The Thread

Short Dhamma talks by Ajahn Kalyāno

Namo Tassa Bhagavato Arahato Sammāsambuddhassa
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Buddhaṃ Dhammaṃ Saṅghaṃ Namassāmi

The Thread

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"A happy path"

I'd like to talk about a few of the guiding principles, particularly principles that guide our attitude in spiritual practice.

We can see how the Buddha says over and over how spiritual practice is something that goes against the ways of the world, goes against the stream of sensuality. So, when we embark on this, it can be a little bit daunting and can seem rather negative – we have to give everything up, be very good, and then we'll be happy.

This can seem a difficult thing to do, it seems like self-sacrifice, going against our habits. This is because we're not going about it in the correct way. If we go about it in the correct way, then the Path is a very natural one.

The Buddha doesn't judge sensuality – this is the first point to understand. The Buddha sees four kinds of happiness – the first one of material wealth and material happiness he sees as a kind of happiness, he doesn't see that in a negative way. And yet he sees three other kinds of happiness that are higher: of being virtuous; of the concentrated or trained mind or of mindfulness, sharpness of mind; and that of liberation, a freedom of mind, freedom from suffering. These three kinds of happiness are greater than the first.

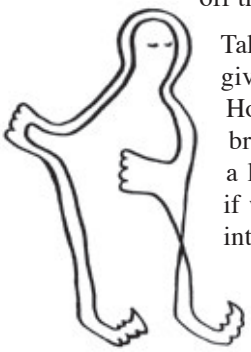
And yet he doesn't encourage us to pursue these through an idea. What he encourages us to do is to begin to practise. So first of all, the sīla - keeping the precepts – keeping the five precepts as a layperson one begins to enjoy the sense of harmlessness, a sense of self-respect and dignity. These kinds of qualities coming into our hearts – lack of regret and remorse. Then we can want to do this rather than feel that we should do this – particularly if we're meditators, particularly if we watch our minds and see the results of unskilful conduct or unskilful thinking. This is the first main principle then – that

we establish ourselves on the spiritual path, we get fruits from that path of one kind or another, and then we let this enjoyment take us forward.

When I was a layman I used to go on retreats – I'd have a nice retreat, come back, and then I wouldn't want to put on the telly, or play music, I'd want to just be quiet, and enjoy the peacefulness of that. It's not that I was denying myself anything that I had previously, it's just that I'd found a taste for peace and quiet. This is the natural path, a happy path, and not a path of idealism or self-sacrifice. The Buddha doesn't really encourage us to be self-sacrificing, but to seek happiness in a skilful way, seek the highest happiness, the one that lasts the longest.

Often there's an investment here, we're looking for a longer-term result, and we're making an investment towards that longer-term result – we're not just resorting to the quick hit from the senses. Say we're helping another person in some way, making friends. Then good results can come back to us – perhaps that person's then willing to help us when we need help. And we can see how our goodness benefits them – this can give us great pleasure. If we can make a friend, this can be a very lasting thing, rather than a quick hit from the senses.

And then of course we're also often up against an addiction to the things of the senses. In this case it's the pleasures of the senses that are keeping us going. So we need to wean ourselves off the more unskilful sense pleasures.



Take drinking for example: if we try and give this up it can be a very difficult thing. How do we go about breaking habits, breaking an addiction? Let's go into that a little bit more. Often a good first step, if we find ourselves led astray by falling into habits from the past, is not to be wilful about it so much as to change our environment. There's a lot of psychological research on this these

days – that the way to change our habits is not a wilful one – the will always lets us down – but to change the environment.

If you have a problem with drink, then just get rid of all the drink in the house – it's the most skilful way to start, and this can go a long way. This is what monasticism is all about, among other things. We're choosing an environment where we just can't do certain things – not handling money for example, not getting things for ourselves and not seeking things, not able to. This puts us in a very spiritual space so to speak. We can't pursue the pleasures of the senses.

A monk, in this point of view, sets a good example. Obviously this kind of life-style takes an amount of support by the group. They're setting up somebody in a situation in which they're no longer able to be dependant upon these pleasures of the senses. So we can teach another person how to break this same addiction – what to look for, how to establish and strengthen the mind, to be free of dependence on these things and in a positive way – the way of finding something else. We're finding something else that can substitute for these pleasures, a higher pleasure, something more pleasant.

Then there are the pleasures of meditation – a long-term investment. It usually takes quite a while for the meditation process to begin to offer pleasure, sensory pleasure of a different kind – the pleasure of the concentrated and open mind. One will begin to see this when one establishes one's mindfulness – the pleasure of being present, the pleasure of being clear, and having a sense of self-control - also having a mind that will follow our wishes, not an ill-disciplined one. A kind of benevolent discipline is what we're looking for in order to tame and train our minds, and the result can be very pleasant. It's very pleasant to have a mind that will follow one's wishes rather than fighting against us.

A Buddhist Attitude

"Just do your best, in the present moment, and then accept that whatever happens, happens."

I thought to offer a few reflections on what is a Buddhist attitude to life – a skilful attitude to life.

The best one I have found was stuck up on a tree, waiting for me, in a monastery in Thailand – it said, "just do your best, in the present moment, and then accept that whatever happens, happens."

This very much encapsulates the Buddha's teaching: one is encouraged to do one's best, which means to live in a skilful way – and seek one's happiness in a skilful way, and the happiness of others – but also, at the same time, be able to accept that whatever happens, happens. We have to accept the fact that we can't control the things of life, that the world is bigger than we are. There are a lot of things that we can't control, so we can only do our best. Then these good intentions will bring us good results in our minds and hearts.

Bringing these two things together – doing our best, and also accepting whatever happens, happens – is often something that we develop first of all in the meditation process. This might be done when we're doing our best to keep our mind with the meditation object, say, following the breath in and out. When our minds wander, we patiently bring the mind back again. The way to be good at this is both to be able to apply effort and also to be able to accept whatever happens, happens, so that we don't just add to the suffering of the wandering mind. If the mind wanders, we don't beat ourselves up over it. We start again patiently. Patience is really the key here. It's patience that brings these two parts of this skilful attitude together.

If we patiently do our best, then that very patience will keep our mind in the present moment. If we're not in a rush, then we can remain in the present moment. This will sharpen our mindfulness, and then there's a kind of softness there that can accept that whatever happens, happens.

Often there's a delay here for the untrained mind. We try our best, and things go wrong, then we don't get what we want, we get frustrated, fed up, and then maybe eventually we accept what's happened. Maybe we sit and meditate at the end of the day, and we can come to some acceptance of what's happened – we haven't got what we wanted, things didn't go very well. But if we meditate in a good and skilful way, then all the time we can be dropping away our expectations, a continual letting go and yet we can still apply effort.

There can be a lot of confusion in teaching these days – some people emphasising the application of effort, other people saying that effort is not necessary or it's even counter-productive and the mind is pure already and there's no need to make any effort. Often the reason why people teach in this second way is they see how unskilfully people can apply their effort. It's not that effort isn't necessary – it is necessary – but it needs to be a skilful effort to bear good results.

There are places to go in the mind that are more pleasant than where we are now and they're worth going to. We do this through the application of effort, but also the application of letting go – the two together. The two don't actually oppose or exclude each other in any way – if we have patience. Then our effort won't disturb or stir up the mind.

This is what I would call an overall Buddhist attitude to life. It's a very light attitude actually. We see this well-exemplified in a Buddhist country like Thailand, where there are a lot of people doing a lot of good things, and yet there's a tremendous lightness about life. The goodness doesn't take on a heavy or self-sacrificing quality. It's a very light thing, it's light about life. It's not trying to control.

In a Buddhist culture, people also accept the idea, or fact, that there are pleasures that are higher than those of the senses. All the things of the world are not where we're looking for our greatest pleasure in life. We get by with the things of the world but we're not seeking to fulfil ourselves. We're doing our bit to get by, to help others get by. But our greatest pleasures lie elsewhere, the pleasures of the spiritual life that create a different set of priorities. This skilful effort of doing our best is not just to accumulate as much money as we can find, or to go to as many parties as we can, but to cultivate a more skilful kind of happiness, a happiness that really lasts.

Deep and Broad Practice

"The Buddha suggests that we principally work towards our strengths"

Tonight I'd like to propose that the practice of Dhamma is one that has two dimensions – a dimension of depth, and a dimension of breadth. That through our lives as practitioners of the Dhamma there are times when we want to apply ourselves, or be able to apply ourselves, to one of these dimensions – of breadth or depth. There are times when we will be able to devote ourselves to one or the other, situations that will suit one or the other and people who are good at one or the other. And yet I would suggest that a rounded practice, a complete practice is one that has both of these dimensions to it.

I'll explain what I mean by these two. A broad practice is a practice where somebody can be calm and see clearly through any kind of situation. A deep practice is a practice where somebody has seen very deeply into the nature of things; and seeing things in a different way have transformed their perception of the world.

Typically, the first one is often the way for a lay practitioner to lead a skilful life, to be positive in the present moment, live in the present moment, be positive and skilful in all the circumstances, various wide circumstances that they find themselves in. The monastic life can present these periods of time and this kind of practice to us as well – where we can find ourselves in all kinds of situations trying to hold it together.

There's a great strength that can come from this, the ability to ride along, bump along, and to be able to step back from our own state of mind. We watch our own mind and the mind might be going a bit crazy around certain situations, doesn't want to be there, and we can step back and still remain clear.

So observation, this ability to just look on, is a very useful one, an essential one in broadening our practice in different situations – non-reactivity. And yet there can be a lack of response – this is a kind of passive state in some ways, passive observation of things. There's not necessarily anything there that helps to

show us where to go forward. For this we're reliant upon a little depth of practice, our minds seeing the underlying dynamics of things. This is a source of wisdom in the mind in order to show us what to do, what's a skilful course of action in life.

Sometimes this deep practice can go very deep, and it can completely change our view of the world. If we just have breadth of practice, we may be able to accept the way things are and yet we haven't really seen the way things are. However for the person who has developed some depth of practice, who has seen the way things are, life is very much easier to accept – because everything is good news. The way things really are is very good news, it can liberate the mind. There can be a lot of joy coming just from seeing the way things are.

If we don't try to deepen our practice to see a little deeper into the nature of things, the nature of life, into the nature of our situation as human beings, then we miss out on this. It is often in the formal meditation practice, or a retreat situation, that we have the opportunity to do this. And we can do it completely independently of the first kind of practice. We can be living our lives as good Buddhists and accepting our lot and working away for everybody's benefit, and then when we can, we take a retreat. Then we can try to deepen our practice in order to see things in a different way, also to get a different source of pleasure in life. This can also be a very important aspect to the spiritual life – to find a source of pleasure within it to keep us going. Meditation and insight are both incredibly pleasant things coming out of the deepening of our practice.

Perhaps it will be useful to consider for yourself what situation you're in, also your personal character tendencies, and what you're suited for, how to use the situation. We can think "This is a nice quiet peaceful situation, and I can maybe use this to deepen my practice a little" or "This is a very difficult situation but I can use this to broaden my practice, to develop steadiness and non-reactivity of mind."

As a monastic, when we are moving from one monastery to another, I often reflect on this. You go to one monastery, and it's perfect for developing depth of practice. Lots of time on your own, quiet, and very good sīla kept in the monastery – all these

kinds of things are very conducive. You go to somewhere else, it's very busy, a lot of duties, things going on, a lot of people in the monastery who don't understand what's happening – or going out on teaching engagements. All these things are an opportunity to try to broaden one's practice.

To my mind it's quite appropriate that the particular individual should try to work to their strengths rather than just try to tackle their weaknesses. This is a principle overall. The Buddha suggests that we principally work towards our strengths. So for somebody who's good at developing depth of practice, this is what they should principally be doing. This will be a lot of benefit to the group as a whole because we can share our insights with others about the nature of clarity and of the nature of the human condition, our existential condition, position in the world as human beings which is not what it appears to be, at all. This is a very valuable kind of person to have around. They're worth supporting, somebody who genuinely has this ability.

And yet there's always some people who are off in their quiet kuti (hut) just to get away from everything. They're not necessarily using their opportunity to develop themselves, but just to escape from things. That's not so good. Yet even people who begin like this can benefit, they find they have to practise because all the things they are trying to get away from follow them to their quiet kuti.

Within a group it's often very valuable to have different members who have different strengths. To have somebody who is a very broad practitioner who's been in all kinds of different situations and ridden them out could often be in the front as the leader. Then the one who's developed the depth of practice gives the Dhamma talk. This is what can happen in a good spiritual set-up in the monastery. Then we all learn from each other and protect each other.

Often the very outgoing people tend to be people with good breadth of practice. Whereas the inward looking quiet ones are those who develop the depth of practice – and they need to be teased out, drawn out as to what they know about the nature of the mind, or the nature of the relationship between the body and mind.

Buddhist Therapy

"The ultimate solution"

This evening I thought I'd say a few words about how Buddhism can help us relate to our emotional world. Or how Buddhism can be like a therapy to us and how it's similar to or different from therapy. Being as how I've studied psychology, I feel a bit qualified to say something about this in the context of the Buddhist practice that followed on from it.

Often when we begin to meditate, then it's our emotional world that is a predominant feature. In common parlance, we have a lot of stuff coming up as a reaction or response – opening the Pandora's box.

What is this first of all? Often the reason why this happens is that sitting and meditating for a while we are denying ourselves. We are not acting on the craving that's in our minds, we're not doing what we want. We're just sitting there, so all this craving is entering into our minds but it does not always say what it really wants. Craving has all kinds of different voices, it can sound very reasonable. Its not always saying "I don't want to do this, I want to be doing something else". It just moans away in a much more anonymous way, it doesn't really reveal itself very well at the beginning. We have to get a bit deeper to see where it is all coming from, all this stuff.

There's the reaction to the pain of sitting. If we aren't used to sitting for long periods then the discomfort can bring up a lot of stuff. People can actually downplay this, they don't realise that that's where it's coming from. They're not used to just tolerating this kind of discomfort for no good reason – seemingly for no good reason. Yet this can actually be the principal cause. If one can recognise this, one can place one's mind on that discomfort, and realise that it's not a big deal. Or else we can learn how to tolerate it. It's a very useful skill to be able to tolerate that discomfort, not allow it to push our minds around. After all, we're just not able to escape all the discomforts of life; if we lead a life of running around trying to, it's not much of a life.

If we go a little deeper it can seem – as a lot of psychologists point out now – that there is a relationship between our emotional stuff and our bodies. A lot of therapists will talk as though all this stuff is in our body – it can seem like that, like its coming up out of the body. This is where the feeling predominantly is – in the body. The body is the thing that feels things.

But it's not in the body actually. This is what Buddhist practice can show us — and this is a very important and very radical thing – it can change our relationship to our emotional world completely if we realise that our stuff is not in the body but in our minds. It can seem that this stuff lives in or is stuck in our bodies. In the modern Yogic tradition, people getting in touch with their bodies and then all this stuff coming up, coming out, "it's very healthy to get it all out", they'll say. It's a useful half-truth to say that that's the case, it can be a useful process, the yogic process, and yet it's not the truth, not the ultimate truth.

Ultimately then, these phenomena can seem like they're in our bodies because our minds are attached to our bodies. Or while our minds are attached to our bodies, then this is the case that our thoughts and feelings or emotions will seemingly arise from the body – our thoughts are in our head, or our feelings are in our bodies – but if we lose our attachment to the body then this whole relationship changes. If the mind detaches from the body through the meditation practice then the whole thing changes.

So our emotions seem like they're stuck in our bodies, because our minds are stuck in our bodies. If our minds are not stuck in our bodies, then our feelings won't be. And we won't have to go fishing around for them, they'll be right there in front of us, but in a much more open space. If we imagine they're trapped in the body, trapped and stuck in this limited place. It's their limitation and their stuckness that is the suffering of them, principally.

If we can open up the space in which they operate that is a different experience already and this is the kind of thing that our meditation practice can offer us. We become aware of the

body, to the posture say and this is an open awareness, not a focus. We're not looking down looking for the feelings with a focused mind, but we're opening the mind and allowing these things to go their own way and setting them free from being trapped down there. This can be very pleasant, very liberating, and also very enlightening. We begin to see their real nature.

This means that we can become our own therapists. We don't need somebody else to interpret our feelings any more. We can see them clearly for ourselves without the complications of a relationship with a therapist – of projection or of dependence or so on.

If we establish the first foundation of mindfulness, that of the body, the whole body, then we open up a channel to our emotional world. I remember a couple of years after my father died very tragically, back then I had my first chance of a retreat in the forest at Chithurst. I was very keen and did a lot of body-sweeping, going through the body over and over again, the feelings of the body. Then when I went back to the monastery one of the nuns was describing her own father's death and all of a sudden all the feelings were coming up very strongly, very freely. Being English I then ran off to my private room upstairs and cried my eyes out for two hours, then it was all over.

Now, in terms of the resolution of post-traumatic stress, this is what the therapists are looking for, they're looking for all the feelings to come up but they all wonder how these feelings can come up without us re-traumatising. In other words – when memories or feelings come up, we just suffer anew. Then these things aren't being released at all, we're just going back through the whole mucky scenario, suffering all over again. Next time these things come up, it will be the same story. Every time these things come up it might be the same story.

So, how do we prevent this re-traumatising? We do this by welcoming these things into an open mind, a mind opened by mindfulness of the body, opening the channel just through

pure bare awareness of the body. Then these things can pass through, and go their own way.

As for the development of the detachment from the body this is a much more long-term result. One pays attention to and examines the body, examines the body and then the mind becomes detached from it. We see the mind and the body separate from each other. It's a much more deep, subtle thing. It takes a much longer time and dedicated practice to get to this one. But this is the ultimate solution. We're cutting the root of all, the root of attachment, so the mind will no longer attach to the body. These things can no longer get stuck. The stickiness has gone.

And in the meantime, there's developing more free-flowing emotions. The suffering of emotions is when they get stuck. If we get them to flow freely in open space, then it's an awful lot easier.

Seeing is Believing

"To establish mindfulness can be said to be the teaching"

To some people the practice of Buddhism can seem rather complicated. Certainly, there is a lot of instruction and analysis offered, a lot of concepts that one can apply to one's experience and to find out "well is this the case or is this not the case?" We can reflect on the teaching like this. For people who have this kind of mind, this can be a good thing to do, to read the suttas (the Buddhas words) and then to compare the concepts there with what we see in front of us, and to see "well is this really correct?", "can we see this for ourselves?", "can I see it like this?", "is this really the way it is?" And seeing is believing. If we can see these things for ourselves, then we will have faith.

We can also see that the opposite isn't true – believing isn't seeing. We can become very dedicated Buddhists, learn all the theory, and believe something, but this believing won't be seeing. It happens the other way around. It operates the other way around. Seeing is believing, believing is not seeing.

This should be our attitude to this kind of investigation, the use of the theory or the suttas.

And if it seems too complicated, then we can make the practice extremely simple – to establish mindfulness. To establish mindfulness can be said to be the teaching. That's it. Full stop. If we can get a hang of what mindfulness really is – and if our idea of mindfulness doesn't lead us astray.

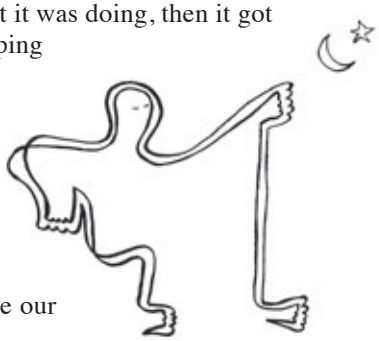
So what is this thing called mindfulness? What is the mind, first of all? The mind in Buddhist terms is very much associated with what we would call the conscience in English, not just the thinking mind. Getting in touch with our own conscience is mindfulness. We have to develop a highly developed conscience. This can often have negative connotations – our

conscience is something that nags us, our conscience is a negative thing. But it need not be like this, our conscience can be a very positive force in our lives, an extremely positive force in our lives.

Our relationship with our conscience is a crucial thing and the quality of our own conscience so to speak. The meditation process is a way of working with this, of relating to our conscience, opening it up, considering, watching the results of our actions, watching the kamma flowing through, the thoughts and feelings about what's happened today, how we might change how we go about life tomorrow, make a new resolve.

And then we do this in a way that keeps us in the present. We're watching in the present moment, which is where we can act. We're trying to let go of the past, accept whatever's happened in the past has happened and keep making a fresh start. This is what mindfulness can do for us, keep coming back to the present, making a fresh start – an attitude of, "oh well never mind, next time," just about sums it up.

I was thinking the other day how the mind can be resistant to moral training at the beginning, but if one continues, one starts to get results, how this can completely turn around. It reminds me of watching a farmer training a sheepdog, in a place I lived over a year or so – at the beginning this sheepdog was rather reluctant to do what its master was trying to get it to do, and then once he got the taste for it, the taste for the discipline and seeing the results of what it was doing, then it got extremely enthusiastic, jumping around all over the place.



It's often when we get the results of practice that it turns our minds around. This is the natural way in which our minds get turned around. It's hard to do it any other way. It's hard to resolve our

doubts in any other way. Often study can be a way that people try to resolve the doubts, and yet this doesn't really work. It's getting results and seeing things for ourselves in the heart that really gives us faith.

At the beginning it can all come down to this, this simple integration of the conscience into the present moment and keeping it there, not allowing it to wander into regrets over the past or the hopes over the future – relaxing around the conscience, respecting it, respecting this sensitivity that we have, valuing it, calming it, making it peaceful. How do we do this? Through meditation, through this calming the mind, breathing in, breathing out but also through reflection, through reflecting on the transitory nature of the phenomenon of the senses, the pursuit of the frustrating nature of the things of the senses, they escape our grasp, they don't last, – turning away from these things.

That's what ultimately brings a different priority, a different purpose for looking at things. We're not looking at things just for the enjoyment of them but to care for them in a wise and skillful way.

Staying at The Heart

"Giving the game away"

There are various ways that we can summarise or encapsulate the practice – different ones are going to resonate with particular people.

One of these I rather like is to summarise the whole practice of Buddhism as, 'not going out'. The great Chinese master, Master Hua, was asked, "Well, how is it, Master, that you can have all these monasteries and duties and things to do, and yet you seem so at ease?" He said, "Oh, it's because I don't go out." They asked, "How is this, you don't go out? What do you mean?" "I don't go out. I stay at the heart, stay right there at the heart."

This can be one way in which we can summarise the practice, it's one way in which we can watch our minds – action, result – see if the mind goes out, then there's suffering. If the mind doesn't go out, no suffering. It can be as simple as that.

The mind has a certain tendency to go out so we have a lot of training, discipline and hard work required for it not to go out. In formal meditation practice, we're holding it where it is, keeping it where it is, keeping it at the heart, breathing into the heart, staying with the breath, staying with the heart, mind, awareness, and the present – gathering it at the heart, gathering our awareness at the heart, opening, and becoming receptive.

And then the mind, rather than going out, running around after things, then it opens and receives things. This a very different experience, these two – the experience of the mind going out and running around after things, getting lost in things, grasping things, and then these things don't last so that the mind will just get a temporary hit, a temporary satisfaction, and then "oh...err...", a good feeling and then at the end of the good

feeling – "oh...err...". Yet if we open and receive – this is a very different experience.

Walking out into a nice day, flowers outside – the mind goes out there and picks the flowers, it grasps at them and delights in the colours, – suffering, because when it's over, then the mind will just be looking for more flowers, and we become dependant on flowers for our happiness. It's nice when they're there, and it's not nice when they're not there. They can't be there all the time, they don't last forever, do they?

Whereas if we're walking out into a nice day, the mind's open and receptive, then we can see beautiful flowers, still beautiful, and yet the mind doesn't go out and pick them. Then they stay out there, they're in the ground, so to speak. Whenever we're out there, then there they are, like that. But if we think of going out and picking flowers and going back and sticking them in a vase we just watch them die and it doesn't last does it?

The grasping mind that goes out after, delighting in things, the Buddha describes as 'delighting in' yet it's not that one can't enjoy things without grasping. One can enjoy things with an open centred mind, very much so, but in a completely different way, a completely different kind of attention. It's not a desiring attention. There's no desire in the attention – there's receptivity, like a listening kind of quality rather than demanding something of something. It's more of a listening to what it has to say. What are the flowers saying? We can have muditā, joy, sympathetic joy, with the flowers in their moment of glory – this kind of thing can arise. Then when one moves on there's no immediate diminishing of that joy.

This is one way in which we can describe the fruits of the practice. In a way it's giving the game away a bit, isn't it? We've got a danger here – we talk about giving up the pleasures of the senses for the spiritual life – this is good – but it can seem a little bit daunting, like we're losing something. And

the secret is that we're not losing anything actually, all we're losing is the desire. The desire was never pleasant. Is desire ever pleasant? Craving, is it ever pleasant? Watch it. Sit there when you're meditating, watch your desires coming up – are they ever pleasant? Find out for yourself. That's the open mind that finds out for itself – is desire pleasant, any desire?

When we look at things without desire, they're far more pleasant – we enjoy them far more and yet that could be giving the game away, couldn't it? We could go out there and think "Oh it's great you know, even though I'm really into spiritual practice I can still enjoy all these things of the senses." We can be enjoying and delighting in things and using different words for it. This doesn't work, we still miss those things when they've gone. We can fool ourselves with this. We forget that these days with people all over writing or a lot we can listen to, read about the fruits of the practice, so the game's already been given away really, hasn't it? If we just buy the story and haven't practiced we can be selling ourselves short.

It can be very good practice, watching how the mind moves, what happens when the mind goes out through the senses – or when the mind is open in the heart and not attached to the senses. We can see how the mind will just shoot out through the eye, grab a hold of something, we can feel that in the eyes, a kind of intensity there, focus there, as the mind goes out through the eye. We see something, the eye kind of delighting, feelings related to the sense of the eye, sense of eye consciousness. It's felt right there at the eyes. Or any of the other senses – taste, touch, feeling, smell, all the senses, delighting in them in order to obtain pleasant feeling, which then arises and ceases – doesn't last.

Contrast that with the pleasure of the mind that's open and receptive, that isn't channelled through the senses. The senses are open and relaxed rather than grasping at things, or rather the mind is open and relaxed around the senses. The mind is

relaxed into the present rather than focussing on the present. It's cool, no desire or wanting anything, it can just move from one thing to the next.

Then the mind is enjoying its own quality, of receptivity and openness. And this enjoyment is more enjoyable than the objects within it. The quality of the mind is more enjoyable than the things within it. It begins to take precedence, is more important. We realise that happiness is in the mind, and we can cultivate it there.

There we are. That's really given the game away, hasn't it?

The Serenity Prayer

"A matter of courage, a matter of serenity and a matter of wisdom."

Teachings these days on Buddhism seem to vary from one extreme to another in terms of whether they are recommending action or inaction. In this respect some teachers recommend no effort, not doing anything – that it's not about doing anything. Others recommend effort in all areas of life. So what's the right answer? Where is the Buddha's teaching on this dimension, where does it actually lie?

We can see that the Buddha recommended action in some cases and inaction in others, which is possibly where these different teachings have arisen from. It often is the case that a teaching to a given individual is mistaken as a general teaching. The Buddha actually recommended some people to act according to the circumstances both inwardly and outwardly.

The principle that guides all this is encapsulated by the serenity prayer which would say that "we should have the courage to change the things one can change, and one should have the serenity to accept the things that one can not change, and one should have the wisdom to know the difference."

The Buddha points to the field of our intentional action in particular as the thing that we can change – our actions of body, speech and mind. These are things that form our future, our kamma, when we run along with our intentional actions of body, speech and mind.

But then there's a lot of things that we can't change, a lot of things in the world that we can do nothing about. So we have to have a way of dividing these two things. As individuals sometimes we can be very active people or quite laid back people. We need to go against our tendency to be too laid back in areas in which we can make a difference or too active in areas in which we can't.

I often find these days that people who come to the monastery worry a lot about the world and about things in the world that actually they can do very little about. Maybe they can do something but they can't really affect the problem very much. They have no voice, really.

As monks then, we are less in touch with the world, the news and so on. This affects us less so it's quite noticeable how lay people come and talk about politics or the environment or whatever it is. How they can get very upset about these things. And the kind of futility of this can strike home if these are areas that we are not so involved with.

It's still a good question whether it is wise to watch the news, for example. Whether one just gets stirred up about things that one can't do much about. For myself I find that some particular stories in the news or particular types of news I found myself interested in because they offer an opportunity to spread metta (loving-kindness) to those concerned. Metta can be a general practice, one doesn't really need to know the details of what's going on. Are people suffering? Well, I can just spread metta to all beings who are suffering.

And yet sometimes it can add a focus to the mind or generate wholesome qualities of compassion or kindness to follow a story. I followed the story of the children murdered in the school in the United States, for example. I took a picture from the newspaper, put it up on my shrine, and spread metta to the children.

But also I didn't have the picture there all the time. This was a practice that I would pick up and then put down again. This can be an important principle – if we pick something up like this, then can we put it down again? This is what a trained mind can do. Can pick up what is worthwhile to pick up and do something with it and then put it down again or not pick up something that's not worthwhile to pick up.

So then we can see the act of picking things up. We can see the act of picking them up and carrying them around. This we

don't need to do. We don't need to carry things around with us, to place the world on our shoulders.

Then the perspective we have in this respect can change a lot through years of practice or deepening practice. We begin to abandon a lot of areas of engagement or things that we were caught up in previously and pick up the things that are really worthwhile, aim ourselves at the fertile ground – at the mind, cultivating the mind. This is something that we can work with and something that really lasts.

Notice in the serenity prayer how these are different qualities that we are developing: the courage to change what we can change, the serenity to accept the things that we can't and the wisdom to know the difference. There are three different qualities that we are looking to develop here. Not a single one but a matter of courage, a matter of serenity and a matter of wisdom.

And all of it we are looking on with merciful eyes. As we become more aware of the quality of gaze of our own minds eye, and begin to see the quality of our awareness, we can start to see whether these qualities are there or when they are not there. When we lack the courage to try and change something our energy suffers – if we don't act when we could have acted then we can feel disempowered – or if we act in a futile way how we also feel disempowered.

Turning Inwards

The Automatic Pilot

"The heart will always be looking for the most pleasant feeling."

Once one of the postulant monks in the monastery, one of the anagarikas, was going through it somewhat. He asked me in a seemingly desperate way "I have all this stuff coming up, where is it all coming from?" he said. It's a good question, isn't it?

What all this stuff represents is our automatic pilot, and when this stuff comes up it's the automatic pilot that's tuned to liking and disliking. And it's kind of forcing our minds looking for pleasant feeling and looking to avoid unpleasant feeling. This can have a lot of power and strength if we've followed our likes and dislikes all through our lives.

Actually, it could be all we got, going on automatic or a lot of our lives, running on automatic. Drawn into the things that we like and shying away from the things that we don't.

In a culture which promotes this as a way of operating (modern, material culture) then we are already starting to go against the flow, just by starting to sit meditation and not follow our desires. We sit still and already this is kind of confronting and upsetting this automatic pilot, unless we can really see it as that.

If we see all this for what it is then it needn't upset us so much. We can see how "oh, yes these forces in my mind, voices in my mind, emotions and feelings, this is what they are, they are trying to help me find pleasant feeling and avoid unpleasant feeling."

With mindfulness then we can retune this pilot towards our spiritual goals which will also be avoiding unpleasant feeling

and going towards pleasant feeling, but in a different way. It's not that we have to destroy the system. The system is perfectly good but to find it new pleasant feelings and nicer feelings. This system then can retune itself to these.

And over the long period of practice we can automatically turn away from situations which would get us into trouble in terms of our sīla for example. When our precepts become very well established we are automatically turning away from such situations, we are not accepting the invitation to go to the pub or whatever it is.

We know it gets us into trouble. We just do that automatically. Just in the same ways we used to automatically turn to go to the pub we can automatically turn away from it. But that takes time, doesn't it? We establish new patterns and reactions in our minds.

There are two forces here, one is the enjoyment of spiritual life, and the other is seeing the things that we used to desire in a different way. So we can also say that all this stuff arises because we are not seeing in a wise way. If we see in a wise way then these things won't arise.

Yet this clear seeing also has to have a motivation. Our hearts have to have evidence that this is going to take us somewhere pleasant. The heart will always be looking for the most pleasant feeling. This is the way it is. But the feeling of calming desire is already a pleasant feeling.

So that's where all the stuff comes from. If you wanted to know.

Same System, Different Master

"It's the way we see things that forms our thoughts and emotions."

As we practice meditation and begin to look at our internal world of thought and emotion, then sometimes this can lead us to take a stand for or against thinking. We can think that thinking is a good thing, a useful thing and we can take a stand for it, or we can think that the goal of practice is not to think and we can take a stand against it, or we just don't want to think.

And there can be the same pattern with our emotions. We can either see them as a source of wisdom or a source of suffering – so we can want to get better in touch with them, or to get away from them.

Then again we see the dynamics of our mind in relation to these things – thought and emotion. Sometimes this can change, sometimes we're pro thought or anti thought, sometimes we're pro emotion or anti emotion depending on how these things are going. If it's like that then it can get a bit confusing. We listen to teachers who also can sound like they are pro thought or anti thought; or pro emotion or anti emotion.

The Buddha's teaching on this is that thought and emotion are both merely systems; also that they are both really reactions and responses to things. Because of this these systems can be driven by greed, hatred and delusion. Or by non-greed, non-hatred and non-delusion – then there can still be thought and there can still be emotion although these will be very different from the thought and emotion that we started out with. Quite of a different nature even. But still this is the same system, coming under a different master, so to speak.

There can be times when there is wisdom in our minds, when we will have wise emotion and times when we have no wisdom in our minds, when we have unwise emotion; the same

with thought. When there is wisdom in our minds, then we will have wise thoughts. When there is no wisdom in our mind then we will have unwise thoughts as a result. These are all results of the perceptual process, which is the thing that we tend not to see, the thing that we are blind to, the thing that comes before everything else.

It's the way we see things that forms our thoughts and emotions. And this is true moment by moment. If we can get in touch with this perceptual process, the knowingness of the mind, and become aware of how we see things, then all this becomes clear. Seeing how "oh, yes we're seeing in a certain way today". And we can be seeing in a certain way because we have certain thoughts and feelings, it can then go the other way also.

It's all cause and effect, it's a spin that we find ourselves in. It's a kind of chain, the chain of saṃsāra if this is all connected up with greed, hatred and delusion. But this is the chain of enlightenment just the same if it is not caught up with greed, hatred and delusion.

So we don't expect the great masters not to think or not to have thoughts. Their minds will naturally be emptier of this kind of automatic pilot, but they are still able to think and they still have feelings. All be it for different reasons, they have a different set of feelings according to their different set of values, their spiritual values.

And also for the spiritual practitioner then, over time, we realize that there is something bigger than both of these – the container. Bigger than both thought and emotion, it contains both thought and emotion. Something bigger and something more stable. We begin to see these things as things that arise and cease within the bigger frame.

If we can begin to get in touch with this frame this is where we see the greed or the lack of greed. We can see here at the mind, at the citta. We can do this, we can know very clearly for ourselves, whether there is greed in the mind or whether there is not, whether there is wisdom in the mind or whether there is not – by the way the mind is.

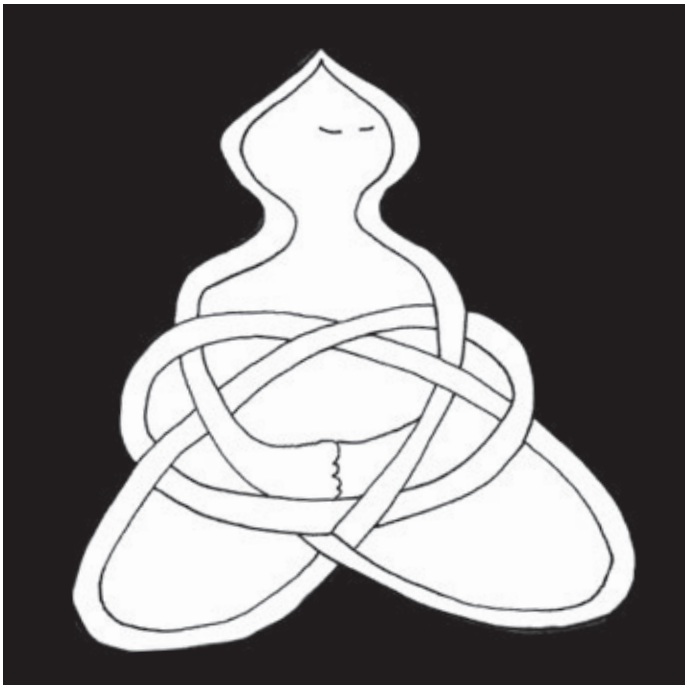
The wholesome states, the ones that lack greed, hatred and delusion are of a very different character to the ones that do involve those qualities. We need to see this for ourselves, but generally speaking the states that involve greed, hatred and delusion are ones that are grasping states. Whereas the ones that do not are opening states - opening versus closing. A mind that closes down, focuses down, grasps and fights, dark and mysterious. These are all the kind of words that we might find to describe our unwholesome mind states. Kind of dark forces, spooky, where we are not quite sure what it's doing or where it's going or what's happening. Like the old notions of the unconscious.

Wholesome mind states are quite different. They tend to be very clear, very open, associated with mindfulness and calm together. If the mind is not in the present moment, the mind is not calm, then these unwholesome forces creep in to our minds. They are adventitious. They get in to our minds without us realizing, very often.

So it can be quite important then that we try to avoid taking a stance – to think all emotions are bad or all emotions are good; or that all thoughts are bad or all thoughts are good. This is being a bit simplistic about it. Or trying to get rid of something that we don't like – an unpleasant feeling or thought. All this stuff we would say, all this rubbish that comes up. People talk like that very judgementally. Not having so much compassion for themselves, actually on some level, isn't it? Or much patience with these things.

The opposite would be to glorify these things and see all emotion as ultimately wise. This is a kind of nice, more positive view, but fact is that our minds are in a good state sometimes and then not in such a good state at other times. If we live skilfully, if we keep the precepts, if we practice meditation then our minds will become more and more wholesome. That's the faith that we can have as practitioners.

This is the one to watch for. Not as something right or wrong but to ask if it is skilful or unskilful. Is it leading us in a direction of happiness, or unhappiness and suffering.



Pain

“The mind can remain steady.“

I thought I would offer a few reflections on ways to practise with pain. Harmless physical pain is something that we learn to face up to in our meditation practice, through the sitting. If we train ourselves to sit longer and longer we will encounter some physical discomfort. This is not harmful to us. I think most people can tell the difference between what are normal aches and pains from sitting a long time and the kind of sharp pains that indicate problems in the knees or the back.

It is very much part of the practice to learn to endure this harmless pain and actually strengthening the body. This is a very useful thing to do because if we can learn to tolerate discomfort we gain strength in our minds. We learn not to shy away from things which are useful and skilful but maybe uncomfortable.

We find that we need less comfort in life, which can be very liberating. How much of our life have we spent chasing comfort and being afraid of pain? However, if we sit and feel out this pain we can discover that it is not really as bad as it might have seemed.

This is particularly so if we can divide the sense of the body, the mind and the pain as separate things using our mindfulness and awareness of the body.

Say we have a pain in the knee as we are sitting. We don’t want to sit through too much pain in the knees but at the beginning it is quite normal to have a bit of pain. Then we can become aware of the knee, the physical knee, the hardness of the bones of the knee. Feel that it is in a way underneath the pain. The pain kind of hovers and vibrates over it.

We become aware of these two things, we realize these are not the same. Then the mind starts to separate out these aspects

of things. And as the physical pain becomes clear we can also see clearly how if we start to become agitated or upset about that pain, how that is also different. Mind or emotions are different from that physical pain. All these things separate out. A bit like oil and water in a bottle – they don't mix, they separate out.

Sometimes the pain diminishes as a result, sometimes not. But there will be much more tolerance of it, there will be much less suffering. Note that pain and suffering are not the same thing. There can be a lot of pain and little suffering, or there can be little pain and a lot of suffering. These two things are not the same, they don't necessarily correlate with each other for different people or different kinds of problems. If we know what the problem is, that it is not harming us and so on, then there is little distress over it. After all, pain is a warning sign, it's calling us, we need to listen and work out if this is harming us or not. But if we are confident that as soon as we get up and walk away the pain will go away, then we are not harming ourselves, we can just learn to tolerate.

We can train the mind not to make a fuss over things that are all right. If we learn to tolerate discomfort in this way we can learn to tolerate all kinds of discomfort actually. To tolerate physical pain like this we can also tolerate painful states of mind the same way. Are we adding to them the way we might add to physical pain? Are we making more of it or making less of it, trying to make light of it in a skilful way or are we adding to it in some way? We don't really need to. We can tend to judge ourselves for doing this, but if we just see clearly what we are doing often this is enough to stop doing it.

As we begin to practise our experience of our self is fairly all mixed up – feelings and thoughts, physical and mental, it's all just one thing, one experience – "how I feel". Everything is mixed up with everything else. We don't have the discrimination between physical pain and mental pain, emotional pain and the body itself. Often the body to us is just a bunch of feelings,

we are not actually sensing the body itself – the weight of it, or the posture of it, or the movement of it.

We tend to lose perspective, we get focused in on the pain, grasping at it. We can make it worse like that, and then, by tightening around it so often it is not helpful to focus on it. If we instead can open the mind around pain then often this is the first step, to relax around it and open the mind around it.

I myself am somebody who have experienced quite a lot of pain, I have had a lot of back problems and injuries over the years. From building work and very heavy physical work – so I talk from a bit of experience on this, not just from ideas.

This has worked for me and when the mind becomes very steady through meditation then this can also be of great benefit when we are in physical pain – the mind can remain steady.

Restlessness

"The restlessness is a superficial thing and underneath is often an underlying anxiety."

The first thing to note here is how the Buddha associates restlessness and anxiety together – a single hindrance. And very often it's the restlessness we will notice, that the mind is agitated and can't settle down. Particularly if we are meditators. "Oh, yes the mind is not very peaceful".

However sometimes we can miss the anxiety. That is often a little deeper. The restlessness is a superficial thing and underneath is often an underlying anxiety. We are somehow unsettled about a situation. This can stir us up to be restless and we end up going into activity. Sometimes it is not really related to the source of the anxiety. We often busy ourselves through anxiety, yet we are not busying ourselves doing what we need to do to relieve that anxiety.

In formal meditation, concentration practice is extremely useful with this. Just to sit for a while, to be still, or to lie down. Lying down meditation can be good when we are restless. Just to be still, and to watch and try to see underneath that restlessness. It is the same as with anger. That if we are feeling angry, then we are just still and watch to see what's really underneath this. Its the same with restlessness – often there is an anxiety or unsettledness for some reason. We are not able to settle with something or somewhere, for some reason.

Take a monastic example; if a monk is restless, then he maybe needs to study the rules, regulations and ways that things operate in the place that he is in to feel more settled with the place. Or go somewhere else. Often a decision needs to be made. Perhaps an awkward decision, not an easy decision, but it needs to be made.

Often when we are restless we are moving away from something that we find difficult or unpleasant. Rather than pushing against it or acting against, with anger or ill-will, then we are tending to keep trying to move away from it, rather than really examine. So to be still and examine, go beneath the surface, is often what is required. Find out what's going on.

Or sometimes we can just get into a spin, and just stopping is enough.

Physical exercise can also be a useful thing, work off some of our physical energy. If it is done with a positive attitude, not trying to get rid of the restlessness but use the energy of it. Not seeing the restlessness negatively either, but just as physical energy. What this requires is seeing body and mind a little more separately from each other. It's like a trick, it's like working indirectly at the difficulty. If mentally restless and agitated – then we just tire the body. To help us to stop, slow down.

So a few suggestions there on working with restlessness and its associated anxiety.

Keeping The Thread

Direct Knowledge

"In fact it is more possible, for us as human beings, to get an objective view of the mind than an objective view of the stars or mathematics or anything else."

I thought I would say a little bit about the difference between scientific knowledge or way of knowing, and spiritual knowledge or way of knowing.

In science there's a difference between subjective and objective knowledge – the knowledge that we obtain through the senses as human beings and the objective knowledge of science; objective in the sense of a truth that is beyond the view of any individual and has an independent standing.

In science the second is considered the higher, it's the higher bridge to make. However there tends to be a subjective element to our human enquiry in science which is hard to eradicate. When we are looking through a telescope at the stars, mapping the movements of the stars, then there's still a human eye looking through the telescope. Human error creeps in, subjectivity creeps into the science. Science has never really overcome this flaw, or crossed this bridge to something that is truly, completely objective. There's always the element of the way that a human being would interpret or see these facts. When these facts really come home to us, we see our biases one way or another.

Then what is an objective view of the mind? How do we get an objective view of the mind – the most subjective thing of all? This is a very difficult thing.

The Buddha would say this is possible, in fact more possible, for us as human beings, to get an objective view of the mind than an objective view of the stars or mathematics or

anything else. We can know more clearly, more directly, our own states of mind than we can other things. We know about other things, we know about this, we know about that. But the thing that we know most directly is our own mind. We can be very clear about that.

If we clearly see and label a state of mind then there's a certain brightening that happens in the mind. We see that brightening – "Oh yes, there we are. That's right." We can begin to trust that. Trust that we can see clearly one mind state from another. It's kind of intuition.

Not a mysterious kind of intuition but a very clear one. We can see the difference between a wholesome and an unwholesome mind state, they are different animals. As we go on in the practice we see more and more clearly how these two things operate in completely different ways to each other. How wholesome mind states will tend to be very open, bright and clear in character. Unwholesome mind states tend to be cramped, dark and contracting.

The brightness or darkness of our own hearts can become very apparent to us. We are no longer entering into a moralistic or judgemental world to see clearly for ourselves the results of our own thoughts or actions. Our mind becomes brighter or darker. More still or peaceful, or more agitated. Wholesome mind states leads to a mind which is open, still, peaceful, calm and bright. Unwholesome mind states leads to suffering and agitation, are unclear, never clear, and we never really find them, illusive, dark and spooky. Often the idea of the world of magic is one thought of as spooky, dark, mysterious and dangerous. And this is what unwholesome mind states are like – spooky, dark, mysterious, hard to find, hard to reveal.

But they tend to be revealed by wholesome mind states, revealed by the open, bright, wholesome mind states, outshone by them. We also see how the forces of good overcome the forces of evil in the mind. The brightness of a wholesome mind state naturally dispels the darkness of an unwholesome one.

It's gone, not seemingly suppressed by some kind of trick of the mind creating a sense of "these dark forces hidden away" and the unconscious, the deep, dark, spooky, powerful unconscious, the dark mind that is illusive and throws up smoke screens at us.

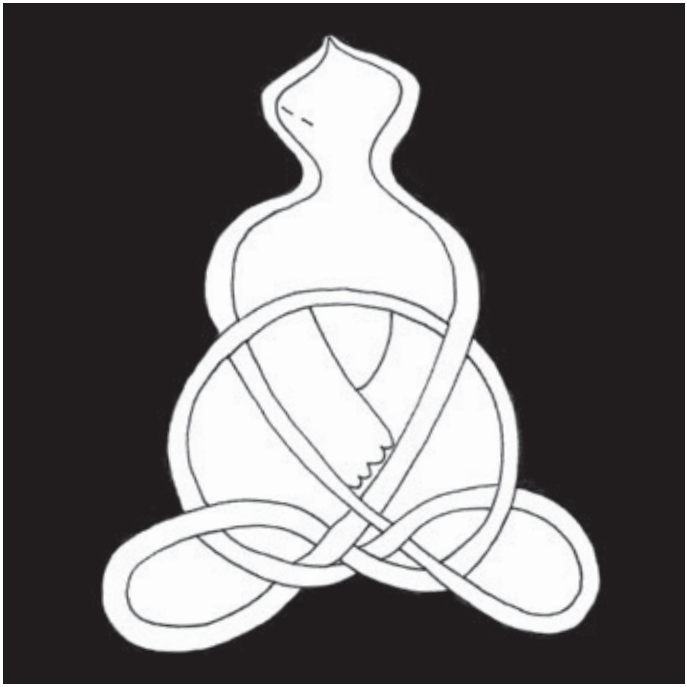
We also notice how as we go on as practitioners we begin to talk in a more impersonal way about these things. We see them as dark forces but it's not really to put these things inside or outside of us. Instead just to talk in a more objective way about states of mind, how the forces of Mara the tempter come and lead us astray one way or another. How this manifests as dark, smoky states of mind that trick us, cover things over, prevent us from seeing the truth. The bright mind as the opposite – open, seeing something clearly, the way it is and dispelling the darkness - in particular seeing clearly in relation to the body.

In psychological terms we can say that the kilesas or the dark side of the mind, the unwholesome side of the mind, can look very benevolent like a defence mechanism. We have these defence mechanisms that prevent us from seeing our own mortality, psychologists would say. This can seem very benevolent. If the impermanence of the body was such bad news then we could think "Oh, this is the mind being very benevolent to us, hiding this terrible fact from us". And yet the reality is not like that. The wholesome mind sees the impermanence of the body and at the same time it sees that the mind is not that, the body is not self.

In a way maybe the unwholesome forces of the mind are trying to be benevolent and hide something from us that they think that we can't see, shouldn't see, that would destroy us. And yet if we see the realities of the body, the impermanence of the body, it doesn't destroy us, it liberates us. The opposite really.

If we begin to understand this, we can see these states of mind as tricksters. Not that they are defending us from something that we can't face up to. They are tricking us into seeing things in a way that they're not. They trick us to not see the impermanence of the body, to not be able to see our own mortality.

Yet this seeing can be the most beautiful thing. Often when you meet people who have had a terminal diagnosis, then either it destroys them or makes their life, wakes them up to Dhamma even. They live in a much more full way and if they see clearly, then they are not afraid of death.



Really Knowing

"Both as a source of wisdom but also as a refuge."

Our ultimate refuge in Buddhist practice we can call "the one who knows". Sati-paññā is the Pāli term, mindfulness and wisdom. In Buddhist terms, this is the ultimate cure for suffering, the end of suffering. Mindfulness and wisdom together, not just mindfulness but wise mindfulness, the right kind of mindfulness, not just awareness in the present, but the right kind of awareness in the present, how do we develop this?

It's not a complicated but a very natural thing. It's knowingness, which arises out of staying with what we know. What we know is the state of our own minds. It's what we know directly. All the things we know through our senses we know indirectly. They change and are rather uncertain. We know about these things but we don't know anything for sure. Whereas the state of our minds, we know this also changes but we know this for sure.

If we are meditating and notice something arising in our minds, say anxiety is arising, and we notice correctly "Oh, this is anxiety", then there will be a little brightening of the mind, right there. If we practice this a while there will be a little brightening of the mind, a little knowingness arising, right there. Then that's right, it is anxiety.

The Satipaṭṭhāna-sutta, the most important of all the suttas, lists all these things that we can know. The body, feeling – pleasant, unpleasant or neutral, physical and mental – and then the mind, the mind itself, the state of the mind itself, contents of the mind, thoughts. These are things that we can know directly, without any doubt. If these are the main things we direct our minds at then we would naturally develop this knowingness.

If our minds are centred on these things, on the things of the mind, then we will develop this kind of knowingness. This happens gradually over the years of practice – we develop a knowingness in our minds that we can become aware of.

We know when we know, we know when we don't know. It's much more simple than it sounds in one sense but it's also quite difficult to do. Our nature is that we like to speculate, rather than to just be aware. Rather than to just simply know.

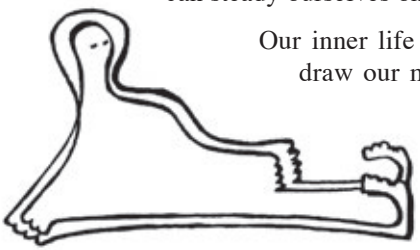
"A feeling is a feeling", or "a thought is a thought". It's so simple it's difficult to do, to not proliferate. The mind has a proliferating nature. Desire drives this proliferating nature. We tend to proliferate around everything. Particularly feeling – we can just note it, "Oh, this is pleasant feeling arising and ceasing" but we get carried away with it. Or we don't note what is unpleasant feeling arising and ceasing because we tend to want to get away from it.

We are reactive rather than responsive to these things. Actually it's perfectly ok to respond, all our reactions are made redundant by our responsiveness. That's mindfulness.

As we continue to be aware of these things certain characteristics will come to mind, we will notice certain things about all of these phenomena, the thoughts and feelings. We will notice how they are unstable and uncertain, their changing nature. How our bodies are uncertain, of a changing nature. How we can't hang on to these things.

Because of that we become less enchanted by them, we just see them as transitory phenomena and we become more interested in the mind that is aware of them – the stability of the mind, the stability of awareness itself, of the knowingness itself.

When we become aware of this knowingness we can steady ourselves on it.



Our inner life is one that will tend to draw our minds out of the present moment and into past and future. If we can be aware of our inner life and yet remain steadily

anchored in the present moment then we will become aware of this steadiness.

Clearly seeing and knowing our mental and emotional phenomena we will come to know the one who knows, and this is the refuge. The essence of this knowingness is a transcendent state, transcendent element to the mind. It's not pushed around.

I first really discovered this, years ago when I have had a long retreat, a very good meditation retreat. Just after that retreat I hurt my back very, very badly indeed. I was in agony for many days, could find no rest from it. And yet, this knowingness, the knowing element of the mind remained steady throughout that experience when I could contact it. Then I found myself working very hard to sustain my mindfulness and wisdom to keep awake and aware, to keep the knowingness going. Because the essence of that, the knowingness, the knowing quality in and of itself, was beyond the pain.

I wouldn't have wished for that experience in any way at all – I didn't know pain like that existed. Quite a serious injury it taught me a lot, it gave me a lot of faith in this particular element of the mind both as a source of wisdom but also as a refuge.

Dependant Origination

"What is born dies, what is not born doesn't die"

When the Buddha was asked to explain his view of the world, the way things operate, he described it according to dependent origination. Which he said is the middle way between the two views of Eternalism and Materialism.

In the modern world then the Materialist view is the predominant one. People will believe that the mind is dependent upon the body and brain which perhaps is the most important application of the material view in spiritual terms. It's an epiphenomenon of the brain, the activity of the brain. When the brain comes into being, then the mind comes into being. And when the brain dies, the mind dies. This is the Materialist view.

And this would be opposed by the Eternalist view which would say that the mind is independent of the body, or independent of the brain. There is an essence to it that is independent. There is something that doesn't die.

First view, Materialism: something is born, something dies. The second view, Eternalism: there is something, an essence, that doesn't die. Something that is born that doesn't die.

And dependent origination can be described as what is born dies, what is not born doesn't die. What arises, ceases. What doesn't arise, doesn't cease. What enters the world, then ceases or dies, passes away. What doesn't enter into the world in the first place, doesn't and that there is such a thing – the unborn, the uncreated, that which doesn't enter into the world, that which isn't born.

The theory or the observation, the description of the world of dependent origination then, when we look at it, we can see that this is a kind of psychological theory or view of things. It is a view in which the mind is the predominant thing, talking about the mind and how the mind is born into one body after another, reincarnation according to cause and effect.

The mundane view of dependent origination is that we get born according to our kamma. Our birth is according to our kamma. This is very similar to other religions – that if we do good we go to heaven, if we don't we go to a lower realm. And we can see this in terms of when we do good we feel happy, when we don't we feel miserable, full of regret.

It acts on this level but it also acts on an existential level. It's a matter of the whole mechanism of being born. It's almost like a psychological description of what being born is about. And that a mind that doesn't see clearly, in that kind of mind, there will be worldly needs and values, or what we might call "habitual drives" will be present in that mind. They have been present there for a very long time and these the Buddha called sankhārās. These draw the mind into the senses, draws the mind out after the things of the senses, these natural drives which the materialist view would see as wired in, wired in biological inheritance. These draw the mind into the senses and then because of this the senses arise dependent upon the body.

And therefore a body comes into being. A body that feels pleasure and pain. It's our drive toward feeling pleasure and avoiding pain, this craving that is the cause of rebirth. We are looking for pleasant feeling. The mind is looking for pleasant feeling. And therefore it gets born into something that feels. A feeling kind of being. Or we could say it's a creator of it. Or we could say that these two depend on each other. The mind and the body are interdependent upon each other. Not that one is dominant upon the other.

Having been born into a body we have to get old, sick, and die. What we gain, we lose. It's all impermanent, the whole shooting match. This is what many of us would see as inevitable, as "this is life". And yet the Buddha says that there is another alternative – that all this can cease, can be let go of. We can enter into a different kind of existence altogether. And not just when we die, but while we are still living. This is a kind of consciousness which isn't attached to or dependent on the things of the senses.

Therefore it is not dependent upon the body. The mind is not drawn out into the senses, sense-consciousness or viññāna doesn't come into being. Instead it's a more open consciousness that is not attached to the body. The heart opens into space rather than being attached to the things of the senses or clinging to the things of the senses. There is not a closing or grasping focus in the mind, the mind is open and bright. Feelings are different. Feelings are of opening rather than fondling and delighting in things of the senses. Feelings of letting go.

This is the reverse of dependent origination – the letting go cycle. Where we see into the nature of things, we see the unsatisfactory nature of things. We have a different perception of the world which biology wouldn't recognize. It wouldn't recognize that we can change our perceptions and therefore change our habitual drives. Transform this system that seems to be hard wired. Our desires that seem to be wired in can be transformed by a different perception of things. The whole system goes cool. It was kind of running hot before, on the passions, but the whole, same system can run cool.

The mind isn't drawn out, the mind remains at the heart. It can open outwards, extend outwards, not pulled out. This is a mind that is free. Attachment is a kind of bondage, dependence upon things, and detachment is already freedom. Not withdrawal but letting go, letting go of things. Seeing things as impermanent and therefore unsatisfactory and not self.

This is where we go in the practice, we go from solid things, coarse, physical, material things, related to the body, and we go more towards things of the heart – light and space and brightness and these things. And yet we have to be careful because this as well can be deceptive. We can think that when our mind becomes at one with space or one with the present moment, bright and

spacious in the present moment, this is already detachment but it's not. It's just the mind being aware of space, attachment to space, rather than a letting go. Letting go has to be even of space, completely non-discriminative, letting go of everything. It's a kind of all or nothing teaching really, the Buddha's teaching. It's like we are either going for everything or we are not going for anything.

But this isn't annihilation, this doesn't mean that somehow consciousness is annihilated, it's not. It just remains in a detached state from phenomena. The nature of consciousness is that it arises dependent on an object, all consciousness does this and enlightened consciousness is no different. It's an independent state but it's not a withdrawn state. It's in the world but not of the world.

Mystical or Psychological

"The discrimination that we need to make is between wholesome and unwholesome"

Coming here it can be interesting but also at times quite challenging to be living in a Buddhist community which is a mixture of east and west. People tend to see things in quite different ways.

One of the ways in which these trends can present themselves is that a western practitioner will often see the things of their mind as all arising from within. They have a psychological view of what's happening. Something comes to them then it's either a benevolent force in their own mind or a malevolent one.

Often the Asian practitioners are different to this. They will tend to see certain things that come to them as outside of themselves. They see something inside, usually, more often then they'll see it as outside of themselves, an externalizing rationale. Compared to the western internalizing rationale of our mental or emotional world.

An Asian practitioner will be terrified of going into the forest because they'll be frightened that ghosts will come. Whereas a westerner would feel afraid that they would just be overcome by their own stuff, they can't face their own stuff. Just being on their own, day after day. They start to get lost in their own inner imagination, lose track a bit of reality. A deluded mind state. Whereas an Asian person will tend to talk about visits from ghosts or benevolent spirits and so on.

These two views conflict with each other but actually the conflicts are minor and rare. People are not really talking on this level with each other. If they do it can, in my eyes, be quite sad because we don't really need to rationalize on this level. It's not necessary.

Ajahn Chah said the same. Somebody asked him "All these things that come to me, are they in my mind or do they come

from somewhere else?" He said, "Craving wants to know the answer to that question". In other words: we don't really need to know as practitioners. We may want to know, the craving may want to know - "Is this something special or different or exotic or is this just my mind?" We may want to know for various reasons but as practitioners we don't need to know. We have to restrain all this speculation.

The discrimination that we need to make is between wholesome and unwholesome. "Is this something that's benevolent, does it lead to wholesome mind states, benevolent mind states, kindness and care and love and all these good things?" Or does it lead to fear, hatred or greed or what's the result? What's coming to us and what character does it have and what's the result? It's very pragmatic, the teaching, in this respect.

And yet it's true if we go on and become experienced practitioners, that in the long run, the nature of these experiences will reveal itself to us. We will know whether something is imagined or not. Whether we experience it in our imagination or not when a Deva walks into the room and sits down.

These things will sort themselves out in the long run. When our practice goes deep enough then the mind will sort itself out in this respect. We don't need to try and sort it out, try to discriminate. It'll all become obvious in time. Often the advice of the teachers is "Just keep going. If something good happens it's a good sign, keep going in that direction, it's like a sign post. If something bad happens then turn and go the other way."

But either way often the advice if anything happens is to just keep with the meditation object, that's where our refuge is. That's one of the reasons why we have one. Things can overwhelm us otherwise, take the mind over. We attempt to keep the meditation object going, keep turning to it to calm our minds.

If the mind becomes calm then it is no longer creating anything. The mind is very peaceful, still and there is no creation within the mind. There is no imagination. Often if we calm our minds, then we will see. For a start we can see the suffering of this realm of imagination. How fleeting and how hard to sustain these things can be. But also we will see the difference, very clearly right there, when the mind is still. There's no creative energy really in itself. No heat. It's cooled down, chilled out.

We can watch our minds, can't we? And we might be getting a bit hot about something. In Buddhist practice we are not really looking to get hot about anything at all. We end up shooting ourselves in the foot if we do. If the mind is getting very peaceful and enter into a lovely state, if we then get passionate or excited about this, we spoil it.

Just to emphasize: the discrimination that we need to make as Buddhist practitioners are not so much psychological as moral. Or not so analytical. It's a very simple division between wholesome and unwholesome, suffering and non-suffering. This is what we are following. Skilful or unskilful. We follow this for long enough and well enough, then all other distinctions, all other things will become clear to us. There won't be this kind of doubting and confusion.

Taking Study Beyond the Intellect

"What is knowing? What do I really know?"

For some people study can become a very important aspect. It's not been something that's been central to my monastic life or myself. Although I did read a lot when I was a junior monk, I read all the suttas.

People who are very accomplished scholars can indeed be wonderful people to have around. They can tell you what the Buddha would have to say about all kinds of things. What would the Buddha say about this? Or what would the Buddha say about that? They can be thinking "Oh, yes well, the Buddha would say this about this or that about that." This is incredibly useful, isn't it? And yet it can also lead to conceit, can't it? The person can be very conceited or this whole area of study can become conceited unless it is put in perspective.

In Thailand it's clear that study is seen as very valuable, there are whole Buddhist universities. And yet there seems to be a higher source of wisdom gained through meditation. The way it would go is that the great monks would practise meditation very diligently and then go to discuss the results of their practice with the scholars. Then they could be clear about exactly what they had experienced. Right down to getting all the Pāli right and everything.

Or some of the great monks as well, they studied before they practised and realized "right now I know what I'm doing, I know why I'm doing what I'm doing", and they gained tremendous faith. But they realized they needed to go beyond the intellect, deeper than that. So they would turn to the meditation. Yet the wisdom of study was always there to inform their actions and keep them out of trouble.

But in the longer term we can see that we can develop the Buddha's eyes for ourselves. We won't need the books any more because we can see. It's possible to be able to see the

way the Buddha saw – for the wisdom of the Buddha to arise in our own minds. This is the deeper practice.

It's a wonderful thing that we can see with the same eyes and come up with the same teaching. The Buddha is describing nature, the nature of material things and also the nature of the mind. We can potentially see all of this for ourselves.

Seeing is believing whereas the other way around, believing is never seeing. We can read all the scriptures, we can have it all down, believe everything, be completely convinced on an intellectual level and yet we still won't see in that way. We can still not be liberated by that understanding. We'll be a very clear person, have a lot of concepts and virtue that we can apply to our lives – virtue and convention. And yet we won't be free from suffering. We can suffer a lot actually, if we have all those ideas and the way of seeing isn't matching those ideas. These ideas can become standards and things that cause views that we can make ourselves trouble with. We differ with other people's views or we end up having high standards that either we can't keep or we want to try and impose on others.

In terms of what we can study there are some parts of the Buddha's teaching that can draw us in and we try to apply the intellect but we don't get very far - with something like samādhi for example. We can study all the states of samādhi yet if we've never experienced samādhi it's all a bit futile. It's like studying parachute jumping and never jumping out of an aeroplane. Describe how amazing it will be, write a thesis on what it's like to jump out of an aeroplane and never jump out of one.

These are areas which end up being rather futile to study, actually counter-productive – if we know about all the states of samādhi we can just want them all and enter into meditation practice with a lot of craving, expectation or preconceptions.

And yet, there are other areas of practice which can be productive to study. One that I like is Luang Por Paññāvaddho's example. Actually I didn't know this but I ended up studying the same way that the great Luang Por Paññāvaddho, disciple

of Luang Ta Maha Boowa studied. And the question he posed himself and I posed myself was "What do I know and how do I know it?" or "what do I really know and how do I know it?" This is the area of Ontology and Epistemology in philosophical terms, if you want the technical words, but this is something that we can really bring alive for ourselves. What is knowing? What do I really know? And doing this in an open way, like Luang Por Paññāvaddho, we can immediately conclude "Ok, well I don't know the world. What I know is sights, sound, taste, touch, ideas, thoughts and feelings. This is what I know but I don't know the world," were the first conclusions he came to and me the same.

If you want to dip into a Buddhist subject, with a bit more material there to work with, then dependent origination is a very interesting one, the Buddhist theory of the relationship between body and mind essentially. In the Tibetan tradition they study this for years. It's a kind of intellectual study that ends up taking you beyond the intellect. To some degree we can understand this with the intellect, rebirth and all the rest. We can understand what the Buddha's theory is on all this and then we can try to bring that alive for ourselves.

What does this mean in terms of our moment by moment experience? Ajahn Buddhadāsa in Thailand was a revolutionary teacher in this respect – the first person in Thai Buddhism to suggest and explain a way of observing dependent origination in the present moment. Seeing the forces of becoming in the present moment, for example, Buddhists talk about "I really got born into this one". This kind of phrase can come out of an appreciation of dependent origination in the present. And yet we also have to accept the law of kamma, from one life to another.

People try to put the two theories against each other. They have the life by life theory of dependent origination and then a moment by moment one and there are people who argue about which is right, which I think is silly because they can both be right. I don't think Ajahn Buddhadāsa was contradicting the life by life reincarnation version of dependent origination with his moment by moment one. But people can pick it up that way.

Dependent origination is a cycle of birth and death, birth and death, over and over. Suffering, arising and ceasing, arising and ceasing, over and over. If we don't understand dependent arising, the way things come about, then we also don't understand dependent cessation, which doesn't mean the way things end. This is a very, very common misunderstanding.

Cessation or nirodha in Pāli does not mean "ending" it means "to not arise in the first place". Therefore my understanding of the final goal of the practice isn't just to watch things arise and cease and say "Oh yes, there it goes. There is arising and then there is ceasing. There is nirodha". That's not nirodha. Nirodha means non-arising. Practice is a way towards non-arising of suffering. Our stuff doesn't come up in the first place. Not the mere ending of it and then another beginning.

I would suggest starting off studying it with those perspectives. Don't start studying it with the common misunderstandings already in place. Otherwise it's going to take you in the wrong direction.

Every End is a New Beginning

The Nature of Consciousness

"Calm perception, calm mind."

I'd like to say a little bit more about the nature of consciousness. Particularly in regard to whether consciousness is an individual thing or whether we are all separate beings. If we are separate consciousnesses or whether there is any coming together of these different minds or consciousnesses.

There are different ways in which a consciousness of one person can affect the consciousness of another and this can show us about the nature of consciousness, what it is, full stop. So, a few of these then we all know about – one mind can affect another through body, speech and mind. Through acts of body, physical contact through the body, physical feeling – pleasant or unpleasant and then mental feeling pleasant or unpleasant, we can elicit in each other. Now I can say something that pleases you and you have a pleasant mental feeling or I say something that upsets you and you have an unpleasant mental feeling. This all happens through conditionality rather than causality actually. It's not inevitable that that happens because if I were to say one thing to one person then they would have one reaction. Say the same thing to a different person and they would have a different reaction, or no reaction. And why is this?

Well, all these feelings depend on perception. Perception is the thing that forms feelings. If we have a pleasant perception of something then we'll have a pleasant feeling on the mental realm. If we have an unpleasant perception of something then we have an unpleasant feeling. This is the mental realm of feeling.

We can have some control of this if we have control of our perceptions, the underlying perceptions and attitudes. Then we are no longer just at the mercy of others. We can also affect others in a very strong way if we can form powerful perceptions. And this is what advertising spend millions and millions of pounds on – designing very powerful perceptions

or saññā. And these perceptions can become very much collective perceptions. They can be a cultural perception, a cultural perception of what's beautiful, say. One culture will have a perception of what a beautiful woman looks like, then everybody will see a woman that looks like that as beautiful. And a woman who doesn't look like that is not beautiful.

This is how collective consciousness forms - it's working through this mechanism of perception. So there can be somebody there who has a different perception of the whole thing and has a different reaction all together.

Through feeling and perception it can seem that one mind affects another but this is in an indirect way, not in a direct way. Of course physically we can directly affect each other, body to body. But through speech and mind, through the mental realm, then this is indirect. So there's always an element of interpretation here and we see how therapists try to get into the minds of their patients through this kind of methods of analysis and so on – through trying to see like them.

In my eyes, the way a good therapist can work is they're trying to see things in the way that the patient is seeing them. And then they will have the same kind of feelings and they can empathize. They have the same perception, they get an idea and some sense of how a person is seeing something, then they can empathize.

A monk can be different from that, a monk is out to see things clearly, calmly and then to present that perception. If somebody can see the same thing in the same way then that will similarly calm their mind. Calm perception, calm mind.

It's only when we get beyond this realm of feeling, perception and thought; see through speech and ideas. It's only when we get past these that we get into a truly communal consciousness, one that's direct and one in which minds are truly coming together, our hearts are truly coming together. Before this then

there's always this indirect effect which leaves one a bit in the dark. It's like being a bit in the dark about everything. We have our own perceptions and feelings and always fishing around to find out what other peoples' are.

We can even be a bit in the dark about our own perceptions and we don't see how we're seeing things until something happens that reveals what our perceptions are. It arises through inference. We see these movements of the mind through their tracks, it's like tracking a wild beast or something, tracking the unconscious. The models of psychology that have attempted to work on these levels then – they're working with interpretation of dreams and so on, like tracking something in the darkness.

And yet, there is a different world to this which comes about when the mind loses its attachment to the senses. Then a different world arises altogether in which there can be a true meeting of minds, one to another and a direct effect, a positive effect, of one mind upon another.

There's a kind of overlap here between this realm and the previous one of feelings and perceptions which in the west we would call the psychic realm. There it can be possible for one person to directly affect the mind of another through some kind of psychic ability. Say things like voodoo. Very scary, maybe people will find this very scary because they can see that somebody can have a direct effect on their mind. There's a tremendous power there, isn't there, both for good and for evil.

So if the power of the concentrated mind ends up mixed with the things of the senses, feelings and perceptions, this is a real mess. But one we can trust is the one who has let go of the things of the senses. The mind that doesn't have attachment to the things of the senses, that's free. This enters us into the world of Dhamma.

You know, a force like mettā or mettā-bhāvanā, is a real palpable thing. My teacher, Ajahn Anan, he went to one of the big aquariums in Australia. I wasn't there unfortunately to see

this but apparently what happened was that he put his hand up against this huge great plate glass window. This massive tank full of fish and sharks even, I think, big fish of one kind or another. And when he put his hand up against the glass then everything was coming to his hand. In fact the stingrays were even coming off the bottom of this huge tank. Other people were trying this and everything was running away. To Ajahn Anan's hand they were all coming, this is because he was spreading mettā, loving-kindness.

Some people would say "Oh, yes there's this benevolent energy that he is emanating", but it could be deceptive to start talking about an energy. Then it sounds like we are talking about something real and physical and mechanical but we're not. This is a thing of the mind. At this level the mind is no longer a material thing. It's conjoined to space. A mind of mettā is conjoined to space, united with space, entered into a certain kind of space. All the brahma-vihāras are like this: mettā (loving-kindness), karunā (compassion), muditā (sympathetic joy), upekkhā (acceptance). They culminate in the mind becoming one with a certain kind of space, very bright and expansive spaces.

And this has a direct effect on this same space within another being or attracts another being. This is the realm purely of the mind. It's a very difficult one to talk about because English just doesn't have the vocabulary to talk about these things, we have a kind of mechanistic and material vocabulary.

It's also very hard to talk about these things in a way that doesn't become confusing or scary. But these things are neither confusing nor scary. And you can't confuse these kinds of experiences with any other kind of experience either, they are completely different. People might fish around for "have I ever had this kind of experience or not?" If they're fishing around like that, then they haven't because these kinds of experiences are novel and completely different from the normal, unmistakable.

And reality is very much still reality, everything is perfectly normal so to speak and yet there is something extra, an added dimension to the whole thing. This isn't a kind of scary, unpredictable realm; this is just seeing an additional dimension. Not one that distorts the original dimension but just adds to it.

Still there's the mind and then there's the object. The mind is conjoined with space so this is still a mind that is dependent upon that space or that object. Not yet completely released, detached. But this attachment is on an extremely subtle, refined level. There is something that is very materially subtle and refined and long-lasting. These states last a very long time and beings who have these kind of states happening live a very, very long time. Devas, the Buddha would say, live for aeons. They are kind of made of mettā, or made of karunā, this kind of thing, but not immortal.

Then there is the deathless, consciousness that has gone beyond birth and death. One that is detached through realization, through seeing the four noble truths, through seeing the suffering of things, the impermanence of them, seeing the suffering of them and having let go and yet not having withdrawn.

This is the mind going cool, very cool and yet not cold. It's the ultimate chill, you might say. And the Buddha wouldn't describe this. People would say "Well, what was the nature of that consciousness?" He would describe the nature of the others: having been conjoined with the body or feeling or space. But if you would try to draw him on "what is the nature of that consciousness?" the only thing he would say about it is that it's not-self.

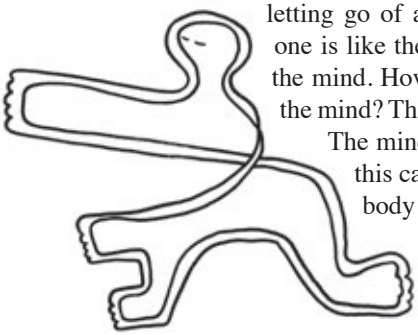
People get very confused about this one but this is making a distinction that would have existed at the time. A good meditator could enter into some kind of space through their samādhi and then they would think that that is it, that's the ultimate, that's the independent state. But it's not. The only thing that distinguishes the ultimate state from that state is that there is no sense of self in it.

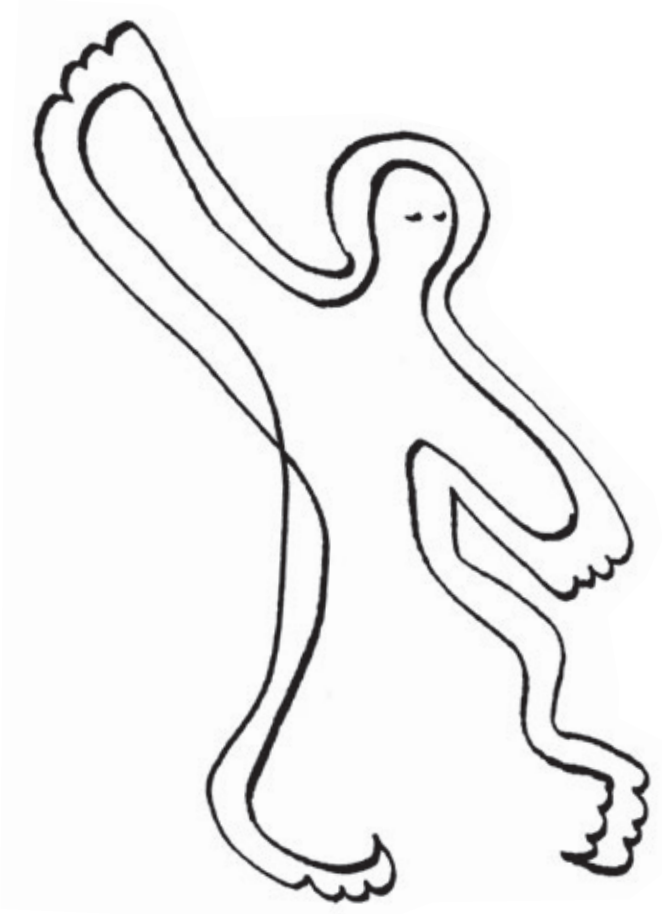
So this term of anattā was a way of pointing at that. We see that with some people he won't be drawn on this at all, he wouldn't give an answer. Maybe these were people who hadn't experienced the samādhi, so to them it would just be confusing. It's an unnecessary distinction to try to make. Yet, for people who had then this was a distinction that needed to be made. Because they may think that they already arrived at an eternal, immortal consciousness when in fact they hadn't. They had a mind that had become conjoined to something very refined.

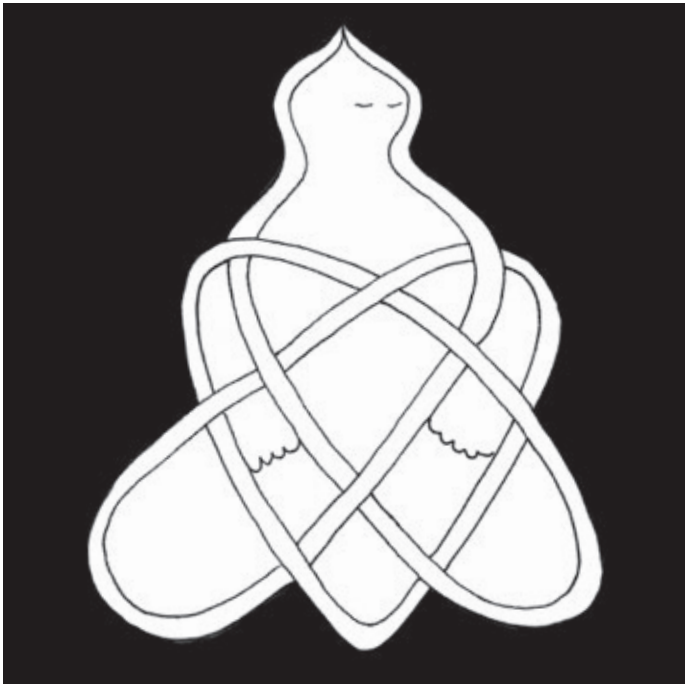
He clearly lays out how we seek this deathless consciousness but he doesn't describe what it is, its nature. He just says "there is an unborn, an uncreated and unformed and this is how you get to it". And this type of consciousness is characterized by this lack of sense of self, which doesn't mean that it is annihilation either. Just that there is no sense of self there.

The way one seeks this is if we see the mortality of the body clearly, we see death, then we can see the deathless. The impermanence of the body, that's the key, within this bright, clear and light mind. That's what cools it out. That's where we can find this detachment which is why physical form is a good place to be, a human life. This is why all enlightened beings, all Buddhas, have been born into human existences because it's in letting go of this material body that we realize.

It's very clear isn't it? Letting go of a material body, whereas letting go of an immaterial or ethereal one is like the mind trying to let go of the mind. How does the mind let go of the mind? This is a difficult thing to do. The mind letting go of the body – this can be done. And to see the body as impermanent and not-self, this can be done. And this is the way.







Detachment as Wisdom and Compassion Together

"A dance of detachment"

Another way in which we can talk about detachment is the perfect balance between wisdom and compassion. This is detachment in stereo: A wisdom that draws away and a compassion that is drawn towards. The perfect balance, I would suggest, leads to the quality of detachment.

When the mind sees the impermanence of things then there's a natural drawing away. There can also be compassion at the same time, naturally will be, if the seeing is absolutely right – perfect sight.

As we go on in the practice we can watch how our minds can get carried away with wisdom or carried away with compassion. One can lead and then the other one leads. We go out of whack. If we get it right then we keep them together. We see the mind going one way and then we balance it out, or it balances itself out.

Sometimes it can be the discussion or the verbalization, the expression of these qualities, that can be deceptive. We start talking in a wisdom way about things and the compassion element may not be necessarily so obvious. Similarly we talk in a way of compassion and the wisdom element may not be so evident. This can be a limitation of language – that one moment our minds can sound wise, then another moment our minds can sound compassionate and often we are trying to express the combination, the blending of the two. Then what we say is something that swings between one and the other. Say something of the wisdom faculty and then we want to balance that or soften it or point out the application of it, towards compassion.

True compassion is the application of wisdom. Compassion can be worldly – tainted with attachment or indulgence, or compassion that isn't – compassion that is clear and strong, that is neither indulgent, stingy nor hard.

As we go along the path then it's like "left, right, left, right" walking on the path. Left is wisdom, right is compassion. If we are getting it wrong it can feel like we are hopping along with a lot of effort to keep it going. Like there's something not right here. All of the sudden we might think we are getting it right but it turns into a lot of effort. We're just hopping along with wisdom or hopping along with compassion.

When the two come together then we can be really striding but when the mind is too conjoined with speech or thought, a discursive mind, then it's going to keep whacking one side to another, one expression to another. This is one way in which silence and getting beyond words and intellect is important. It's extremely hard to express the combination between the two. One can maybe try to blend these two together in art or poetry, head and heart. Perhaps a good poem is an example of the perfect blend but this is a crude analogy, wisdom isn't just in the head or about thinking. This is a limited view of what wisdom is.

We can think that compassion doesn't involve thinking but this is a limited view of what compassion is, or can be. Perhaps we can see how, as time goes on, we can find some way of bringing head and heart together. Good enough to look at it this way. Rationality and a feeling response coming right together we are thinking equally of ourselves and others, say.

Also at times it can be quite useful to be provocative, to challenge ourselves one way or the other, to challenge our preconceptions or way of seeing things – with a very cuttingly wise response or a very all-embracing loving response. This can be the way to cut through, if one does fall one way or the other. If our compassion is becoming tainted with desire or attachment a very clear cutting through with wisdom can work

even if we don't really mean it, even if it is just inside. Like "It doesn't really matter, it's not really important. What ultimate importance is this?" As an inner response it can be very helpful despite the fact that it won't change our caring.

In some ways the Dhamma is a very internal thing, we reflect on impermanence or the impersonal nature of things. This is a very internal thing but when this is applied then we are looking for more than that, we are still looking for permanence. It's actually in looking for permanence that we discover impermanence.

This is another way in which the balance can show itself. Out of compassion for ourselves we are looking for permanence and looking for the deathless, looking for a way out of old age, sickness and death. Then it's the wisdom that lets go and the compassion that stays with. We are seeing old age, sickness and death with wisdom and responding to it with compassion. Then compassion and wisdom are going in the same direction. Otherwise it can seem like they are going in different directions. But they are not going in different directions. It's not a matter of one holding on and the other letting go. They are going in the same direction, in the direction of detachment.

A mind of detachment is a mind independent already if it is not clinging. The Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta speaks of the mind that is independent, not clinging to anything in the world. Not clinging is already independence, stability. We don't need to go further than this. We won't wish to if there is still compassion in the mind then there won't be a wanting to withdraw, but instead a wanting to help.

It's only the looking at things with unwise attention that draws us into attachment and dependence and then old age, sickness and death. While looking on with wisdom and compassion doesn't do this. The mind remains detached in this middle state, not withdrawing and not attaching.

Maybe we can practice by keeping on reflecting on this. This is the key word in the teaching – detachment. Keep reflecting on detachment, what that means. How is it a middle way? Where is it in a given situation or a given relationship with things? Where is detachment, where is the detached position in this? There in the neutral ground.

The positive mind will take us into things, the negative mind automatically wants to pull away. Perception related to detachment is of a neutral nature. The mind related to detachment endures pleasant and unpleasant feeling rather than moving towards pleasant and away from unpleasant. In terms of the feelings through the senses, it is drawn to an opening of mind, rather than a grasping. Yet not an opening that withdraws and steps away from, so there's still a sensitivity.

Tai chi is a very good example of this. For anyone who has ever practised or seen this practice, there is a thing called "pushing hands", where two people are contacting each other's hands. Feeling out your opponent with a mixture of pushing forwards and withdrawing in turn. In the beginning it can seem like one person is following the other. One person pushes and the other one withdraws but they stay in touch, this light touch between the hands. This is the quality, the light touch between the hand of one person with another. One person pushes the other one withdraws then the other one pushes and the other one withdraws.

You start off following each other like this, one person following the other, after a while you are not sure who is following. You are just mirroring each other, just maintaining this sense of light touch, throughout the movements. Any heaviness of touch makes you vulnerable one way or the other. If you come forward with a heavy touch then the other person can pull you or find the centre of that push and push back. Feel out where that push is coming from and push back at it. A bit hard to describe but maybe you get the idea. We can say that Tai Chi, pushing hands, is like a dance of detachment.

Dispassion is another part of this same state of mind I would suggest. So the mind cools down. Dispassion doesn't mean some kind of rejection of the passion, not a moving away from. It's not a moving towards and not a moving away from. It's a very commonly misunderstood term. Not moving towards the things of the senses – not a passion for them, but not a moving away either. Maybe the word dispassion suggests moving away from.

These are examples of key words and we can see how there is a use for study there if we choose a key word like this and we feel it out. These kind of key qualities. "Is this what He meant by it?", "Is it like this?", "Is this dispassion?", "Is this detachment?", "How detached is this?" not being black or white either thinking "this is detachment and this isn't", but asking "how detached is this?" or "how passionate? how dispassionate?"

Also, if one use these kinds of words people can think one is claiming something, the mind can go this way when one start to talk about the goal. "So if he talks like this, does he think he is enlightened?" this is seeing it as black and white things, these qualities, that the use of the word means the perfection of it. There is the word samādhi as well. One can talk about samādhi, and the listener's mind can go: "is this person claiming that he has samādhi?" It's another strange way the mind can go, taking everything in black and white terms, this or that. Maybe if there is a little bit of concentration there, a little bit of samādhi, what might this quality be like? What can we deduce about what it may be like even if we've never experienced it? Where might it be within our experience?

This kind of open minded way of practice and inquiry rather than a close minded one – open questions, open use of terms, for reflection, always for reflection.

Living a detached life

"Child of the universe"

The Buddha says that detachment is Nibbāna. Not attachment, not withdrawal but detachment. How do we practice this? How do we find this? Well, many ways. The life of the Buddhist samaṇa is designed to be an embodiment of this, an example of this. Not living our lives with attachment and not living our lives withdrawn either.

We can perhaps see how monastic life is one where we try to minimize our attachments. A family life – having wife and children and so on and there is lots of joy to this, a lot of good fuel there for spiritual practice and yet the downside or the difficult side is that we become attached to our loved ones.

The life of a samaṇa is also modelled on the family life and yet it is like the extended family.

The other extreme would be somebody who lives alone as a hermit, wouldn't it? Who just stays away from everything in some way or other. In this respect, the life of the samaṇa is trying to be in the middle. We're living in a very much larger group of people, one that is not discriminating in terms of "this is my family and this is not my family". The whole thing is our family. Not blood relations but just people with different positions within the monastic set-up. We end up living with people that we don't really know very well and yet have the same kind of relationship with or obligation towards them as we do to our family, in the sense of looking after each other's basic needs.

Because there isn't the same material priority this becomes possible, to support each others most basic requirements in life. And actually the monk doesn't seek even the things that he needs for his own survival. He doesn't get these for himself, but he makes offerings of teaching, guidance and then makes himself available to receive the support that he needs to continue his life in return. The samaṇa is offering spiritual food in return for physical food if you like. But there is no obligation either way.

The laity are not obliged to offer physical support to a monk, the same way as a monk is not obliged to offer teachings. It's all done

on free will offerings, there is no contract there. If there was a contract then there would be a sense of attachment like the person is trying to survive. In a way a samaṇa is not trying to survive, they are just living on faith. If the requisites come, they come; if they don't, they don't. Maybe sometimes it is best to go somewhere else where those things are available. If the food is meagre in one place we can go and look somewhere else, get support somewhere else. But not demanding anything. No contract.

So it is an uncertain life, not seeking to survive but just receiving the sustenance of life. Not taking from anybody else. It's a very beautiful, harmless way of living, one that is not attaching even to existence, even to health or our basic needs, willing to go without, willing to die. Often when somebody ordains the big teachers they'll say "Ok, so you are ready to die?" Ajahn Chah used to say this in Wat Pah Pong, "Are you ready to die?"

A true samaṇa is somebody who is ready to die. Ready to accept what's offered if it's offered and to go without if not, to the point of not surviving, point of death. He or she is not attached to this existence. This particular existence.

This requires tremendous faith, and one may think "Is this suicide?" It's not if one has faith. If one has faith then even if one dies in the robe then one is bound for a very good rebirth. The great teachers in the old days in Thailand would say that for monks to go out into the forest and risk their lives in order to find a secluded situation for meditation, even if they died, then this wasn't a wrong thing to have done. But to take a chance, take a risk, is not to go to the other extreme and take an unwarranted risk. This is edging towards wanting to get away from, isn't it? Wanting to die. We are not wanting to survive, or wanting to die. We are just living freely – child of the universe.

Then we see how our minds veer from wanting to survive to not wanting to. And yet there is always this middle way which is doing our best to get what we need but then accepting that if it doesn't come – never mind. This is the situation a lot of poor people are in. In poor, rural areas in Thailand if the rains come and the food grows then all well and good, if it doesn't then well that's it, isn't it?

Or if we get sick and we can't afford the medicine, the doctor or the hospital then all we can do is let go – that's it. People are willing

to do that. They are open to that possibility. They can accept that. They are not seeking their own demise but they are willing to accept it, let go – having confidence that if they lived a good life then they are bound for a good rebirth. They accept their lot like that. Very beautiful.

We strive for the best we can, but we are willing to accept the worst if that's what comes. That way we can't lose. Can we? We do our best in worldly priorities or spiritual ones - looking for worldly happiness or spiritual happiness. If we can accept that we are not always going to get what we want then even if we fail in all our efforts, we will find a way, we will find a way to let go. This is the 'no lose situation'. Yet it can be quite a difficult state of mind to find. Our minds are always vacillating between wanting to get or wanting to get away from because of the power of worldly feeling. Wanting to get pleasant feeling and to avoid unpleasant feelings of the world. This is natural enough but if we keep following this then we just end up pushed around in this life, or from life to life. We are pushed around by the circumstances that often are beyond our control.

You'd think in one way the samaṇa life is quite a risky one but in another way, if we have faith in the way that the Buddha sees things, then actually this is the refuge. This is security, safety, insurance. The best insurance we can take out is the five, eight or the 227 precepts. Then we've got a life insurance. Looking after that which was never born, and that which will never die. Taking care of that, this quality of detachment. Not seeking but open to receive. The mind not going out but open to receive what comes. It is not being born, going out into things and yet not trying to get away from, but open to receive. This is what I take all this to mean, my perspective. This is a model that I try to apply in my life – not to seek, not to run away although strength of mind comes from a degree of independence.

Related qualities are kāya-viveka (seclusion of the body or independence, independent living based on the offering of alms) and citta-viveka (emotional independence of mind). Traditionally we go pindapat (alms round) into the village. You are supported by an enormous group of people, just offering a little bit. You are not reliant upon an individual. You are not reliant upon,

dependent upon a small group of people you have to please and earn a living like that. You are dependent on a very large group of people offering through faith in the robe, faith in the teaching rather than faith in you. So there's looseness in the relationship, not a contract, not tied either way. And yet there is a dependence. Not a withdrawal. Another example of the middle way.

A samaṇa will make his living like that and live in a monastery which is secluded but not withdrawn. Open to visitors, open to people to join their way of life even. Certainly open to visitors and open to discussion and yet not so involved. A little aloof, not involved in worldly affairs; not handling money; no worldly power or influence. Another example of the middle way.

We see the way that a monk lives, with all the rules, regulations and discipline, how this is all set up to a detached way of life. Not a withdrawn one, and not an involved one. It's kind of middle ground. Not like being on the kind of periphery of the society, not kind of partial withdrawal but something that's truly a middle way, truly a kind of blend or a light touch.

In a monastic sense this is a kind of ideal and then the lay people can get a taste for this, this quality of detachment in their lives. Ajahn Buddhadāsa, a very famous teacher of both monastics and lay people in Thailand, but principally of lay people, said that the most important teaching for lay people is anattā or not-self. The way lay people can gain detachment in the midst of phenomena is to see that nothing belongs to them. It may seem to them that their house does belong to them, or their children or their car or whatever it is. But even in the midst of all these things then detachment can be won through seeing these things, as anattā, as not who and what we are. And that we don't own these things. Non-ownership is perhaps the most crucial point.

Ownership can seem quite clear but in the monastic life again ownership is not so clear. We don't really own what we have. Everything is just Sangha property. They are kind of on loan to us.

So it's in your face really, this quality of detachment. Can't get away from it – it's there in everything. It can also be there in everything for a lay person if they can get this sense of non-ownership. Keep reminding themselves "well, these children they are not mine",

"this house is not mine", "none of this belongs to me, I can't hang on to it, can't control it." This gives you a taste of detachment.

Or you could find by mixing with Sangha, mixing with samaṇas, trying to get the sense for the attitude of a samaṇa, the kind of freedom that they have. It's much more obvious or all-pervading in the way that they live. Non-seeking, but receiving, taking what comes. Which is not passivity but an openness.

Over time, and particularly in a Theravada tradition there is great value placed in the elders of the tradition because this is something that works on one over time. People who have been ordained a very long time, many years, become moulded by this quality, this middle way, not clinging, not moving away from.

And to establish this we have to find space. Another way of putting this is that a detached mind is one which always has a bit of space in there. There can be the need to find seclusion in order to find that kind of space. We live a relatively secluded life to find the seclusion of mind (citta-viveka) by finding kāya-viveka first, independent living, not depending on individuals but on the group as a whole. Citta-viveka is similar, one's got an emotional independence of mind. Not cut off but able to live on one's own, able to survive in seclusion, not needing others.

Need is perhaps the most subtle manifestation of clinging, the kind of bottom line.

People who have lived a long time in seclusion, had long retreats, can be very solid in themselves. It's much more difficult than it looks to be on your own and keep going. Remain responsive and in touch with things and not rely on others. People can develop a lot of strength like this. Strength that they can share with others. They are not needy materially, not needy emotionally. So it strengthens us, time on our own. No-one else to turn to or talk to about our problems. We have to work it out for ourselves. A sort of self-reliance and we can teach this self-reliance to others.

We can't rely on others, can we? We all can lose people. But we can rely on the larger group, the independent units within a larger group helping each other to be independent but not withdrawn, available.

Detachment is Nibbana

"It's very common for us practitioners how this pendulum of practice swings from one extreme to another and we miss the middle ground"

It seems if we read the suttas that in the Buddha's day there were a lot of spiritual seekers of all kinds drifting about. With quite clear views about what they saw as the way things work. The way the universe is. Some of this is similar these days and in other ways different I think.

In those days the scientific view of things didn't hold so much sway so there were views of the universe and the world which would be contrary to that. But also there would be views which were just about the mind and spirituality, the same as today – different religions so to speak. Well articulated views would debate with each other. We see how in the suttas over and over again the Buddha is debating with such people and then what was presented was his kind of triumph.

He was a great winner of debates, drawing people over to his view. Whether we call this converting people to Buddhism I don't really know, but certainly drawing practitioners into his view of practice. Because the Buddha, after all, puts forward a path of inquiry, a way of looking rather than a doctrine. Although he states clearly what is seen by somebody who sees clearly. Somebody who sees clearly sees this. But this is a bit different from a doctrinal argument debate, isn't it?

Somebody sees not just with the intellect or through belief but they realize something, they realize the deathless. They see something that goes beyond birth and death and this changes their whole perception of the process of birth and death. So I think if we put it like that then it's quite clear that if one sees something that's past the grave then it would change our view of everything. When we see what that is, that it exists.

The Buddha says that if we can see this then this will change everything else. It will change our view of the world, the things in the world, the relationship between the body and the spirit.

This is the kind of crux of it. In the old days there would be two kinds of view. The Eternalist view, which is that the mind survives the body intact, that the essence of the mind just carries on. One birth to another, reincarnation.

And then there is a view that the mind is dependent upon the body. Which is the opposing view, the Materialist view.

The Buddha's teaching is in the middle between these two. It's neither of those things so we have to be careful about this. We can come from the Materialist view, the scientific understanding of the world which is almost taken for granted these days, then we think that we can maybe open this up or go a bit beyond this to suggest that the mind may be able to survive the body in some way or other. If we do that we can fall straight into the opposite view, that there is an essence to the mind, an eternal soul, eternal spirit.

And yet the Buddha doesn't state this either. This can seem confusing but we can think of it like this: the Eternalist view is that there is something that is born that never dies. The Materialist view is that everything that is born dies. And the Buddhist view is that there is something that is never born that never dies. What is born dies, but there is something, and the Buddha describes and defines this and shows a way to find it that doesn't get born and that doesn't die. To me that's the clearest description of this thing, the deathless.

This we can relate to in our own experience. We do relate to it, you know, even if we are not a philosopher or a mystic. We do have a stand there somewhere. If we look closely at our underlying attitudes to life then we are taking a stand. We are living according to one of these kinds of ideas even if we don't really articulate it or think about it very much.

We may live in just a material way looking to get what we can, enjoy life as we can until the final curtain. And that's the priority. We don't really think of anything else, we have never seen any other kind of possibility. That's what we can see so we just think that this is what we have. We just see what we want in life and enjoy what we can the best we can while we can. This can be positive or negative actually. We can also just stay out of the trouble of the material world as best we can, the difficulty of it. Look after ourselves, shelter ourselves the best we can from the adversity of it. Either way.

Then there's a mind that is less involved with the things of the world, that is open to the possibility, or has a sense for the spiritual. But here then, anything can be taken as representing this eternal self. We will not examine what we see as representing this essence of mind that goes on. Often, a very common trap, in my view, these days in practice, is that we start to practice mindfulness, we have presence of mind, and then this presence of mind gets labelled as "this perfect, eternal present moment."

Or the mind enters a little bit into the present, or fully into the present, and we get a sense for space. This is often what can happen - a brightness of mind, which is an entering of the space element into the mind, the brightness there in the present moment. Then that becomes our eternal self, the manifestation of the spirit.

Yet the Buddha is very clear to point out that actually all these things are in the world. Space is in the world. Space is appreciated by consciousness which is impermanent. We can see this when we fall asleep. We can see "Well, it's not always there". The mind becomes unconscious for one reason or another, sleep or any other reason. It's human consciousness arising and ceasing. And when we are conscious then we are aware of this thing and when we are not conscious then we are not.

The Buddha pointed all this out, the mystery of the mind is that there is something that goes beyond all this. There is an unborn, there is something that doesn't depend on the world, doesn't depend on latching onto something, even space, or light or very subtle and long-lasting things. The other danger

in spiritual life is that our mind can latch on, ordinary human consciousness latches on to something that is very stable and permanent and then takes that to be the ineffable.

And yet, this is the way, this is going in the right direction. If we go away from the things of time, the things of the senses and towards things that are longer lasting, ineffable and stable. If we put our minds onto these things this is going in the right direction. This is the purpose of the meditation process, to take our minds into this kind of realm, this kind of heavenly realm of light and space, openness and brightness.

Even the Buddha himself made this mistake seeing that this was in a sense just a more refined sense pleasure. He thought "This is a wrong direction. If I attach to these things they are still just impermanent". So he fell away from the path of fine meditation and turned to asceticism thinking that the way would be to find a way beyond the body. This was a turning away from the body, a kind of rejection of the physical existence in a way, a way of overcoming the mind's dependence on the physical. Kind of the opposite angle, isn't it?

We can go towards light and space, take the mind in that direction and then when we see that this can't last, the mind needs to return to the physical. Or we see the impermanence of the consciousness that places itself there. We see the act of volition that takes us to those spaces, the dependence of that act of volition which is part of human consciousness. We see the dependent arising of these states. And then turning around and thinking "Ok, well maybe it's a matter of getting away from the body, turning away from the desires of the body – asceticism". Then we can't find a way there either and we swing like a pendulum.

It's very common for us practitioners how this pendulum of practice swings from one extreme to another and missing the middle ground. And the Buddha wasn't an exception in this. He went from one extreme to the other as well, in his spiritual practice, until he found the middle way which is not a rejection and not an indulgence either. Just seeing. There is no movement of the mind through craving, craving to get or to get away from.

There is no becoming and no being, and no rejection of being either. There is no birth, then there is no death. No birth into things one way or another. No movement of the mind one way or the other. There is stillness; coming to stillness.

The wanting to attach to things, hold to things, a sense of a need to hold onto something or the wanting to get away from, withdraw and then the middle way of detachment. Nibbāna is detachment. It's not a getting away from, withdraw from or annihilation of. Neither is it a becoming something. The mind can exist in a state detached, not attached and not withdrawn.

To me this is shown by the symbol of añjalī, whether this is the real intention of that gesture or not, placing one's hands together out of respect, I don't know, I suspect not. It's perhaps more to do with the etiquette of the warrior caste in the old days, showing that you come in peace, put your sword down, put your hands together and bow. Putting yourself in a position of harmlessness. Show that you come in peace.

And yet, to me this gesture is a very good way of expressing this principle of detachment. We are not clinging and not withdrawing. Not one or the other. This is where the Dhamma is. This is finding the place that takes us to the deathless, finding this light touch on things. That's the way.

This is something that can seem quite philosophical but actually this can very much influence the underlying movements of our minds. Towards or away from. Into things or out of things. Often this is unseen, just the same as this middle way is unseen, the middle ground of detachment which is neither into something or away from something. Neither grasping nor rejecting. A letting go, but not a letting go that is getting away from, withdrawing from.

And this is something that needs to be experienced. As the pendulum swings, gradually the main spring of existence winds down, cools down. The pendulum swings all the more subtly and falls towards the middle. The middle of what is unborn and which never dies.

So I offer this for your reflection

Biography

Ajahn Kalyāno was born in Hitchin in 1961. He has been a practicing Buddhist since he was 17. He began visiting Amaravati in the 1980's. As a layman his path of practice and enquiry led him to work in hospitals for nearly twenty years specialising in neurological rehabilitation and learning disabilities as a Clinical Psychologist, Physiotherapist and T'ai chi teacher. He has a particular interest in exploring the relationship between body and mind. He took full ordination at Chithurst Monastery in 1997 and has since travelled to Italy, Thailand and Australia.

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Tobias would like to dedicate his work
"To mother, father and grandmother."

Andy would like to dedicate his work to his mother
"An inspiration to many, a law unto herself."

Mikael would like to dedicate his work
"To my family and my teachers."

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