful contemplation which actually begins with hearing and understanding these teachings on the Four Noble Truths. We ponder on them until they settle and become firmly established in our hearts.

The First Noble Truth

May we assume, then, that we all feel ready to move on to consider the First Noble Truth? This says, 'Life is suffering.' This might sound like a strange thing to say as one of the founding statements of a world religion, but it was said because it is true. And it is eternally true. That is what *ariya sacca* or 'Noble Truth' means.

A more literal translation of the first Noble Truth is, 'All aspects of conditioned reality are in a state of stress', which is subtler than 'Life is suffering'; but from where most of us enter the Way the less subtle message is more useful.

It needs emphasising that this is not a value-judgement on life. It's the same as saying, 'bees sting'. Knowing that bees sting determines how we relate to bees, it doesn't mean that there is anything wrong with bees. Likewise, the First Noble Truth makes an observation about conditioned reality that helps determine our relationship to life.

Regarding this point, I recall one night when I was living at Wat Pah Pong, the monastery where I received *upasampada* (acceptance into the monastic Sangha). The teacher ascended the Dhamma seat and began his evening talk to the gathering of several hundred monks, nuns and lay folk by saying, "You don't have to feel embarrassed about the fact that you are suffering. We all suffer." I felt a great sense of relief. I was

being reminded that suffering is a shared predicament and not just 'my' unfortunate problem. I suppose I had been holding to the expectation that he would say I shouldn't be suffering if I were practising properly. But no, here in the Buddha's teaching we are told that acknowledging the pain we experience is the first and most important thing to be done in life. It is the first true thing that needs to be said. Acknowledging this fact is the entrance to the Way beyond the frustration of limited existence.

This statement glaringly contradicts a lot of what we, particularly in our Western culture, hold to be true. But the Buddha said from the beginning that he was offering a reality-teaching, not a message of consolation. We can find strength in realising that our willing acceptance of the presence of struggle in our lives is the first step on the path of awakening to reality. Admitting the struggle *is* the spiritual path, not some unfortunate obstruction to it.

In the beginning this acceptance is a process of mental consideration and then, little by little, it becomes a feeling appreciation; we start to find ourselves more directly in touch with our own body/mind experience of feeling limited or tethered. We have a fresh perspective on it. Now we become conscious of the sense of imprisonment.

That which initially might appear to be a negative judgement of the conditioned world on further inspection is seen to be a simple but powerful insight into what we already knew but were afraid to admit. We already knew we were suffering but we felt it to be some kind of an indictment against us. As the insight of non-resistance to 'struggle' begins to sink in, our whole life changes and frustrations take on a different appearance. They are no longer enemies to be conquered; they are entranceways to a path of valid inquiry.

As more individuals become aware of the brilliance of this insight, the commonly held views in our culture will change. This is one reason why I'm so positive about promoting Buddhist teachings in society. These teachings can influence the character of our world. Isn't it the case that society is shaped by the hearts of individuals in that society? Our world, so fraught with intense struggles on all levels, with the apparent intransigence of the parties involved, is the predictable consequence of the views that we hold. The chronic denial of the actuality of our inner pain creates the poison that spills out into the world and hurts the planet and beings living on it. Hearing about the Four Noble Truths offers real hope of addressing, with awareness, the root of the struggles.

The Second Noble Truth

Having begun to accept the reality of our struggle we find an enthusiasm for discovering what is *actually* taking place. We are inspired to ask, "Is this all there is to it? Is life just a bad joke? Isn't there more to life than this?" And this leads us to the Second Noble Truth. Here the Buddha instructed us to look backwards, or further inwards, for the cause of the struggling. We need to find out why we feel so caught up in the pushing and pulling of our inner and outer worlds. Now that we are not compulsively running away from it, we can investigate and see if there is something that we are doing that is contributing to the drama. So far, we have let go of the assumption that this is all happening *to* us, that we are mere victims; this new understanding already makes practice much more interesting.

I hear there are people putting around the story – they call it the Buddhist story – that something called *samsara* is to blame for our suffering. When they are having a hard time over

something they say, "Well this is *samsara.* What else do you expect?" This is a mistake.

What is the meaning of this word *samsara*? The Buddha used it to refer to beings caught in the delusion of an incessant cycling through a process of birth and death as it appears to take place in our minds. He discovered that this is how things *appear* to be, but this apparent reality is a distortion of awareness, a trick of perception. He encouraged us to observe how, when a contraction of awareness occurs around any mental impression that arises, then a 'being' is born in that moment. If for example the impression is a pleasing memory, with this contraction or grasping taking place, the thought, "I am happy" takes root – a 'happy being' is born. And as with all that is born, this 'happy being' will die.

Nobody is saying there is anything wrong or inappropriate about all this, but we need to see this process if we want to live in freedom. We need to see that we are responsible for this grasping. If we are to apportion blame anywhere, then in truth it is us who are to blame for *samsara.*

The Buddha, while still a walking, talking human being, was free from the suffering of *samsara* because he had gone beyond all grasping. For him *samsara* didn't exist. Our task then is to observe, with feeling-awareness, how this process takes place. We are involved in a feeling-investigation of reality as it happens, which is different from investigating our feelings about some aspect of reality. Here we are equipping our capacity for discernment with full feeling-awareness so as to know for ourselves the precise movement that creates the personal experience of suffering. Blaming an idea like *samsara* for our suffering is not much different from blaming our parents or the stars. We need to be engaged in solving this struggle with insight, not projection.

Seeing the part we are playing in this drama and how we have the authority to inhibit the habit of contraction doesn't mean that the nature of existence changes – it does not mean that life ceases to hurt. What changes is how we relate to this nature. When, with right understanding, the impulse to grasp at desire is restrained, then desire no longer appears as the demon we thought was responsible for our unhappiness.

Although the formula of the Four Noble Truths states that desire is the immediate cause of our suffering, it further points out that ignorance regarding the nature of desire is the root cause of the problem. When we understand the way of bees we don't go too near them and neither do we have to get rid of them. And so with desire, when our hearts are rightly informed, we learn how to live with desire without being stung by it.

As long as we grasp at desire, then the inherent nature of desire, that is, 'wanting', will become our nature. Or at least it will appear to become so, and we will struggle endlessly to be free from the pain of it by striving for gratification. But gratification of sense desire is not the same thing as the satisfaction our hearts are looking for. If we understand this fully then 'letting go' frees us from the agonising sense of being a victim of desire.

When I lived at Ajahn Thate's monastery there was a tradition of reciting the Evening Puja in Pali and in Thai. Commenting once on the section chanted in praise of the qualities of an *arahant* Ajahn Thate said, "Translating the word *arahant* as 'One far from defilements' is completely wrong. He or she is not far from defilements at all but right up against them. However the difference is that an *arahant* knows how not to grasp hold of them!"

So whether we experience ourselves as being bound to suffer or not depends on how we take up life. Speaking about the

teaching he gave, the Buddha said it was like a snake: if we were to pick up a snake directly behind the head there wouldn't be a problem; if we were to take it by the tail then it would turn around and bite us. How we hold an experience is the point. And we become aware of how we are holding by way of our feeling-investigation of life.

These first two insights into Truth re-educate our hearts and minds in a manner that reverses the previous conditioning that caused us to fight frustration. As these insights begin to function in support of our aspirations on the Way, we have another chance to examine the path our life is taking and indeed that which it has taken thus far. Previous struggles that have not been fully lived through and remain lodged in our bodies and minds can be re-inspected; they take on fresh meaning. The wisdom of the Way means we can translate everything that has ever happened in terms of practice.

Those who have been around me have probably noticed the difficulty I have with sitting on the floor for any length of time. This is mainly as a result of a motorbike injury that I sustained when I was nineteen. At the time, the accident appeared to be a total disaster. A head-on collision with a car caused serious damage – to me and the bike. Not wearing a helmet was a pretty unintelligent thing to do and I was lucky to wake up at all which, fortunately, I later did, in hospital. It was a financial disaster as the bike was borrowed and the insurers of the car I hit sued me. The incident contributed to the breaking up of the community in which I was living and coincided with my best friend's being drafted into the U. S. military. He wasn't going to go to Vietnam, but he had to return to the States and he married another of my close friends so she could go with him.

However, that incident and the forced period of convalescence gave me an opportunity to stop and assess what I was doing and where I was going. It also happened

that somebody sent me a book which effectively reconnected me with inner aspects of myself that all the busyness and excitement of my life had obscured. When I reflect on that time I am unable to recall anything very much in my outer life other than that book that would have affirmed those aspects. Regrettably it is rare to find wise men and women who can guide us through such periods of intense struggle.

However, the Buddha's teaching of the Four Noble Truths can serve well in this area, by introducing us to the wisdom of receiving our struggles as a message to awaken to life in a more open and honest way. I count myself fortunate to have had the encouragement at the right time to turn inward consciously and find how to be with myself in my distress.

As soon as I became mobile again I moved away from the situation I was in with all the personal history that had been made there, and immediately encountered a world with new friends and contacts. Soon I was practising yoga, disciplining my eating and not long after left on a journey overseas where I found the Buddhist monastic lifestyle and the opportunity that brought me, most gratefully, here. That motorbike accident and the testing that it put me through was not a disaster, although it appeared to be so at the time. Being able to sit comfortably on the floor for hours is not a guaranteed ticket to liberation anyway. Neither is a teaching on the Four Noble Truths, but our contemplation of these Truths is like studying a map, a map that offers reliable guidance for travelling through the trying terrain of life.

The Third Noble Truth

The teaching on the Third Noble Truth isn't a solution to our problems, but a statement about the relativity of them. It says: "There is an unconditioned reality which is inherently free from all sign of stress". In speaking of this the Buddha used the word *nirodha*, which means cessation – that is, cessation of the 'apparent reality' which deluded us into believing that grasping and struggling for well-being was the right way. Here, we are told, is a state that is perfectly characterised by self-existent well-being. From the perspective of the realisation of this state, no further search is necessary; there is no need. Any impulse to identify with a conditioned sense of need is undone by the knowledge that 'all conditioning is just so'. There is no one to blame for our suffering. The perception of 'somebody' is seen in the clear light of Dhamma.

This statement of the Third Noble Truth poses a problem for those who study this teaching as an intellectual exercise. The word cessation, or another word, *nibbana*, or extinguishing, produces an impression of loss and, generally speaking, we are all in this for gain. Hence the Buddha's hesitation to talk about it. We are seriously addicted to being somebody doing something about our problem and we find it troubling even to face the idea of its coming to an end. We are so used to trying to fix ourselves that even to imagine a state of self-existent well-being can appear threatening.

So we don't try to imagine it. When we go for refuge to Dhamma, we are aspiring on the Way out of a faith in perfect adequacy; and that state of perfect adequacy is utterly unimaginable from an unawakened perspective. The only things we can ever imagine are a rehashing of the past. We can never imagine anything totally new. As long as we are still believing in the mirage of ourselves as somehow inherently inadequate or flawed, we can't possibly imagine the state of

liberation. But this doesn't mean that it is unrealisable. Because awakening is a realistic possibility 'for those with but little dust in their eyes', the Buddha did decide to teach about it. Opening our eyes to what is in front of us is something we can do about our predicament.

It is useful to remember the story of the turtle trying to explain to the fish how pleasant it is to take a walk along the beach. Of course, the fish only has access to the reality of water so to even attempt to describe the activity of a totally different realm is useless. To try could even be disheartening. Accordingly, the Buddha taught skills for applying awareness in the reality in which we are present. Dhamma takes care of the rest.

The first two Noble Truths offer us a new awareness of how we relate to the present experience of struggle and now the third Noble Truth gives us a vision to help us look further. It is important that we have this vision of liberation to believe in. The Dalai Lama recently commented in conversation with a gathering of Western Buddhist teachers, "Without Enlightenment, why would we bother with all this practice? Have sex, alcohol, relax!" Without a goal that accords with Dhamma, all our effort is just a management exercise: we are merely dealing in a realm of things that we think should or shouldn't be the way they are. But with this vision we are able to work with an appreciation that there are causes for everything that happens; there are no mistakes, and it's up to us to learn to see deeply into the reality of the present experience.

Some may feel worried about believing in something that we can't be sure about and think, "Doesn't that contradict what the Buddha said about not blindly believing?" We should notice that disbelieving the existence of some particular reality is still a kind of believing. If we don't know from our experience that something is not true, we need also to be

careful not to blindly dismiss it. For those seeking the Way, the Third Noble Truth points to a profound mystery and invites us to wonder. This is letting go of our commitment to predictability. So rather than acting out of blind belief we choose to embrace the mystery in full awareness of our aspiration to live in this faith.

And as to whether, when we arrive at this liberation, life will somehow be boring or we won't know what to do with ourselves; well, the experience didn't cause the Buddha any problems. He and his enlightened disciples have in fact generated tremendous benefit and we are still receiving the fruits of their realisation.

The Fourth Noble Truth

When we discover an appreciation for the potential manifest in these teachings we find ourselves at the beginning of the Way, or *magga.* The Eightfold Path is both the Way to liberation and the expression of a commitment to that Way. The eight aspects of this Noble Path are: right view (*samma ditthi*), right intention *(samma sankappa*), right speech (*samma vacca*), right action (*samma kammanta*), right livelihood *(samma ajiva*), right effort (*samma vayama*), right mindfulness (*samma sati*), right concentration (*samma samadhi*).

The profundity of the Buddha's articulation of the Way cannot be overstated and I am hesitant to offer only a brief interpretation here. But I do feel it is worthwhile examining these eight aspects however brief. Tonight's consideration is not an in-depth presentation of all aspects of the Four Noble Truths but an attempt to support and stimulate our own personal consideration of these various factors. It is through such consideration that these teachings can inform the manner in which we live our lives.

The opening portion of the Eightfold Way, that is, right view and right intention, is about our inner work. The middle portion – right speech, right action and right livelihood – is about outer work. Then the last portion, of right effort, right mindfulness and right concentration, is again about inner work. Notice how in this depiction the outer expression of our lives is contained and would thereby be shaped by the inner reality. Being aware of this image can help us keep our priorities balanced: it may indicate the proportion of attention we ought to give to the inner and outer aspects of our lives. We can each consider this for ourselves.

Right View

When considering this teaching, I like to consider 'right' as referring to the quality of attention that we give to an object. Understanding right view is not merely about finding the best philosophical stance. It is also about perspective. It is about how we actually hold our views. Yes, the 'view' of suffering, its causes and its cessation is offered as a correct representation of reality, but like the snake, if we pick these teachings up wrongly then they turn against us. It is out of wrong holding that religious fanaticism is born. So we are asked to ponder on these factors of the Eightfold Path not as absolute doctrines but as objects of contemplation. And as with all our practice the appropriate approach to this is, with no straining. This is definitely not just about trying to be 'right'. Our view, even if we believe in the Four Noble Truths, is wrong view if we are heedlessly grasping at an idea. Our view is right when it is pure view; that is, purified of the pollutants of grasping.

Right Intention

The factor of the Path mentioned following on from right view is right intention, *samma sankappa.* This is the link between our views and the next three factors of speech, action

and livelihood. The domain of views addresses our underlying perspectives on life, while the factor of intention can be considered as referring to how the thinking and perceiving which arise out of these views in turn condition our actions. It serves to connect our basic assumptions with our active participation in life.

The guidelines given in the scriptures offer instruction on the cultivation of three specific mental attitudes: renunciation (*nekkhamma*), non-aversion (*avyapada*) and harmlessness (*avihimsa*). We are encouraged to investigate and see how paying attention to these aspects of our mental world generates the kind of intention in our hearts that translates as action which accords with the Way.

It is sometimes said that all we have to do is be sure we are acting out of good intention. I disagree with this attitude. If he had accepted the idea that good intention was enough, then the Buddha would have stopped with just the first two factors, but he didn't. He knew we needed clear guidance, so he went on to elaborate on what a life lived in accordance with the Way looks like.

These next three factors which comprise the middle section of the Eight-fold Path could be said to be about cultivating skilful means. This includes both the development of specific skills and an awareness of the how we relate to them.

In my opinion we all have a responsibility to study the classical teachings on these matters as well as whatever other supports may be available, so as to learn how to act and speak both wisely and compassionately; that is, in ways that lead to increased freedom from suffering for oneself and others. We should be aware that the consequences of not honouring this responsibility become greater the further we progress on the path.

The precepts about speech and action and the instruction on which forms of livelihood are suitable and which are not, seen from one set of assumptions, might be thought to be a criterion for determining who is a Buddhist and who isn't. But I prefer to think that what is required to be a Buddhist is simply for someone to know that they want to be free from suffering – this way everyone is included. Happy Buddhists are those whose investigations have led them to conduct themselves in a manner that accords with inner and outer freedom. I would rather not see these teachings used as determining factors for who is in and who is out. We already have too much of that. If we approach these pointers with an interest in finding what works, then our natural intelligence will protect us and will also protect others. When there is this kind of interest we don't have to depend on rules.

Right Speech

The texts tell us that for any of these factors to be considered as right, they must be associated with the first factor of right view. What kind of speech would arise out of right view? Bringing careful attention to matters of communication readily reveals causes and effects in this area. For instance, we see how any kind of deceitful speech doesn't accord with freedom from suffering. Speech with intent to deceive increases confusion. Straight talking with interest in benefiting the other does accord. Timely speech, kindly speech and speech motivated by the wish to increase understanding are all in harmony with the Way.

The Buddha highlighted right speech as an area deserving of careful attention because he saw directly the power of it. When we speak out of kindness we have the power to heal; when we speak out of malice we can injure.

Right Action

Speech is *kamma* (action) made by way of voice and physical activity is *kamma* made by way of body. Right action is about being alert to the fact that what we do with our bodies affects the world in which we live. Again this applies to both inner and outer dimensions of our lives. Careless action creates disturbances that have repercussions far into the future. We need to be aware of how much energy we put into ignoring these consequences.

As our ability to manipulate the material world becomes more and more sophisticated, there is an increasing risk that we will use it to blind ourselves to the results of our actions. I'm told that children from the city visiting farms are sometimes shocked to find that milk comes out of great big beasts. They thought it came out of cartons! Only a few decades ago, when we went to the toilet we would have been more aware of the result of our actions: it didn't disappear in a flush of fragrant blue water! In peasant cultures, people are more naturally aware of what happens if they act 'wrongly'; in our time someone can commit a crime and be in another town or even another country within an hour or two. Serious crimes are being committed all the time on the Internet and nobody knows what to do about it. So we need to be careful about how we relate to the convenience of technology; not allowing it to confuse us about actual causes and effects.

Training in the skill of right action also involves accountability. In the domain of our inner work we are primarily accountable to ourselves. In the domain of outer work we need to know that we are willing to be accountable to others. And this applies however long we might have been in the training. As a new monk I heard that, while already a leader of a sizeable monastic community, Ajahn Chah once lost his temper and threw a spittoon at a novice. The Ajahn made absolutely sure he knew for himself, and that the

community knew, that he stood to account for his heedlessness: he put himself on a fast for a week.

If we can see that we are willing to be accountable for our actions, I would say that could be called cultivating responsible, considered action, or right action. This kind of work leads to integrity and brings with it an appreciable sense of self-respect.

Right Livelihood

Right livelihood is taking responsibility for our actions in a specific domain: that of our interaction with the resources of the material world. It's about finding a balance of energy which means we can feel quietly and honestly at ease about what we give and what we take from the outer world.

The injunction that dealing in weaponry is wrong livelihood is only one indication of the importance of finding out what is suitable. But this is nevertheless still an injunction. I wouldn't want to give the impression that morality is a totally relative matter. From the perspective of his far-reaching wisdom the Buddha knew that certain intentional actions lead to specific painful results. So, regardless of any argument based on economics or politics, dealing in arms is an inappropriate way to make a living. The effort being made will generate unwholesome results for the dealer, whatever the outer appearance. In this consideration of right livelihood we are called upon to own the consequences of our involvement in perpetrating imbalance, or furthering balance, as the case may be. Again, we want to see if we are willing to stand accountable, this time for our lifestyle.

Right Effort

The closing section of the Eight-fold Path is concerned with establishing and maintaining inner balance. The teaching on

right effort directs our attention to how we engage with our experience. This is a problem area for us so long as we aren't able to abide in non-judgemental awareness. It is not possible to examine the quality of effort we make when our awareness is distorted by excessive wilfulness. I personally took a long time before finding any clarity around this one. Eventually, I settled for an understanding that right effort in my case meant doing the best I could and watching to see where my effort missed the mark. This attitude was a lot less judging than others I had attempted to apply and so bore fruit.

When we apply well-cultivated awareness to this area we readily recognise for ourselves how in some situations we need to be assertive and in others we need to yield. Hence we see that agility is one aspect of right effort. It means we can move and adjust according to what is required. It is the opposite of rigidity, which causes us to make brittle and often insensitive responses. With the ease of agile attention we can flow with conditions. Sometimes we need to protect something wholesome: at other times what is required is a decisive dismissal or throwing out of something unwholesome. There are times when we know we need to make effort to develop a particular wholesome quality in which we are deficient, and at other times what is called for is a strengthening of our spiritual immune system; building defences against the growth of unwholesomeness.

Right Mindfulness

Instruction on right mindfulness asks that we cultivate the right quality of mindfulness and that we know how to apply it to the right object. The Pali word for mindfulness, *sati*, has as a root meaning 'remembering'. Our work here is to generate a presence of attention in this moment here, now. The suggestion from right view is that we remember to be present for any element of struggle in our experience of this moment and *see* into its causes. For example we could be mindful of

any number of sense objects that might be manifesting at any given time. For our practice to be productive in terms of releasing compulsive grasping, we must train the faculty of mindfulness to attend to that which is most relevant.

Inspiration has a big part to play in this training. As we study the teachings and engage in Dhamma dialogue (*dhammasakaccha*) our interest is quickened and our attention directed towards the right objects of mindfulness. That is, we are prompted to remember, at the time we need to remember, to look at what we need to look at in order to let go. Traditionally, students of Dhamma would set time aside to listen to recitation of *suttas* to find this kind of inspiration. We can still do this but, as the Buddha himself advised, we need to know what we are listening to. There is a cultural tradition that assumes that just to hear the teachings recited, even in a language that is not understood, brings benefit. I'm not sure what the benefit is besides patient endurance. Remember, the cultivation of *sati* is the point, not the form.

Some years ago I lived with a young monk who was passionately committed to observing the noble and ascetic practice of not lying down to sleep, (*nesajjik'anga vatta*) which is aimed at developing a powerful form of mindfulness. In fact this austere practice (*dhutanga*) means not lying down at all and there are few who succeed in keeping it. It is very challenging and if we don't get it right then it can create problems. So this particular monk only managed to develop the ability to sleep in all postures, even standing up! He reluctantly put aside this austerity when his teacher told him that practice without *sati* wasn't practice at all. Talking about the value of mindfulness, Ajahn Chah used to go even further in saying that to the degree we are without *sati*, we are without sanity. We can see from this the emphasis that needs to be given to mindfulness.

Right Concentration

Usually, when this subject is discussed, the idea arises of our having to attain to extraordinary, lofty states. Along with this idea comes the sense that we either gird ourselves up for the challenge and aspire with all we've got for the heights of *jhana* or 'absorption', or alternatively we quietly despair, thinking that there is no way we could reach such a goal with the kind of fickle minds we have. Both of these attitudes are fine; they arise out of the type of effort we have been making so far.

Now we receive the gift of an opportunity to simply observe, free from judgement, the perfectly understandable struggle in which we are involved. We remember that heedlessly taking sides is not the Way. Pretending that we don't have sides is not the Way either. But the process of expanding awareness beyond the limitations with which we are familiar to *include* all sides delivers us into a state of focus and clarity.

For some this type of concentration can be more readily sustained. The quality of concentration we might arrive at through wilfully suppressing distracting tendencies of mind is dependent on the application of a function of our minds that has often been over-used. Whenever we apply will we are inclined to over-apply it. It is true that we do need to exercise and discipline will, but for many of us it is more important to learn to relax our trying and, by way of a path of contemplation, come to accommodate all tendencies of mind in vast awareness.

I'm not suggesting that we shouldn't practice focusing on our meditation object, but I do want to support the *right* kind of focusing. If we force ourselves to attend to something that we are not genuinely interested in, then it is only a matter of time before we resent ourselves for being so unkind. Not that we will see it like that. Most likely we will become bored and think that the meditation object or the system is not suitable

for us. Maybe we will become disheartened and give up, which would be a pity if all that is wrong is our approach.

If we can get interested in what we are doing then focus comes naturally. In formal meditation practice we should try to hold our object as we would hold something we really valued and cared about – as we would hold a child. So, in cultivating right concentration we need to exercise great care and kindness in seeking our way.

Taking Up The Vision

The effort we make as we gently but consciously engage our way of contemplation nurtures a new life – a spiritual life that is born out of a commitment to the Middle Way. The being that lives this new life is nobody's being; it belongs to the Way itself. This being is equipped with the skills of attention and interest in reality. The previously distracting tendencies of our conditioned nature now form the landscape along the Way on which we travel. Maybe we will still wander off the path but the impulse towards freedom draws us back. The clarity of the vision of right view acts as a beacon from which our hearts can take direction.

The teaching of the Four Noble Truths re-forms our attitude to life and its struggles; it helps clear up the distortions of our mistaken views. Taking up the vision of self-existent well-being, we are inspired to work, inwardly and outwardly, until our involvement in all of life falls into a perceivable harmony with this present moment. The Way that has been shown us is that which is beneath our feet. We know now what to do to move on.

The Ritual of Separation

The Ritual of Separation

We live the life of renunciation because it reflects our heart's deepest yearning. It quickens an inner longing to awaken to our true inheritance.

Today I would like to ask that we ponder on the question, "What is the value and the place of the celibate renunciant community in our modern world?"

A number of years ago when I was about to deliver my first public Dhamma talk, a friend mentioned to me by way of encouragement that talking about Dhamma was like contemplating out loud, giving voice to what one does anyway. It is in this spirit that I ask to talk with you today. Ideally, we would have a respected and venerable elder to conduct this ordination ceremony and to address this particularly important subject; but such individuals are rare in the world, so we have to make do with what we have at hand.

How relevant is the celibate renunciant life at this time? I wish to make this enquiry because our participation in this community life, whether as monks, nuns or lay people, will only genuinely serve us if what we are doing is directly relevant in terms of Dhamma. If we are involved for any reasons other than those that accord with our heart's deepest longings for truth, then we could be creating more difficulties for ourselves and for each other.

Based on a talk given at a Samanera Pabbajja, Ratanagiri Monastery, Vesakha Puja 1997

I would like to begin with a story. It is from India where many good teaching-stories arise and involves the Puja routine of an old swami. This swami kept a cat in his ashram. There were very few occasions when the cat and the swami were not seen together. The only time there was ever any problem was at Evening Puja, when the cat sometimes upset the oil lamps. After a few incidents, the swami decided the cat could not be present during the Puja any more and took to putting it out just before the ritual began. This solved the problem comfortably and Puja went on for years without interruption. Eventually the swami passed away. All the faithful devotees continued doing Puja and continued to put the cat out before it began. One day the cat died. There was no question in the minds of the devotees: they immediately went out to the market and found another cat for the ashram. It would not be possible to do Puja properly without the ritual of putting the cat outside.

So we want to see in our case how much of what we are doing is Puja and how much is putting the cat out.

The Asians who are here today may have no doubt about the relevance of this renunciant lifestyle. It is part of your culture and has always been there for you. But maybe you should doubt it, particularly if you want to have genuine answers to give to your children when they come to you with their genuine questions.

The Europeans, on the other hand, might prefer to avoid the question, out of fear that something that they hold dear will fall apart. But we don't have to protect reality. Reality doesn't fall apart. We do need to protect opportunities that help us see reality, which is what the renunciant lifestyle is designed for. If we inquire carefully, which implies respectfully, then we don't have to be afraid. In fact our questioning will give us protection. In this Way of cultivation we are interested in fostering an unobstructed relationship with the truth of our

own hearts. We don't need to fear seeing what is true. The only thing we need to guard ourselves from is unawareness.

I want to consider this matter openly today because I've observed a strong force in the Western Buddhist world which, in effect, is attempting to deliver a redundancy notice on the renunciant lifestyle. Often one hears or reads comments like, "We must create a new form for this time. The traditional celibate form belongs to a different era." If we are not clear for ourselves about the validity of our involvement in this lifestyle, there is a good chance that this species of celibate monks and nuns will die out. Some might say it is supposed to – and maybe it is. But maybe it isn't. My twenty-two years of attending to this Way inclines me to believe that it still has life in it – vibrant life and meaning. This is not to say that there isn't a very real need for adaptation.

In considering the process of adaptation it is essential that we are aware of how our assumptions colour our perceptions. These are what form the basis of our inquiry. For instance, it used to be that monastics were afforded respect because of their superior learning. Secular education has changed all that. Over the centuries advances in technology have allowed more and more people to have ready access to vast amounts of information. The positive side of this is obvious, but we have lost the context of the person-to-person relationship which communicated much more than just information. We should notice how this might alter our perception of the role of monastics in society – if you can download Discourses and Commentaries from the World Wide Web, why bother visiting a monastery?

Respect given in regard to education is one area. Possibly an even more profoundly important area that has undergone tremendous change is that of sexuality. With the use of modern medical techniques, the consequences of an active sexual life have been obscured – birthing and child-rearing are

now an option not an inevitability. Skilful use of contraception can offer significant benefits in the domain of health and population. However these techniques have made it more difficult to appreciate what kind of effort is required to give up sexual intimacy. The impulse to respect celibacy is no longer a straightforward matter.

So let's take on board collectively, as a Buddhist community, how changing conditions affect our perceptions. This matter will continue to exercise our considered attention as we share this ongoing development of Sangha.

Going Forth

Today being *Vesakha Puja*, we celebrate the birth of the Buddha, we honour with devotion his Enlightenment and we recall with respect his passing away. And we are celebrating these events together as members of the Sangha of disciples of the Buddha. Sangha as we know means 'community' and this community is called the *savaka* sangha. The word *savaka*, meaning 'disciple', has its roots in a word literally meaning 'one who listens'. We are all listeners, hearing – each in our own way – the teachings that the Buddha gives us. This sangha of disciples is also called The Four-fold Sangha: monks (*bhikkhus*), nuns (*bhikkhunis*, or in our case *siladhara*), laymen (*upasaka*) and laywomen (*upasika*). The Going Forth ritual we are about to conduct demonstrates the relationship between the renunciant sangha of monks and nuns, also called *samana* sangha, and the upasaka *sangha* of laypeople.

This formal ceremony, which is called the Going Forth (*pabbajja*), appears for some to create a separation between us. People occasionally comment on how they feel sad at the loss of a wonderful friendship; that the closeness of a relationship they had before has been taken away by putting on the robes. Some sadness is understandable, because something valued has been lost. But isn't there also something gained?

Remember, wisdom sees both sides, whilst attachment to our preferences causes the distortion of seeing only one side. The space that appears in our relationship is also an opportunity for something new to develop between us. Familiarity is not the only context for insight and maybe not even the best. Sometimes we assume a familiarity with each other so as to avoid the pain of the loneliness that we feel. Maybe by emphasising difference we can arrive at a greater sense of mutual benefit. This comes out of a new quality of relatedness that has a beauty of its own.

The Buddha required that his monks and nuns have an appearance distinct from householders. For instance, he established a training rule that we are not allowed to put our robes aside and wear lay clothes. He wanted renunciants to be noticed. I'm sure he didn't expect that everybody would want to join the renunciant sangha, as some people suggest might happen. We are different beings with different perspectives. It seems to me that the Buddha saw the celibate renunciant community as having a particular contribution to make, both to the individuals who live the life, and to those who support and witness it.

To use an old-fashioned expression, this life is a *calling*. In the same way someone might feel called to become a nurse. Have you ever met a real nurse? If you have been ill and had the good fortune to be cared for by someone who is a nurse out of a sense of calling, you will know what I mean. There is a natural healing that comes with their attention. It is in their nature to nurse the sick. Not everyone should or could become a nurse and not everyone should become a monk or nun. If it's not in one's nature to live the renunciant life then it won't work. But I would say that for those by whom such a calling is heard, follow it. I truly delight in witnessing occasions such as this, when someone 'goes forth'. When any of us finds our true way in life, it is a benefit for all beings and that is indeed a cause for celebration.

Benefiting the Individual

Giving up Self-seeking

In the individual making the gesture of joining a community of celibate renunciants, there must be a conscious interest in going beyond self-seeking impulses. Without this kind of desire for transforming selfishness, there is a real risk that the entire effort will turn against us. Instead of our wild, animal passions being transformed into that which is truly human, our ego-nature is empowered and we turn into monsters. This does happen.

So in the training that is this lifestyle, we recognise the compulsive tendencies of our ego to seek happiness through mere gratification of desire and we become interested in realising the true nature of desire itself. We *want* to experience 'wanting' within awareness, without being caught by it. We want to train to go beyond the attachment to wanting. This is skilful wanting, or right practice (*samma patipatta*). This is the point. On the conventional level we are asked to give up certain physical activities, but the aim is an inner awakening: a renunciation of our commitment to ego-conditioning. The form itself is not it.

In terms of specific training guidelines the Code of Discipline (*patimokkha*) requires that we renounce all personal involvement with money – no bank accounts, not even handling money. It also takes away the security of having control over how and when we eat. We can't store food, grow food or cook food. The other primary area of behaviour regulated by the training is sexuality. A total giving up of all intentional erotic activity is expected. This is extremely difficult for everyone.

But these requirements of physical restraint in the areas of money, food and sex are not to be seen as an end in

themselves. And we all need reminding of this, since the struggle that arises from a sincere attempt to keep to these guidelines generate such an intensity that we can lose perspective; we forget the real point and focus too tightly on the rules. This is one reason why, particularly in the early years, it is so helpful to live in community. For the first five years it is required. We often need each other to help us remember not to get overly rigid about it all. As committed materialists, we readily mistake the form to be something more than it is. The form is there to serve the spirit. The cat was put outside so Puja could go on uninterrupted. When the cat died they should have forgotten about it. The Puja was the point. In our case, the heart's surrender to the Way beyond conditioned, self-seeking preferences is the point. All the conventions we follow are to support that.

Energy from Renunciation

When the spirit of renunciation is alive within us it is not unpleasant to give up things that we want – it begins to feel like a blessing that we have this encouragement to do so. We feel grateful that we have a form that sustains a long-term effort of body, speech and mind to go against the deep, strong flow of self-seeking passions. We know how without it we mightn't have held the tension long enough for a letting-go to happen. When letting-go does happen we discover tremendous energy – all the energy that was previously locked into maintaining the rigidity. Each time we rediscover this precious reservoir of energy our aspirations are refreshed and reaffirmed.

In the beginning we are inspired from our studies and association with wise beings to investigate the possibility of the Way. This interest is a form of energy, but not enough to dissolve the powerful structures of personality belief (*sakkaya ditthi*). This structure of personality, viewed from one perspective, is quite suitable. Of course we are not saying that

there is something wrong with developing a stable personality. But from a spiritual perspective, this is a limited stage of development. It carries with it a burdensome sense of loneliness and isolation. It feels like a prison and impels us to act out of greed and anger and confusion. These three 'poisons', as they are classically called in Buddhism, spread their toxic matter throughout our body, heart and mind. They are the nutriment of deluded 'me-ness'. This training points out that enormous energy is required to undo these structures and renunciation is one of the best ways of finding this energy.

Often people comment to me that they lack energy in practice. Try giving up something and be aware of the intensity of energy in the 'I want. . . ' that appears. Energy is there, but it is a matter of how to get in touch with it and how to manage it. We don't want wild energy to flare up and out in every direction, but neither do we want to be lifeless. The passions are our assets, or our inheritance, that we must free up so they become available for our cultivation of the path.

We all have lots of good intentions and ideas, but sometimes these don't translate into a practice as simple as getting up in the morning at the time we decided, or being able to focus on a chosen meditation object, let alone releasing some clinging that we know is keeping us back. Herein lies the difficulty of this training. It requires energy and it generates energy. Eventually we come to realise that all of our energy is needed if we are going to proceed. We need it to dissolve the barriers, to penetrate through the inertia of our conditioned nature and see into ourselves. It is this same energy that sustains us when we feel like everything is lost.

The inspiration towards reality is not a sure thing; it changes and sometimes feels like it's gone altogether. Our initial inspiration is like a loan we receive to get us started on the Way. By the time it runs out we need to have found our own

sources of support. Invariably, we run on inspiration as long as possible. Some try to run longer than is possible; but eventually inspiration passes and disillusionment sets in. This might happen five or six or seven years after taking up the renunciant path. If it coincides with another of life's crises, the impact will be profound. But whenever it occurs there will be a need to refer to others for reflection. Hence, once again, we see the value of community life. If we find trusting, open friendship, then the empathetic relationship is itself a rightly-sustainable source of energy. Right relationship itself generates energy. The stage of disillusionment is more terrible than can be described, but it is as natural and necessary as is spiritual companionship. It wasn't for nothing that the Buddha said that true spiritual friends (*kalyanamitta*) are essential.

Benefiting Others

Visible Contrast

I would imagine we all recognise that the option of living in community is suitable and healthy for humans beings to take up. Communal living has been around a long time. Just how long celibate renunciant communities have been around is not so clear. One thing they do is serve as a sign that affords society a contrasting perspective.

Consider our community here. Our life is based on becoming as conscious as possible of all frustration that arises. We elevate frustration to the level of a spiritual force. This is not what most of the world is up to. Here we are learning to *love* frustration – that is, embrace it wholeheartedly. We don't expect to like it. Most people on the other hand are developing strategies to avoid it at all costs. So it's good to have a group of people such as ourselves around. By being seen to be meeting the frustration of life in a contrasting manner, we offer an example that challenges the generally

held assumptions of the world; assumptions that, if unnoticed, could be pushing an entire civilisation into over-consumption, over-population and even annihilation. Whatever the actual result might be it is true that the uninspected assumption of 'the more the better' definitely has sad consequences.

Here today at Ratanagiri, the person requesting acceptance into the *samana* sangha is about to formally request to sign up for our course in applied frustration. He wants to do the work of untangling the habitual contraction that occurs in the face of personal disappointment, and engage the energy that is released in cultivation of wisdom and compassion. I believe the Buddha wanted our world to have this sign as an active teaching in society. We are not a cloistered group of people shut off from the world – quite the opposite. By establishing the restrictions around food the Buddha made it necessary for the monks and nuns and lay people to maintain some contact. The compulsory dependency of the *samana* sangha on the *upasika* sangha is designed to keep us involved with each other. We need each other and we know it. Intentional dependency of this kind is aimed at creating a quality of relatedness that is not available elsewhere. This kind of dependency is not a sign of weakness; rather, not being able to depend on others when to do so accords with increased well-being is more likely to be a sign of limitation.

Contemplation on the nature of relationship, then, to ourselves, to each other and to the world, is one of the offerings made to those who live in or visit places like this monastery. A mindfulness of relationship is enhanced by the observable differences between us. Our need for each other is not a symptom of our inadequacy – it is a choice we make out of perceived adequacy. The quiet inner seeking of a renunciant is, as Thomas Merton put it, as relevant as the trees that stand unnoticed in the night converting the carbon dioxide into oxygen for living beings to breathe.

A Universal Sign

Shortly, a group of nuns will be setting out walking from just north of London to our monastery in Devon. They will be establishing their own community there for the first time. I don't know what they have in the way of safety nets on this journey, but generally speaking it is their intention to walk all the way, trusting that the people they meet will want to offer enough food and accommodation for them to complete the journey.

The monks from Ratanagiri go walking most summers, simply with an almsbowl and sleeping-bag and they almost never go without. In fact, there is often a problem with too much food being given. Sometimes people begin by offering money which the monk has to decline, explaining that he can only accept food. Often this leads them to the nearest supermarket but by the time they return someone else has already filled the bowl.

In our hearts we have a feeling that the sign of a monk or nun means something. We are not so sure what it means, but there is a universality of recognition. In traditional Buddhist countries it is easy to understand how the sight of a *samana* triggers faith and hope. But even here in post-modern, secular Europe the sign carries a message.

People see something of themselves in this sign. They recognise by the appearance of a shaven head, robes and sandals, a human being who has said 'no' to personal gratification of desire – that is, if they don't write us off as crazy, which does also happen. But more often there is a recognition. And I think what is recognised is the monk or nun inside of them; the one who contemplates life's mysteries and seeks to see beyond the outer manifestations of the sensory world. By offering food to the 'outer' monk or nun, their 'inner' contemplative is nourished. By showing respect to

someone seen to be living the renunciant life, their inner renunciant is honoured. This is the meaning of the verse from the *Mahamangala Sutta* that we chanted at the commencement of today's gathering;

Samanañca dassanam etam mangalamutamam
The sight of a renunciant is a superior blessing.

If we recognise what is symbolised in the form of the monk or nun, that contemplative quality which *sees* beyond the outer appearance of things comes alive for us. It is for this reason that such encounters often give rise to so much joy. It is indeed a blessing to reconnect with an aspect of truth in our own hearts – perhaps an aspect that we had forgotten or maybe the existence of which we had doubted or dismissed altogether.

Accordingly it seems to me that such signs have their place. They serve the truth in all of us, and whenever or wherever the truth is served, all beings benefit. This is the only reason this convention has lasted 2,500 years. It reflects our heart's deepest yearning. It quickens a remembering of an inner longing to awaken to our true inheritance.

The Blessing of Service

This inheritance is symbolised for us by the Buddha image. Seeing it can speak to us of what there is to be realised. The light created by the faith we have in a real reality generates hope and inspiration to walk this ancient Way. Our trust in Dhamma enlivens a natural wish to be of service to that which supports Dhamma. As we say in our Evening Puja;

"I am the Dhamma's servant, the Dhamma is my Lord and guide. The Dhamma is sorrow's destroyer and bestows blessings on me . . ."

The words used here in translation may or may not work for us, but the sentiment is what matters. The spirit is the point, not the form. It is in the spirit of serving Dhamma, in the service of wisdom, compassion and purity, that we are all united. We are equal and together in this, and as today we join in celebration of the birth, Enlightenment and passing away of the Buddha, let's recall and refresh once more our appreciation for this blessing. Without this refuge in the Triple Gem, without this orientation of our heart's longing, we would most likely be seeking security by clinging at something out of fear. How unfortunate and unnecessary to become rigid. Our willing surrender into service of the Way keeps us alive, all our body, speech and mind actively according with the precise and vibrant reality of this moment.

From one perspective, the witnessing of a friend's Going Forth into the renunciant sangha may create a feeling of separation, but if this new opening is received with recognition of how we are united, any sadness won't last for long. The radiance of reality outshines all shadows cast by false familiarity.

We Have What We Need

We Have What We Need

Nothing is left out, nothing is bypassed and nothing is rejected by a heart committed to the Way of Transformation.

If we talk about our path as a Way of Transformation then we can have a feeling that our practice includes all aspects of our lives. Everything that happens is part of our spiritual work; everything is acknowledged, everything is received. I find this wonderful to contemplate.

As Buddhists, we regard a heart committed to transforming greed, anger and confusion into generosity, kindness and clarity as a heart that radiates blessings. These blessings are for the benefit of all beings. And because we work at transforming *all* of our life, we don't have to be afraid of any part of ourselves. Whatever we find within is O.K. It is all to be recognised as part of the Way. It is there to be seen. In the words of the Buddha, this Way is about "seeing clearly all the world, in all the world just as it is, and in so seeing finding freedom".

In talking about our practice I prefer to use the word transformation rather than transcendence. The word transcendence can tend to conjure up a sense of leaving something inferior behind and moving on to higher things.

Based on a talk given at a Samanera Pabbajja, Ratanagiri Monastery, August 1996

I don't think we can afford to leave anything behind; except, that is, our false ideas – and that is the same as leaving nothing behind. We don't transcend anything at all, we receive absolutely everything. We keep moving towards greater and more ready receptivity, until we find a constant flowing willingness to greet that which is in front of us right now.

Our task then is to find the skill to keep remembering what it is we have set out to do and the ability to meet that which comes to us. Thankfully, the Buddha and his disciples have given a lot of guidance to help us along. Today, let's look at some of this guidance and how it pertains to the manner in which we meet the raw condition of our reactions in daily life. In taking on this task of facing our raw nature we have to be able to develop resources. We need to know where to turn for support. So where do we turn?

Inner Spaces

Many people who visit our monastery say, "Oh, you're so lucky to live in a place like this, it must be wonderful. Look at the beautiful meditation room and the gardens and all the inspiring monks and novices – they're so friendly and helpful. Lay people come and bring you delicious food and you don't have to work . . . ." Usually I just nod my head, knowing that, while a lot of what they say is true and these surroundings are conducive, there is still a very demanding task to perform. Peaceful surroundings are only part of it. When we investigate the transformative power or capability of the heart, then we are directly addressing this task. When we refer to the heart in this manner we mean the core within us, the inner place that is the heart of our being. This is where we can turn to find what we need for working with the raw condition.

Indeed, we can consider our heart as consisting of several transformative places. As we go along the path we discover all

the many spaces, or rooms within, as Ajahn Chah used to say. He would tell us, "You monks have lots of rooms in your mansions that you don't even know about yet." We'd be complaining about this and that, and he'd say, "Just wait awhile. You've got all these wonderful rooms that you haven't yet even explored." And he was right.

As we all know, our daily-life reactions are made up of the raw material of anger, passionate desire, confusion, jealousy, loneliness, resentment, and so on. It's raw and it's unrefined. But it's like the compost heap in the walled garden near our monastery. I have a tent in the walled garden which I use on fine nights and the smell of the compost heap keeps me company. I reflect on this. From one perspective, it spoils the walled garden with its beauty and its grand view. But from another perspective, it's all right. When we appreciate what compost is, when we really appreciate what the raw material is and we understand something about transformation, then it's O.K. If we don't, well, then we miss the point and we just think, "It stinks." It does stink, that's true, but that's only because it's in its raw condition.

Now, what are the transformative spaces or transformative powers of the heart? As I said, there are many rooms, many places within ourselves where we can go to work. Today I want to bring into our awareness four of these, which are traditionally called the Four Divine Abidings (*brahmavihara*). These Divine Abidings are just that; they're like four rooms or four spaces within ourselves in which we can dwell. We can also go there to work. And we do a particular kind of work in each of these four places.

It's the same as if you're going to prepare some food. We used to have a novice here who was marvelous at making cheesecake; he did this in the kitchen because that's the space to do the work of making cheesecake. He didn't do it in the workshop; you do a different sort of work in the workshop.

It's very helpful to know what sort of work to do in what sort of space.

Let's consider these four spaces as opportunities that we have available. It is important that we appreciate that these spaces are already, potentially at least, there within us. For human beings the existence of these four spaces is a given. If we don't know how to enter them, well, that's something else. Talking about the divine abidings on this occasion is one way of encouraging us all to remember how to approach these doorways – to recognise, then open them and to go in.

Loving-kindness

To begin with, then, there is the raw condition of ill-will. We all have ill-will, and if we don't have a place to go to work with it, we will struggle. Even if we know how to go to that place we can still struggle! But we have a feeling for what to do. It's as if you are in a well-equipped kitchen with a good larder – you feel confident. Similarly, we can feel confident when we appreciate the heart-space of loving-kindness, *metta* in the Pali language. You will recognise loving-kindness as a quality, the Buddha said, when you observe a mother with her only child: that sparkle in her eye, that gentle eye, that radiance of her skin, that selfless caring, that out-flowing wish: 'May this child be well.' It is a caring quality which is unconditional: 'May you be well.' It doesn't matter what the child is doing, even if it isn't very nice. The mother's love for the child remains: 'May you be well.'

And so the Buddha encouraged us. He said that if we want to know how to meet ill-will, how to receive it when it arises, then locate the space within the heart, go to the space within ourselves from where we can radiate the wish: 'May all beings be well'. In our monasteries we chant: "May I abide in well-being, in freedom from affliction, in freedom from ill-will."

As an exercise in approaching that doorway to the room of loving-kindness and entering into it, we can say these words to ourselves. We are encouraged to practice in this way regularly, to recite these verses and use them as objects of meditation.

I would like you to take them away with you today and try practising, repeating inwardly, "May I abide in well-being, in freedom from ill-will." Actually try generating this wish for yourselves. If we do so, we discover this inner space and how we can enter it. When we know we can enter this room whenever ill-will arises, whenever we feel resentful, or whenever we've got the painful sense of righteous indignation, we don't end up running around wondering where to dump it. We know we have a place to go to. We're not going to that room to dump the ill-will; we're going there because it's in this space that we can find the resources needed to responsibly engage with it. In that room, if we do that work, we will discover a sense of confidence that we *can* meet the ill-will; anger is not a disaster.

Compassion

The second place within the heart is, in Pali, *karuna*, or compassion. The Buddha said that the quality of compassion is best recognised in observing a mother with her only child, when that child is sick and writhing with a fever. Just feel that for a moment. What is that quality, what is it that comes forth most naturally from a mother in that state? What is that wish if she were to give it voice? It is, "May you be free from suffering." It's an empathic feeling with that child's pain. It's different from the radiance of *metta*, loving-kindness, which says, "May you be well." In this case compassion is feeling with the pain of others and giving rise to the wish, "May you be free from suffering." One has a sense of, "I share this pain with you. I'm in this with you." And what a wonderful space

this is for working with such unpleasant conditions as sadness, loss or loneliness. So long as we don't know the space of compassion, don't know the space in which one can feel the shared predicament of human suffering, we will struggle badly.

On this theme, we have a helpful story from a commentary to one of the scriptures of a woman, Kisagotami, who first lost her husband and then her baby child. She was so beside herself with grief she couldn't put the child's corpse down, and carried it around with her. Out of pity, the village headman said to her, "There's a holy man living nearby, go and see him. He's supposed to be able to fix everything." So Kisagotami went to see the Buddha. The Buddha didn't give her the wisdom-teachings on impermanence, even though it is true that everything is impermanent and everything that is born is bound to die. Instead, he said, "I *can* help you. I will bring your child back to life. All I need is for you to bring me a cup of mustard seed from a household where nobody has died. That's all." So, of course, Kisagotami went off, and spent all night going from house to house seeking for the cup of mustard seed; and slowly it began to dawn on her that every household knew the suffering of death. So the realisation arose, "We're all in this together." With that opening of the heart came a new receptivity, an increased capacity for holding her pain. She was able to put down her dead child and gladly express her appreciation to the Buddha. This image of Kisagotami can encourage us to approach the doorway of compassion.

Empathetic Joy

The third Abiding is empathetic joy, *mudita* in Pali. This is the place in which jealousy is transformed. Do you know how painful jealousy can be? We don't have to drag it out; we've all had some experience of that pain I'm sure. But if we know

this room, if we know how to approach this doorway of empathetic joy, we can feel the pain of jealousy, we can sense how unnecessary it is, how unfortunate it is, and let this awareness of suffering open us to the possibility of a place where we can actually release ourselves from it. Turning away and avoiding jealousy doesn't deal with it, as neither does the avoidance of ill-will, sadness or sorrow. But in mindfully receiving jealousy there is an opening and if we receive it fully then we discover empathetic joy. It's a wonderful quality in which we can feel, "May beings not be parted from the good fortune they have attained." This is the thought that we cultivate. It means celebrating and taking delight in others when we see them doing well, instead of getting lost in the painful feeling of, "Oh, I wish I had that."

The Buddha again compared this to seeing a mother with her only child. She sees the child doing well, and feels happy for the child; she's happy *with* the child. This is empathy, this time in the context of joy. Hence we are encouraged to cultivate this place into which we can take jealousy. We can meet it; with a struggle perhaps, but now we have some ability.

Equanimity

In this consideration of the powers of transformation that are called the Divine Abidings, we have spoken so far of these three: loving-kindness, compassion and empathetic joy. The fourth quality is equanimity, in Pali, *upekkha.* We need to give particular attention to this very important quality. Joy and love and well-wishing are heartfelt, energising and beautiful qualities. However, we can have a tremendous desire for beings to be well – yet *they are not well.* How do we meet that? Perhaps with confusion. We wish ourselves and others well, putting ourselves through many, often dramatic, efforts in pursuit of well-being. Despite our efforts, though, we sometimes find ourselves in a complete mess. Sadly, we often

react with, "It shouldn't be this way. I'm a decent character, it shouldn't be like this."

If I could give a personal example, I recently received a letter from someone, not a nice letter. I was disappointed and rather affected by this letter; it was a bit more than I could manage. I was disturbed, for several hours, until Evening Puja came along. I thought, "Well, I won't go to evening Puja, I'm too upset." But this isn't the right way, this isn't what I tell the other monks. So I went to Evening Puja, and sat there as we usually do. Before long I heard the thought, "It shouldn't be this way." At that point I spotted the problem: I was pushing away the struggle, the reality of it. And then with a sense of relief came the recognition, "Here we are again." This was the quality of equanimity. There is nothing wrong with saying 'should' or 'shouldn't': imagining how things could be otherwise is an aspect of our intelligence. The problem is our getting stuck and lost in imagining how things could be otherwise.

The Buddha said that if we want to really work with confusion of this sort, we can go into the place in which there is an appreciation of the law of kamma. There are causes and effects; there are laws; there is a bigger picture. We have a meditation for accessing this transformative space so that we can meet confusion: "I am the owner of my kamma, heir to my kamma, born of my kamma, related to my kamma, abide supported by my kamma; whatever kamma, whatever intentional action I shall do, of that I shall be the heir." This is a valuable grounding contemplation. Of course, when we're terribly confused, it may not make much difference to start at that time thinking about these things. But that is also why we have the encouragement of these teachings, these suggestions: we are readying ourselves in preparation to recognise these doors, and eventually these rooms, so that when we are called to meet the raw condition, we know how to enter.

Dedication

I feel grateful to the Buddha for directing us to these places where we can go to do the work that we all know we have to do. As we experience the benefit of this work, we see the world in front of our eyes more and more clearly. I recently heard a minister from Edinburgh offer an ancient Gaelic prayer which relates to this. It went,

Bless, oh Lord, my eyes, that they may bless all that they see.
Bless, oh Lord, my ears, that they may bless all that they hear.
Bless, oh Lord, my hands, that they may bless all that they touch.
Bless, oh Lord, my face that it may bless everything.

This too is my prayer. For us, the Heart of Transformation is Lord. May all beings in all directions feel blessed and wholly received.

Glossary
Of Foreign Words

The following words are mostly in Pali, the language of the Theravada Buddhist scriptures and chants (if not Pali, the language of the word is noted). They are brief translations for quick reference: these are not exhaustive or refined definitions. Not all the foreign words found in the talks are listed below, as many are defined at the point of use.
Note: most Pali diacritics have been omitted here and within the book, as few people are familiar with the specialised pronunciation conventions.

ajahn (*Thai*) 'teacher'; often used as the title of the senior monk in a monastery.

anagarika 'homeless one'. A person living in the monastery keeping the eight precepts. Often the first stage of training before 'acceptance' into the bhikkhu-sangha.

anapanasati meditation practice of mindfulness of breathing.

anatta impersonal, 'not-self', without individual essence; one of the three characteristics of all conditioned existence.

anicca impermanent, transient, having the nature to arise and pass away; one of the three characteristics of all conditioned existence.

arahant an enlightened being, free from all delusion.

Asalha Puja celebration taking place on the full-moon of July remembering the time when the Buddha delivered his first Teaching.

ariya sacca Noble Truths. Usually referring to the Four Noble Truths which form the foundation of all Buddhist teachings.

brahmavihara Divine Abidings: loving-kindness, compassion, empathetic joy and equanimity.

bhikkhu male alms mendicant; the term for a Buddhist monk.

bhikkhuni female alms mendicant; the term for a Buddhist nun.

Dhamma often used to mean the Buddha's teachings. Also refers to Ultimate Truth, towards which the teachings points; and to a discrete 'moment' of life, seen as it really is.

dukkha imperfect, unsatisfying, 'hard to bear', dis-ease; one of the three characteristics of all conditioned existence.

kamma intentional action or cause leading to an effect.

karuna compassion.

kalyanamitta wholesome companionship, spiritual friendship.

magga path, way.

metta loving kindness.

mudita empathetic joy. Happiness at witnessing another's good fortune.

Nibbana freedom from attachments. Enlightenment. (Sanskrit: Nirvana)

pañña discriminative wisdom.

samadhi concentration or one-pointedness of mind.

samana one who has entered the renunciant life.

samanera a novice Buddhist monk.

samsara the unenlightened, unsatisfactory experience of life.

sangha the community of those who practice the Buddha's way.

sati mindfulness.

sila moral virtue.

sutta a Buddhist scripture.

siladhara a ten-precept Buddhist nun.

Theravada the southern school of Buddhism.

upasaka/upasika male and female lay Buddhist practitioners.

upasampada ceremony of acceptance into the bhikkhu-sangha.

uppekkha equanimity.

vinaya the Buddhist monastic discipline, or the scriptural collection of its rules and commentaries.

vipassana the penetrative insight of meditation, as distinguished from samatha mental tranquillity.

wat (*Thai*) Buddhist monastery.

"Wherever the Buddha's teachings have
flourished,
either in cities or countrysides,
people would gain inconceivable benefits.
The land and pepole would be enveloped in peace.
The sun and moon will shine clear and bright.
Wind and rain would appear accordingly,
and there will be no disasters.
Nations would be prosperous
and there would be no use for soldiers or weapons.
People would abide by morality and accord with
laws.
They would be courteous and humble,
and everyone would be content without injustices.
There would be no thefts or violence.
The strong would not dominate the weak
and everyone would get their fair share."

THE BUDDHA SPEAKS OF
THE INFINITE LIFE SUTRA OF
ADORNMENT, PURITY, EQUALITY
AND ENLIGHTENMENT OF
THE MAHAYANA SCHOOL

LIVING IN A GRATEFUL WORLD

Be grateful to those who have hurt or harmed you,
for they have reinforced your determination.

Be grateful to those who have deceived you,
for they have deepened your insight.

Be grateful to those who have hit you,
for they have reduced your karmic obstacles.

Be grateful to those who have abandoned you,
for they have taught you to be independent.

Be grateful to those who have made you stumble,
for they have strengthened your ability.

Be grateful to those who have denounced you,
for they have increased your wisdom and concentration.

Be grateful to those who have made you Firm & Resolute and Helped in your Achievement.

From the Teachings of
Ven. Master Chin Kung

A Path to True Happiness

TRUE SINCERITY
towards others
PURITY OF MIND
within
EQUALITY
in everything we see
PROPER UNDERSTANDING
of ourselves and our environment
COMPASSION
by helping others in a wise, unemotional and unconditional way

SEE THROUGH
to the truth of impermanence
LET GO
of all wandering thoughts and attachments
ATTAIN FREEDOM
of mind and spirit
ACCORD WITH CONDITIONS
to go along with the environment
BE MINDFUL OF AMITABHA BUDDHA
following his teachings and vowing to reach the Pure Land

□ From The Teachings of
Ven. Master Chin Kung □

With bad advisors forever left behind,
From paths of evil he departs for eternity,
Soon to see the Buddha of Limitless Light
And perfect Samantabhadra's Supreme Vows.

The supreme and endless blessings
of Samantabhadra's deeds,
I now universally transfer.
May every living being, drowning and adrift,
Soon return to the Pure Land of
Limitless Light!

~The Vows of Samantabhadra~

I vow that when my life approaches its end,
All obstructions will be swept away;
I will see Amitabha Buddha,
And be born in His Western Pure Land of
Ultimate Bliss and Peace.

When reborn in the Western Pure Land,
I will perfect and completely fulfill
Without exception these Great Vows,
To delight and benefit all beings.

~The Vows of Samantabhadra
Avatamsaka Sutra~

DEDICATION OF MERIT

May the merit and virtue
accrued from this work
adorn Amitabha Buddha's Pure Land,
repay the four great kindnesses above,
and relieve the suffering of
those on the three paths below.

May those who see or hear of these efforts
generate Bodhi-mind,
spend their lives devoted to the Buddha Dharma,
and finally be reborn together in
the Land of Ultimate Bliss.
Homage to Amita Buddha!

NAMO AMITABHA

南無阿彌陀佛

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we request that it be treated with respect.
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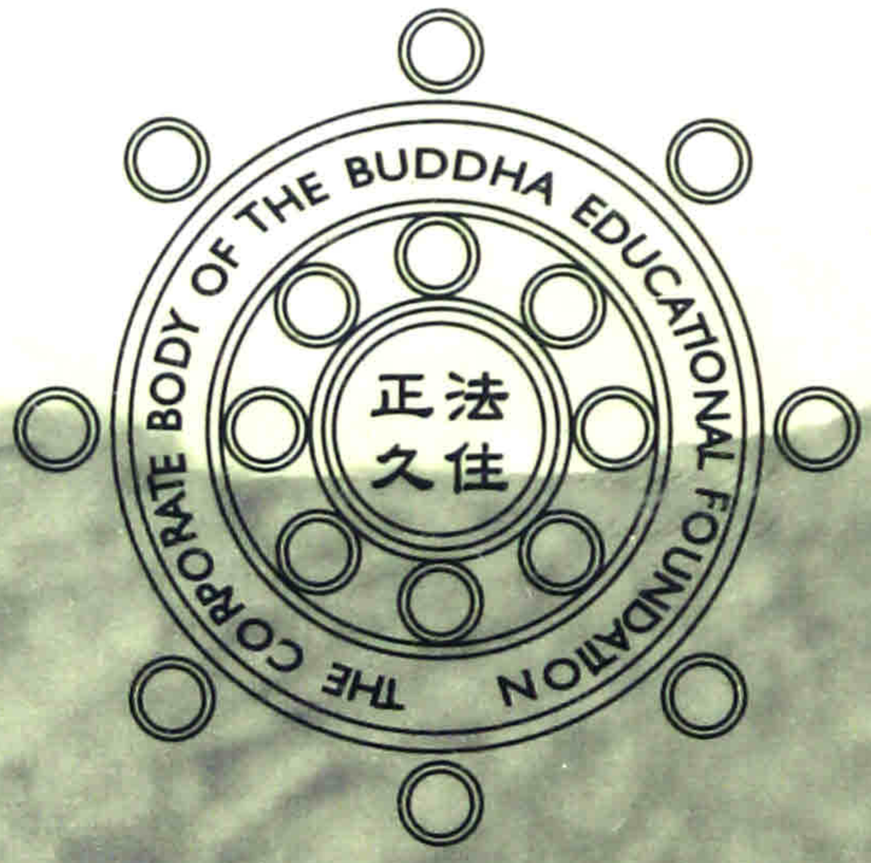
offer it to a monastery, school or public library.
Thanks for your co-operation.

Namo Amitabha!



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