Ajahn Martin Piyadhammo

Signs Along the Path of Practice

Talks on Dhamma Practice

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A Selection of Talks on Buddhist Practice

By Ajahn Martin Piyadhammo

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"The gift of Dhamma excels all other gifts"
The Buddha

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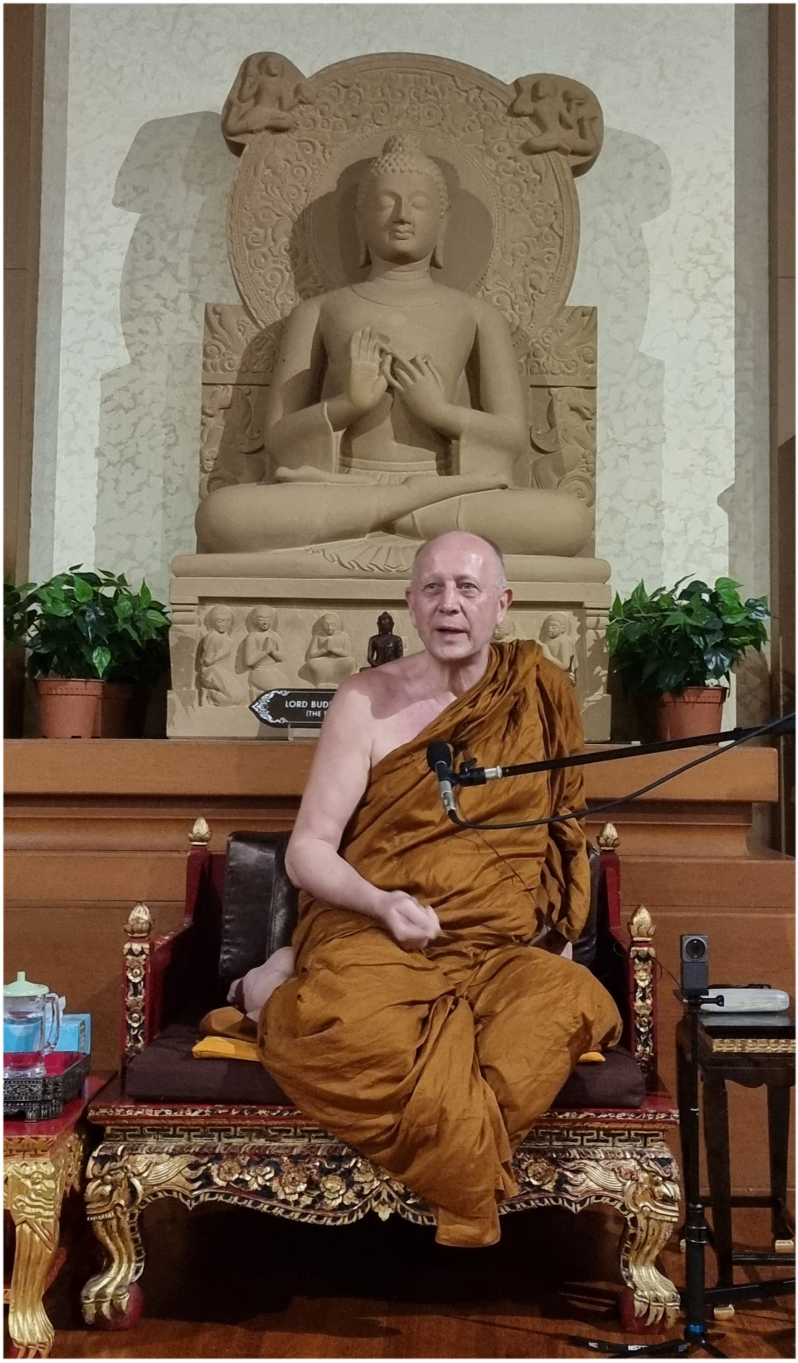

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Introduction

Ajahn Martin Piyadhammo, the author of this collection of talks on Dhamma (*desanās*), is a Buddhist monk (*bhikkhu*) in the Thai Forest Tradition, which puts emphasis on the practice of meditation to attain enlightenment in this life.

The founder of the Thai Forest Tradition was Than (Venerable) Ajahn Mun (1870–1949) who spent most of his life practicing meditation in the extensive rainforests of Thailand, Myanmar and Laos. Many of his disciples also became accomplished meditation masters, and certainly the most famous in Thailand was Than Ajahn Mahā Bua Ñāṇasampanno (1913–2011), affectionately known as Luangta Mahā Bua. Ordained as a Buddhist monk in 1934, Than Ajahn Mahā Bua attained enlightenment in 1950 and founded his famous monastery at Baan Taad near Udon Thani, Thailand in 1955. Thereafter, he became the central figure in the Thai Forest Tradition. Than Ajahn Mahā Bua often called his monastery the forest university, which indicated that it was not primarily designed for monks or laypeople at the start of their practice but rather for serious practitioners aiming to achieve a "doctoral degree" and rid themselves of *avijjā* (fundamental ignorance) once and for all. From the 1970s onwards, he wrote a number of books detailing Than Ajahn Mun's life and mode of practice – intensive meditation, discipline and renunciation – which brought these teachings to an international audience. The Thai Forest Tradition is summarized in this quote from Than Ajahn Mahā Bua: "This is the Lord Buddha's teaching – *rukkhamūla-senāsanaṃ,* retreating into the forests and mountains. After ordaining as a monk, one should go and live under the shade of a tree, in the forest, in the mountains, in caves or under rocky overhangs. These are places conducive to the practice, where one will not be disturbed. Your practice there will progress comfortably, smoothly and well. There you should practice diligently and with perseverance for the rest of your life!"

Ajahn Martin Piyadhammo was born in Stuttgart in 1957 and studied electrical and computer engineering in Germany and the USA. In 1995, he went to live with Than Ajahn Mahā Bua in Baan Taad Forest Monastery, and was ordained as a Buddhist monk in the same year. His first five years were spent living inside the monastery under the tutelage of Than Ajahn Mahā Bua and other senior monks. As Thai monasteries have a precise and detailed etiquette covering most aspects of life, he had to learn everything anew: how to wash himself, how to sit down properly, how to eat his one meal of the day, and how to behave and conduct himself as a monk. Meditation practice was not easy at the beginning, of course, but Ajahn Martin went deeper and deeper into practice as the years progressed. If obstacles arose and problems came up, he used his wisdom to overcome them, reflecting that whatever he had experienced before in his life had led to nothing but *dukkha*, whereas the satisfaction and joy that came from meditation was something he had never experienced in ordinary life. He was certain that he did not want to be reborn again. His teacher Than Ajahn Mahā Bua also had a vital role to play. As Ajahn Martin recalls, "He kept coming at the right moment, and he saw through all of us."

When his five years of apprenticeship in the monastery were over, Ajahn Martin went on *thudong* around the surrounding provinces for two to five months each year, returning thereafter to Baan Taad forest monastery to live with his teacher. At first, he spent his periods of solitude at a very remote monastery with other monks. However, as time went on, he preferred to be alone on *thudong*, spending time in caves located far away from the villages and largely undisturbed.

Ajahn Martin has mastered living in solitude, without becoming anti-social. He exudes a warm inner peace, shows great interest in the well-being of his fellow human beings, and does his best to help them to develop their full potential. He is known for the directness of his teachings that come straight from the heart and hit the questioner at exactly the right spot – the heart. Ajahn Martin does not beat around the bush, whether in his discourses or in his personal encounters with people. If he feels that someone is just about to understand something, he digs in further. He finds the sore

point and presses his finger on it, so that the person can understand exactly what he means and look directly inwards for a solution. If some people find this provocative, then so be it, for it is part and parcel of Ajahn Martin's talent for getting straight to the heart of the matter. He reaches effortlessly into people's hearts, asking questions like, "Are you awake or asleep? Are you still alive? May I try to wake you up, at least a little?" As he explains, "Buddhism in the West, and Theravāda Buddhism in general, is often too scholastic. People talk and talk about it with a superior attitude, but this is not the right way. Rather, it is one's own experience that counts."

To illustrate the point, he uses the analogy of a group of scholars sitting around a fire. They discuss the fire, arguing over whether it is hot, warm, or even, perhaps, cold. Without direct experience, these scholars have only their assumptions about its true nature, but when one of them touches the fire, he knows the truth for himself without having to ask anyone else's opinion. He then gets up and leaves, for he knows there is no use discussing the truth with these scholars. Ajahn Martin sees his task as encouraging people to practice Dhamma to know the truth for themselves. In an interview, he was asked what had driven him to move towards his goal of ending the rounds of rebirth with such energy and directness. He replied that the most important factor initially was his experiences during meditation retreats as a layperson in Germany: on one occasion, he had a feeling of utter silence that filled him completely; on another occasion, he had a feeling of indescribable joy. Afterwards, he found that everything in everyday life was stale and bleak in comparison; he had found something that was more beautiful than all the promises he had run after previously. Later, as a Buddhist monk, he came to the firm decision that he wanted to make sure that his present life was to be his last.

In 2002, Luangta Mahā Bua gave him permission to teach and from then on he was responsible for teaching *bhikkhus* and Western meditators visiting or staying at Wat Pa Baan Taad. In 2017 Ajahn Martin moved to the monastery of Wat Phu Khong Tong in the Nongbua Lamphu province of Thailand, where he is the acting Abbot and gives teachings to visitors and those staying at the monastery.

Following a request from a group of visitors in 2006, Ajahn Martin's Dhamma *desanās* began to be recorded regularly. Eventually the talks were made publicly available to help the meditation practice of those few seekers interested in training themselves to reach *magga*, *phala* and *Nibbāna*. The selection of his Dhamma *desanās* in this book has been chosen to represent key aspects of his teachings between.

Many words in the talks have been left in *Pāli* because there is often no adequate translation in English; it is hoped the reader will forgive any difficulties that this may make, but it is felt better that the reader should not-understand rather than mis-understand. However, a fairly comprehensive glossary has been included at the back, which should cover all the *Pāli* words that are not actually explained in the text.

Following the first selection of Dhamma *desanās*, published in 2019 under the title Forest Leaves, and the second published in 2021 under the title The Way to the Heart, the talks in this book have been chosen to represent key aspects of Ajahn Martin's teaching between 2007 and 2019. Also included is a selection of Questions and Answers taken from *desanā* meetings throughout the years. It is hoped that these are most likely pertinent for those just interested in Buddhism, and those already practicing meditation and looking for guidance.

The Editor, November 2025

Stop living on Autopilot

18th May 2017

A talk given to mostly retired meditators in Malaysia

I like the expression "living on autopilot." It really describes all our lives. We program the body in the first fifteen years, initialising the computer with instructions on where to go, what to do and how to do it. Then we press the start button and life flows on and on and on ... until it runs out. Every now and then, when danger presents itself, we wake up, wonder what's going on — and go straight back to sleep! If that's the case, why live at all? What do you expect from life? Does anyone have any ideas? You've already lived a long time. The *kilesas*, the defilements within the heart (*citta*), have promised happiness, nothing but happiness, all your life, saying that if you act on their orders you'll be happy, you'll be thrilled. But do they keep their promises? No! Yet we continue to believe them, and fall for their tricks every time. If a friend continually lies, you don't believe him next time, but you're happy to keep believing the *kilesas* and giving them the benefit of the doubt: "Yes, you're right. I should try this or do that, and maybe it'll make me happy." What we all forget, or perhaps have never realised, is that happiness is born here, right here in the heart. All we need to do is go to the heart and find it. Of course, it's difficult because we've lost the key to the heart, and that key is very well guarded by the *kilesas*; they took it a long time ago, and now they have control over all of us.

So why are you alive? What brought you here in the first place? What was your dream before entering the foetus? Do you know? Some people remember if they come face to face with death: "Oh wow! I didn't want to live this way. I wanted to have a different life." And some change their lives completely afterwards; we've all read or heard stories about them. In fact, I once met someone who had fallen head first on a rock while skiing and was dead for a few moments before coming back to life. He told me that he'd thought about how his life had gone and realised that he hadn't wanted it to be that way.

But that's what usually happens when we press the autopilot button, isn't it? Life goes by, and in the end we don't even know what we're doing – because we've fallen asleep.

So try to remember. What was the purpose of your life? To have children? To build a nice house? To make money? To eat the best food? To travel here and there? As you get older, you have more time to think about things like this, especially when you're retired. But here's the incredible thing: young people have no time for anything, and in the end old people have even less time! They think they've so much to do before they die. Some of them can't even wait patiently at the checkout in the supermarket, and have to go first. I don't know if it's like that in Malaysia, but it was my experience in Europe – old people are always in a hurry, as if they're rushing to their deaths. It's as though they can't wait to die. Actually they're retired, so they've nothing better to do than enjoy life, yet they seem busier than before. Why is that? Can someone explain it to me? I've been retired since the age of thirty-two, and I have nothing to do. I've so much free time that I can travel here to Malaysia to teach on this retreat and then go to Germany to teach another group. So what are all these things you really have to do in retirement? Little things, nothing much, right? Nothing essential; nothing very pressing. Correct me if I'm wrong.

What's so urgent? In fact, as a retiree you can spend all day cleansing the heart, making spiritual progress. But instead you think about everything you missed while working and bringing up children. But you can't go back. From the age of thirty-two, I've had all my own time, all the time to practise and cleanse the heart. It was very hard work but at least it was worthwhile, and the results could be taken with me into the next life. The work that you're all doing now – shopping, eating, walking the dog – can't be taken with you. Before coming to this retreat, you were reading this, watching that, listening to this, chattering about that, and so on. But it's all gone. As you finish reading the book, it's gone. As the movie ends, it's over. When you've eaten the meal, it's finished. Haven't you realized that yet? Haven't you got the message? The things of the world are *anicca*, impermanent, constantly changing. You can't take these

things into the next life, but you can take any progress you make in developing the *citta*.

If you think about it, now that you're retired, you can focus on developing the heart. The world doesn't need you anymore, or at least it doesn't seem to. That's a shame, of course, since people who have lived the longest have more life experience and should be most valued, for experience brings wisdom. But society doesn't value the old any more; it just casts them aside. Old people themselves don't have to see it that way, however. Now that they've retired and hopefully have a pension, they can put all their efforts into meditation practice to cleanse the heart and prepare for the next life. And the next life is coming. It's like the monsoon: it always comes, sometimes stronger, sometimes weaker. What else do you have to do in old age? There's nothing else so useful. Society doesn't value you anymore, and your children maybe see you as a burden, but you can use the days you have left — and no-one knows how many there are — to clean the heart and plant the seeds you want to harvest in the next life. That's a fruitful use of your time, not wandering around complaining and moaning about how the world has changed.

Of course everything was different fifty years ago; times have changed in both Malaysia and Europe. I'm not saying they've changed for the better; in fact, I think they've got worse. It seems to me that wisdom is less valued than it was. People read lots of books, get lots of qualifications and acquire lots of knowledge, but they have little wisdom. In fact, they're just as stupid as they always were when it comes to things that really matter. Than Ajahn Mahā Bua used to say that the more people study, the stupider they are, stupid in the sense of the Dhamma taught by the Lord Buddha. They're intelligent in a worldly sense, intelligent for the *kilesas* to be sure, but really stupid when it comes to Dhamma. This is because they know too much, adhere to that knowledge and cling tightly to it. This becomes a problem as they age, of course, since society values their knowledge less and less as time goes on.

So what are all these things you feel impelled to do in old age? Chasing after sensual pleasures? Eating this and that? Going on holiday to different cities or countries? They're just fleeting moments,

aren't they? And you don't have much time left. Death is waiting, and sometimes it even knocks at the door saying, "Hey, come on – it's almost time to go!" So why not come to your senses and use the time you have left wisely? Do something beneficial for yourself. You've done enough for your children and don't have to support them anymore. Let them live their own lives and start living your own. I understand, of course, that children today often see their parents as cash cows and think they have a right to a hand-out. Help them if they really need it, certainly, but you've already done your part, and now your job is to train yourselves, train the heart. That's the most important thing you have to do. And don't think about all the pleasures you've missed in life. Even if you'd experienced them all, they would have been fleeting. All the things you could have done earlier in life – climbing mountains, hiking through forests – would have gone by now, vanished into thin air. So why regret something that's no longer possible? Just wait for the next life and you might be able to do some of them – if that's really what you want to do. But why want a next life?

Why did the Lord Buddha teach? He wanted to show people the way out of the round of rebirth. He was saying, "Get out of here; stop chasing these fleeting pleasures and get out. I'll show you the way." Well, you've all spent a couple of days on this meditation retreat, and you think the way out it difficult, so difficult. But you're wrong – it's easy, really easy. You just have to do one simple thing. Every time the mind wanders, bring it back to the meditation object, whether it's the breath at the tip of the nose or the mental repetition of the word *buddho*. There's no easier work in the world. When you do this long enough, happiness and contentment fill the heart. In the end, that's what you're looking for, isn't it? When you're chasing sensual pleasures, you're looking for peace and happiness. That's why people go to see movies or dine out in fine restaurants – but the pleasures of the senses are ephemeral. Take eating: people eat and eat and eat until their stomach aches and then feel heavy all day long – all for the fleeting moments of pleasure on the tongue. Other sensual pleasures might last a little longer, but they remain ephemeral. All that we're seeking, if we're honest with ourselves, is true

happiness and contentment, but they can't be found with the senses. Actually, peace, happiness and contentment are in the heart all the time, so the heart is where we have to look to find them. The problem is that we've lost the key to the heart and have to find it again, and the key is being aware of the breath or the *buddho*. Just keep coming back to the meditation object. There's no need to worry; the world isn't going to collapse because you're bringing your attention back to *buddho*; the apartment isn't going to catch fire. The world will still turn round.

Actually, meditation is a real pleasure. People can find it difficult, particularly at first, but I do wonder why they give up so easily. Women should be drawn to meditation more than men, because they have tougher lives, giving birth, bringing up children and working too. But they tend to give up easily. Men like to play the tough guy, but they can also be weak when it comes to meditation and find all kinds of reasons to avoid it. Looking around this hall, I see mostly women. Have you noticed? Where are the men? Maybe they've all ordained as *bhikkhus* – ordained with the *kilesas* more like! It's the same in Germany; far more women than men come on retreats. It's a little different in my forest monastery, where there are mostly men and very few women, maybe because life is rougher there than outside. Women do come to the monastery to live for a few months, but I don't allow them to cook, as they sometimes want to do. I only allow people to practise: walking meditation, sitting meditation, walking meditation, sitting meditation ... all day long. The only other activities allowed, which everyone takes part in, are cleaning individual dwellings (*kutis*) and the large meeting hall (*sālā*) every morning, and sweeping the paths of leaves. The food comes from our early morning alms round (*piṇḍapāta*) at the local village. I don't allow meditators to cook in the monastery because they start thinking about recipes rather than their practice. As a *bhikkhu* for twenty-five years, I've seen that happening. The laywomen staying in a monastery for a longer time sometimes wanted to start cooking, not because they wanted to help (as they imagined) but because their *kilesas* didn't really like the basic, rustic food. When it comes to food, the *kilesas* are usually in charge. But our bodies are satisfied

after eating any kind of food, aren't they? We've filled our stomachs up; that's the whole point of food, and that's what we have to learn. Of course, the *kilesas* like particular tastes on the tongue, so they're annoyed with basic food — but so what? We have to learn to be content with what we've been given, and once we've developed some progress in meditation, some calmness in the heart, a lot of contentment appears. But that's just the first step.

Don't seek sense pleasures from outside; seek the happiness that exists in the heart. This is the first step. If you find that you're satisfied with that, with the contentment it brings, that's fine. But if you want to go further, to go beyond simply calming the mind, continue practising to develop wisdom by investigating everything. I'm speaking to retired people, so there's lots of things to investigate in meditation. For instance, as we age the body slowly starts to fall apart. It doesn't work as it used to. We fall over, not from lack of attention but because we're weaker and have balance problems. My first experience of this was at the age of forty-five. I was going downstairs and suddenly fell, because my knee had stopped working. It was then I realised that old age was creeping up. It's like having an old car: one thing breaks and then another, and even if it goes to a garage for repair, things are never the same. In the end, the car has to be abandoned. And so does our body: "Bye, bye body — I'm off to the next life." But even if you get a new younger body, it still has to be trained for at least fifteen years. Please take this to heart. When old people think about their next life, they usually imagine themselves around the age or twenty — young, fully functional and healthy. They don't think about being babies and toddlers and going through all the pain involved in learning to walk and talk. Do you ever dwell on that when remembering your childhood? Of course not: no-one wants to think about it. Isn't that interesting?

However, being reborn as a human being again means going through all the same hassles again. It starts with learning to digest: at first the food comes out much as it went in, and it takes time to perfect digestion. Learning to walk, learning to talk, learning to read and write — was it all a bundle of fun? And what about going to school to learn all that stuff? Did you like primary school or secondary school?

Did you like being told what to do all day? And as for puberty ... well, who wants to go through that again? Certainly not me. It was a mess, with all kinds of strong emotions: "Why doesn't she call me? Doesn't she love me anymore or what?" All these thoughts — it was hell. I remember my heart pounding, almost exploding out of my chest. We've all been through it, though no-one wants to remember. Then as adults we have to look for jobs to earn money, live on autopilot for a few years, get old, retire and die again — only to be reborn, learn to walk, learn to talk, go to school, go through puberty, look for a job, get old and die again. Imagine going through all of that again and again and again and again. Is it really a barrel of laughs? No, so why not get out of it? The Lord Buddha gave us all the exit instructions, so why not follow them?

So when you're tired of being reborn, pluck up courage and tell yourself that this life is to be your last. This means walking the Lord Buddha's eightfold path[1] which in the Thai Forest Tradition consists of three columns: morality or virtue (*sīla*), concentration (*samādhi*) and wisdom (*paññā*) that comes from investigation. Put simply, morality for laypeople means keeping the five precepts; concentration means learning to meditate by focusing the attention and awareness (*sati*) at one point; and developing wisdom means investigating deeply those things we think of as me, mine and myself. The Lord Buddha kindly identified five groups or "heaps" (*khandhas*) for us to contemplate: the body, feeling, memory and association, thought, and consciousness. The first thing to investigate is the body, which I often say is the pot in which the plant of greed and hate is rooted. So the body has to be examined again and again and again until our work is finished, and only then do we turn to the investigation of feeling, and then memory and thought, in which delusion is hidden.

The reason for investigating the body is to understand that it's not what you really are, that the heart — the *citta* — and the body are two different things, just as a car and its driver are not the same thing.

1. The noble eight-fold path leading to *Nibbāna* comprises right view, right thought, right speech, right action, right livelihood, right effort, right *sati* and right *samādhi*. Each step has a subtle, intricate relationship to the others.

When that's done and the first two fetters have been significantly weakened, you enter the stream and become a *Sotāpanna*, which is the first stage of enlightenment, even though it's still only the lowest of the four stages. The idea is to get out of the car and finally realise that the car is not yourself. So get out of the body and see that it's not you! Once that's achieved, the body becomes less bothersome and doesn't need so much attention. It just needs feeding, resting, washing – that's all. How much time does it take to take care of the body in my monastery? Have a guess. Actually, not more than two hours a day including eating and washing, and that leaves twenty-two remaining hours to work on the *citta*. And now look at your own lives. Twenty-three hours to take care of the body versus half an hour (if you're lucky) to cleanse the heart. That's quite a difference, isn't it?

There are ten fetters[2] or chains binding all of us to *saṁsāra*, the cycle of birth and death, and the *Sotāpanna* has only cut the first three, so the work is not finished at that point. The fourth and fifth fetters are greed and aversion and they're rooted in the body, so body investigation has to continue and go even deeper and deeper. One technique that I found useful, after withdrawing from *samādhi*, was to use the concentrated energy to mentally chop the body into pieces.[3] The idea is to show the *citta* just how repugnant the physical body really is; it's a real mess. When medical students dissect a body for the first time, some faint or vomit with the shock. That's the automatic reaction of the *kilesas* when they're presented with the reality of the body. Its loathsomeness is concealed beneath the soft, smooth layer of skin, but in meditation we have to see it as it really is. Even the skin itself is disgusting – have you noticed? You have to clean it every day, not because it gets dirty on the outside but because dirt, such as sweat and grease, come from the inside. Every part of the body has to be investigated. Rip away the skin and flesh, cut out the

2. A list of the ten fetters (*saṁyojana*) is given in the Appendix.

3. Ajahn Martin's talk, *How to practise body contemplation*, in his book, *Forest Leaves*, available on his website (www.forestdhammatalks.org), explains this practice in more detail.

muscles and ligaments, break the ribs, take out the heart, the liver and the oily bloody lungs and feel them in your hands, and do the same with the innards. Feel them, smell them, touch them ... and over time, you'll start to ask yourself, "Is this the disgusting thing I carry around with me all the time?" But remember: the idea isn't to make the body seem disgusting, but to realise that it is, in fact, a vile repulsive mess. Feelings of disgust automatically arise in the *citta* as soon as it sees the body as it really is.

Of course, the *kilesas* don't like doing this. In fact, they hate it. The body is their favourite toy and they don't give it up easily. If you have grandchildren, you'll know they take their favourite toy everywhere, even to bed. Well, the *kilesas* want to keep their favourite toy too, and they can bring up anger when you start to investigate the body. So you must be ready to investigate anger itself. What is anger? Where does it come from? How can I counteract it? And do the same with greed if it comes up: what is it? where is it from? how can I counter it? One way to counteract the greed for food, for example, is to mentally replace the most appetising food with its end product, faeces. No one likes doing that, of course, but it is helpful. Transforming a tasty dish of lobster and rice into a pile of steaming excrement certainly interrupts greed for a while.

Replacing unwholesome thoughts with their opposite is something we all have to develop to make progress, and actually it's quite easy. But it needs awareness and presence of mind (*sati*) to recognise what's happening in the mind at each moment. We train *sati* by concentrating on one point, replacing every thought with awareness of the breath or the *buddho*. Eventually we'll be able to replace every thought connected with greed or hate with its opposite, and we'll see these emotions disappear immediately. How do you think a *bhikkhu* can survive being celibate for years? He's still a human being, after all, and needs a weapon to counter sexual desire (*rāga-taṇhā*). What can he do when sexual desire arises? Well, he can rip apart the image in the mind and look inside the physical body, seeing it as it really is — a bag of bones, blood, pus, faeces and urine covered over by a thin layer of skin. This makes sexual desire disappear for a time. Of course, the *kilesas* try to sew the image back together again and

sexual desire reappears. Then he has to rip the image apart again so as not to be caught up again. You can think of replacing one thought with another as a game, and it's a game we can learn during the initial training in *samādhi*. Later, it's invaluable in the higher training as a way of overcoming greed and aversion. And once that work is finished, we'll have attained the state of *Anāgāmī*, and will never be reborn again, not in the hells, not in the heavenly (*deva*) realms and not in the human realm. The job is done. No more bodies — thank God! No more worries! But it takes a lot of work; it's a very long road.

The final stage of enlightenment involves overcoming delusion, which lies in two of the five *khandhas* — memory and thought, which work together, so quickly you can hardly see them. We have to investigate them, separate them from each other, and understand how they fool us time after time. Then we come face to face with *avijjā* itself, the master behind it all. Even at this stage *avijjā* can deceive, and people can think they're already in *Nibbāna* because the radiance is so fascinating, so powerful. But once *avijjā* is conquered, *Arahantship* is attained and the work is at an end. This is the end of the path, the extinction of suffering (*dukkha*).

So that's the path, and I'd advise you to start walking it. When your minds start wandering to the next life, remember the first fifteen unpleasant and difficult years of this life. Ask yourself if you want to go through all that again: learning to speak again; learning to write again; and sitting in school again memorising all the stupid things you didn't want to know. Was that jolly fun? Well, that's what's going to happen again and again and again if you don't put a stop to it. It's up to you to stop; no-one else can do it for you. If you want to be reborn, it's your decision. It's your life, your responsibility, but you have to live with the consequences. However, if you insist on being reborn, at least make sure it's in a pleasant realm. Live a moral life by keeping the five precepts and do lots of good deeds, so that the next life will be more comfortable. Also, be generous, respectful, and grateful for whatever you've received in this life — even if it wasn't to your liking. Generosity, gratitude and respect can make the next life more tolerable, and can also lead to rebirth in the higher realms.

Look at the young people today addicted to games on their silly devices like smartphones. The game is always the same but they have to play over and over again. They never get tired of it, thinking they'll win this time, but losing and playing again until they win, and on it goes playing one game after another. Well, it's the same with all of us. You want to become a wonderful dancer, but things don't work out in the first life. The next life has a better outcome, and by the seventh you're a star of stage and screen. Then, having reached the summit, you feel like being something else, a musician, engineer or doctor. No-one can master a subject in one life. You all know from school or university that students differ in their ability; some have natural talent and pick things up very easily while others don't. There's an airline pilot on this retreat, and he knows how some people take to aviation training right away while others never get the hang of it. To master a subject, you have to train over and over again, in a number of different lives. But once you've mastered it, you want to move on to the next subject. That's why my teacher, Than Ajahn Mahā Bua, called the *citta* the everlasting tourist. That's how it goes; the wheel of *saṁsāra* turns, but it's up to you to jump off.

It's your choice, of course, but please be aware of what's in front of you. That's the message I want to get over. If you find your mind drifting to the next life, try to remember the painful and unpleasant bits of this one. Start at birth, which is painful for the mother and traumatic for the baby. Sometimes the baby and the mother come close to death. Do you want to go through that narrow channel again, only to go through growing up again? Only you can make a decision about this; you're the one paying the bill. It's just like being in a restaurant eating a delicious soup — you can eat but you have to pay the bill. If you insist on having a next life, and have the *kamma* to become a human being again, you may get a life similar to this one. Or if you've made good provision by living a moral life and doing some very meritorious things, you may go up to the *deva* realms for a while. This sounds nice, but what happens after that? Do you know? No-one knows their mountain of *kamma* lurking in the background; you might fall straight into hell. Good deeds lead

upwards to the *deva* realms and bad deeds lead downwards to hell, but they can't be exchanged. Once a stay in the *deva* realms is over, you can fall straight down to hell. This is the wheel of *saṁsāra*. The Lord Buddha saw this and taught people the way out, but some didn't believe it, even during his lifetime. It's said that on one occasion he opened up the worlds, the thirty-one realms, so people could see the many beings there and the suffering they have to endure. People wouldn't have believed it otherwise. And how much harder is it to believe this today? I sometimes hear Buddhists saying that hell and heaven are only on Earth. But that's wrong; they're not. There really are hell realms, and there really are heavenly realms. People can of course experience "heaven on Earth" if they live in comfort, or "hell on Earth" if they're really suffering, but let me be frank. I'd rather have "hell on Earth" than hell in Hell. If you could see what happens in the hells, any kind of life as a human being on this Earth is far, far better.

Success Needs Determined Effort

14th September 2007

Meditation always has positive results, whether *samatha* to calm the mind or investigation to develop insight (*vipassanā*). Generosity, gratitude, and respect for other people are three positive qualities that also have wholesome results, whereas anger and greed are negative emotions with unwholesome effects. We all know this, but we keep acting in negative or unwholesome ways over and over again throughout our lives. To break this cycle, we have to be able to stop ourselves before we follow our greed and anger, and this means having awareness (*sati*). Unless we're aware of what's happening, we'll never be able to catch it.

We are like blind people in this respect, and that's why *avijjā*, the fundamental ignorance which must be overcome to reach enlightenment, is also called blindness. We're blind, stumbling in the dark, falling into the same pit again and again. After clambering out and realising what happened, we wonder how we ever fell in, but then we repeat the same mistakes, tumbling into the same pit again. This happens because we're looking up at the sky and not at the road ahead. With *sati*, we can stop falling into the pit, but we have to develop it, really develop it. Don't think that *sati* develops from one moment to the next; it has to be fostered, and developing it is a slow process that can take a very long time. It was difficult for me to take the first steps towards developing *sati*, but I had one thing that most of you probably don't have — an extreme determination not to let go of my meditation practice. Whatever happened, I refused to give up.

The first two years were the toughest for me, tougher than any time in my life before. I was still a layperson living in Germany at that point, but I practised for an hour morning and evening, before and after work, and several hours at the weekend. During that time, all the crap from the past came up in the mind, so much so that I sometimes felt unable to breathe so heavy was the *dukkha*. But something in me realised, "This is the way it is", and that I needed

to keep going. After all, someone who wants to get rich knows that he has to work for it. Look at the gold diggers in America in the nineteenth century, getting by on meagre food, sleeping little and working until they couldn't even lift a shovel — and all for just a lump of gold! They didn't give up, did they? But what do people do when they start practising to find the riches inside themselves? They throw in the towel after an hour or two and have a nice little rest. Like the gold diggers, I had something in mind, that there was something to gain, something beyond. That's why I was willing to do the heavy lifting and go through all the *dukkha* involved in my early practice. It really was heavy stuff, and there were times I seemed to be breaking apart. But I told myself that I was still alive and hadn't broken yet, so I kept going. Every day, all the crap from the past kept coming up, until after two years most of the coarser things had been cleared away. But if I'd avoided the *dukkha*, if I'd run away from dealing with all the crap, I'd have stopped practising and never found my inner treasure. That's the kind of determination I had, the determination not to let go, whatever happened. And remember: at that time I didn't even have a teacher. I don't know how I managed it. I went on a meditation course only once in a while during this period, but for the rest of the time I was on my own, with no-one to ask for advice. I was just by myself, trying to find the wholesome results that practice can bring, and it was tough, really tough.

You people are lucky. You've come to Baan Taad monastery where there is spiritual guidance. Than Ajahn Mahā Bua looks after this place, so you're in very good hands and nothing harmful can happen to you. But please don't think that the results of your practice will come easily. They don't for most people, who find meditation practice hard, hard work. It's so difficult to maintain the determined effort (*vīriya*) to keep going. *Vīriya* is one of the seven factors of enlightenment[1], and it is lacking in almost everyone today, especially people from the West. They might put a lot of determination into practice initially, but they get bored after a few months and

1. The seven factors of enlightenment are awareness (*sati*); investigation (*dhammavicaya*); effort (*viriya*); rapture or happiness (*pīti*); calm (*passaddhi*); concentration (*samādhi*); and equanimity (*upekkhā*).

start thinking about other things. This applies to *bhikkhus* as well as laypeople; I've seen it happen in both. People are interested at first, but see no results after a while and start looking for something else to fill up their time. *Bhikkhus* switch to easier tasks around the monastery, and laypeople disappear back into the worldly life which seems much more fun. Yet, as the Lord Buddha realised just after his enlightenment, there are a few people whose eyes are only a little covered with dust; they can see the truth and be determined to find it. So while you're here, please use this chance to make progress. Take the opportunity to practise and ask questions. In time, of course, you'll find that the answers reside in only one place — your own heart (*citta*).

All I can do is point the direction for you to go in. The Lord Buddha's teachings are pointers to the truth but aren't the truth itself, as he made clear, just as the signpost to Rome has nothing to do with the real city or the signpost to Baan Taad monastery has nothing to do with the actual place. Similarly, the word *samādhi* has nothing to do with the experience of *samādhi*; it's just a pointer showing how to attain that state and experience it for yourself. You must understand this. Signposts indicate the direction to go to end up at a destination, and not following the sign will get you nowhere. The teaching of the Lord Buddha can only point to the truth, but it can never be the truth itself. Just fiddling around with words or manipulating signposts won't get you anywhere nearer the truth. Walking the path, continuing to practise — for instance, mentally repeating the *parikamma* word *buddho* over and over again — is what you have to do. Keep repeating *buddho* until it snaps in. I promise you that if you keep doing this practice, it will snap in. Then you'll be able to observe it, listen to the *buddho* that repeats itself within your own heart and become enchanted with it. It's so peaceful and harmonious, but if you don't reach that point, if you don't make it happen, it never will. Everything I'm saying here is worthless if you don't take my advice and act on it.

Words in themselves have nothing to do with the truth. I can tell you about *samādhi*, but the instant you experience it, you'll know it for yourself. When I'm talking to someone, I know from their

description whether they've entered *samādhi* or not because I've experienced it myself. I do know these things, not by magic but from my own experience. Everything I'm telling you I know for myself; I've walked the path all by myself. I've gone through good things and horrible things, through happy times and very tough times. But I never gave up the repetition of *buddho* or the object of my investigation. *Buddho* became so ingrained in my heart that I never let go of it, because it was the only anchor I had through the ups and downs of this world. And you all know the ways of the world. They're based on greed, hate and delusion, and they sway the heart backwards and forwards giving it no time to rest. But if you have a mainstay in the heart, you'll have a safe haven that you can return to any time, a place where you can rest. That's what you have to work on. I want you to understand this.

But remember — all my words, all my descriptions, have nothing to do with the experience itself. When you look at a picture of a fire, you can imagine how hot it is or what the heat feels like. But you'll only really know the meaning of great heat if you actually thrust your fist into a fire. And it's the same with signposts to a particular destination; they may be beautiful and engraved in gold lettering, or ugly and made of wood or paper, but they all point to the same place. We shouldn't get stuck on the signposts themselves. Five people might all see different signposts, beautiful and ugly, and meet to speculate about the destination. They're all likely to have different opinions and may even seem to be talking about completely different places. This is because they've taken the signposts to be substitutes for the destination itself. Only on reaching the journey's end will they know for themselves. In the context of practice, this means making the journey back to the heart through the practice of meditation. The path leads us there. It's the way taught by the Lord Buddha, the way we can experience the truth for ourselves.

Different accomplished teachers (*Kruba* Ajahns) use different words, but they all point to the same thing. Don't get confused by the words; just keep doing your work. And the work is so utterly simple that some people despair as soon as they start. How can it be so simple? There is no simpler work in the whole world than the

internal repetition of the word *buddho*. It doesn't even need any training; you just repeat the word over and over again, and that's it! There's so little to understand. But it's so difficult to keep doing it and doing it and doing it, over and over again. People manage to keep it going for five minutes and then start speculating about the results, and that's where they go wrong. Just do the work, don't think about the results and you'll end up at the *citta*, the heart. And don't bother about words or descriptions, otherwise you'll take them as real, start imagining and get confused. Forget words and descriptions about *samādhi*; apart from anything else, your *samādhi* will be different from someone else's because your background and characteristic tendencies differ. They will have something in common, however, though only someone with experience of *samādhi* will be able to tell what it is.

So just start practising. The first thing to happen is that the mind becomes peaceful and happy. It has to. It has to become quiet because it has ceased running around after things that harass, worry and frighten it. It can't pursue them because it is focussed on *buddho*. The mind is a single processing machine. It can't perform parallel operations, only one thing at a time, but that's why we can control it. There's no magic about any of this. If the mind was a parallel processing machine, we wouldn't be able to keep it under control. So don't give up: just put your attention on one thing alone. As I said, at the beginning of my practice I had to go through a whole load of *dukkha* whilst trying to stop my mind running around. In the *suttas*, the Lord Buddha describes this work as taming a wild elephant.[2] How long does it take to tame a wild elephant, until it will do what we want it to? It takes a long, long time, not just a few days or weeks, and it's the same with an unruly mind.

But think about your childhood. How long did it take to develop the skills needed to function as an adult, training the body, mind and character? Did you like the training, being told right from wrong by your parents or teachers? No, but you had no other choice, did you?

2. This refers to the Dantabhumi Sutta, the discourse on "The Grade of the Tamed", in the Majjhima Nikāya.

Now you're all adults, of course, and think you have lots of choices – but that's where you go wrong. In fact, you've no other choice than to meditate if you want to find your inner treasure. This training in *citta bhāvanā* is like training a wild elephant or teaching a child to think, walk and speak. Just don't give up! You didn't give up learning to walk, even after falling down again and again. You didn't give up learning to speak, even though it took years and involved a lot of angst. None of us gave up, did we? We wouldn't be here if we did. It took at least ten years at school to develop and hone your mental faculties and three or four years to get a university degree, but you went through it all because you wanted the end result. So, why give up meditation so easily? Well, you say, it's all too much hassle, but is it any more hassle than all the other different kinds of training you've had to go through? Do you think that training in *citta bhāvanā* will be any easier, that you can perfect it just by snapping your fingers? The truth is that you don't have any other choice if you want the end result. Just don't give up. If you keep going, you'll eventually get a "degree" at what Than Ajahn Mahā Bua called the "Forest University". You'll get into *samādhi* and go on from there.

I managed to get into *samādhi* after two and a half years, I remember. As I was sitting there – one, two, three – I was gone. The first time it happened, I didn't know what was going on, but my teacher was able to explain it. Then I wanted to get into *samādhi* again, but that very wanting prevented it happening for one whole year. That year was extreme *dukkha* for me, but it was a consequence of me wanting *samādhi* again, wanting it so badly. In the end, I just had to let go of the wanting and keep practising to the exclusion of everything else. Than Ajahn Mahā Bua told a similar story about his early days. His practice was up and down, progressing then declining, until he realised that he had to drive a stake firmly into the ground – just like the elephant tamer – and hold tightly to it no matter what happened, the stake being the mental repetition of *buddho*.[3] This needs determined effort, of course, and it's so easy to slacken and let the practice deteriorate.

3. See the talk, From ignorance to emptiness, in Than Ajahn Mahā Bua's book, Things As They Are, available on the Luangta website (www.luangta.eu).

Someone who practises faithfully for two months and then lets his effort decline can find the world starting to appear rosy and colourful compared with the seeming cloudiness and greyness of *citta bhāvanā*. If he had continued for another week, he might have seen some results; instead, he was snared by the colours of the world, its sights, sounds, smells and tastes, and been pulled back into it. Some people come to the monastery and set up their determination, only to see it decline, after which they leave, doing this over and over again, starting at the same point every time. Their practice may be a little bit easier each time, but they start at the beginning nevertheless, meet the same difficulties as before and go back into the world again. Similarly, *bhikkhus* can start undertaking worldly tasks like constructing another temple or building a better meditation hut (*kuti*) as their determination wanes and their practice deteriorates. In this way, they can lose any progress gained and forget their real purpose in ordaining as a Buddhist monk.

What made gold diggers work like mad for forty years under dismal and difficult conditions? It was because they were blinded by the prospect of gold at the end of their labours. If they found a nugget or two, they spent the money quickly, and twenty years of work was gone. This isn't the case with *citta bhāvanā*. The gold in your heart has been there since the beginning and, once revealed, you'll have access to it for all time. So whatever you need to do to access the gold in the *citta*, do it. The job is worthwhile. Trust that there is something within yourself that is worth discovering, and bring up the determination to find it. People travel the world to learn new things or observe other planets for evidence of alien life forms, but they don't know who they really are or why they are acting as they do. It seems to be easier for people to look outwards than inwards. But once you get a little success in practice through the attainment of *samādhi*, once you get an inkling of the treasure residing within the heart, the experience will boost your determination to go full pelt for the real thing. Of course, getting into *samādhi* is only a first step, but the experience of deep calm and happiness fosters trust that the hard work ahead really is worthwhile. *Samādhi* itself doesn't

relieve people of all their *dukkha*, of course, but it increases confidence in the path and helps to develop the *sati* that is the key to practice. In the beginning, both concentration and *sati* seem to be the same thing. However, as *samādhi* becomes more subtle, *sati* and concentration separate out — *sati* is the knowingness of the object that concentration is trying to pinpoint. In fact, *sati* supports *samādhi* and *samādhi* trains *sati*.

The gold that we're looking for doesn't exist anywhere outside of ourselves. Wherever we go, we take it with us, along with the filth covering it. Anything you do to remove the dirt hiding your inner treasure is worthwhile, because the riches will reveal themselves wherever you go. And they'll reveal themselves to the extent they are uncovered. But as long as you don't recognise their presence, you'll be blinded by the world of greed, hate and delusion. So find the treasure inside yourself. All of you are fooled by sights, sounds, smells and tastes, and — especially if you come from the West — by your own thoughts. Westerners are so thrilled, so extremely fascinated, by their own thinking. They can create worlds out of their own thoughts and believe they can fulfil all their desires. But thinking has nothing to do with reality, just as a signpost has nothing to do with the destination. Just thinking about being rich and spending millions of dollars doesn't make us rich. We don't have this money. Though it might create a brief feeling of happiness, when we wake up from our dreaming the cruel old world is still there, isn't it? Most of us stay in the cruel world for only a few minutes at a time before jumping back into imagination, switching back and forth between reality and dreams. This is how we spend our lives, going in and out of dreams and mental fabrications, dreaming during the day and having dreams or nightmares at night.

But remember, the things which happen to us in this world, that we run away from into our dreams and imagination are impermanent. They come and go, arise and pass away. The *nāma-khandhas* of feeling, memory and association, discursive thought and consciousness all arise and pass away, as does the body (*rūpa*) itself. My advice to you is not to grab onto these things; just observe them as they are, arising, changing and passing away. Everything is imper-

manent, nothing in the world is stable. The only thing that doesn't change is the *citta*, but at the moment it is defiled by greed, hate and delusion. You have to cleanse it, remove the dirt to reveal the treasure within. It's a hard task, but look on it as washing the laundry, a job we all dislike but have to undertake. Than Ajahn Mahā Bua calls the *citta* the everlasting tourist; it goes from one realm to the next, one body to the next, but it never dies. Everything else arises, changes and passes away – worlds, realms, bodies – but the *citta* inhabiting the body can never die. So what do you actually have to worry about? Just get doing the work – discovering the true nature of the *citta*. If you get into the deep state of *samādhi* (*appaṇā samādhi*), you'll see the true nature of the *citta* for yourself and experience it for the first time. Than Ajahn Mahā Bua calls this state the *Nibbāna* of the little man, a preview of *Nibbāna*. As soon as you come out, you'll want to go back in, and you'll realise – at that moment – that all your hard work has been worthwhile. No work in this world is more worthwhile than the practice of *citta bhāvanā*.

View of Phu Pan Tong in Nong Bua Lamphu

The Goal of a Bhikkhu Is Vimutti

18th May 2008

You all ordained as *bhikkhus* for one purpose — to achieve *vimutti*, freedom from the domination of the *kilesas* and *avijjā*. This means following the noble eightfold path[1] taught by the Lord Buddha, the path that leads to *Nibbāna*, the end of *dukkha*. In the Thai Forest Tradition, the path is described as having three columns: *sīla* (morality), *samādhi* (concentration) and *paññā* (wisdom). For *bhikkhus*, maintaining *sīla* involves keeping two hundred and twenty-seven monastic rules, not just the five or eight precepts undertaken by laypeople. It also includes following all the minor rules of conduct and discipline included in the *Vinaya*, the monastic code. You should train yourselves to keep *sīla* perfectly at all times because it's the guarantee that you won't spiral down to the lower realms of existence in future. *Samādhi* comprises *sati* (awareness) and the ability to concentrate on one object, while *paññā* arises through investigation and the development of insight; both are necessary to cut the fetters binding the *citta* to the cycle of rebirth.

Remember that we rely on the generosity of laypeople for food and other requisites. Everything we own, everything we have, is donated by them. It will be the same as long as we remain *bhikkhus*, so don't underestimate it. If you don't do the work, don't maintain *sīla* and develop *samādhi* and *paññā*, it will count against you in future. Look on the food and support you receive as a long-term loan which has to be repaid in a future life. You'll have to repay it all if you don't do the work of a *bhikkhu*, so be intent on practising as hard as you can. This doesn't mean attaining *Nibbāna* in this lifetime — though if you can, that's great — but rather keeping the *Vinaya* rules governing the conduct of *bhikkhus* and putting effort into *samādhi* and *paññā*.

1. The noble eight-fold path (*ariyo aṭṭhangiko maggo*) leading to *Nibbāna* comprises right view, right thought, right speech, right action, right livelihood, right effort, right *sati* and right *sāmadhi*. Each of these steps has many facets, and has a subtle, intricate relationship to the others.

If you can do this for the rest of your lives, you can say that the holy life hasn't been wasted. However, if you do anything else, such as building work or even teaching laypeople, then you're wasting your opportunity as *bhikkhus*. These extraneous tasks are not the work the Lord Buddha exhorted his *bhikkhus* to do. And remember: in the *suttas*, the Lord Buddha didn't give permission to every *bhikkhu* to wander around preaching at will. Only those who had reached enlightenment, finished their Dhamma work and achieved *vimutti*, received his permission to go out into the world and teach others. There was a good reason for this. Enlightened people are free of the *kilesas*, so there are no *kilesas* to influence their teachings. Ordinary people, however, still have *kilesas* lurking in the background which pollute whatever they teach, and when this impure teaching is then passed down to the next generation, over time, much of the Lord Buddha's teachings can become skewed by the *kilesas*. In fact, the whole *sāsana* can become so watered down that the essential teachings are almost unrecognisable. This doesn't mean that one *bhikkhu* can't help another with his difficulties on the path of practice, of course. A worldling can be helped by *Sotāpaññā*, a *Sotāpaññā* by a *Sakadāgāmī*, a *Sakadāgāmī* by an *Anāgāmī*, and an *Anāgāmī* by an *Arahant*. Only the Lord Buddha can help an *Arahant*, however, but that need not concern us here.

Do you see the danger lurking there? Than Ajahn Mahā Bua used to warn of the dangers of starting to teach without having finished the work of eradicating the *kilesas*. Within a few short years, the Dhamma acquired from meditation in the monastery or forest will be gone, because the practice gets curtailed or stops altogether. Only *saññā* and *sankhāra* will remain, the tattered old memories of past practice. All the *bhikkhu*'s effort will have gone into teaching rather than practice, with nothing of value left in the end. You must see the danger in this, see the danger even here in this monastery where there are relatively few opportunities to teach. Once *bhikkhus* start teaching, audiences give them admiration and support, and it's easy for them to start loving the attention. But this has a negative effect: in fact, fame is one of the main obstructions on the path of practice. It can also lead *bhikkhus* to give teachings that audiences

like to hear rather than what they need to hear for their spiritual development. And what people want to hear doesn't necessarily accord with what the Lord Buddha really taught.

In fact, most people aren't interested in what the Lord Buddha actually taught. They mostly want to hear anecdotes about his life or stories about peacefulness and happiness. They don't want to see or be reminded that their own *citta* contains the mountain of greed and hate needed for birth as a human being. People don't want to be told that they're bad. They want to hear teachings that comfort and content them. Point out all the evil in their hearts and they don't like it, do they? But the path of practice means objectively looking at oneself, objectively examining whatever is inside the *citta*. What is happening at this moment that makes you desire something, want to change this or that, want to drink, eat, listen, see or follow any of the senses? You really need to look, and if there is greed or hate in the *citta*, don't follow it, any of it. After you've trained yourself like this for a while and learned to stop following unwholesome impulses, you can begin to look for the roots of greed and hate in the *citta* itself. If you examine the reason for wanting, you'll find that it always comes down to an unpleasant feeling, whether weak or strong. Unpleasant feelings always send us out into either greed or hate; a really unpleasant feeling might elicit hate, for example.

So you need to look, look deeply into the *citta* and see what is really going on. Then you can reflect. Ask yourself whether following your desires, greed or hate, will really change the situation or really make a difference. If you reflect wisely, you'll see how the *kilesas* trick you all the time; they always want to change the subject. We all know from experience that when we're told something we don't like, we try to change the subject to avoid feeling uncomfortable. Well, the *kilesas* are the same; the moment there's an unpleasant experience, even just tiredness or boredom, they want to change the subject and promise something to make you happier. For instance, they promise that venting hate on someone will relieve the hateful feeling. But we know that's not true. Following hate or greed doesn't get rid of them. You should carefully reflect on this. Ask yourself: what is happening in my *citta* at this moment that the *kilesas* want to change? How do

they want to change it, and how exactly do they intend to go about it? You have to become smart, not smart in the way of the *kilesas* but smart in the way of Dhamma. You have to reflect like this and have insight into what is going on. Once you've trained yourself not to follow greed and hate, you can start to dig deeper. The longer you dig into greed and hate, the more you poke at it, the deeper you'll get and the more the truth will be revealed. Actually, the only thing that can set people free is the truth. It's insight — seeing into the true nature of the heart, the *citta* — that breaks the fetters binding all of us to the wheel of *saṁsāra*.

The first goal of a *bhikkhu* is to destroy the identification with the body (*sakkāya-diṭṭhi*), which is one of the first three fetters. This means investigating the body inside and out to realise its true nature, to see what it really is. But don't worry if it's difficult at first, for it may take weeks, months or years to investigate it thoroughly and really understand its nature. I don't mean understanding with the intellect alone. Our minds know that the heart beats, that the lungs and liver have particular functions, and that blood vessels supply all the organs, but knowing intellectually is not the same as investigating with wisdom. Investigation is concerned with seeing the body and its parts as *anicca* (constantly changing), *dukkha* (a source of suffering) and *anattā* (not self), the three universal characteristics of existence. Take *anicca*; the body has to be born and taught how to digest, walk and talk, and trained how to think properly. It takes between fifteen and twenty years before we could use the body for our own purposes. Then it gives pleasure for another thirty years before it starts to break down, limiting what we can do, and it continues to deteriorate until the moment of death. The young think they can change the world and make it a better place, but these plans falter as the body breaks down. In any case, changing the world only changes the outside, whereas the real challenge is to change the thing inside that makes the world go round. People never think about that, do they? Imagine trying to teach a car to drive. That would be silly because we all know it's the driver who drives; it's the driver who needs lessons. In the same way, the *citta* needs to be taught, not the body. If the *citta* wants to move the body or its parts, it does so, and

if there's no *citta* the body doesn't do anything at all. So to effect real change, it's the "driver" we have to teach. Please understand that it's not the body that wants to do things, it's the *citta*.

There are many ways of investigating the body. One is to break it into its elements — earth, fire, water and air — as recommended in the *suttas*. Another is to see the body decomposing after death. It can take a while for you to get a clear *nimitta* of this, but once established you can watch the process of decomposition, how the fluids run out, the blood dries up, shrivelling begins and only the bones are left to turn slowly to dust. Or you can investigate the process of being born, the pain involved in squeezing through a small channel covered in mucus and blood. One method that I used myself was to mentally cut the body up into pieces, throwing each part out in front until there was a pile of mincemeat with blood, fat, bone and body parts sitting before my inner eyes. After throwing every body part out in front, you'll realise that something remains sitting in your place — the knowingness of the *citta*.[2] At first, the *citta* may seem to understand, but you might have to do this exercise a thousand or a million times before the *citta* accepts the understanding that it and the body are two different things. This is the principle of *anattā*, the truth that the body and everything associated with it are not me, not mine and not myself. You can all understand this intellectually, I'm sure — but that's not the kind of understanding needed for deliverance. You have to realise the truth about the body for yourselves, deep in your hearts. Whatever happens, you must do these and similar exercises until you see the true nature of the body and understand that it and the *citta* which drives it are not the same. Of course, whatever technique you use will bring up pain, discomfort or horror, but remember that these are created within the *citta* by the *kilesas* because they don't want to see the truth. They don't want to be reminded about death, birth or the nature of the body. All they want is fun, running amok doing whatever they like. You could say that they only want to see the head side of the coin and not the tail, the upsides not the downsides.

2. See Ajahn Martin's talk, *How to practise body contemplation*, in his book, *Forest Leaves*, available on his website (www.forestdhammatalks.org).

Dukkha is also involved in having a body, of course, and that's also something to reflect upon; feeding it, resting it, washing it and dealing with all its needs is an unpleasant nuisance. Food tastes great on the tongue, but there's no taste involved when it reaches the stomach, goes through the digestive system and plops out as faeces, is there? There's *dukkha* involved in it all. It also has to be kept healthy and be moved around from here to there, changing position every few minutes. Normally, people only get pleasure from the body when it feels completely rested, satisfied and pain-free, but how often is that? Mostly it's something of a nuisance, and there's a lot of unpleasantness associated with it too. In ordinary life, people don't usually bother much about the body, being preoccupied with their memories and discursive thoughts, their *saññā* and *sankhāra*, but investigation forces our focus onto the physical body to see it as it really is.

So your work as *bhikkhus* is to reflect at all times on the nature of the body in terms of *anicca, dukkha* and *anattā*. But don't give up easily, for even thinking you understand doesn't mean that you *really* understand. You've understood with the brain, not the *citta*. The *citta* has to see clearly, in front of its own eyes, that it and the body are not the same. It's a particular way of seeing, of understanding, not the usual kind of thinking or concluding using the intellect. Teachers have to use particular words, which exist in the realm of concepts, and the mind can grasp these very easily. But when I mention seeing and understanding in line with the truth, I'm talking about understanding with the inner eye — really seeing. And once the *citta* has really understood, it lets go on its own. This is true understanding: it's the difference between surmising from afar that a fire is hot and actually thrusting your hand into it. The untrained *citta* doesn't understand the true nature of fire; it's only when it thrusts in its hand and finally knows the danger that it truly lets go of its own accord. But please understand that I don't mean let go in the conventional sense. I hear people talking about "letting go" in the context of meditation, but you must get rid of the idea that you can let go just by thinking it. All you can do is teach the *citta* to see the danger clearly, and as long as it doesn't, it won't let go. It'll still want, hate, like and dislike. But once the *citta* sees clearly and

realises the truth, the investigation of the body has come to an end. The greed and hate that produce so much of the heavy *dukkha* have been removed: the state of *Anāgāmī* has been attained.

The investigation of the *nāma-khandhas,* the mental components of personality, can then begin. However, they are far more difficult to investigate than the *rūpa-khandha*, the body which we can at least see as an external object, as something apart. The *nāma-khandhas* are what we think we are — our memories, our thoughts, our consciousness, and the emotions that come along with them. We feel attached to them because they've been part of our self-view for such a long time. Investigating them feels like ripping our very being apart. No-one wants that, just as no-one likes being criticised or verbally attacked. But remember: the things we want to avoid are the places where the *kilesas* lurk the most. They lurk in the dark, but they have to vanish once the light of Dhamma shines on them. So we have to look into all the dark corners of the *nāma-khandhas,* into this view, that opinion, this memory, that thought, and so on. The *kilesas* hide where we don't investigate, for they don't want us to see how they use memory and thought to deceive us, to trick us time after time.

And there's one more important thing — the main attack of the *kilesas* comes through fear and doubt. Fear of death, fear of harm, fear of causing pain to ourselves, fear of boredom, doubt about the practice, doubt about our own abilities — these are all used by the *kilesas* to resist progress in practice and stop us doing battle against them. Fear and doubt are the main enemies most people face after sitting in meditation for half an hour. If the *kilesas* win, they've beaten us back to our old ways, the path of taking the easy way out and finding a little bit of comfort. But that's not the way of Dhamma. For *vimutti*, we have to take on the *kilesas* and fight them to the very end.

Ajahn Martin Piyadhammo on Alms-round

The Two Kinds of Silence

Based on an interview with Birgit Stratmann in

Tibet und Buddhismus (2013)

People want silence, the silence of the heart (*citta*), but they don't want to do the work needed to find it. They first have to remove all the garbage blocking the path to the heart, but that needs resolution and endurance. If you start practising seriously, you'll find yourself pushed to the limits of your capacity, almost to breaking point, both physically and mentally. For the first year and a half after coming to Thailand and Baan Taad monastery, I felt as though the water was up to my neck and that I couldn't take much more. Predicaments like that only come about when you leave the world behind and start on an inner journey, a quest in which the only option is to accept and deal with all the difficulties that arise. And it's a long journey; even when the grosser obstacles are overcome, finer ones come along, and these include hatred, greed and, of course, sexual desire which is extremely strong.

When emotions come up in the silence of meditation, it means things are going well. Actually, that's when the practice gets interesting. In this silence, you can look at everything inside yourself and work with it. It's your only chance to get rid of whatever lies there. Emotions are always there anyway, so to speak, in the deeper layers of the mind, so when you stop occupying the mind with external things, they rise up. The activities which used to fill your days and keep emotions subdued have gone all of a sudden. These emotions are the basis for all our actions; why we look for someone, why we pick up the phone, why we go on the Internet, and so on. We don't usually recognise this in our noisy world, but it's true. And these suppressed emotions come up when we remain in silence and have nothing else to do but be aware of the breath or the body. So what can we do about them? Well, the first step is to accept that greed, hatred and delusion are inside ourselves rather than say, "I'm a Buddhist and shouldn't feel like this." Instead, we should recognise that

every living being in the cycle of rebirth, including ourselves, carries the fires of greed, hatred and delusion in itself. Seeing this is not pretty; most people run away from that truth because they can't bear it. They yearn for silence but don't want to deal with its consequences, and this blocks the way to the heart. But if we can deal with the emotions that come up, we'll get closer and closer to the root. In most cases, this needs a teacher who can bring us back if we've taken a wrong direction in meditation practice or can point out things that have been overlooked. Sometimes, the teacher can give you a (metaphorical) kick and ask, "Well, does it hurt?" This is precisely the task of the spiritual friend (*kalyāṇa-mitta*) — to show us where we're stuck.

People who don't have a teacher to instruct them probably won't make much headway. And it's more difficult if they're involved in the world of work or play and in contact with friends who are not practising meditation. They might be able to make progress for a short time, if they know how to practise, but they're unlikely to get far without guidance. The problem with meditating alone at home is that people can repeatedly fall prey to the *kilesas*, the henchmen of *avijjā*, because they can't see where they're going wrong. For example, they might use silence to avoid aspects of practice they find tricky, and only put exertion into meditative concentration (*samādhi*) which doesn't involve dealing with actual emotions. But emotions like greed and guilt can prevent the mind making progress, as can the failure to observe the moral precepts (*sīla*). People need to be able to work with emotions, and that involves investigation, not just *samādhi*. Also, some people may become depressed or afraid and so can't move forward if there is no teacher to help. Successful meditation needs a teacher! For some, it's enough to visit a master now and again and remember his advice, and this should be sufficient for the most typical problems.

I should explain that I'm talking about an inner silence, not something from the outside. There are two kinds of inner silence according to the *Pāli* canon. The first occurs in access (*upācāra*) *samādhi* and the second in the deep state of *appaṇā samādhi*. The silence in *upācāra samādhi* is the silence beyond thoughts and memories.

Here we are aware of things, but only peripherally; they don't affect us and are perceived as if they were far away. The person has his eyes closed, is listening and still feels, but doesn't react internally. He feels perfectly safe in this state, and it brings much peace, happiness and tranquillity – and sometimes a joy that pervades the whole body. Once he comes out of *upācāra samādhi*, however, thoughts and memories flood back in. The second kind of inner silence occurs when one goes much deeper, into *appaṇā samādhi*. The only way to describe it is a clear knowingness. The person is awake, but there are no objects in the mind relating to that knowledge. Everything ceases to exist. First the body disappears from consciousness; sometimes it dissolves slowly, first the lower parts of the body and then other parts, until only the feeling of the breath remains. At the point where there is no interest in external things, the person's gone. The world ceases to exist; it's like descending so far into a deep well that you can't see any light. In *appaṇā samādhi* there is no perception of time and space, and the body no longer stirs. Sometimes the breath stops at this point, and this is a critical stage in the meditation because people become afraid that they'll die when the breath stops. Don't give way to this fear, however – just keep meditating. There is a third kind of *samādhi* – momentary (*khaṇika*) *samādhi* – which involves diving briefly into the deep silence and coming quickly out again largely unchanged, but little needs to be said about that.

To achieve *samādhi*, you need patience and perseverance above all, and it doesn't necessarily take a long time. A Swiss woman stayed here in the forest monastery for three weeks and only managed to reach *upācāra samādhi*. It was only when she went to Bangkok and was able to let go completely that she could spend the whole night in *appaṇā samādhi*. Most people make the mistake of looking for peace and joy from meditation, forgetting that the real work is to focus on one point, such as the breath at the tip of the nose or the mental repetition of the word *buddho*. Learning meditation is like a child learning to walk: it stands up, falls down and starts again. Similarly, when focusing the mind on an object, you have to keep bringing it back and bringing it back every time it wanders off. Actually, if you meditate every day for at least an hour or two, you can reach

upācāra samādhi. This doesn't sound difficult, but most people don't even reach that point.

As regards practice in everyday life, meditating for an hour in the morning and an hour in the evening at home can "cleanse" the *citta*. All the impressions of the day can be washed away. And after your sitting practice you can reflect how the day went: what you thought when brushing your teeth, when you ate, who you met, what impact your actions had, and so on. You have to do this, otherwise you won't be able to solve the problems that arise. Everything must be brought up and experienced once again so you can see for yourself how you routinely create your own problems. The most important aspect of this exercise is to not judge! It's only without judging that the true intentions of the *citta* can be seen for what they are. The more often you do this daily exercise, the deeper understanding becomes and the easier it is to stop performing unwholesome actions. Also, you should aim to go on a meditation retreat at least once or twice a year to deepen your practice. Daily meditation can maintain practice at a certain level, but only intensive meditation retreats will deepen it.

By itself, *samādhi* doesn't lead to insight, but without *samādhi* insight is hardly possible. The more intense the silence, the deeper the *samādhi*, the easier investigation leading to insight becomes. With a basis of very deep *samādhi*, it's possible to see through everything, and it becomes easier to let go of rigid, almost rock-solid views and attachments. When you come out of deep *samādhi*, you feel full of energy; all your batteries are charged. This energy can then be used to investigate and develop wisdom (*paññā*). Than Ajahn Mahā Bua used to compare *paññā* to a knife that cuts through misconceptions, and *samādhi* to sharpening the blade. If the blade is very sharp, you need only apply it lightly for it to cut through all by itself. You see through, so to speak, and this happens because you're free of attachments at that time, whereas it's impossible to see clearly with a mind full of ideas, thoughts and memories. Only this kind of practice can accomplish letting go in its fullest sense.

People sometimes ask me whether silence has a healing quality. Well, there is outer silence and inner silence. Outer silence can be

frightening to some people because, in the absence of distractions, they're confronted by their inner selves, and most people don't want to meet themselves. Inner silence, however, always has something satisfying, something gratifying, as there is no loneliness. There are no thoughts, no worries, no fears; it's just peaceful. That's the beauty of the experience that we can have in access *samādhi*. People who have experienced it always feel great, and they have a relieved and happy smile.

It's not absolutely necessary to withdraw from the world to find inner silence, but it helps. Of course, I realise that it's difficult for people living ordinary lives to break away from their environment. Westerners have a particular problem with doubt. They don't understand that tremendous patience and perseverance are needed to get results in the spiritual life. They try to avoid difficult training, running from teacher to teacher or trying out different practices – to no avail since they always meet the same problems or reach their limits and hit the same old wall. Their lack of perseverance and their impatience certainly play a part in this. They can spend their whole lives running from teacher to teacher, from one tradition to another, but they'll never make contact with their own inner obstacles. And as well as doubt, there's another major obstacle – education. Westerners rely on their minds instead of their hearts. Thinking, remembering and speaking prevent people from experiencing the present moment. I'll let you into a secret: experience can only happen in the present moment! If we're in the present moment without thoughts or memories, i.e. if the *citta* is silent, then this moment, this one moment, is where we are truly alive.

In fact, there can be no development without silence. The last of the four noble truths is the path leading to the end of *dukkha* and it consists of morality (*sīla*), which relies on keeping the precepts; concentration and awareness (*samādhi* and *sati*); and wisdom (*paññā*). Without *samādhi*, none of us can walk the path. We must focus our whole attention inwards, but most people do just the opposite. As long as the focus is on the outside, on the surroundings, we'll never be able to solve the puzzle of life. We have to return to the foundations, get down to the basics, and examine the body and its feelings.

The truth is that we don't really know ourselves. We sometimes call ourselves bad or say that we feel bad or terrible, but we really don't know how we're feeling or what's going on inside. For example, if we've experienced an unpleasant feeling in the past, there's a tendency to hang onto it, or rather the memory of it, even though it no longer really exists. In effect, we are strengthening and prolonging the feeling without realizing it. Yes, we sometimes do everything we can to stop reliving the feeling or memory — by eating ice cream or going to the movies, for instance — but the memory remains, doesn't it? We live in thoughts, ideas and illusions, and kill time to avoid seeing what's really happening.

For people living a normal life in the world, the first step towards experiencing inner silence is to go on a meditation retreat for at least ten days or, better, three weeks. This will let you get in contact with this kind of silence for the first time. You need to taste the sweetness of silence and become confident that meditation can lead to the peace you're seeking. Whatever you're looking for, it can be found in your own heart. Whatever arises, arises in your heart, and a good meditation teacher shows you the way to the heart. If you can have a deep and valuable experience on a retreat — even for only ten or fifteen minutes — it can be a spur to start meditating every day, if only for forty-five minutes a day or longer at the weekend. This will bring up energy and confidence. Remember — if extraordinary states of happiness, peace and tranquillity never came in meditation practice, no one would ever have walked the path and reached the end.

Speaking personally, just as other people need sleep and food, I need silence. It is my life energy. This doesn't mean I have to sit down formally to experience silence; there comes a time when this isn't necessary anymore. But, of course, I remain in silence as often as possible because there is nothing better in life. The inner noise, which is like a constantly blaring radio, is switched off. Unfortunately, people don't usually know where the switch is located, so they have an inner radio blaring incessantly: "I like that, I don't like that; Things should be like this and not like that; I mean this and

assert that; I'll do this now and afterwards...", and so it goes on. It blares for twenty-four hours a day, and at night people dream about everything the radio has broadcast during the day. How can silence arise when we're being bullied by thoughts and ideas all the time? Yet how pleased everyone is when the sound stops, even if only for fifteen minutes. The deeper the experience of silence is, the more powerful is the motivation to meditate. In that way, people can climb mountains they wouldn't normally attempt to climb.

Ajahn Martin Piyadhammo receiving a
Picture of his Venerable Teacher
Than Ajahn Mahā Bua Ñāṇasampanno

Don't Forget Your Original Intention

16th September 2007

What do you want to do with your life? What do you want to achieve? These are important questions, and you need to be clear. When the end comes — as it will, sooner or later — do you want to look back and see a wasted life? At the very least, you want to have done something truly worthwhile, with positive effects that carry forward into the next life. So it's sensible to check in with yourself every day, remembering what you wanted to achieve and seeing if you're on track to fulfil it. Whether it's a spiritual or worldly goal, you need to be clear, otherwise you'll lose your way. When most people look back on their lives, they realise that instead of following a straight line they've been driven by their wants and feelings, running towards their likes and away from their dislikes. So I want to make this crystal clear: be certain what you want to achieve and go for it wholeheartedly, otherwise you'll become distracted and get lost.

Dukkha drives people to this monastery; they find life unsatisfying or unsatisfactory in some way. You're all like this, and that's why you've come here to learn to meditate to reach an end of *dukkha*. But after a few months, most of you will go back into lay life and, despite your best intentions, get enmeshed in the world again, forgetting all about your original intention. This is how things work; it's the way of the *kilesas*, the way of *avijjā*. They make you forget, and all your good intentions get lost. It's similar to people with an illness who feel very sick and focus solely on getting treatment. Once the illness resolves, however, the world looks brighter, and they move on to other things, forgetting that they were ever ill. So please don't forget why you came to this monastery in the first place.

Since we were born, we've been pulled here and there by the things of the world. As little children, we reached for colourful objects and wanted to have them, or smelled something and wanted to eat it, or saw something frightening and ran away. This is the usual way of the world, and we've been following it all our lives, forgetting our

original intentions and losing our way in the process. So I warn you: unless you have a straight line to follow, unless you keep practising constantly, there is no hope of you achieving anything from meditation practice. Some of you practise until you feel calm and happy, and then promptly forget about doing it. Then, when the *dukkha* comes creeping back — and it may take a few years — you suddenly remember what you were supposed to be doing and start practising again. But walking the path means continuing to walk until the very end, the end of your life: please remember this and let it stick in your heart. Ideally, it should stick in your heart like a thorn, as the knowledge that practice is something you absolutely must do. Just following the mind with its sensations, thoughts and memories — that's where you go wrong.

You've all lived long enough to know that following the mind and its desires is a waste of time that just leads to *dukkha*. You have to clear all that away, and follow the clear intention to put practice at the core of your existence. Think of dirty laundry that you leave to pile up because you're too lazy to wash it. After a year you start washing, but the pile will be as high as a mountain and you give up the struggle. Well, your internal dirty laundry arrives every day: unwholesome thoughts, bad intentions, greed, hate and delusion. They come up all the time, and they all affect the future. They have to be cleaned away as soon as they arise, otherwise they store up in the *citta*, and wherever we go we take the *citta* with us. Wherever we go, we carry the large store of unwholesome feelings, memories and thoughts, along with the bad *kamma* that comes with them. Wherever we flee, they come along for the journey. We can change residences, professions, hairstyles or clothes, but the unwholesome contents of the *citta* don't change, and we keep storing them up one after another. This is the way it is, the way it has been over countless lifetimes and how it will be unless you do something about it, namely, clear up the mess through the practice of meditation.

Imagine having a cellar full of garbage. You close your eyes in disgust every time you go near it, yet continue throwing in more and more rubbish. This is what your *citta* is like — full of garbage you don't want to see. Every day, every hour, every minute, every

second, more garbage comes in, and eventually, when you start practising, you start asking yourself where it all came from. Well, it's come from one place – the *citta* itself under the control of the *kilesas* and *avijjā*. And following your desires and intentions makes it increase even more. If you don't clean it out, it will continue to accumulate and accumulate. At the end of the day it's your life, of course, and if you're happy having a *citta* full of garbage, that's your business. You have to take responsibility for your life; I can only take responsibility for mine, not anyone else's. But if you're unhappy with the accumulated trash, you have to do something to get rid of it.

To be successful in practice, you have to be aware of every mind-moment that occurs, and there can be many thousands of mind-moments in the blink of an eye. You have to realise that *kamma* is being created all the time; its effects mount up in the *citta*, and we carry them wherever we go. For garbage not to pile up, you have to be aware of your meditation object at every mind-moment. Please understand this. When we have *sati* (awareness) and are fully in the present moment, i.e. focussed on the breath at the tip of the nose or the mental repetition of the word *buddho* or a specific object of investigation, the *kilesas* have no power, no power to dump more garbage into the *citta*. But if *sati* is not established, they become very active at piling more garbage up, and there's so much of it that we can't even bear to look – that's where the problem lies. *Avijjā* is blindness or not-knowing; we simply don't want to see, don't want to see reality. We live in dreams, thoughts and memories. We might imagine they're real, but what do they have to do with reality? Nothing. Think about that. Dreaming about this and fantasising about that – what do these things have to do with reality? In fact, reality is just this one present moment. If you have *sati* and are truly present for one moment, that's what reality is.

A thought is not real; it comes and goes, and so does a memory or a feeling. The body comes and goes too, though it lasts a little longer. Actually, what we normally perceive in daily life has nothing to do with reality. We usually perceive what we want to perceive. We see, hear, smell, taste or touch the things we want to and not those we don't. But as soon as we focus on the *buddho* or the breath – that

is the present, that is reality. When we have *sati*, we're experiencing reality and not becoming enmeshed in thoughts, assumptions or conclusions about anything. This is pure awareness where there is no judgement and no labelling of things as good or bad; it's just knowingness. If we see or hear a rooster, for example, we just stay with the sight or sound without identifying it. If the thought arises that the rooster is crowing too loudly or that it cried like that yesterday, we're already back in thought and memory, not in the present moment. We're already in the past or the world of imagination. The mind constantly goes out; it wants to identify objects that it sees, hears, smells, tastes or touches. When eating food, for instance, we try to identify whether we like it, whether we've eaten it before, whether we want to eat it again, and so on. And if we once liked a particular food but have never come across it again, we might feel sad, sometimes for years. This is how we behave all the time. You must realise this; you must see this. This monastery is the perfect place to examine what's happening inside yourself, but you have to train *sati* if you want to see the true nature of things. You have to have *sati*, be aware, aware of every moment within the *citta* as it happens. And remember the promise of the Lord Buddha in the *Majjhima Nikāya*: a person who maintains *sati* perfectly for seven days and seven nights can attain *Arahantship* within that time. If *sati* is less strong, however, it might take seven years or seven or more lifetimes, for progress depends on the strength of *sati*.

That's how important *sati* is, and it involves being constantly on the spot, not following thoughts or memories, being aware of pleasant or unpleasant feelings as they arise and staying with them without conceiving or having a view about them. As soon as you have a view, you've already gone, for then you'll try to react. That's what people do all the time. They evaluate whatever they come in contact with, labelling this as agreeable or that as awful and wondering how to keep what they like or dump what they hate. Such things consume our thoughts or actions, but they have nothing to do with reality. Reality is hidden behind all the memories and associations (*saññā*) and thoughts (*sankhāra*). These are the two most important *khandhas* hiding reality and veiling everything that's really happen-

ing. The body and feelings can distract us a great deal, but *saññā* and *sankhāra* are the *khandhas* chiefly involved in delusion created by the *kilesas*. You could call the *kilesas* the captains of deception used by the field marshal *avijjā* to keep people blind. They entice us into the past or the future most of the time, switching from one to the other, creating and evaluating thoughts about past events or future possibilities to prevent us simply observing what is going on. This is where we're at fault, where we go wrong.

To fight the *kilesas*, the Lord Buddha exhorted us to drive a stake into the ground and bind the wild elephant to it. In this metaphor, the elephant is the untamed *citta* and the stake is *sati*, and training *sati* involves being aware of only one object at a time. When practising for *samādhi*, we should be aware of only one object – the *buddho* or the breath – not thinking about what we did yesterday or might do in the future, which is the way of the untamed mind, running wildly from here to there. It's only when we stay with the one object that we can be aware of the mind really focussing in and notice how the *citta* wriggles around all the time. To bring the *citta* to stillness is to enter *appaṇā samādhi* – the state of one-pointedness that is a preview of *Nibbāna*. If you can get there, I promise you'll never forget it. It's an experience that burns itself into the *citta*, like touching a fire. It's an experience of utter calmness of mind and the true nature of the *citta*. You'll never forget it as long as you live. But to get there you have to bind the *citta* to the stake of the meditation object; you'll never get there otherwise, no matter how much you think or imagine. You only get there if you do the work. Don't worry if you find the breath disappearing and think you're dying, and don't be concerned about what dies or remains. The knowing is the only thing to be interested in. Whatever will die, let it die. The *citta* won't die. It never dies, but everything else arises and ceases, arises and ceases. The five *khandhas,* including *saññā* and *sankhāra*, all arise and cease, and so does the whole world. But the one who knows about this arising and ceasing does not. Get to see the true nature of the *citta* at least once in your life. It's not beyond your ability. But if you don't have the sure intention, the clear determination to do it, you never will.

As I said at the beginning, be very careful of your intentions and how you live your life. I recommend that you live in a way that allows you to see the true nature of the *citta*. As a child, you wanted to think, walk and talk, and you managed it after a lot of heartache, didn't you? You wanted to get qualifications and you did. In the same way, you can get into *appaṇā samādhi* if you really want to, if you have the intention and put in determination and effort. I don't know how to make this point clear to you. I feel like despairing when I see people not putting all their effort into practice. I'm talking from my own experience when I say that I accomplished it because I had the determination, and you can do it too with the right grit and resolve. But most of you lose heart when you come up against a little hindrance, and you start doubting the path ahead.

The Lord Buddha taught the Noble eightfold path, which is described in this tradition as having three columns — *sīla* (morality), *samādhi* (concentration) and *paññā* (wisdom). Each is necessary to tread the path, but what do we do in the West? We focus on *paññā* as a way of breaking free, thinking that the other two are unimportant. We want to "investigate", so we only practise the technique we call "*vipassanā*" and end up circling around inside our own thoughts and imaginings. Thinking about this, thinking about that — that's what we call investigation. But what kind of investigation is it if you don't have *samādhi*, if you don't have the ability to focus and really go deep? In fact, penetration is only possible if you can concentrate on the same object for at least fifteen minutes without the mind running around. Just going round and round in idle thoughts and imaginings is pointless; Than Ajahn Mahā Bua describes it as a fruitless task that gets people nowhere. Actually, when someone from the West told him years ago that *samādhi* was worthless, he called that view nonsense; it was like preparing a meal with a blunt knife or trying to cut down a great tree with a pocket-knife. The tree in this case is the tree of life — greed, hate and delusion — and the strokes of the pocket-knife are *paññā*; cutting here and there will have no effect. Without the power of *samādhi* allied to the power of *sati*, meditation practice will get nowhere.

After staying in this monastery for a little while, you can begin to see how difficult it is to make the mind stay on one object. It's difficult, isn't it? The problem is that your efforts are intermittent. It's rather like setting up an experiment and checking it's progress only once in a while; how will you ever understand what's happening? Actually, you need to have *sati* all the time to observe — without ever letting go — what's really going on. That's the kind of determination needed if you are ever to understand the magical nature of the five *khandhas* working together and the magician *avijjā* which uses and controls them. The interplay of the five *khandhas* produces the whole world we experience, the whole universe and all your *dukkha*. You must understand the interaction of the five *khandhas,* otherwise there's no hope of getting beyond *dukkha* and breaking free, no hope at all. You can scratch with a pocketknife at the outer bark of a great tree, but the cuts just close up again, and you'll never be able to chop it down once and for all.

So sati is the basic requirement. You must determine to maintain *sati* and keep maintaining it every day. And don't forget your good intentions, but if bad intentions come up, then forget them fast. People easily forget to do wholesome things, so why not the unwholesome things? Just forget them. The *kilesas* and *avijjā* are like little mockingbirds that chirp behind our ears, constantly whispering about what we should be or not be, like or dislike, do or not do. Just listen to them, listen and know them for yourself. And we believe them and blindly agree with what they're saying. And it's the same for *bhikkhus* and laypeople; they all act on these whispered orders, forgetting why they came to be ordained or why they wanted to come to the monastery to practise in the first place. Of course, bhikkhus ordain for one reason, to overcome *dukkha*, and laypeople come to the monastery to relieve their *dukkha*. But both have little mockingbirds chirruping behind their ears, and they have a powerful influence, don't they? They tell us to drink or eat something, go to the toilet, or leave the monastery to go back into the world — anything to pull us out of the practice. And we agree without a second thought. Isn't that tragic?

I really don't know how to get the message through to you. I want you to take these things to heart, to see them clearly and understand them. Determination and resolution can take you a long way. Whatever you want to be in the world — a physician, a magician, a scientist — you can attain it, and if you want to be free of *dukkha* you can do that as well. So don't forget your reason for coming to this monastery. After one or two months, people start to feel calm and have less *dukkha*, but then they forget again. They forget the practice that has lessened the *dukkha* and supported their wholesome states of the mind, and everything goes back to the way it was before. If you don't practise constantly, if you don't keep going faithfully until the end, determined to maintain *sati* every day, you'll certainly fail. But it's the same with mundane skills, isn't it? If you study at university for a month and then have a fun month off, you'll have forgotten a lot. You know this for yourself. Learning to walk or talk in childhood wasn't easy, but you had the determination to keep going and succeeded in the end. Well, it's the same with practice. Just do it, and make it the major focus of your life.

From my own practice, I know it's not easy. We're all so easily fooled by the *kilesas*, the fangs of *avijjā*. If I hadn't come to learn under Than Ajahn Mahā Bua, I would have been fooled by them as well. I had previously practised for six years in Germany and England, and I really believed that I understood various aspects of the Dhamma and knew what enlightenment was. But something deep in my heart told me that there was something more, that something essential was missing. So I came here to this monastery, and it took me about two years to reprogram my thinking — to "brainwash" myself if you like — to understand Dhamma on a completely different level. My teacher helped greatly in correcting my wrong thinking, but the process took around two years. Whenever I thought that enlightenment was this, that or the next thing, Than Ajahn Mahā Bua, in a talk a few days later, would explain that such thoughts were nonsense. I thought it was amazing when that happened! I had all kinds of wrong views — because in Western Europe we are trained to use our brains, our intellects, to understand. We read the *suttas*

but only understand them with the brain and end up with lots of different views and opinions. That's why there are different Buddhist groups all over Europe, and why they tend to argue with each other over which view is correct. All my wrong views had to be removed, cleaned out of my mind. It was about two years before my mind was emptied of all that rubbish, before I could drink in the Dhamma of Than Ajahn Mahā Bua. If I hadn't let go of my views from the West, I would never have succeeded. Westerners are taught from childhood to use their intellects, to read this and understand that. So when they become interested in Dhamma, they approach it the same way, which means understanding it wrongly.

We all have views about everything and they infect our reading of the Buddhist *suttas*, so that one person understands them one way and someone else another. Imagine if there were a number of different signposts all pointing to the same place, some ugly, some beautiful; some large, some small; some cheap, some expensive. People might envision the destination based on just the appearance of the sign, but the signposts are only pointing out the direction. If people get caught up in their imaginings about the form of the sign and don't follow its direction, they'll always end up in the wrong place. They may even chance upon the destination, but comparing it to their imagination decide it cannot be and turn away. Similarly, the *suttas* are just signposts pointing to the truth, not the truth itself. They've nothing whatsoever to do with the truth. They show the direction of travel and indicate how to get there, but that's all they do. If people don't start moving, don't take one step after another, they'll never reach the right destination, the end of *dukkha*. Of course, some intend to walk from Berlin to Beijing but eventually stop at Prague because they find it lovely, forgetting all about the real destination, and it's the same with having the original intention to attain *Nibbāna* — most people forget about it as time goes on.

We can all read the *suttas* and store up our own opinions about *Nibbāna*, but these are just imaginings. We can manipulate them as much as we like, but they have nothing to do with *Nibbāna*. If I hadn't come to this monastery, I'd have been lost in the same illusions about the Dhamma that are common in the West. I visited

Germany a few months ago and encountered lots of views and opinions about the Dhamma, about the practice and about *Nibbāna*. But no-one there actually knows the way to *Nibbāna*, that's the truth of it. It was the same in Germany and England twenty years ago, and that's why I ended up here in Thailand. I wanted to find one person, just one person, who could tell me the way out, and after reading the book *Straight from the Heart*, I somehow felt within my own heart that its author knew the truth.[1] The only thing I regret is not coming earlier, as I delayed for four years, roaming around Europe from teacher to teacher, because I was afraid of the different language and culture in Thailand. However, the first time I saw Than Ajahn Mahā Bua I knew I'd found my home. I'd found my spiritual home and my spiritual father and mother. But it's so easy to get fooled. During my first six years of practice, often alone, in the West, I had very deep experiences. But my contact with the *vipassanā* organisations existing at the time and the teachers who were involved in them made me go in the wrong direction. Frankly, most of it was bullshit, and it took almost two years of "brainwashing" at Baan Taad monastery to rid myself of it. But if my heart hadn't revolted, I would have ended up floundering around like everyone else in the West. My heart knew that something was missing, that there was indeed a path to *Nibbāna*.

In the *suttas*, the Lord Buddha says that spiritual friendship is the whole of the spiritual life, and that someone who finds a spiritual friend (*kalyāṇa-mitta*) should cherish him. If you really want to reach the end of *dukkha* and have someone who can show you the way out, you should stick with him whatever happens. Even if he throws you out, or if the environmental conditions are very harsh, stick with him, because he is the person who can lead you to *Nibbāna*. Think about Thailand. No other country in the whole world has produced more *Arahants* in the last century. This was due to the great teacher Than Ajahn Mun; between fifty and a hundred *Arahants* came from his tradition. And from the generation taught by

1. Straight from the Heart and other books and teachings by Than Ajahn Mahā Bua, can be found on the Luangta website (www.luangta.eu).

his disciple Than Ajahn Mahā Bua, there have been around twenty-five *Arahants*, though the final numbers are unclear at present. If we know that *Arahants* are still arising, we can be sure that the path is unobstructed, that the way to *Nibbāna* is still open, but time is running out even for Thailand. It is becoming more and more like the West where life is so comfortable that people don't need to practise meditation. Actually, the Lord Buddha's teaching was *rukkhamūlasenāsanaṃ*, retreating into the forests and mountains, not in groups but alone. You can learn Dhamma in these isolated places, where there are no other people, where you're confronted with your own little self and cannot blame anyone else for your troubles. That's why this forest monastery is called the "Forest university". It's a place where we can practise alone and learn from the animals, dealing with ourselves not with others. In the end, we have to resolve our own problems and free ourselves first before we can help anyone else to break free.

Monk's Kuti at Wat Phu Kong Tong

Bhikkhus Should Be Lone Wolves

20th May 2008

When you listen to a Dhamma talk (*desanā*), you should listen within the *citta*, the heart. That's where Dhamma arises and where you have to tune in. Every word of Dhamma arises in the *citta*, not in the ear or the brain, and understanding with the *citta* is different from understanding with the brain. When you stay with the Dhamma at the centre of the *citta*, it doesn't really matter whether you understand the subject matter or not, for the *citta* becomes calm and can even enter *samādhi*. If the Dhamma being explained touches your own level of experience, it can confirm your own insights or help to resolve any problems in your meditation practice, since the *citta* automatically investigates in accord with the topic being discussed.[1] The investigation I'm referring to is not the kind that happens in the brain, namely, thinking discursively about this or that. Rather, it involves the *citta* looking around inside itself for what and how to investigate as suggested by the words of the *desanā*. It just does this automatically. For that to happen, however, your whole attention has to be placed at the *citta*, and to rest very firmly and deeply within it. Then the *citta* can search around and around until it finds the same truth that the *desanā* is touching upon. In this way, the *citta* may understand in line with the Dhamma being expounded, gaining the same insights as the speaker, or it may be able to overcome hindrances to practice. When the Lord Buddha was giving a *desanā*, he was guiding the hearts of his listeners to see the truth and realise it for themselves. They centred completely inside the *citta*, and the *citta* itself investigated without involving discursive thought. This is why some of his listeners could attain to one of the four transcendent paths — *Sotāpaññā*, *Sakadāgāmī*, *Anāgāmī* or *Arahant* — while listening to his talks.

1. See the talk, Two kinds of knowledge, in Than Ajahn Mahā Bua's book, Forest Desanās, available on the Luangta website (www.luangta.eu).

To listen to a *desanā* in this way can be very fruitful. The *citta* can become calm and perhaps enter *appaṇā samādhi*, or it may begin to investigate the topic on its own. But don't worry if you don't understand a *desanā*; just keep tuning in. This is the proper way to listen; tune in and stay firmly at the centre of your *citta*. The Dhamma that you hear is never lost. Even if you don't understand it initially, later in your practice (and it may be months or years later) Dhamma will automatically arise from the *citta* to give a solution to a current Dhamma problem. But please remember: this only occurs if you've listened to the talk centred in the midst of the *citta*. By listening to it in the usual way of the world, with your ears and brain, you'll remember only fragments or forget it immediately because it touched only memory and association (*saññā*) without deeply entering the *citta* itself. Listening with the *citta* means that the Dhamma resides in the *citta* and can come up whenever it is needed.

When I look at you junior *bhikkhus*, I'm sometimes amazed. I talked the other day about how *bhikkhus* should behave while on alms round (*piṇḍapāta*) or performing their other monastic duties. They should be quiet, concentrated, have awareness (*sati*) and get their duties done quickly. But yesterday I observed some of you going on alms round and wondered what was going on. Do you understand what I said, or does it just go in one ear and out the other? Maybe you just don't want to listen, and if that's the case it's a great relief for me as I don't need to teach you. But if you do want to listen, I can only assume that absent mindedness is the reason. After all, there's no other explanation, is there? I said that *bhikkhus* don't engage in talking when on alms round, but yesterday I saw most of you talking. What's going on? Don't you have any *sati*? I keep telling you to avoid situations that involve becoming engrossed in conversation, so why are you still doing it? Why do you get so close to other people on alms round that they can speak to you, enticing you to talk and talk and talk without a penny's worth of *sati*? *Sati*, awareness about what we are doing from moment to moment, should be your guide. Without it, spiritual practice is fruitless, hopeless; it's as though you're not practising at all. It's probably easier for most of you to maintain *sati* while doing sitting or walking meditation, but

sati needs to be sustained and fostered while doing other things as well. You have to be aware of everything you're doing; when walking be aware of walking, when eating of eating, and so on. If you're talking, be aware of talking and what you're talking about, but the alms round is not the time for talking.

In a talk some years back, Than Ajahn Mahā Bua said that if he caught any of his *bhikkhu*s with a mobile phone he would kick them out of the monastery. Everyone listening understood what he said, but what happened? The number of mobile phones actually increased! Why is that? How can people listen to a teacher, understand what he's saying and proceed to do the opposite? The most likely answer is that they're ruled entirely by their *kilesas*. Even if a famous meditation master like Than Ajahn Mahā Bua says that mobile phones are inappropriate for *bhikkhu*s, the *kilesas* still want them and insist on having them. What does this reveal? It says that human beings, including some *bhikkhu*s, are ruled by their *kilesas* and that they can't even stump up enough *sati* to realise that such toys are harmful — even after being told explicitly.

Actually, there's a good reason why mobile phones are harmful for *bhikkhu*s. We ordained to become free of *dukkha*, to walk the path of *sīla*, *samādhi* and *paññā* and reach the end of suffering. This means keeping external influences and other hindrances to a minimum. So *bhikkhu*s should be lone wolves and not have status in society. You can call them outcasts, not because of birth or rejection by the world but because they've left lay society behind of their own free will. They want to separate themselves from society to practice meditation to the fullest extent. Why then should they try to maintain contact with society, family and friends, or go about chatting with every Tom, Dick and Harry? If they've ordained as outcasts of their own free will, why should they want to maintain links to society? What's the point of that? When the Lord Buddha went into homelessness, he left behind his father and step mother, a wife and a little son. Do you think he kept in contact with them during his years of wandering? No: he behaved like an outcast, like a lone wolf, wandering on his own in dense forests practising meditation. He wasn't interested in what society was up to or how his wife or son

were getting along. And he advised us to practise in the same way — *rukkhamūla-senāsanaṃ*, retreating into the forests and mountains. But what do many of you do? Just the opposite! You seem to want to keep up social contacts and get up-to-date news about events in the world, all of which stimulates your interests, opinions and views. But we aren't supposed to be social workers, like those from other religions. We've removed ourselves from society. Please be clear about this. Until the moment of final liberation, the attainment of *Nibbāna*, you shouldn't have anything to do with society, because knowing about it is a burden and a hindrance. What's happening out there can always snag your interest, pulling you out to get involved. If you've become a *Bhikkhu* for the goal of liberation, you'd better follow the example of the Lord Buddha and fight the *kilesas* that reside within your own heart, not look outside of it.

I want you to take this to heart, to understand it deeply. Let go of society. Let go of concerns about it, even if it's difficult. Before I ordained, I had to get my parents' permission to become a *Bhikkhu*. My father said that he didn't believe it was a good thing to do, but I told him that he didn't have to: all he needed to do was give his permission. He thought I wanted to become a beggar, an asocial being, obtaining food with a begging bowl. I'm still amazed at my reaction at that time. I told him very calmly that if he wanted to see ordaining in such asocial terms, that was fine, for *bhikkhu*s are outside of society, living off society without taking part in society. Before this, I'd always thought of myself as a social being who cared about society and its development. As *bhikkhu*s, however, our only task is to fight the *kilesas* in lonely places where society doesn't go, to fight for freedom from the tyranny of *avijjā* — nothing else. We have to separate ourselves from society to be successful, otherwise all the troubles that beset societies will flood into our hearts, turning us away from the path of deliverance to the way of the world.

I sometimes see newsletters from organisations, even Buddhist ones, which talk about helping various social causes, but in terms of practising for liberation this is all wrong. That was certainly Than Ajahn Mahā Bua's view while he was still teaching, and it was what he used to tell his *bhikkhu*s. On one occasion, a *Bhikkhu* asked to go

visit his family, and Than Ajahn Mahā Bua said, "Yes you can go, but don't bother to come back." Do you understand that? Another time, the father of a *Bhikkhu* died, and when he asked permission to go to the cremation the answer was the same. Than Ajahn Mahā Bua didn't consider *bhikkhu*s who concerned themselves with such things to be practitioners of the right kind, namely, people whose only focus was on the goal of liberation, not on visiting or cremating parents. In the Bible, Jesus said something similar: "Follow me; and let the dead bury the dead." But the *kilesas* love to be social, love to be busy. Are you starting to understand why we have to cut down social contact? As long as you don't sever yourselves from society, you'll never find the way out of the cycle of birth and death because there will always be worldly things to do. Even spreading the Dhamma is acting in society, and it is none of our concern now. So why are you so interested in keeping contact with other people? Why do you need to ask someone if they're fine and reply that you're fine too? Is that so important? Or maybe you want something from them, like help with building a monastery, so you can be a *Bhikkhu* catering to society. Isn't this all contrary to the path of practice?

It's when we are lone wolves, living in lonely places, that we can really fight the *kilesas*, the deceivers that rule over our hearts and make us adore social contact. They love to be in society and are afraid to be outside it, and that's why they bring up worries about losing contact with other people. Than Ajahn Mahā Bua used to inspect every letter written by his *bhikkhu*s. Sometimes he'd allow a letter to go out, but he'd ask the *Bhikkhu* why it had to be written. As you can imagine, *bhikkhu*s were very careful to ensure they had a good reason to write a letter. Please remember that we chose this path when we ordained. Some *bhikkhu*s think that they're at the top of society instead of the bottom. It's easy for them to become conceited, consciously or unconsciously, and play on their role as "holy" people who need to be supported well. In fact, rather than complaining about the quality of the food, we should all be ashamed to take the resources of poor villagers when we go on alms round. We should be training ourselves to be satisfied, and this means being aware, having *sati* all the time. Yes, laypeople want to support the

Sangha, but that is also a danger for *bhikkhu*s. They look up to us because they know they couldn't live our life of solitude and hardship, but we shouldn't use that as an excuse to become conceited, thinking we're better or special. We're not; we should remember that we're at the bottom of society and became outcasts the moment we ordained.

So live on your own, take little and have a sense of shame for the food and requisites you are given by laypeople. *Hiri-ottappa* — feeling shame for doing wrong — should be your guide. You shouldn't be asking laypeople for more requisites or feeding your self-conceit in various ways. The idea is to get rid of the self-view, so don't foster it. Always think of yourself as a kind of outcast, and that will help guide you along the path to liberation. *Bhikkhu*s live off the labour of others; never forget that, so foster *hiri-ottappa*. Watch, observe and be aware of your thoughts as you go on alms round, and note your preferences, likes and dislikes. Sometimes the food in villages can be quite basic whereas people coming from further away often bring finer food. It's not unusual to have a preference for the latter, but isn't that a form of conceit? Shouldn't you feel ashamed of that? The local villagers are doing their best most of the time, giving the best food they have. But it can be easy to disrespect that, wanting something better. Shouldn't you be ashamed of such thoughts when they come up? Or maybe you don't even notice because you don't have a penny's worth of *sati* and don't even know what's going on inside yourselves!

Actually, if you really wanted to train yourselves, you would eat only what you received in your own alms bowl after going alone on *piṇḍapāta* rather than in a group with other *bhikkhu*s. Human beings are herd animals, of course; they are more comfortable around other people and feel afraid alone. If you had *sati*, perhaps you'd recognise the need for contact and the magnetic attraction groups or particular individuals have for all of us. This attraction involves the need to talk, which is inherent in people but comes along with the loss of *sati*, and walking the path of practice needs *sati* to the highest degree. You need to be extremely aware of what's going on inside yourselves, what lies behind your decisions, what makes you

act and whether it is in line with the Dhamma. This really means being alone, keeping away from other people. Please understand that practice without constant *sati* is useless. You can practise until the end of your life and not gain a single thing. If you don't already have this *sati* at this level, your first task as a *Bhikkhu* is to develop it. Being aware of talking when talking, of eating when eating, and knowing why you are acting as you do — that is *sati*. Walking around with your head in the air going, "tra la la, tra la la" — that's not *sati*. Thinking that you're walking is not *sati* but rather self-conceit; *sati* is the awareness of your intention to do something. So foster *sati* if you don't already have it.

There's a Thai phrase which translates as not having a penny's worth of *sati* or a dime's worth of awareness, and it describes someone running hither and thither under the orders of the *kilesas*. Without *sati*, the *kilesas* sit on the throne of the heart and make it follow their likes and dislikes, whereas if *sati* is present, the Dhamma possesses the throne. So *bhikkhus* need to have *sati* at every moment, especially when undertaking their monastic duties. These involve going on alms round, cleaning and taking care of the monastery, selecting food and eating it, and washing and taking care of the body. We normally do these things automatically because we've done them so often before, and we can be thinking other things at the same time. But we need to do these apparently simple things with extreme *sati*, knowing every intention. When washing the body, we need to be aware of looking for the soap, taking it with the hand, turning on the water, and so on — aware of every single thing.

If you really want the goal of liberation, you'd better start — from this moment on — not allowing your mind to slip off into absent-mindedness. Actually, monastic duties are the perfect time to train *sati*, as it can be lost more easily than during set periods of walking or sitting meditation. When you sweep leaves, for instance, you can keep the body as the main focus and be aware of every movement, and then try to catch the intention that makes the body move. These intentions don't come from the brain but from the *citta*. So if you stay centred on the *citta* and have *sati*, you can also be aware of your intentions and stop acting if necessary. For instance, if you see

a group of other *bhikkhu*s talking, you can avoid joining it. We have to be lone wolves, but not in the sense of Herman Hesse's *Steppenwolf* who had no perspective. We do have perspective, we're lone wolves fighting for freedom, for liberation. So foster *sati*. Catch all your intentions. Without a high degree of *sati*, the practice of investigation will be fruitless, vague thinking rather than directed focussed attention. Once you have enough *sati*, however, you can begin to seriously investigate the body and bodily feeling, as the Lord Buddha recommended. And once that is finished — once the attachment to the body has been destroyed forever — you will have attained to the state of *Anāgāmī* and be half way to full liberation.

Many people, particularly Westerners, think that they're only a little attached to their bodies, but that's not true. They wouldn't have been reborn as human beings if they didn't desire a body. People in the West often live inside their minds, with little thought for the body, seeing it as a kind of biological robot that they take to the doctor when it breaks down. You could say that they don't even know their bodies; and that is one form of delusion that has to be overcome. But that doesn't mean that they're not interested in having a body. They are — because the body is the pot in which the plant of greed and hate flourishes. To investigate the body, you first have to become familiar with it and see it in a different way. Actually, it's the thing that houses the six senses — seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting, touching and thinking — which are why people want a body in the first place. These senses are all rooted in the body so don't entertain the thought that you're not attached. Bodies form the basis of existence as a human being, and greed and hate are rooted there. If you can destroy the attachment to the body, greed and hate will have nowhere to grow and you'll never be reborn again. It's as though you've been given a pass to be released from prison; you've become free. Even the prison guards don't know the exit door from the prison, however, so you have to find it for yourself and this may take a while, but when you do, you'll know. Once you step out and look back, you see the prison, the place of your incarceration for millions of lifetimes, vanishing before your eyes as if it had never existed.

There will still be barriers around you and work to be done, however. The prison of the body has vanished, but you remain imprisoned in the four *nāma-khandhas,* the mental components of personality, namely, feelings, memory and association, thought, and consciousness. Their investigation is difficult, unlike investigation of the body which we can recognise as an object and investigate as being not me, not mine and not myself. Actually, we identify far more with the *nāma-khandhas,* thinking that our moods, thoughts and memories belong to us the moment they arise — my memories, my opinions, my desires and so on. We think they're our very existence, and this deep attachment arises without even being aware of it. They're very difficult to investigate because we're fooled by our very existence, but it has to be done. You could say that we have to draw the life out of our own existence. We can do this by denying them, by making them "not", just as Than Ajahn Cha used to say, "Not sure"; whatever I'm thinking, feeling or remembering — not sure. Or we can hammer into the mind that these mental phenomena are not me, not mine and don't belong to me, that my experiences and the views I cherish so much are not me and have nothing to do with me. After all, what we think of as our experiences and adore so much are just the remembrances of these experiences, aren't they? And these remembrances carry a sort of life, a sort of worth, a sort of value. What I did then, what I've come through, what I've achieved — these remembrances seem to constitute life itself. However, our real life lies hidden from us. It's as though there's a thick curtain concealing what the *citta* really is.

You really have to fight this attachment to the four *nāma-khandhas.* For example, if you're disturbed and upset by the sound of a chicken squawking, ask yourself what the sound disturbed. It was your notion of how things should be, wasn't it? However, your ideas of how things ought to be are written in your memories, views and beliefs, while real experiences are something different from your notions about them. In fact, experiences are just what they are, but the moment we add something onto them, make comparisons or judgements, they become altered in accord with our views. And people don't even realise this is happening. They just believe it all

and get fooled every time. That's why it's so difficult to cut through the thick jungle of mental feelings, memories and associations, and discursive thoughts that make up the *nāma-khandhas.* It's the jungle of delusion. Greed and hate are destroyed at the attainment of *Anāgāmī*, but the jungle of delusion still needs to be cut down, and delusion hides in the two *khandhas* of *saññā* and *sankhāra*, thought and memory.

In some of his talks, Than Ajahn Mahā Bua describes how, as a young *Bhikkhu*, he trained himself in *samādhi* to the point where it became solid as a rock. After five years, his teacher Than Ajahn Mun advised him to start investigation of the body, and it took him only eight months to destroy his attachment to it. But it still took him another two and a half years to get rid of delusion, to unravel the intermingled tangle of *saññā* and *sankhāra*, for the interaction of these *nāma-khandhas* occurs so quickly that we can't even tell which is which. Then it took him another three months to finally vanquish *avijjā* forever. People think that ridding themselves of the attachment to the body is the most difficult part of spiritual practice, but it's not. If it took Than Ajahn Mahā Bua two and a half years to deal with the *nāma-khandhas,* it might take us two and a half lifetimes. To be successful, you need to have *sati* to the highest degree, to catch every experience as it happens and not let any comment about it take place in the heart, the *citta*. These comments are poison, as the nature of delusion is poison. They poison the heart, and the process starts as soon as the newborn baby opens its eyes. But we don't see that, do we? We don't recognise it either in the newborn baby or in ourselves. We don't recognise the delusion that is there all the time.

So your first step as *bhikkhus* is to destroy the attachment to the body. The moment that occurs, as soon as you look back, you'll know that the prison of the body has been demolished and has vanished forever. It can never return because it has been completely destroyed. But remember this: until that moment happens, trying to investigate the *nāma-khandhas* is really just fooling yourself. You can't properly investigate them until greed and hate has first been destroyed. It's as though there are four mountain peaks you have to climb, but access to them is blocked by another mountain. You need

to clamber over the first mountain before you can tackle the others. People love to think that investigation of the body less important, so they play around with the investigation of the *nāma-khandhas* instead. Yes, some views and opinions have to be removed, but don't fool yourselves. Unless attachment to the body has been destroyed, there is no point in the deeper investigation of the *nāma-khandhas* because you'll never be able to unravel the deception of *saññā* and *sankhāra*. That deception is so extremely difficult to catch — because it's what we think we are!

To conclude, every one of the views and opinions you have about anything you've ever experienced is poison, and social contacts just add to the mess. That's why it's so dangerous for a serious practitioner to keep in contact with family, friends, colleagues and the world in general. Every time the world touches you, it feeds your own self-view. So be a lone wolf. I hope I do not speak in vain: please remember this well.

Walking Meditation Path at Wat Phu Kong Tong

Digging at One Place Makes a Hole

1st November 2009

Dhamma is very subtle. As soon as it comes out of the heart of the speaker, it looks for the opportunity to seep into the hearts of listeners. But sometimes it doesn't come out. If the hearts of listeners aren't open, it won't come out at all. The tap of Dhamma opens only if people are interested, so there are times when I really don't know what to say to visitors to the monastery. I look at them and just end up talking about the need to keep the five precepts (*sīla*), a topic that's important for human beings in general.

People who come here have often been to different monasteries or meditation centres in Thailand, India or the West, and they've all learned different things. The prevailing attitude in the West is that the more you learn the cleverer you are, the more you know the better you are. But Than Ajahn Mahā Bua actually says that the opposite is true: the more you know the more stupid you are, not in the ways of the world but in the way of Dhamma. The world is the province of the *kilesas*, and the cleverer the *kilesas* become the more stupid we are in the way of Dhamma. So when you come to a place like this, the forest university where you can learn *magga*, *phala* and *Nibbāna* (the path, the fruit of the path, and the end of *dukkha*), you have to retrain yourself. And it can take a few years before you really grasp the differences between the teachings given here and what you learned before. From my own experience, I came here after learning meditation in Germany and England, and it took two years before I understood the differences, because they were subtle. The words were the same and the concepts similar, but the meaning was different, and it took me a long time to grasp that. For instance, the word *samādhi* is just that – a word. But the way of training for *samādhi* in this monastery is different from other traditions. Here, the idea is to become one-pointed, i.e. to observe only one point where the breath is felt at the tip of the nose. To observe the breath at other

locations of the body isn't taught here because it won't lead to one-pointedness. In fact, observing the breath at other points where it seems more obvious can lead to more obvious problems. For example, it can be detected from the rising and falling of the abdomen, but many feelings and emotions are stored down there; sooner or later, we'll get in touch with them and need techniques to deal with them. These things can disturb meditation practice, and it's better not to have them in the first place.

So the emphasis in this tradition is to get the mind to stay at just one point without drifting away into various thoughts or memories. We simply focus on the tip of the nose where the breath goes in and comes out, without following it. Fixing our attention at one point is the only way to reach one-pointedness. The aim is to be aware of the breath going in and coming out, without the mind wandering off. That's all we need to do. The mind will suggest that we move our attention somewhere else, but we don't. Our awareness, which is different from the point of concentration, will know if the breath is going in or coming out, if it is deep or shallow, and so on. This one-pointedness leads to the true nature of the *citta*, to the *citta* itself, and that's why we use this particular method. And what is the true nature of the *citta*? As long as we don't know, we can speculate. We can say it's the soul, but it's not. Actually, it's knowingness — pure, clear, crisp knowingness. This isn't the knowingness of an object, but knowingness in itself, knowingness as a whole, knowingness of everything we ever wanted to know but were never able to. And this particular method of training *samādhi* leads to such knowingness if we never move away from that one point.

The other way to "fix" attention is through the mental repetition of the word *buddho*. For people who think a lot, the repetition of *buddho* can be really helpful, and the repetition becomes slower and slower as the mind becomes calm. Of course, it's more difficult to fix onto *buddho* than the breath, so in the beginning you can combine both methods by internally saying "*Bud*" with the in-breath and "*dho*" with the out-breath. Similarly, during walking meditation, you can combine awareness of the breath with the movement of body. If you become really aware, of course, you'll find that one or

the other will fall away. When I was meditating in Europe, I practised *ānāpānasati* at the tip of the nose[1], but I learned the *buddho* method after arriving at this monastery. When I become concentrated, the first thing that falls away is the *buddho*, then the breath disappears and only one-pointedness remains.

The longer you can stay on one object the better and the more likely it is that you'll drop into *samādhi*, either *upācāra* (access) or *appaṇā* (deep) *samādhi*. It's only in *appaṇā samādhi* that the knowing nature of the *citta* can be experienced, because everything has to disappear. In that state, we're not aware of anything because the five *khandhas* — the body, feeling, memory and association, thought, and consciousness — have disappeared for that period of time. If they've vanished, consciousness has disappeared and we can't "know" anything in the sense that the world understands the term. It's in *appaṇā samādhi* that the true nature of the *citta* is revealed — the clear, crisp knowingness. In that state, we don't know what we know, but we know. This is very difficult to explain because it's beyond conventional reality; you'll only know what it is when you experience it. And the moment you come out of *appaṇā samādhi*, you'll realise that you've been somewhere you've never been before. You'll feel completely recharged, as if your fingers had gone into an electricity point on the wall, because as soon as the mind gets one-pointed, all its energy remains inside. You'll feel enormously energetic, which shows just how much of the energy of the mind is routinely used for thinking, worrying, fearing or feeling. It's not long, however, before it dissipates out into thought and memory again. But the longer you've been in *appaṇā samādhi*, the more energy you have and the longer it takes to dissipate. It's like filling up a tank of water; the longer the tap to the tank is open, the more water it collects.

So this is *samatha* practice, which leads to *samādhi*. It's very easy to describe, yet it's so difficult to do because the mind doesn't want to stay on one point. It tries to break out, and it can find all kinds of reasons to escape and run around. It'll say that you'll break your leg

1. Ānāpānasati (awareness of breathing in and out) is one of the most commonly used meditation techniques recommended by the Buddha.

if you carry on sitting, that your back hurts, that the sitting posture is wrong or that it's bored, and that's where you stop practising. But if you reflect on the fact that people don't feel pain or break their bones after sitting in an aeroplane for eleven hours or while watching the latest movie in the cinema, you can see that these reasons are not real. They're just excuses for not practising. They seem to arise from nowhere, but they come from the *kilesas* which want to pull you away from meditation. The *kilesas* can also use doubt, fear or any number of thoughts and emotions, and they whisper that meditation doesn't lead anywhere, but how do they know?

Remember the instructions, the directions given by the Lord Buddha, and follow them. The Lord Buddha's teachings are just words on a page, but the meaning of each word is within each of us. Meanings aren't written on a stone pillar somewhere, they're within ourselves and what a word means is whatever we associate with it. Actually, the teachings of the Lord Buddha don't lie in the words on a page or our views about them. The teachings are just signposts, and practice involves following the way they point. Take the case of a signpost to Rome; if you follow it you end up in Rome. But if you think you're already in Rome when you see the sign, you're already stuck, aren't you? The sign doesn't have to be in gold letters or engraved on a stone; it just needs to point in the right direction. And going in the right direction to attain *samādhi* means putting your attention on the object (the breath at the nose or the word *buddho*) and gently bringing it back when it seems to be going astray. And gently bringing it back to the object, and gently bringing it back to the object, and gently bringing it back to the object — over and over again. If your attention won't follow your instructions, be more forceful so that it stays for a little while, and then kindly bring it back to the object if it strays again. This is where effort and determination are needed — in bringing your intention back, not pushing it down. We all know just how difficult this is. When an enticing thought or a long distant memory comes up, we want to stay with it and begin to wonder how to keep it. But the practice is to bring the attention back to the object, the breath or the *buddho*. We're not concerned with what the thought or the memory involved or why it arose but

only with bringing our attention back to the object. If we can do this faithfully for one whole day it will lead to *appaṇā samādhi*, but this is extremely difficult to accomplish because the monkey mind is so used to going wherever it likes.

This is the training, a training that can't be learnt from words or books but only from experience. You have to keep bringing the mind back, and do it, and do it, and do it, over and over again. Actually, following in the footsteps of the Lord Buddha means doing things: if you do this, it'll lead to calmness; if you do that, it'll lead to wisdom; if you cut the first three fetters, you'll become a *Sotāpanna*, and so on. These doings, these actions, lead to the promised outcomes — but only if you actually walk the path and do them. The difficulty lies in sticking your awareness, your attention, onto one point and not letting it drift off. You have to put all your effort and determination into not letting go of the object, bringing the mind back, and back, and back, again and again. This is the only way to enter *samādhi*. Once the mind stops thinking, it will become calm by itself, and when it is concentrated enough — more than fifty percent stabilised on the object, say — you'll come to realise how scattered the mind is most of the time. People usually think they have a lot of awareness (*sati*) in ordinary life, but they don't. It's only when they start getting a certain level of concentration that they see just how unaware they are most of the time. This is the first stage. The next is to go on, keeping attention on the object until you reach *upācāra samādhi*, which is a safe haven, a place of rest. A ship on the ocean is buffeted by waves going up and down, but once it reaches a safe haven there is equanimity. In *upācāra samādhi*, you know that the world is still there but you're untroubled because there are no thoughts. There are no worries or fears, just experience plain and simple. If you can enter *upācāra samādhi* a few times, you'll realise that all worries and all fears originate from thought, and that stopping discursive thought means eliminating worries and fears. This is a state that people don't normally experience because they don't concentrate long enough.

And why is *upācāra* called "access" *samādhi*? Because it gives access to all the other plains of existence. You can think of it as a railway station with different platforms which, if you know how to

board a specific train, it can lead to other realms of existence, such as the *deva*, ghost or hell realms. Of course, inexperienced people can take a long time to learn to read the signs and board the correct train. If they haven't been in a particular realm in previous lives, for example, they won't be able to read the signs and normally won't get there unless someone shows them the way. Various phenomena can arise and cease in *upācāra samādhi*, but it's important to keep your attention on the object. As you become more concentrated, the breath will become more and more subtle until it seems to stop. This is the only time to switch your attention to the knowingness of the *citta*. It can be a bit tricky to do this but it's a necessary step. It's the same when the object is the *buddho*; the mind becomes so concentrated that it can't think *buddho* any more; the awareness of this leads to the knowingness of the *citta*. Similarly, when the breath seems to stop there isn't a thought that you can't breathe any more but rather a knowingness of what has happened. In either case, you should switch to the knowingness itself. This is the only time to jump away from the object of concentration.

The first time it happens, we don't have to jump — we just get pulled in. If we go with the stream of concentration, it pulls us in automatically. However, if people fear they are dying when the breath seems to stop, they'll be pushed out of *samādhi* and will have to start the work all over again. Similarly, if they ask themselves why they can't think *buddho* any more, they'll exit *samādhi* and have to go back to the beginning. This happens until they learn how to get to the knowingness of the *citta*. Actually, the more we concentrate, the more we'll feel the point of concentration, our awareness, slowly going down to the *citta*, even though the point of concentration is still apparent. We'll know it, and actually don't have to do a lot; we just stay there. But for most people this experience is new and fresh, and they become afraid, afraid of losing themselves. Of course, the deepest state of *samādhi*, *appaṇā samādhi*, means the loss — for the time being — of the five *khandhas*. This is similar to the deep state of sleep when we "lose" the five *khandhas* and are unaware of them. Deep sleep, however, is not associated with the crisp, clear awareness of knowingness of *appaṇā samādhi*. Actually, the fear of dying, of losing oneself, is frequently a hindrance to the attainment

of *samādhi*, and people have to find some trick to get over it. After all, when you're falling asleep, you're not afraid of "losing" the five *khandhas* and not waking up again. You can't be, otherwise you'd never go to sleep, would you?

So all you need to do is place your attention at one point. It's the simplest task in the world. People are able to do so many complicated things in the world, but they don't seem able to manage this utterly simple task. Of course, lots of things come up to get in the way, for there are many hindrances on the path.[2] Take sleepiness; when we first sit, we're enthusiastic to stay in the meditation posture for the next five hours, but we give up after five minutes. Pain comes up, doubt comes up, we feel hungry, thirsty or cold, or feel like going to the toilet – any number of reasons come up to stop practising. So where has all the determination gone? The determination to sit for hours is the determination of Dhamma, but the *kilesas* are afraid of it and soon take counter-measures to get in the way. So we have to fight, and that's why Than Ajahn Mahā Bua uses the metaphor of the boxing match. At first, we go into the ring as an amateur boxer meeting the world champion. We get knocked out but go back in again, getting knocked out over and over. But in time we become able to catch the movements of the opponent – how he tricks us, how he hits – and learn to duck and not lose so quickly. Eventually we discover his weak spots, get a punch in now and again and even knock him out once in a while. *Samādhi* is a way of knocking the opponent (*avijjā* and its fangs the *kilesas*) out for a time. While he's knocked out we can have a rest, and *upācāra* or *appaṇā samādhi* is where we get peace for a while. These states bring peacefulness and happiness to the heart because the boxing champion, *avijjā*, isn't there and has no power over it. And this is why people who come out of *samādhi* want to go straight back in again.

Once the mind has been trained to stick to one object for at least ten to fifteen minutes without going off anywhere, you can begin to investigate. Starting investigation before then is rather useless.

2. The five hindrances (nīvaraṇa) to meditation are sensual desire; anger and ill will; sloth and torpor; restlessness and remorse; and doubt.

Although you've spent most of your lives thinking about various things, the attention you've applied has been weak and superficial. Have you ever noticed that mind stays on the same subject for only three thoughts before it starts moving, and then it keeps moving on until after around ten thoughts it has drifted to a completely different subject? That's why it's not useful to do meditative investigation with this kind of mind. You have to get the mind calm before you can put it to work. It's like teaching a monkey to dig a hole. It knows how to dig but after a few shovelfuls it jumps to another spot. Will it ever get a hole? No, and it's the same with the mind. People don't notice how their minds flit around like butterflies. The next time you think about a particular thing, observe how your mind moves, darting around until after ten minutes it has traversed the whole world. This kind of mind is useless for investigation. However, a mind that's really focussed on a subject can comprehend it quite quickly, as we all know. It's the natural power of concentration, and we need it for the practice of investigation.

There are only five things to investigate — the body, feeling, memory and association, thought, and consciousness, these five *khandhas* that make up what we think we are. We take the body first because it is the easiest to get a handle on; we can see it, touch it and experience it. In the world, most of our effort goes into looking after the body — taking it for a walk, putting it to sleep, sitting it on the toilet, washing it, earning money to have a house to put it in, and so forth. It's the primary object in our lives actually, whether we realise it or not. Many people, particularly in the West, live in their minds, in imagination and daydreams. They know a lot of things, and you could say that they're spaced out by their knowledge most of the time, which is the same as saying blinded by their own fantasies and imaginings. They spend their lives processing and reprocessing existing knowledge to try to come up with new knowledge, but this is like churning though old garbage to produce some new pieces of paper. People who are spaced out like this first have to make contact with their bodies. Walking meditation can be useful — feeling the swaying of the body or the touch of the sole of the foot on the ground — but it's also vital to be aware of the body at all other times

during the day. For example, we eat only one meal a day in the monastery, and mealtime seems a significant event because it involves the only obvious sense pleasure (taste) monastics can indulge. So eating is a good time to be aware of the body: the hunger for food, chewing, swallowing, digesting and excreting. But there's a range of other activities we do with the body, such as washing, walking around and speaking, and we need to be aware of the body at these times as well.

There are many ways of investigating the body. For example, you can reflect on your own life. How long did it take to train the body to use it for your own purposes? You first had to learn to breathe properly and digest food, and over time to walk and talk. Learning to think clearly took another ten years or so, and studying to develop the mind took longer. The body is a complicated biological robot, and programming it correctly takes a long time. All in all, you can say it took twenty years or more before you could call yourself a fully fledged human being, fully able to enjoy the body by talking, exercising, reading, thinking, and so on. But was all that training a lot of fun? Learning to walk by bumping in to things, learning to talk and getting words mixed up, going to school every day, learning how to deal with other people — was all that a bundle of joy? Childhood and adolescence is a pretty rough time, and it's only in early adulthood that we can call ourselves fully cooked, mature human beings. How much *dukkha* did we go through in the early years? Reflecting on these things can bring up a lot of insight.

The parts of the body can also be the subject of investigation. Take the five parts that *bhikkhus* are given as meditation subjects at their ordination: hair of the head, hair of the body, nails, teeth and skin. These are the externals that attract people to other bodies, but are they really attractive, and why are people deceived by them time after time? What's left after the skin is removed? Just a whole mass of blood, pus, flesh and bone. Take off your skin and look in the mirror; what defining marks of yourself are left? Don't we all look much the same with the skin stripped away? The skin and hair are great deceivers, and people put an amazing amount of effort into beautifying them; think of all the different creams, moisturisers,

shampoos, deodorants and perfumes for sale in the shops. Or think about clothes that cover the skin. All anyone really needs is one change of clothing, but look into people's wardrobes. How many shoes do they have? Too many. Look around your apartment — how much of the stuff is catering for the body, comforting it, beautifying it, feeding it, relieving it and so on? Now compare this with what is available at this monastery. It's very little, but in all the years that I've been a *Bhikkhu*, I haven't needed anything else; it's sufficient for caring for the body and keeping it reasonably healthy. Also, one meal a day is enough to keep the body going, and one shower every few days is enough too.

In the end the body dies, doesn't it? It dies whether we like it or not. Think about the time and energy people spend looking after something that's useless in the end. I estimate that *bhikkhus* in a monastery spend at most two hours a day catering for the needs of the body. The rest of the time is free to develop the *citta*, the thing that drives and commands the body. Robots, even biological ones, don't command themselves do they? They need various programs, and the *citta* is the programmer of the body. That's why the body doesn't move at all when the *citta* is resting in deep *samādhi*. When the *citta* is centred, one-pointed and calm there is no movement, and you don't even feel pain. You simply experience everything without the body moving. Isn't that amazing? In Christianity, people think that sin is associated with the body and the desires of the flesh, but actually the "sinful" thing is the unenlightened *citta* with its greed, hatred and delusion. The body doesn't do anything unless it's directed by the *citta*. If you get very deep in meditation practice, you'll see how the *citta* commands the body, how every movement the body makes springs from the *citta*. You'll see it for yourself. The *citta* is close to the physical heart and transmits its commands through it, so you can check the calmness of the *citta* by looking at the activity of the heart; a calm *citta* means a calm heart.

It's up to you to experience these things. You can hear about them and have views about them, but the actual experience of *samādhi* is the real thing. It's the experience of peaceful happiness and joy. It's close to the happiness and joy we experience in the world, but it lasts

much longer and is much purer. And by the way, it's free; it doesn't cost a penny. All you have to do is keep your attention on one point and all the happiness stored in the heart will come up. Peacefulness is a quality of the *citta*, and it comes out at the very moment the heart opens up. But people keep the door of the heart closed all the time, and that's why they never see what's inside. We fool ourselves constantly because we keep looking outwards but never inwards. We don't see what's in the closet because we're too busy looking outside at the things of the world. So centre your attention on the point where everything occurs, the *citta*, the prime mover.

In this monastery, you have the opportunity to experience *samādhi* for yourselves. The more endurance you have, the more determination to bring the mind back to the single point of attention, the faster you'll get there. There's no secret behind this—and no shortcut. It's like walking from here to Bangkok; the more steps you take the faster you'll reach your goal. But if you moan and groan after a few steps and think it's better to have lots of little rests, it will take longer and you may never get there at all. So cut down on your thoughts and memories and bring the mind back to the point of attention. If you do that faithfully, you'll get there. It can't be otherwise.

Ajahn Martin Piyadhammo Teaching in Singapore

Anicca Is a Very Profound Teaching

29th August 2018

Change is happening all the time, all around us. The whole world and everything in it is in a state of constant flux. We all think we know this, but the problem is that we don't really understand it – or don't want to. Sometimes we want things to change, like when a baby wants to walk or teenagers can't wait to become adults. But most of the time we don't want change and spend a lot of time resisting it. After all, who wants to face old age, sickness and death; who wants pleasant feelings to vanish; and who wants their partner to leave or die? Thoughts that arise fade away, feelings that arise fade away, the things of the world are created and destroyed, and the bodies we inhabit are born and die, yet we want to hold on to them. We want things – relationships, jobs, bodies and minds – to remain the same, and when they change we blame other people, even though our eyes and ears tell us that change is part of the universe. Whatever arises has to cease, whatever is created has to fade away, but we can't accept it. We just don't get it, do we?

The Lord Buddha used the word *anicca* to refer to impermanence, the transience of things, the continual transformation of everything around us. In his teaching, *anicca* is one of the three characteristics of existence, along with *dukkha* (suffering or discontent) and *anattā* (not-self). The three are interlinked, of course; *dukkha* arises because we want continuity and mistakenly cling to things that are *anicca*, while things that are *anicca* must also be *anattā* due to their temporary nature. Everyone recognises that objects in the outside world are *anattā*, not me and not mine, but the Lord Buddha went further; he taught that the five *khandhas* (the body, feeling, memory and association, thought, and consciousness) – the five groups that make up what we conventionally think of as ourselves – are also *anicca* and *anattā*. His teaching points to something beyond, something that just knows, something that watches, something that is conscious of change as it occurs in the five *khandhas* or the external world. If you go out and look at the sky, you can see sunshine

becoming obscured by clouds, clouds releasing rain, and rain stopping to reveal sunshine again. Something is watching all this; something knows what's happening. And the same is true with internal phenomena. When a pleasant feeling changes into an unpleasant or neutral one, something knows this. Thoughts come and go in a flash, but something knows them. Isn't that true? The one that knows these things is the heart (*citta*) which drives the *khandhas*.

You can call the *citta* "the one who knows," the one who knows that a feeling, memory or thought arises or ceases. If the *citta* really, deeply understood *anicca*, it wouldn't be attached to changeable things, such as the five *khandhas*. Do you see that? As long as you don't understand *anicca*, you'll always grasp at transient things, albeit against your better judgment. Look at it this way: growing up transforms our thoughts, ideas and experiences, and our experiences as adults also change us for better or worse. Characters change, and character is nothing more than a well-worn pattern of habits. Some habitual patterns lie deeper in the mind, of course, and they are harder to alter than more superficial ones, but they also change, deepen or fall away over time. They're not permanent; nothing is constant in this universe, nothing. You really have to understand this — everything, everything is inconsistent. When the Lord Buddha taught that everything is *anicca*, his aim was to help people to stop clinging to transient things. After he became enlightened, he looked around and saw people who were deluded. It was as if they were playing a fast moving computer game, immersed in the fleeting events on the screen. His Dhamma is sometimes called the lion's roar, which makes all the other animals in the forest stop in their tracks, but we can also think of it as a tap on the shoulder that stops the person playing the computer game in his tracks.

Meditation is a way of stopping. It's the core of the Lord Buddha's teachings, and the main meditation practice in the Thai Forest Tradition is to switch off thoughts and memories, ignore them and focus on the breath as it comes in and out at the nose, or on the mental repetition of the word *buddho*. Most people who learn meditation, certainly in the West, just do *samatha* exercises until they feel calm and tranquil, and then they stop again. It's a stop–go cycle which

gets them nowhere in the end. The Thai Forest Tradition, however, encourages people to go deeper, to the point where thoughts and memories fall away and, if *samādhi* is deep enough, the whole universe collapses. The past falls away, the future vanishes, and the only thing that remains is the present. When we come out of this state, we find that thoughts and memories return as before, but we know that we've experienced something completely different from the world we had known before, and the longer we stay in *samādhi*, the more satisfied we feel.

In that state, there are no desires or *dukkha,* only calm, satisfaction, bliss or whatever name you give to the experience. But the moment we come out of *samādhi* and dive back into the video game of the world, we find that all our wants and needs have returned, along with the associated *dukkha*. Thoughts start up again, memories come back, concern about the future returns to plague us, and worries worm their way back in. Most people want to dive straight back into *samādhi* because they loved the experience, but *samādhi* isn't eternal either. It's also *anicca*, and just as changeable as the rest of the universe. In fact, people can never have the same experience of *samādhi* twice because each time it is different. Even if they want to repeat that experience of happiness or bliss, they won't be able to. This can lead to despair in meditators who believe they've found something wonderful, but their desire to repeat the experience shows that they haven't really understood *anicca*. They don't see — or don't want to admit — that every experience is different. Yes, meditation for calmness and tranquility can take people to a state where there is rest, where thoughts stop and where memories stop, but the experience of *upācāra* (access) *samādhi* is also transient. Some people, a few, can dive even deeper into the deepest state (*appaṇā samādhi*) where everything disappears, everything, and we see the truth. This is the experience that Than Ajahn Mahā Bua calls a preview of *Nibbāna* — but even that is transient.

Actually, diving into *samādhi* again and again doesn't get us very far. Of course, it's better than chasing after the things of the world, running after soap bubbles. We laugh at children when they run

after colourful soap bubbles that burst at the slightest touch, giggling and having fun, jumping after this one and that one. But we all spend our lives running after bubbles called thoughts, ideas, feelings, imaginings and opinions, don't we? They're all soap bubbles that keep bursting, because nothing in the universe is constant — except the *citta*, the one who knows, the one who notices that the sunshine is obscured by clouds, that clouds turn to rain and that rain stops to reveal the sun. It just observes, while we whirl around in *saṁsāra* from birth to death, one rebirth after another, chasing soap bubbles, thinking we're getting somewhere but going nowhere at all.

So, experiencing *samādhi* is better than running after soap bubbles, but you have to realise that it too is *anicca*. No matter how long you meditate, even if you stay in *appaṇā samādhi* for days, you'll eventually be thrown out again, back to things as they were before. This is exactly what the Lord Buddha realised during his quest for enlightenment. His first teacher, *Ālāra Kālāma*, taught his students how to attain various states of meditative absorption (*jhānas*), and the Lord Buddha found them blissful and peaceful, though when he came out his mind returned to its former state. When he asked *Ālāra Kālāma* if there was anything else he could learn, the answer was no. His next teacher, *Uddaka Rāmaputta,* also taught the *jhānas* (possibly the higher or *arūpa jhānas*), but the story was the same — the jhānas alone led to stillness but not to liberation. Eventually, the Lord Buddha realised that there had to be another way, a way out of the wheel of suffering altogether, and for the next six years he practised extreme asceticism, including the mortification of the body. In the end, realising the limitations of these practices too, he sat down under the *bodhi* tree at Bodhgaya and found the *Majjhima Paṭipadā*, the middle way of practice. This is what he taught the world — the fourth Noble truth, the path that leads to the end of *dukkha,* the path supported by three pillars: *sīla* (virtue or morality), *samādhi* and *paññā* (wisdom).

I'm inviting those of you who practise the Dhamma and want to end *dukkha* to take a step back and look at things from a different perspective. All beings are on a wheel comprising the thirty-one different realms of existence. Now they take human form, now they

go to hell, now they become ghosts (*petas*), now they appear in the heavenly (*deva*) realms, and so on, while the wheel of rebirth turns around and around. They are stuck, stuck in *saṁsāra vaṭṭa*, the cycle of birth and death. But no matter what level of existence they find themselves in, it's subject to change; none of the realms is eternal. If you had a bird's eye view, you'd see beings running and running, striving and striving without getting anywhere. Next time you go to a pet shop, look at the hamster running in its wheel and you'll see exactly what I mean. It puts in all that effort to achieve nothing and go nowhere.

As long as we're attached to things that are *anicca*, that never stay the way we want them to be, we'll be caught on the wheel. To break free, we need to practise, but real practice involves not only keeping the moral precepts (*sīla*) and stilling the mind in *samādhi,* but also investigating with wisdom. Only through investigation can we get off the wheel. We need to investigate everything, but the main focus has to be the five *khandhas* we think of as ourselves. We all identify with the bodies we inhabit and believe them to be me and mine – that's why we're all so scared of dying – but we also identify with feelings (physical or mental), memories and thoughts. We remember events ten years ago, five years ago or last year, and speculate about what we want to become in future. But we ignore the fact that the body, feelings, memories, thoughts and consciousness are all subject to change. This is where we fall down. We want things and take steps to get them, but the results are often unsatisfactory because the conditions have changed in the meantime. We ourselves are changing, and every experience changes us for good or ill. But these transformations of mood or character are not permanent; they're *anicca*, they're fleeting. Everything we gain, we can lose again. Everything we can create or conceive of, we can lose again, and all of us will die and lose it all.

The body has been changing since it was born whether we liked it or not; it was once a collection of cells, then a baby, then a child and now an adult, but something in us realises that process is happening. When we change our minds, we realise that too. When our character changes, we realise that too. There is something that

knows all these things, but we need to develop *samādhi* to glimpse it and awareness (*sati*) to see things clearly. If *sati* is strong enough, we can even become aware of the events preceding a thought, such as the intention to think, move or remember a past event. But what is aware of these things, what knows thoughts as they arise, and what recognises the desire to think? What knows the quality of the meditation object, for example, whether the breath is calm or agitated, deep or superficial, long or short? It's the one who doesn't change. *Nibbāna* is called the unconditioned, the unchangeable, the eternal. Some of us feel a sense of the eternal, but we search for it in changing things – in houses, love, a profession, and so on. Actually, we should get wise and stop looking for fixity in transient things. The world of phenomena is *anicca*, and the five *khandhas* belong to that world. The aim of meditative investigation is to make the *citta*, the one who knows, understand the truth of *anicca*, really understand it rather than just know about it, for only then will it accept the truth of *anattā*, that nothing in the world of phenomena can truly be me or mine. The observer cannot be the things it observes. If we don't realise this, we'll keep falling for the affairs of the five *khandhas* that are subject to change, identify with them and suffer accordingly.

Our true nature and that of every living being is the same. It's the knowing that is unconditioned; the thing that knows no conditions doesn't hang on to phenomena that change and doesn't depend on the things of the world. We have to make this clear to ourselves again and again, patiently reinforcing the message, and this is why we have to investigate over and over again. We have to get back to the thing that is aware of these changes, the thing that doesn't change. In deep *samādhi* it can be experienced temporarily, but we can only realise the truth using *paññā* developed through seeing, experiencing and investigating. Take our attachment to the body: when it has youth and strength we think we're young and strong, and when it decays we think we're falling apart. But through investigation we can see that the body is just a tool that performs certain functions. It's just a means of transport like a truck, but we're attached to it and spend a lot of time and energy keeping it going. We work hard to provide for its needs, to give it something to eat or wear, and give it shelter and medicine when it becomes ill. We sacrifice a lot to preserve a body

that it is dying slowly but surely, though we can't be sure when death will come. The fact that we give the body such attention means that we don't get it, we don't understand. Actually, the body is neither beautiful nor ugly; it just has a certain nature – to be born, grow up and die. Having a body is the same as buying a dishwasher, a bicycle or a computer, except that we all realise that these useful objects are not part of ourselves. The body is just a tool that we use for a certain time, but we think it's me and mine, and that is why we suffer when it breaks down in illness or disease. We all understand that bicycles or computers give up the ghost eventually, but we struggle to accept that bodies do the same. In fact, the body is no more me and mine than a bicycle or a dishwasher, and we have to teach the heart, the *citta*, that it and the body are two different things.

Normally, we love everything that goes into the body, and detest whatever comes out of it, but love is a form of greed and detestation is a form of hate. This is why the body is an ideal subject for investigation – the *kilesas* of greed and hate are rooted there. As we investigate over and over again – the hair, the skin, the teeth, the nails, and so on[1] – to make ourselves see clearly again and again, we'll come to realise that the body is nothing special. In fact, it's just like a tree; it consists of earth, fire, water and air. One scripture uses the metaphor of the chariot to illustrate the point, but a modern analogy would be with a car. If you take apart the chassis, the engine, the seats, the steering wheel, the upholstery leather, the screws and lay them on the ground, there's no car, is there? There are only parts that can be combined together to make what we conventionally think of as a car. No-one would look at them and call them a car. Similarly, if you dismembered a body there would be a few fingers here, a foot there, half nose here, some hair there, a liver here, a pool of blood there, and so on. Most people would call these body parts, but how many parts does it take to make a body? How many parts can we lose before we stop having to call it a body? Try

1. Thirty-two body parts are cited in the suttas as suitable for contemplation. The first five of these are the most visible aspects – hair of the head (kesā), hair of the body (lomā), nails (nakkhā), teeth (dantā) and skin (taco) – and they are given as meditation subjects to *bhikkhus* at their ordination.

it for yourself in your meditation: if you practise correctly, you can mentally dissemble the body parts one by one and visualise them in front of you. How many parts can you lose before the concept of the body is undermined? And what is left observing when all the parts are out in front? If your examination bears fruit, you will eventually be able to destroy the greed and hate rooted in the body. And once investigation of the body is finished, there's peace – the absence of greed and hate – for the first time. After this, the investigation moves to the mental (*nāma*) *khandhas,* principally thought and memory, which make up delusion. Delusion is not knowing or not being able to see clearly, and it is rooted very deeply in the heart.

While it's important to start our investigation with the body, you also have to be ready to investigate anything, absolutely anything, that comes up in meditation practice. What is pain, what is fear, what is loneliness – what are these things? When they come along they seem like mountains to overcome, and they block your view of their underlying causes. Take pain: why does it disappear when you get up from your meditation cushion or think about something more interesting than your meditation object? After all, when people sit in an armchair watching a good film on television, they don't complain about pain. If they fly from Germany to Thailand sitting on a plane for eleven hours, where's the pain? But when they sit in meditation, the pain seems to tear them apart after fifteen minutes. They think that the meditation is to blame, that they are sitting wrongly or the cushion is lumpy, but really it's the *kilesas* that bring up these feelings and thoughts. You can never really get used to pain, but you can see it for what it is and understand it, at which point you stop caring whether you're in pain or not. You can't change the rain – rain stays rain just as pain stays pain – but you can understand that you're not the rain. And that understanding changes everything and allows you to find a place of shelter.

As long as you think of the pain as me or mine, and as long as you can't accept it, there's a certain rejection, which stirs up the pain even more. But when investigating, you need to experience and embrace the pain rather than look for ways to alleviate it. Amazing as it seems, it's when the pain is so great and you think it unbearable

that investigation can really drill down to the nub of the problem, but most people don't get that far. Ever since we were born we've looked for ways to alleviate *dukkha*, and we've discovered that food removes the feeling of hunger, sleep erases the feeling of tiredness, and stimulation relieves the feeling of boredom, and so on. This is how we've dealt with *dukkha* all our lives, and we think this is the way things should be. But the way of practice is completely different. It involves getting to the bottom of things. What is pain, where is it, why does it appear and disappear? During meditation, you'll see how, when you're just about to arrive at a solution, the pain in one knee suddenly jumps to the other knee. If you're willing to examine pain until you understand it instead of moving to relieve it, you'll find that it suddenly disappears. This is just an example of the kinds of things you need to see and experience for yourself through the practice of investigation.

Actually, the teachings that the Lord Buddha gave the world are basically simple. Through greed (*lobha*), hatred (*dosa*) and delusion (*moha*), we cling to things that are *anicca* and that cannot be me or mine. But knowing this alone doesn't help; we have to understand it, and this understanding comes only through investigation which can take a long time, possibly many years or many different lifetimes. Yes, *samādhi* is necessary to gather the mind, to bring it to one point, but it doesn't transform anything. It brings a state of calm, a state of contentment for a while, but when its effects wear off things are back where they were before. Nevertheless, the experience of *upācāra samādhi* can help us to see that there is another reality beyond that which we see, hear, smell, touch, taste or think, and that there is a something (a subject) that perceives phenomena, such as feelings or thoughts (objects). When *samādhi* is combined with *sati*, it's even possible to recognise each thought (or a quarter of a thought) or even the intention to think, speak, imagine or move. It's this level of *sati* that you need to develop. Just developing concentration alone, won't bring about change; it's akin to fleeing to a calm and pleasant state but finding nothing changed when you come out again. You can do this for years, all your life or for many lifetimes, but nothing will change.

You have to develop *sati* to see what is happening, otherwise you'll remain blind. You'll remain caught in a forest of reactions, thoughts and memories, all of which are *anicca*. Without *sati*, it's as though you're running through a dark forest, slashing with a sword here and there, thinking phantoms are all around, when all you're doing is hurting yourself and other people. Once you can see the difference between subject and object, between the known and the one who knows, you can put a distance between the two and start investigating in earnest. But please remember, it's no use just knowing intellectually that the subject can't be the object. This needs to be understood deeply, at the level of the heart.

In meditation practice, you can't take anything for granted. Everything has to be challenged, including all the assumptions you've had since birth. That's why I encourage people to do an intensive retreat once in a while, to experience all the resistances that lurk within them, of which they are only dimly aware. People living a normal lay life can meditate for, say, four hours a day but live heedlessly for the twenty remaining hours, making the whole exercise shallow and lacking direction. But here in the forest, we meditate for sixteen hours a day or more. The aim of practice is to get to the bottom of things, and when practice has this level of intensity nothing can escape it. But I accept that it's not an easy path; practice is never easy. Why do you think so few people practise? There are many people who meditate but very few who really practise, and real practice is what it's all about.

So don't let yourself be captivated by thoughts, memories and associations. When they come up, attack them right away, asking what they are, who they are, where they come from, what they are telling you, and why you should believe them. You have to see with your own eyes, your inner eyes, that these things are *anicca*, as well as *dukkha* and *anattā*, if you are ever to understand them. Otherwise, every thought that comes up will lead you astray — every thought. And if you believe any thought, you're on the wrong track.

Be Interested in Your Practice

29th November 2009

***S**ati* (awareness) is the key to practice, but there still has to be interest in the object of its attention. As long as we live in conventional reality, there is always an observer and an object being observed, but the observer has to take an interest in the object if anything is to happen. In Dhamma practice, the correct attitude is to be interested in and care about whatever is happening in the *citta*. We should reflect on it, asking why it's happening and what its effects might be. In the world, people see something – a dog, for example – and immediately classify it as quiet or angry, large or small, and this breed or that. Then they move on to something else that strikes the eye and think about that instead. As practitioners, however, we need to be aware in the moment. Are we really seeing a dog? No. What we first see is form and colour, and then the mental image is picked up by *saññā* (memory and association) which adds meaning by, for example, labelling it with various canine characteristics. If we're not aware of that process, we'll just drift through life with a certain dullness, while days or years pass by without a single second of real understanding.

To really understand, you have to observe closely, and this means being aware of everything happening inside the *citta* from moment to moment. It means wanting to experience the processes as they happen, to see them for yourself. You have to get smart, get clever, and cultivate the insight and wisdom needed to cut the fetters binding you to the cycle of rebirth. This requires being interested in meditation practice, interested in what you're doing – and you have to bring this interest up. When investigating an object, such as a part of the body, you have to make it the most interesting thing in the world and get sucked in by it, otherwise how will you ever get a handle on it? There are thirty-two parts of the body given as meditation subjects in the *suttas*, and one or all of them have to be investigated over and over again for a month, a year or twenty years until their true nature is really understood. But if there's no interest, you're just

wasting time, aren't you? I don't mean being interested in the results that might come in future, but in the investigation itself right here and now. The results come by objectively observing. For example, look at your body burning on a cremation pyre and ask what's happening. You might be amazed by the result. The first answer that comes up is usually from books or from something we've seen before, so don't be satisfied with it. Keep investigating and keep asking. If you challenge an answer, a deeper answer can arise. And you go on like this until the *citta* understands, and once it really understands, it will let go of its own accord.

If your practice is not to fall into dullness — which is a form of *dukkha,* dissatisfaction and unhappiness — you have to put effort into making it interesting. Dullness, though not as much *dukkha* as anger or greed, is a kind of uncaringness, not really being interested in what's going on. The key is *sati*, and it implies being interested in what you're seeing, experiencing and observing. Actually, if you find practice boring, it's because you still don't understand. Turn the situation on its head and ask what boredom is — it's being disinterested in whatever you're doing, isn't it? Ask yourself what sleepiness is — it's a state of dullness when you want to forget. Isn't that why people take alcohol and drugs, to dull the mind so they don't want to know what is going on? And isn't that just what *avijjā* is — not wanting to know, lazily assuming this, or accepting that in the same old way? By contrast, interest is the keenness to understand what is really going on. I remember after my first 10-day retreat as a layman years ago that a question kept popping into my head: "Who the hell is telling me to do things? What is going on in my mind?" I wanted to know, to understand, and that interest and keenness was the key to success. Actually, whatever is happening is a combination of two or three of the five *khandhas,* mainly discursive thought, memory and feeling. These make up the emotional states and moods people experience. So interrogate every mental state; that's the path of practice. And remember — the places that you don't investigate are places where the *kilesas* hide and where they lurk unseen.

Understanding doesn't happen after only one meditation session, of course. You have to investigate the same things over and over

again, digging into them and asking where they come from. At some point, you'll see the difference between thoughts, views or opinions and the knowledge that arises within the *citta*, which is the experience itself. Until you can see the difference, you'll assume that the knowing is your discursive thoughts and views. In conventional language, we use the verb "to know" all the time in various settings, but that's not the kind of knowing I'm talking about. I mean the knowing that comes from the *citta*, and when the *citta* knows — really knows — it never forgets. The knowledge we get from books or discussions starts to fade after a time and has to be refreshed, and it can be superseded ten years later by new information. We've all changed our minds about things we thought we knew, haven't we? But if the *citta* really knows, it never changes its mind. It doesn't have a mind: it just is. It just knows, and the way to approach this knowingness and experience it is to keep your awareness on one point, either the breath at the tip of the nose or the mental repetition of the word *buddho*. It's this focussed awareness that leads to the knowingness of the *citta*. Then you'll realise for yourself the difference between that kind of knowingness and the usual knowingness of the worldly mind. There's a big difference. Take, for example, the knowingness that comes from seeing your own body as repugnant or loathsome; this knowingness certainly comes from the *citta*, and it has nothing to do with knowledge from books or everyday life. When you go to the butcher for a piece of meat, carry it home and fry it, you don't think any more about it. You don't see it as disgusting, do you? Yet it is, and your own body is the same, a mass of flesh, blood, pus, sinews, urine and faeces. So don't be satisfied with the lies of the *kilesas*; be interested in challenging everything that they murmur in your ear. This will lead to the knowingness, to insight and wisdom. Wisdom is what we're after, for it's the only thing that can cut the fetters[1], including *sakkāya-diṭṭhi*, the illusion that the *citta* and the body are one and the same.

1. A list of the ten fetters (saṁyojana) is given in the Appendix. For additional information, see the talk, The supreme attainments, in Than Ajahn Mahā Bua's book, A Life of Inner Quality, available on the Luangta website (www.luangta.eu).

I often say that the *citta* controls the biological robot called the body, and people say that they understand what I mean. But understanding with the intellect isn't the same as the real, deep understanding that comes from direct experience. The first time I experienced this truth for myself, the metaphor of the car and the driver popped up in my mind. What does the driver have to do with the car? Nothing really. I had never heard the relationship of the *citta* to the body described like this before, but I could see the sense of it with my own inner eyes. The *citta* is a separate thing from the body; it can go out and back in again, although it's trapped in the body for most people and leaves only at the moment of death when its exit is forced. Then it looks for another vehicle, another prison, in any of the thirty-one realms of existence according to its *kamma*. That's the problem we all face. We have to find a method of realising — finally — that the two are separate, and this method involves getting the mind in a stable, calm state and then investigating the body. There are many ways of doing this, but one method I recommend is to mentally cut the body up and throw each piece out in a heap in front of you until nothing is left sitting on the meditation seat.[2] When all the body parts are out in front, what's left? Well, something remains; something is seeing the pile and knowing that it's seeing. In Thai this is called the *phu ru*, the one who knows. It just sees the parts of the body and knows it has nothing to do with them.

A similar exercise is to see with your inner eyes all the body parts in a heap, and ask yourself what the term "body" means. Is it the brain, the arms, the heart, the liver, and so on? Be interested; ask yourself over and over again. You must really want to know. Are the individual bits the body? No: they're just pieces of meat and bones covered in blood. Are they what you're so attached to? You don't feel attached to that heap of gunk, but the attachment comes back as soon as the pieces are reassembled in their proper places. Isn't that interesting? All of a sudden the "body" becomes yours again and is able to do all the fun things, like walking, eating, drinking

2. For a fuller account, see Ajahn Martin's talk, How to practise body contemplation, in his book, Forest Leaves, available on his website (www.forestdhammatalks.org).

and reading. But when do the parts become a body? Reunite them in the wrong way and they're not a body you can recognise. Putting the legs in place of the ears, or the brain in the backside, or the colon round the ankles doesn't make a body, does it? In one Buddhist scripture[3], the simile of the chariot is used to make the same point: is the chariot the wheels, the frame, the axles, the reins or a combination of them? Once disassembled, where is the chariot? Once disassembled, where is the body? Isn't the word "body" just a concept? Think about it.

The practice here is to know, to understand. When Than Ajahn Mahā Bua was teaching his *bhikkhus* during the rains retreat, he would sometimes ask what time the rainstorm had started and when it had stopped. And if a *Bhikkhu* said that he didn't know, Than Ajahn would say that the phrase, "I don't know," wasn't to be used in the monastery. You have to know — but it has to be knowing in a different sense, the knowing that leads to the knowingness of the *citta*. This means knowing each movement — why you get up, why you drink water, what you're eating, how it tastes, and so forth. Otherwise how will you ever understand your inner life? Not understanding means following the stream, the stream driven by the *kilesas*, and it has to be resisted. If you're not aware how the river flows, you'll never be able to stop it flowing from one life to the next, and the next, and the next. Not being interested isn't enlightenment. Dullness isn't *Nibbāna*. Some foolish people say that they're completely detached from the world and think they must be in *Nibbāna*. If that's the case, why do they still feel dissatisfaction? *Nibbāna* is described as the ultimate happiness. Their feeling of complete detachment is just a mood of dullness and disinterestedness. Well, if they pile up enough dullness in this life, they will surely be born in a land of dullness the next life, that's all I can say.

Ask yourself: are you really satisfied with the results of your practice so far? Are you contented, are you at ease, are you at peace in this moment? And if not, shouldn't you be doing something about

3. This is the Milindapañha, or Milinda's Questions, an important early Buddhist text which is not usually included in the Pāli canon.

it? Why don't you tackle the *kilesas* that produce the mess you're in? It's because of laziness that we say, "I have enough happiness, compared to five years ago". I'm not asking whether you're a little more happy today than five years ago but whether you're completely contented at this moment. If your heart is full of *dukkha*, dis-ease, restlessness and worry, the answer is to find *sukha* (contentment, peacefulness and harmony), but you have to find it for yourself. If you're not completely content in the present moment, go and do some more practice. And if you find that hard, ask whether you want to be reborn, going through childhood and youth again, learning how to walk, talk and think again, going through it all again. Even the fully fledged adult state lasts only a few short years before things start falling apart. Do you really want a next life? If not, get working on your meditation practice to enter the stream leading to *Nibbāna*. You have to find something to drive yourself on, for without a spur you'll never reach *Nibbāna*. But what's keeping you from seeing the truth? I'll tell you: your views, assumptions, aims, intentions, and so on. Liking or disliking means that something is wrong in the present moment, otherwise you wouldn't want or not want. If we were completely contented in the present moment, there would be no liking or disliking, no wanting at all. So the only thing you have to do — the only thing — is observe what's happening in the present. But, of course, people think that's boring, boring, boring, because one breath is just like the next and one *buddho* is just like all the others. They find investigation of the body tedious too because it doesn't seem to lead anywhere; it's all so boring, boring, boring. So they think about something else, something exciting like eating a cream cake or listening to music. This is what people do all the time, but it's not the way to reach enlightenment. In Dhamma terms, the *āsavas* flow out of the *citta* in all directions, but we don't realise it and that's why we find things tedious. However, if you really know the meditation object in the moment, there's no sense of boredom, no notion of disinterest. The object is completely engrossing because your concentration is fully engaged with it, and the thought that it's boring can't even arise.

I really don't know what to say. Sometimes when I look at you, I see people who seem defeated, with no interest whatsoever in their practice, satisfied in a dull way with their more or less comfortable lives. I see people who don't want to change anything. So what can I say? There was a film years ago, Groundhog Day, about a man facing exactly the same situations every day, meeting the same people and having the same conversations over and over again. After a while, he becomes frantic and wants out of the time loop, the cycle of sameness. In our case, we think exciting thoughts to relieve the tedium, to escape the monotony of doing the same thing over and over, but fantasy isn't the way out. The only escape is *sati*, the awareness of whatever is happening inside the *citta*, allied to interest in the practice, whether *samatha* or investigation. *Sati* itself is objective; it just knows that whatever's happening is happening, and that gives a sense of relief. Remember: a moment of *sati* is a moment without *kilesas*.

Where is your energy, where is your willpower? Have the *kilesas* gobbled it all up? When you first came to this monastery there was a certain energy to your practice, but where has it gone? You need to find energy from somewhere. One way is to think about an activity you loved doing in the past, something you always found the power and interest to do. Bring up that interest and energy, collect it and keep using it. Let's be clear, clear about the situation we find ourselves in. You're in a prison, and your sentence is to go round and round in *saṁsāra*. It doesn't matter how you ended up in prison or why; the only relevant concern is how to break out. Some people love to speculate about the origins of everything or what the future holds, but where does that get them? As the Lord Buddha explains in the parable of the poisoned arrow in the *Majjhima Nikāya*, it doesn't matter what the arrow is made of, who made it or who shot it — the point is to pull it out of the wounded man as quickly as possible. In our case, the way out of the prison is meditation: calming the mind, developing awareness of the breath or the *buddho*, investigating the five *khandhas* and, finally, cutting the fetters binding us to the cycle

of rebirth. That's our way out. And all we need to do is put one foot in front of the other and walk that path until the fetters are so thin that one cut removes them forever.

Do you want to have another body? Dragging the weight of it along every day, putting it to sleep, washing it, feeding it and exercising it. Is that a bundle of fun? Aren't you sick of it? And what does it really give you? Pain, unease, dissatisfaction, discomfort and sickness — that's what. And what about the six senses that come along with it — do they bring lasting satisfaction? If the body was a product in a supermarket, would you buy it? In the world, an entrepreneur looks at a potential business and asks what value it might bring and whether it could turn a profit in future. What does the body bring? Actually, greed and hate, for it's the pot in which the plant of greed and hate grows. Do its benefits outweigh the costs of having it, given that we have to work for years to get the money to keep it going? Yes, we might get a few minutes of real happiness every day, but the trade-off is hours of dissatisfaction. These are the kinds of questions you have to investigate. Most people don't bother asking them; they just drift along with the stream of the *kilesas* as the world sucks them in like a vacuum cleaner. They're caught in a prison and think the prison is what they really are. But you should question everything; you're supposed to be a follower of the Dhamma, after all.

You can think of meditation practice as tunnelling through a mountain. You don't know how large the mountain is or how far there is to go. All you can do is remove one piece of rock after another and keep going until there's light at the end of the tunnel. You'll know you're finished when you can see the light. Until then you need faith, determination and interest to keep going from moment to moment. People love to speculate about the future, but what is the future? It's something that hasn't come, just as the past is something that's gone. The only thing we have is the present moment. If you spend your time fantasising about the future or dwelling on the past, you'll spend the next million lives in the dark tunnel and never see light at the end — never ever. The only useful thing any of us can do is

be aware of what's going on inside ourselves right now. We need to uncondition ourselves, and we do that by observing the conditions inside that trigger unwholesome actions, and remove them forever. We need to do that over and over again until we reach the unconditioned, which is another name for *Nibbāna*. The power of the *kilesas* is to create conditions that lead to opinions, views, meanings, and so on, and we latch onto these things thinking they're real. But none of them are real. They don't exist, for they're just fantasies of the mind. In truth, reality is just one breath going in and one breath going out.

Ajahn Martin Piyadhammo

Avijjā – A Catch-22 Situation

17th February 2010

So why have you all come here? You've come from other countries to this tiny forest monastery in the North-East of Thailand, and something must have drawn you half-way around the world. What drew me was the book, *Straight from the Heart*, by Than Ajahn Mahā Bua.[1] After reading it, I knew that I must see the author, the monk who could speak so confidently about the path to the end of *dukkha*. Actually, even as a young child I questioned everything – why was I here, what was the meaning of it all, and so on – and the answers I received from my Christian background never satisfied me. Something in the teachings of the Lord Buddha clicked, however, and made sense to me. I suddenly understood why I and other beings exist, why they look and behave as they do, and why things happen as they do. *Kamma*, the force that drives the cycle of rebirth, made sense to me. In Western culture, we're told in the Bible to do unto others what we want them to do unto us, but no-one ever mentions the flip-side explained by *kamma* – that what's done to us today is the kammic result of what we've done to others in the past. In effect, we reap what we sow. That made sense to me, but no-one in the West ever reflects on it, do they? Imagine if everyone lived by that teaching: they'd rush to do good, and the world would be a paradise.

In fact, the world is a mess because greed and hate are raging out of control inside ourselves and others. Many people look back over their lives with regret for their unwise or unwholesome actions. In most cases, they were driven to act by a force they didn't even recognise or couldn't find the power to resist. That force is simply the power of *avijjā* that causes all beings to be reborn again and again in

1 *Straight from the Heart* and other books and teachings by Than Ajahn Mahā Bua, can be found on the Luangta website (www.luangta.eu).

the three-fold universe.[2] In *Pāli*, *avijjā* is the opposite of *vijjā*, which is knowingness. So *avijjā* is not-knowing, usually translated as fundamental ignorance. It means not knowing and not understanding that we're doing the wrong thing. We want to know and understand but can only do so within conventional reality. The problem is that *avijjā* is the master of conventional reality, and it itself doesn't know or understand! So we find ourselves in a no-win Catch-22 situation, caught in a trap of delusion. As long as we're trying to escape using the tools available in conventional reality, we'll never get out. We can try to understand using rational thinking, tradition, or information from books, but in the end we have to settle for what we see and think we understand. As long as *avijjā* exists, none of us will ever be able to understand in line with the truth. Yet we all feel, somewhere deep inside, that there really is something beyond, something hidden by conventional reality. And we sense that if we could touch it, we'd finally understand and know.

So how can we touch it? The first step is to put the mind in a state of calm, into stillness where everything unreal disappears, where conventional reality vanishes and the truth can be revealed. This is easy to say but very difficult for most people to do. Yet it simply involves putting your attention onto one point, usually the point at the tip of the nose where the breath comes in and goes out. Don't follow it; just stick to one point and know whether the breath is going out or coming in, and whether it is deep or shallow, long or short, and so on. Memories and thoughts come in, of course, but just pull your attention back to the breath, and keep pulling it back every time. For people who think a lot, the mental repetition of the word *buddho* can also be used, either alone or combined by thinking "Bud" on the in-breath and "dho" on the out-breath, until the mind becomes so focused that it can't think a single *buddho* any more.

It's important to do this until no more thoughts come up and until you can enter access (*upācāra*) *samādhi*, which is a world beyond

2. In Buddhism, there are thirty-one realms of existence, and these can be classified into three great divisions (*tridhatu*): the realms of sensual desire, the realms of form or matter, and the realms of formlessness.

thought. It's just a world of experience that most people don't know about, where the mind stops churning out thoughts and memories and they suddenly realise that there's another reality. Amazingly enough, there's no fear, no worry and no loneliness in that state — just centredness, stillness and happiness. As soon as thoughts come back, of course, feelings and thoughts come flooding in again, along with the greed and hate that underlies them. But remember: if you're troubled or frightened, put your awareness onto one object — the breath or *buddho* — and as long as you stay fixed on the point of concentration the worries will cease. It's a very useful technique.

Objects of awareness such as the breath are not important in themselves; it's emptying the mind of thoughts and memories that leads to stillness and happiness. This is because happiness is always there in the heart (*citta*), even though people don't see it because their minds are full of distracting thoughts and memories that come along with unhappy and uncomfortable feelings. Have you ever asked yourself why you keep thinking and remembering things that you know bring up unpleasant or unwholesome feelings? People seem to spend their lives doing this and are unable to stop the vicious cycle. Well, focusing the mind on one object to the exclusion of everything else is one way to stop. That's it: it's the only magic pill anyone needs. If you can reach *upācāra samādhi*, you'll feel safe for the first time in your whole life — it's a safe haven. It's as though there's a quiet room in the house but you mislaid the key a long time ago. All that's needed is to find the key, unlock the door, go in and have a rest. Well, the key is simple: put your awareness onto one object and unlock the door to happiness, peacefulness and stillness.

While in *upācāra samādhi*, you should continue to be aware of the object. If it's the breath, it will become more and more subtle until it disappears from awareness. Concentration will still lie at the nose, but it will seem to fall into the place where the *citta* resides, at the centre of the chest. If the *buddho* is the object, the more concentrated on the *buddho* you become, the more your attention will seem to be drawn into the *citta*. That's where these methods should lead — to the *citta* at the centre of the chest. The reason these techniques work is that the true nature of the *citta* is knowingness, and

knowing the breath or the *buddho* leads to the knowingness of the *citta*.

The moment you fall into the *citta*, you'll enter *appaṇā samādhi*. This is when the subject (the observer) and the object (the observed) unify into one point. This is one-pointedness. You are unaware of any of the senses, and it seems as though the whole universe has vanished. What's left is an amazing knowingness. It's a clear sharp knowingness in which there's no notion of time. When you come out, it seems like you've been there for a moment, but it might have been five or six hours and the body will not have moved at all. *Appaṇā samādhi* is one of the first wonders of meditation, and it can be experienced by anyone who puts their mind to it. All you need do is put all your effort and determination into not letting the *citta* go out into thinking and memory. That's all. It's not beyond your ability to enter *appaṇā samādhi*. Yes, getting there is sometimes a struggle, but we've struggled all our lives to develop many skills, so why not this most important one? After all, you didn't mind learning to walk, talk and read, even though struggle and *dukkha* were involved.

We should all develop this ability, for then we'll know that something is left when everything else stops — and that's the *citta*. Than Ajahn Mahā Bua called *appaṇā samādhi* a preview of *Nibbāna*. It's what is left when everything has completely disappeared, when *avijjā* is stilled for a time. The confidence that comes from experiencing *appaṇā samādhi*, and the energy that comes from resting there, helps greatly with the practice of investigation. Just as we need rest in order to do worldly work, a mind without the rest of *samādhi* will jump from here to there and be unable to do the spiritual work of investigation.

So what should we investigate? Well, the Lord Buddha identified five components or "heaps" (*khandhas*) that make up what the world calls a personality: the body, feeling, memory and association, thought and consciousness. He identified them for our reflection so we could examine and see through them one by one. *Avijjā* is hidden in the *khandhas,* so it's from there that we need to root it out. At the moment, *avijjā* and the *khandhas* seem to be acting in unison,

and we think of them as ourselves. Sometimes we identify with the body ("I'm old, slim, tall, handsome ..."), and at other times with feelings ("I'm depressed, upset, lonely...") or memory ("Ten years ago I thought like this..."). But most of the time we identify with thoughts ("I believe this, I know this, I've read that ..."). Consciousness, however, is just the awareness that something has arisen in the field of one of the senses, and it seems to lie in the background, changing so fast that it can hardly be grasped. These five *khandhas* are what we call me, mine and myself, and the differences between people – men and women, strong or weak personalities, the healthy or the sick – are just differences in the mix of the *khandhas.* And by the way, if you can find anything in yourself that's not in one of these five "heaps", please let me know.

To get a handle on the *khandhas,* think of an old-fashioned pocket watch. What makes it a watch? It's the wheels inside, one triggering another which triggers the next, and so on. The parts of the mechanism all work hand in hand, and it's the same with the *khandhas.* It's the interaction between them that creates the illusion of a personality, the illusion of an "I". But they work so fast that we can't see this. We're only aware of the output, such as liking this or disliking that. A sense input comes into the ear, and we immediately say it's a chicken squawking, but that process involves the body (the physical brain and the senses), memory and thought. A lot of processing goes on before we can identify the noise. In a completely new country with strange animals we'd have a hard time tying sounds to particular animals, wouldn't we? If we'd never heard a snake hissing, how would we know it's a dangerous snake?

I invite you to have an experiment. Sit down and close your eyes, and put whatever comes into mind into one of these five groups. A thought comes up and goes, a memory comes up and goes, a sense from the body comes up and goes – so where is the "I"? It's the same as opening a pocket watch and looking at the wheels turning around. The mechanism itself doesn't make any sense as a timepiece, but close the watch again and look at the hands, and – *voila* – the time appears. If you only observe the mechanics, there's

no meaning. And it's the same with the five *khandhas;* if you classify everything that comes to mind into one of them, the sense of "I" disappears. The Lord Buddha's teaching is exactly that: there is no "I" in the five heaps – none of them is you or yours, and none of them belong to you. Now, ask yourself: who is it that knows a thought is coming up? Does the thought know about itself? Does a memory know it's remembering? Do any of the *khandhas* know that they're *khandhas?* Who knows them?

Actually, we've all been focusing on the wrong "person" all our lives. If we attended to the one who knows, there wouldn't be any notion of a personality: there'd be just the body, feeling, memory, thought and consciousness. What has the observer got to do with these "heaps" (the observed)? It's similar to going to a movie; what do you have to do with the film really? Nothing, but you still get excited or angry, and cry when the hero perishes at the end. Why? Because you're attached to what's going on, that's why. You identify with the apparent characters on the screen and feel for them. And in the same way, you identify with the *khandhas* and suffer the *dukkha* involved in that. In reality, the *khandhas* are just what they are: a feeling, thought, memory or a moment of consciousness arising and ceasing, arising and ceasing. They are what they are in the same way a movie is just a movie. You can't change the story in a movie because it's already fixed. And you can't change the movie of your own life story; it was laid out the moment you were born, and now it's happening. But you resist, asking why this is happening to you and why is not happening to someone else. If we could deassociate with it and see it's – just the body, just a thought, just a memory, just a feeling – then there wouldn't be a problem. At that stage, our *sati* (awareness) would be so great that no *kilesas* could be present to get muddled up with the *khandhas* and make us associate with the experience. And this is necessary if our investigation is to be successful.

Let's look at the body: does it long for anything? No. We think it yearns for food, but doesn't care if it gets food or not. It just processes whatever comes in, and if there's nothing to process it dies. It

doesn't know hunger or thirst, cold or hot. It just operates according to its own law. The *citta* is the one that knows, but it's fooled and ruled by *avijjā* that itself doesn't understand correctly. People don't know this because they've been trained all their lives to identify with the *khandhas*. They're told that the body wants food or sex, but it doesn't — it's the *citta* that wants. It's the *citta* that feels lonely and wants the other sex. As I often say, the body can be thought of as a car and the *citta* as the driver. A reckless driver crashes the car early but a careful one can keep it for a long time. You could say that the *citta* is living inside a programmed biological robot. Once you realise this, you can begin to liberate yourself from all the programming that leads to such *dukkha* and unhappiness.

The programming is just conditioning: if that happens, then this action has to follow; if I see food, I have to eat it, and so on. The way to defeat a particular piece of conditioning is to recognise it and say, "stop, no more." We need to do this ten, a thousand or ten thousand times until the conditioning is removed. And then we go on to the next piece — if I see this person, I want to punch his face. If we say no again and again, restrain ourselves and perhaps start to smile at him, after a while, the conditioning can be removed. As the process continues we'll see just how much we have to remove, and it's a lot. The idea is to remove all the conditioning, i.e. become unconditioned. *Nibbāna* is called the unconditioned, a state without conditioning. I often call the *kilesas* the fangs of *avijjā*, but they can also be called the armies of the master that try to influence or threaten us with pain, fear or other emotions. We have to fight these armies, and that's quite a battle. If they suggest that you want something, and if you have some *sati* at that moment, you can say no, and they stop for a while. And the more you do this, the longer you act against your own programming, the more you'll see what's really behind the curtain. We don't see *avijjā* at the first step, but with practice we can be aware of its soldiers pulling us this way and that all the time. The *kilesas* are like children at the supermarket with their mother, wanting this and that, screaming and whining. Eventually they stop if the mother doesn't give in, as they see their whining is senseless. Similarly, if the *kilesas* see that we're not following their commands,

they'll create pain or anger initially but eventually they have to stop, and then we can remove their conditioning from our hearts forever.

This all sounds easy, but it's tough. It's tough to go against the unpleasant feelings, such as pain, that come up in meditation practice. You need a lot of patience, as if you're in the back seat of a cinema watching a movie star in a lot of pain but not associating yourself with his suffering on screen. Then you can watch unpleasant feelings like pain come and go, and realise that they're not you and don't belong to you – because something is observing them. If you simply observe, just be aware of pain, there's no *dukkha*. If you feel *dukkha* coming up, however, you know that you're identifying with the pain. We need to put things at a distance. If a book is too close to the eyes, we can't read it, can we? But we can if there's some distance between the eyes and the book, and we can see that the book is not us, as it's something outside of ourselves. So be patient and face whatever comes up.

In the beginning, when training the mind to be aware of one object, pain in the knees or the back can be really bothersome. It can get stronger and stronger over time, so when do we give up? Or put it another way, when does the mother give in to the whines of the child and buy something to keep it quiet? In fact, most people give up whenever they believe the *kilesas* and buy into their whispers. My legs will break after sitting too long, my spine will be damaged, the pain is too much – these are rationalisations of the *kilesas* that make people get up and stop meditating. And this is what the *kilesas* intended all along, because they know that Dhamma practice will hurt them in the end. Think of a tyrant: he doesn't let his subjects escape against his will. He forces them to do things, and the more they resist the more force he applies, and he won't give up until he has no subjects left. You can see it in the world; tyrants never surrender because they love the power, and it's the same with *avijjā*. So don't think you can persuade *avijjā* to go away. You have to put up a fight: when you do *samādhi* practice, for instance, you really have to struggle to keep focused on the one object, the breath or the *buddho*.

The only exception is when pain becomes too strong, and then you have to focus in on it. The first step is to locate the pain and place your awareness on the most painful point. Then observe it just as you observed the breath. Is it shallow or deep, coarse or fine, static or moving, at a point or in an area? Once you've understood that, dive into the pain in more detail. Is it in the skin, the bones or the nerves? Why is it coming and going instead of staying constant? Why isn't it there all the time but only when you try to meditate? Interrogate it like this. Actually, the investigation of pain leads to the truth of pain and the origin of pain. But you really have to know it, see it, and experience it directly for yourself, rather than trusting in your rationalisations about pain or in the opinions of professionals. A professional is just someone who knows a little bit more than you, but who knows your body better than yourself? Of course, the body itself doesn't know what pain is. It's the *citta* that knows, and it doesn't like pain; that's why people give up meditating as soon as pain arises. However, the *citta* knows the body better than anyone else, so why not ask the *citta* for the truth about pain? Try it for yourself. Actually, with practice, you can place your attention on any part of the body and see it with your inner eyes. Sometimes the image can even be sharper than with the physical eyes. The *kilesas* hate investigating the body, of course. They can't stand it when, for example, we visualize the liver, its sliminess, its bloodiness, mentally cutting it up to see what it's made of. It's repugnant, and so are the rest of the organs when we start to see them clearly.[3] *Avijjā*, the tyrant, doesn't want to know the body as it is, however, and doesn't want its subjects to know it for themselves.

So I give this for your reflection. All I can do is help by pointing out the way, but at the end of the day it's up to you to practise. You have to do the work and experience things for yourself. The results that I describe in my talks are things I've experienced myself, by following the path I've described. That path involves facing off against the *kilesas* and putting up a fight, going beyond the inner naughty

3. See Ajahn Martin's talk, *How to practise body contemplation*, in his book, *Forest Leaves*, available on his website (www.forestdhammatalks.org).

child that wants this, that and the next thing and cries if it doesn't get it. There's a lot of meditation to do, so use the opportunity you have in this forest monastery. Bring up some energy and get to work.

Ajahn Martin Piyadhammo Teaching in Singapore

Believing What You Want to Believe

9th June 2010

I was asked recently about the prose poem that Than Ajahn Mun wrote while staying in Bangkok in the early 1930s, which was found in his belongings after his death.[1] It has become quite famous now, and it speaks about liberation (*vimutti*) from the defilements (*kilesas*) which bind the heart (*citta*) to old age, sickness and death. But what strikes me is that people today seem more interested in deciding whether Than Ajahn Mun really wrote the text than in the Dhamma it actually contains. But this is the way of the world, isn't it? People believe what they want to believe, and that becomes the truth for them. They even hear what they want to hear, not what's actually said.

Actually, at the end of the nineteenth century when Than Ajahn Mun was young, the monastic Sangha in Thailand consisted mostly of *pariyatti bhikkhus* studying Buddhist texts, and there were very few *paṭipatti bhikkhus* practising meditation for liberation. In fact, most people thought that the path to enlightenment was closed, that the way to liberation had been lost centuries before. But Than Ajahn Mun and Than Ajahn Sao felt that the teachings must still be alive since the *suttas* describe the Dhamma as *sandiṭṭhiko* (apparent here and now), *opanayiko* (accessed by looking inwards) and *akāliko* (timeless). After rediscovering the meditative (*kammaṭṭhāna*) tradition through their own practice, they wandered all over Thailand as *dhutaṅga bhikkhus*, inspiring many people to follow their example. Than Ajahn Mun was particularly inspirational; many people came to ordain with him and many found liberation, one of them being my own teacher Than Ajahn Mahā Bua. In fact, some fifty to a hundred of Than Ajahn Mun's *bhikkhus* attained *Arahantship*. This happens very rarely in the world, and it shows the greatness of

1. Than Ajahn Mun's booklet *Khandavimutti and Samangidhamma* (English translation by Than Ajahn Paññāvaḍḍho) can be found at www.forestdhammatalks.org.

such a teacher and the influence he can have. It's akin to the time of the Lord Buddha when people became enlightened listening to one of his talks, simply because of the power of the Dhamma flowing through him. Actually, Than Ajahn Mun was half-way to becoming a fully enlightened Buddha, but he realised that it would take aeons and incalculable lifetimes to go the rest of the way. So he decided to finish the journey and become an *Arahant* in this life.[2] But the fact that he was half-way there was the reason why the depth of his Dhamma was so immense.

Dhamma is also called *ehipassiko*, an invitation to come and see for yourself – but you have to open your eyes first and that's the trouble, for we're all blinded by *avijjā*, fundamental ignorance. *Avijjā* uses anything that comes to hand to keep us from seeing, and even the Buddhist scriptures can deceive us if we get the wrong handle on them. Fortunately there's a path to follow, the path of practice which involves looking inwards to the *citta* rather than being befuddled by thoughts, assumptions and views. It consists of three columns: *sīla* (morality), *samādhi* (absorbed concentration) and *paññā* (wisdom). *Sīla* involves adhering to the five moral precepts[3] and keeping them all the time, for they are the protection against falling into the animal, ghost, demon or hell realms.

The second column of practice, *samādhi*, ranges from *khaṇika* (momentary *samādhi*) through *upācāra* (access *samādhi*) to *appaṇā* (the deepest state of *samādhi*). *Khaṇika* usually involves dipping into the deepest state of *samādhi* for the blink of an eye before coming out again. Than Ajahn Mun was skilled at dropping initially into *khaṇika* before resurfacing in *upācāra*. Most people, if they practise well, can experience *upācāra samādhi* where thoughts and memories stop and they find a safe haven. There are no worries or feelings of loneliness in that state because there are no thoughts or memories. Getting into *upācāra samādhi* is not an option; it's an absolute

2. A Buddha and an *Arahant* are both enlightened, but a Buddha finds enlightenment completely by himself at a time when Dhamma teachings do not exist in the world.

3. A list of the five precepts (*pañca-sīla*) is given in the Appendix.

must if your practice is to progress, but it takes all your effort and determination to bring the mind back to its meditation object. The mind must not be allowed to drift into the past or future, or to take an interest in any thoughts or sensations that occur. All your interest, all your focus, must be on the object of meditation, whether the breath at the tip of the nose or the internal repetition of the word *buddho*. Of course, the *kilesas* bring up all kinds of disturbing thoughts, memories and sensations, but you must be determined not to get disturbed. Think of yourself as an emperor facing attacks by the marauding *kilesas* time and time again. If you don't fight them, you're powerless, so do everything you can to stop them taking over the mind. That's how to reach *upācāra samādhi*, the safe haven where contentedness and happiness arise automatically when thoughts and memories have disappeared.

Different people experience different things in *upācāra samādhi* depending on their individual characters: some just feel content or peaceful while others find extreme bliss. Their experiences can also depend on practice in previous lives, and if they've attained *samādhi* before, entering it will be easier in this present life. If they've practised the *jhānas* before, they'll end up in the *jhānas* although most people won't. On entering *upācāra*, the normal world stops. It's like being in the middle of a raging storm and finding a glass house you can enter and close the door. At first, you can maybe stay in for five minutes, but with more practice it can be six, eight or ten hours. The more you practise, the longer you can stay. Coming out usually happens automatically, though some people can make a choice to emerge. Afterwards, if the time in *upācāra* was short, you'll just have a pleasant memory. But if you were in long enough, you'll experience a distinctive state of mind and realise how much the state of *samādhi* differs from the normal mind-state with its random thoughts and memories. However, some people never enter *upācāra* fully; they just open the door, sense the peace and close it in their own faces again. They feel frustrated and depleted of energy when they come out, and that's a sign that they haven't fully been in. But people who come out of *upācāra* always feel refreshed, and

the longer they've been in the more refreshed, energetic and concentrated they feel, as if they've woken up from a refreshing sleep. That's how you can judge if you've really entered *upācāra*, so make sure you close the door of the glass house behind you. And remember: even though thoughts and memories have gone, *upācāra samādhi* is still the world of experience and all sorts of things can happen. Two people's experiences of *upācāra* can be as different as America is from Africa. Over time there will be a common denominator, of course, but at the beginning the experiences will depend on someone's character or previous lives. It's impossible to predict, but they can be experiences of different states of mind or different realms of existence. And each experience of *upācāra* will differ from the next, so don't try to recreate your previous experience because you can't.

Once you've been in *upācāra samādhi* for a while and become contented, bring your focus back to the object. If it's the breath, you'll find that it becomes subtler and subtler until it seems to disappear. If it's the *buddho*, you'll find it more and more difficult to think another *buddho*. When this happens, the concentration will be intense and the mind so fixed that it has to go into one-pointedness, into *appaṇā samādhi* where everything must disappear. The awareness of the body might be the first thing to vanish, but just observe this until the breath or the *buddho* seem to stop. Just let everything drop. And don't become afraid; after all, you're not afraid of going to sleep every night because you know you'll wake up again. Actually, getting into *appaṇā* is not a struggle the first time, but it can be more difficult the next. It can take many hours to get back because the *kilesas* now know what's going to happen. Although they're absent in *appaṇā samādhi*, the *kilesas* are always lurking somewhere in the deep background waiting to pounce.

Appaṇā samādhi is the state of one-pointedness, and if there's only one point how can there be a universe? It's like dropping into a well, and the deeper you go the less you know of the universe around you. Any awareness you had of the body has completely disappeared and the universe has gone: thinking stops, experience stops, everything stops. We can't experience without the senses, and once the mind gets one-pointed it can't experience anything else. If

the observer and the object being observed become one, where is the experience? There is no-one to have the experience.

With complete one-pointedness, we revert to the true nature of the *citta*. If only everyone could experience it. Then they'd see that the universe really doesn't exist as they think it does, within the conventional framework of the world. They'd realise that there is something else, something not of this universe, not of conventional reality. In *appaṇā samādhi* there are no annoying *kilesas* and no experience — just pure knowingness, the true state of the *citta*. And this knowingness doesn't know any other thing. So if you want to understand what the Lord Buddha's path is really about, get into *appaṇā samādhi* and see for yourself. Than Ajahn Mahā Bua calls it a preview of *Nibbāna*. It is what's left when you enter *Nibbāna*, for everything else has disappeared. You've reverted to your true nature, which is the only nature that really exists. It's something not subject to the three characteristics underlying the universe, *anicca*, *anattā* and *dukkha*. While in *appaṇā*, the breath is very slow and the body doesn't move, and people can remain there for five minutes, a few hours or (at most) seven days. They have to come out after seven days because the body needs nourishment and refreshment. The fact that the body remains completely still shows that the *citta* is the driver of the biological robot we call the body. When it's completely one-pointed in *appaṇā samādhi*, the *citta* is unable to control the body. It's as if the programmer of an industrial robot has gone off for a coffee break; nothing happens while he's away. But you have to get to know this for yourself, and it's not really that difficult, just keep focussed on the breath or the *buddho* until everything disappears. Actually, it's the simplest task in the whole universe.

People today can multitask, watching television while speaking on the phone and smoking a cigarette, but doing the simplest of tasks — being aware of the breath or the *buddho* to the exclusion of everything else — seems to be beyond them. Isn't that strange? Yet all we need to do to get into *upācāra* or *appaṇā samādhi* is concentrate on one point, which leads to one-pointedness. The flow of thought has to be cut off because the mind is accustomed to running here and there like a monkey acting blindly on its desires. But don't

force the mind onto one point, for forcing doesn't help. The idea is to cut off the movement of the mind as soon as it starts to wander. You can think of it as tying a rope around the neck of the *kilesas* so they can't get loose. That's where the effort lies. If you can do this you'll get into *samādhi* sooner or later. And if you're really interested – one, two, three and you'll be gone. You have to be interested in what you're doing, and that's really important. One hundred percent interest will bring one hundred percent *samādhi*, but ninety percent interest won't even get you into *upācāra samādhi*.

So, *samādhi* is the second column of the path to deliverance, the path of freedom. It's called the path of freedom because we're in prison, imprisoned by *avijjā*, the master of the universe. That tyrant locked us up aeons ago and isn't going to let us out. After all, a tyrant doesn't let his subjects leave his realm otherwise they'd all run away. We all saw this in East Germany and Soviet Russia – these states didn't let their people leave willingly. *Appaṇā samādhi* is the experience of being out of the prison for a while, but *avijjā* still has lots of tricks up its sleeve. It threatens you with death if you try to escape, and that's why people get frightened when the breath seems to stop as they become calmer. But as I said, you're not frightened of going to sleep at night so why get frightened of falling into *samādhi*? You really have to put up a fight and become smart at counteracting the *kilesas* and *avijjā*. While *upācāra samādhi* is an absolute must, it's really helpful for your practice to get into *appaṇā samādhi*. If you can, I guarantee that the first thought on coming out will be how to get back in. You'll try everything to get back because it's an amazing state of mind. That's why Than Ajahn Mahā Bua called it the first wonder of meditation, a preview of what *Nibbāna* really is. It's something everyone should hope to experience sometime in their life. *Upācāra* is a very pleasant state but nowhere near as wonderful as *appaṇā*.

Of course, to reach *Nibbāna* you have to develop the third column of the path, namely, *paññā* or wisdom, and this involves investigating in line with the truth. In fact, investigation or reflection, when practised correctly, is the only way to develop the wisdom that cuts the fetters binding us all to the wheel of rebirth. Without wisdom, we can

only taste the state of freedom but we can never be free or remain free. However, *samādhi* has to be solid before investigation can be successful, otherwise we're building a house on rickety foundations with only one or two columns. For freedom, the house needs to be secured on the three columns of *sīla*, *samādhi* and *paññā*, and they have to be raised together to the same height, the height of liberation. For instance, the more your *paññā* develops, the clearer you'll see any lapses in *sīla*, and the more solid your *samādhi*, the greater your ability to develop *paññā*, and so on. Without some progress in *samādhi*, you'll really just be on autopilot, and investigation will revolve around thinking. But if thinking had ever solved the conundrum of birth and death, no-one would need to practise meditation, would they? You have to be able to concentrate solidly on one topic and stick to it for at least ten or fifteen minutes without the mind veering off onto something else, otherwise investigation just consists of memory and thought. You've been revolving around in memory and thought all your life and where has it got you? Nowhere.

Look at the so-called great philosophers in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries in Europe. They couldn't find true wisdom however close they came, and some of them actually went crazy because they couldn't stop thinking. Schopenhauer probably came the closest to the truth because he was influenced by early publications on Buddhism, but he became stuck at the will and the question of where intention and will actually come from, and couldn't get any further. Actually, craving or will comes from *avijjā* and its fangs the *kilesas*, and it leads mostly to *dukkha*. It's a form of desire, wanting this or that, not wanting this or that. The path of wisdom is not the path of intellectual knowledge beloved of philosophers: in fact, they are two completely different things. Enrolling yourself in a Buddhist university to study all the *suttas* and commentaries will bring a heap of knowledge but no wisdom. That kind of academic knowing leads people to make their own conclusions, but different people have different conclusions. Wisdom or insight, by contrast, means seeing with your own inner eye; it takes place in the *citta* not the brain and there is no doubt associated with it. Actually, as you walk the path, the way to tell the difference between wisdom and knowledge is

that the latter involves views and assumptions which can be shaken as doubts come up whereas wisdom cannot be shaken. Even if a hundred people insist that you're wrong, you know the truth in your heart. It's this kind of wisdom, sharp as a razor, that can cut the ten fetters binding us all to *saṁsāra*. We need to develop it if we are ever to be free, and we develop it with investigation.

The three universal characteristics of existence — *anicca* (impermanence), *dukkha* (suffering) and *anattā* (not self) — can be used as subjects of investigation. The body is *anicca*; it grows from a tiny cell, reaches maturity and dies whether we like it or not. The four mental *khandhas* are clearly transient as well. Things that come into the mind are fleeting, and even the sticky thoughts that come up in meditation to cause problems arise and cease on their own. And what about *dukkha*? Hulking the body around for a lifetime and watching it get older and decaying, that's *dukkha*. And so are all the unwelcome thoughts that come up when you try to concentrate the mind. Memories that come up unbidden and unwanted are *dukkha*, while the ones we want to keep often fade over time, and that's *dukkha* too. And the *khandhas* are also *anattā*. Take memory and thought: they can't be you or yours otherwise you could order them to stop at any time. They come and go by themselves, don't they? In fact, they don't belong to you and you don't have full power over them. The trouble is that everyone we've ever known has believed that their memories and thoughts belong to them, so we all believe it too. We've been told all our lives that the *khandhas* are what we really are, but they're not, they're *anattā* — not me, not mine and not myself. In fact, there's something inside that observes a thought or memory coming up and disappearing, and that knower is the important thing.

The point of applying any or all of the three universal characteristics to thoughts and memories specifically is to get a little distance, to observe them rather than being pulled into and deceived by them. This also works for experiences like pain, which can be labelled as transient, not me and not mine to distance ourselves from the experience. Actually, we all see ourselves as an entity, one individuality, separate from other beings, and each of us wants to be the centre

of the world. When we believe our thoughts and memories, we're always the centre of the world, aren't we? Well, think about all the other seven billion individual little centres on this planet and it's easy to see how clashes and wars come about. If everyone applied *anicca*, *dukkha* and *anattā* to their experiences, it would reduce these mistaken feelings of uniqueness and help the world in so many ways.

To help us with investigation, the Lord Buddha identified five "heaps" or *khandhas* that make up the entity we think of as self: the body (*rūpa*); bodily or mental feelings (*vedanā*); memory and association (*saññā*); thought (*sankhāra*); and consciousness (*viññāṇa*). These five heaps make up the whole world as we know it. *Rūpa* is a gross structure that can be readily seen, while the other four *nāma* (mental) *khandhas* are all aspects of the *citta* that can be harder to grasp. For example, bodily and mental *vedanā* can be very subtle, and in the beginning people can find it hard to separate them because they seem intertwined. By *saññā* we mean memory plus association which is an aspect of it. We recognise a water buffalo because of the faculty of association, whereas nothing pops into the mind if an object is unrecognised. Similarly, people who arrive in a Thai forest for the first time hear lots of new sounds but have no idea what they are until, with experience, they can associate them with objects such as a cicada, snake or gecko. Lots of misjudgements in this world are made on the level of memory and association. *Sankhāra* consists of short thoughts whereas longer thoughts tend to be mixed up with memory and association and therefore involve two *khandhas*. It's the short thoughts that usually arise when we try to meditate and most of them are just garbage. We don't know where they've come from, we've never invited them and they disappear by themselves. *Viññāṇa*, the fifth *khandha*, is just the faculty of being conscious: it's simply aware of a sense contact without labelling the data coming in from the senses. *Viññāṇa* is very difficult to catch at the earlier stages of practice because the meditator has to have reached the point where consciousness can be seen appearing and disappearing. I want to stress, however, that none of the five *khandhas* are self-aware; the body doesn't know it's a body, and neither do feelings, memories, thoughts and consciousness. It's

the knowing faculty of the *citta* that knows, and if it doesn't know, as when in *appaṇā samādhi*, then it doesn't know. In fact, a *citta* in *appaṇā samādhi* wouldn't even know if the body was chopped into pieces and, in that case, it would have to find another rebirth according to its *kamma*.

The point of identifying the *khandhas* is that we can investigate them, and the body is the one we take first, along with its six senses of seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting, touching and thinking. We start with the body because it's immediately apparent and can be visualised easily. And crucially, it's the *khandha* we most clearly identify as being me, mine and myself. When someone calls your name, you have a notion, formed or unformed, of the body, and the camera snaps you take of yourself and others are pictures of bodies. So we need to investigate the body inside and out, from top to bottom, and do this for a month, a year, ten years or more until the work is finished, until we finally understand that the body and the *citta* are two different things. People are normally only aware of the externals, such as the hair and the skin, which fool them time after time throughout their lives.[4] But open the body and see what it's really like underneath the tissue-paper covering of skin. It's shocking. It's really a repulsive mass of blood, muscles, flesh and pus. Rip off your skin and look in the mirror; do you want to call that yourself and carry it around for a lifetime? Or imagine your partner naked with skin made of glass – is it attractive? You loved the fine hair and smooth skin, but how does it look underneath? Stripped of skin, women and men don't differ much at all, do they? And who would be able to tell the age of a person without the skin? That covering of epidermis as thin as tissue paper hides a horror show, and skin is the great deceiver.

There are also many other ways to understand the reality of the body. Think how food seems delicious and tasty when it goes in but comes out as stinking faeces; you're happy to eat the one but not

4. Newly ordained *bhikkhus* are given five reflections for body contemplation – hair of the head, hair of the body, nails, teeth and skin – since these are the five externals that deceive us most.

the other. Why is that? Again, the digestive system is just a slimy hollow tube that takes nutrients from food and shoots what's left out the other end — plop. People notice what goes in and comes out but never think about the slimy tube in between and the processing that happens inside it. Why is that? Or you can reflect that the body makes whatever it contacts filthy. Clothes need to be washed to get rid of the stink, but the stink comes from the body not from outside. Even food that's been in the mouth becomes repellent all of a sudden; try spitting it out into your hand and see if you want to eat it again. It was delightful before but it becomes disgusting covered in saliva. Why is that? Also, you worry about the body when it's in hospital but go back to ignoring it once it gets better. Why is that? Isn't it because you want to use the body for your own purposes but never want to see it as it really is? In truth, it's a factory that turns appealing food into excreta. If the body was a business producing goods to sell, how successful would it be? Would anyone buy shares in it? And what about the six senses that come with the body? Does the eye know that it's seeing? No, so who knows what's being seen? Isn't the seen manipulated by processing in the brain and (more importantly) by what we want to see? These are the kinds of questions you need to reflect on over and over again.

I often say that the body is the pot in which the plant of greed and hate is rooted. As long as greed and hate have earth and a pot they'll grow and flourish. But the moment the pot is destroyed and the earth disperses the plant has to die, and the plant is rebirth. To uproot and destroy greed and hate, illusions about the body have to be destroyed, and that's why the body is the first of the five *khandhas* you have to investigate. You need to face up to reality, and with practice you'll be able to visualise the body and its parts quite clearly, see them with your inner eye not as drawings in a medical textbook but as they really are. This leads to the attainment of the first three stages of deliverance, *Sotāpanna*, *Sakadāgāmī* and *Anāgāmī*. But it's hard work breaking the attachment to the body, and it can't be achieved without a strong basis of *samādhi*.

I want to stress the importance of being able to face the troublesome feelings and emotions that come up during meditation. Take unpleasant sensations: the body has them all the time but people don't notice because they spend their lives in their heads, in thoughts and imaginings. The most difficult thing to deal with is pain, and you meet it when sitting in *samādhi* for long periods. Rather than running away from it as you've been doing all your lives, you have to dig it out. What is pain, where is it, is it constant or changing? Is it really me, mine or myself? Where does it come from? If you interrogate pain like this over and over again, you'll come to see that it's not real. In fact, being able to sit through pain is the second wonder of meditation. It's amazing: one moment you feel like the body is being torn apart or on fire, and the next moment the pain is gone, as if it were an illusion, a phantom. But to reach that point needs determination. You have to feel like you're dying and go through the experience to see what is left over. What's left is the *citta*, of course, and then the pain disappears, completely vanishes without a trace remaining. It has to disappear because the *kilesas* have been outwitted.

You have to become comfortable with all unpleasant feelings whatever their origin. Learn to deal with them, not push them away but see them as they are, accept them and let them go. For instance, most people find anger or annoyance arising when they do body investigation or *asubha* practice — and this shows they're on the right track. It's the *kilesas* that are angry because they're being shown something they don't want to see. They have an illusion about the perfect body, and investigation is revealing what it really is — a sackfull of excrement no-one would go near if the skin was removed. The *kilesas* don't want us to see the truth, and that's why instead of facing unpleasant feelings people run away from them, and they've been doing that for aeons. If they're in a bad mood, they go to a movie to brighten themselves up. The trouble is that the mood hasn't gone, it's just been pushed into the background. Even if we keep pushing unpleasant sensations and emotions away, they're still there, and one day they all come up. This is one reason why relationships break down: it's not that people didn't see the problems long before, it's that they didn't want to see them.

In meditation you have to come back to reality, to face unpleasant things rather than shoving them into the background. You have to interrogate all of them — everything — until there's nothing left. Dig into the feelings, thoughts and memories that cause you grief, until nothing remains. Then do the same with pleasant feelings and memories, for they have dangers too. Pleasant feelings leave you wanting more, don't they? A nice memory or thought comes up and — zap — the proliferation starts in an instant, fantasising about the future and building a whole world out of a single enjoyable thought. Eventually, when the pleasant and unpleasant are evenly balanced, you'll be able to walk through the middle, ending greed and hate forever.

After the stage of *Anāgāmī* is reached, and greed and hate removed, investigation can focus on the five higher fetters; clinging to form and non-form, conceit, restlessness and *avijjā*. The whole mess we find ourselves in has been produced by *avijjā* itself, and when it's finally destroyed at the stage of *Arahantship* the mess ceases to exist. Then we're liberated, free to do whatever we want. There's nothing more to do. At present you only follow the dictates of the *kilesas*. They give an order and you say, "Yes, my lord", and do it blindly. Love this — yes, my lord. Do this — yes, my lord. Go on vacation to a tropical island — yes, my lord. Save up money to buy a Mercedes so you can have fun — yes, my lord. Dislike this person — yes, my lord. These are the voices of the *kilesas*, the fangs of *avijjā*, twittering like little birds behind your ears. Actually, most people in the world stopped saying yes to the instructions of lords when the era of kings ended a long time ago. But the inner tyrant *avijjā* is still inside each of us, constantly ordering us around. But we don't see that, do we? We just assume the voice of the inner tyrant to be ourselves, part of my being, my personality.

In reality, the thing we call a self is just the five *khandhas* working together. Putting different foodstuffs into a blender makes a mixture of one colour and one taste. Similarly, *avijjā* blends together the *khandhas* to make an apparent individual self. You have to come to realise what the ingredients really are and how the blending actually happens. For instance, a simple feeling is very different from an

emotion, which is a combination of feeling, memory and thought creating a snowball effect. A memory might come with a feeling attached, or a thought with a memory, and within a few seconds a strong emotion of greed or hate has blown up. We've all had anger flare up when someone we disliked came along. But emotions are not real; they're like sugar candy floss, which is just a combination of sugar, heat and air. There are only three kinds of feelings — pleasant, unpleasant and neutral — everything else is an emotion built up from feeling, thought and memory, and we're not aware of the process because it happens so quickly. Like the workings of a computer, the outputs appear so fast that we're unaware of what's happening in the background. Nevertheless, you have to come to see for yourself how *avijjā* blends it all together. Actually, the five *khandhas* are the only things that exist. In English we have more than a hundred thousand words but they all come back to the five *khandhas*. The universe we see is all made up, blown up like candy floss at a funfair.

If you just meditate to get some moments of calm and personal happiness, that's alright: it's your decision how far you want to go. But if you're practising to get free of the *kilesas*, to get liberated from the prison, you have to put all your effort into going the direct route using *sīla*, *samādhi* and *paññā*. Once you become an *Anāgāmī*, you'll realise that you've spent innumerable aeons and millions of lifetimes in prison, and that nothing more remains to keep you on this dirty planet.

Are you starting to see why the teachings in this monastery seem to differ so much from the Buddha's teachings presented in the West? No-one in the West talks about the body as a repugnant mess or a shit-producing machine because Westerners don't want to hear it. They all love bodies — their own and other people's — and want to attain *Nibbāna* with their cherished beliefs intact. That's why they'll never enter the stream or become *Sakadāgāmīs*, *Anāgāmīs* or *Arahants* — because they don't want to hear the truth.

To come back to what I was saying at the beginning, people only hear what they want to hear, to know what they want to know, even when they come face to face with the Dhamma of a true master like Than Ajahn Mun. But if they can't bear to hear the truth, how will they ever enter the stream? How will they ever get rid of greed and hate if they don't know where greed and hate are rooted? Isn't this just closing the door to liberation?

Ajahn Martin Piyadhammo in Pekanbaru Indonesia: Reflecting on Alms Food

Daily Reflection Is Vital

30th October 2019

Why is it so difficult to stop thinking? Why do we think all the time? Are any of these thoughts useful? There are times, of course, when something has to be done, and we have to think about doing it. But here in this monastery, while focusing our attention on an object such as the breath or the *buddho*, there's no need to think. All we need to do is replace any thought that comes up with the awareness of the object. This is actually a very useful technique to learn. Of course, the thought comes up, "I don't want to think *buddho, buddho, buddho*." But what comes before that thought? Boredom, that's what. The *citta* gets bored doing the same thing over and over again. That's why it likes to create thoughts or pull up memories about everything under the sun. It wants to create a fantasy world; it just doesn't want to stay in reality.

Reality is here, in the present moment where things happen. There's no need to think about anything that's happening, no need to comment on it or label it as good or bad, nice or nasty, welcome or unwelcome. Just be here and experience what's happening right now. You can't change the experience even if you wanted to. When the wind blows, you can't change it. When it's cold, you can't change it. Just stay with the experience and don't make a fuss about it. Is that so difficult? In our thoughts, we create a kind of virtual reality, a reality in accord with our likes, where no wind blows and it's never cold. Then we're happy. In fact, we spend most of our lives in virtual reality, a fake world continually recreated from the interaction of our feelings, thoughts and memories. If we don't like a particular feeling, we conjure up a thought that comes along with a warm feeling to counteract it. Boredom, for example, is unpleasant, and that's why we magic up something else, something interesting to think about.

So ask yourself: why can't you stop this? Ask yourself how long you've thought a certain thought? Uncountable times: that's the truth

isn't it? And where has it got you? What has it brought you? Delusion and *dukkha* — because it's just a thought not reality. But we love thoughts, don't we? They make us feel like little gods, the creators of our own personal virtual reality. But even that's not enough. We're already in a virtual reality, but we've found a way to create another one — video games! And I'm told that in some games it's possible to create yet another virtual world, compounding the delusion. That makes three layers of delusion, and if it's already difficult to break out of the first layer of delusion without playing video games, what must it be like with other layers in the mix? This is why I sometimes compare life to a video game. It starts at birth and ends with "game over." And then the next one starts and ... game over. We're addicted to the game of life just as other people are addicted to video games. In a sense, life is a "real" virtual reality game in which we feel, think and remember, although we only realise this in one-pointedness, in deep *samādhi*, when everything virtual has stopped existing and where there's nothing. When we come out of *samādhi*, of course, virtual reality starts up again.

People can't stay still when playing games, and it's the same with the "game" of living as a personality made up of five *khandhas*: the body, feeling, memory and association, thoughts, and consciousness. We all have to act, talk, think and remember, and we just can't stop playing with the *khandhas*. We're all addicted to the game of life. But don't you see how tiresome it all is? Even in a monastery, things can get tedious: waking up in the morning, getting up, doing sitting meditation, then walking meditation, then sitting meditation again. It's a dull, tiring exercise unless, of course, we can find some comfort, some satisfaction in meditation practice, whether from the calmness of *samatha* or from our work of investigation.

Actually, things become really interesting once you start to investigate; "Who am I? What's happening inside myself?" I always asked myself, "What the hell's going on? I want to understand. I want to be the master. I don't want to be a slave of the *kilesas*." The five *khandhas* can be thought of as a toolbox that can be used by two powers, both of which reside in the *citta*: *avijjā* and Dhamma. Only one of

these two powers can sit on the throne at any one time, and whoever sits there is in charge of the toolbox and gets to use it. When Dhamma is in charge, we can use thought and memory to investigate the body and the other *khandhas,* and have awareness (*sati*) to see what's happening and wisely reflect on our actions. *Avijjā* and its soldiers the *kilesas,* however, love to use the five *khandhas* as their playground, though we can learn how to stop them in their tracks.

In most people, the *kilesas* are in charge of the *khandhas* and use them for their own entertainment. They always want to play around, and so do people because they're under the *kilesas*' control. Actually, it would be true to say that — at this moment — we are the *kilesas* and the *kilesas* are us; that's something you have to realise. They are the enemy; the notion of "me" which they conjure up is the enemy, "mine" is the enemy, and "this belongs to me" is the enemy. In fact, there's nothing that belongs to you, not really. Everything has been provided already. All beings came into a world where there were things, and the first being noticing the first thing took it and said, "it's mine, and nobody else can have it." Imagine people arriving in a ghost town. The first person to arrive would find various items and claim them as his own. They didn't have an owner beforehand, and now they have. As more people arrive, fighting breaks out about who owns what. But none of the items ever belonged to anybody in the first place. The ghost town in itself didn't belong to anyone, did it? But as soon as people arrive, they grab hold of things and attach themselves to them saying "They're mine! They've always been mine!" And if someone else wants them, there has to be a fight. What kind of folly is that? Yet it's the reality of the world.

Similarly, we're fooled, absolutely fooled by the *kilesas* that insist the *khandhas* belong to us: "It's my body, my feeling, my thought, my memory!" Well, if they really were your feelings, memories and thoughts, you could tell them to go back where they came from and never return. But you can't do that — because the *kilesas* bring them up for their own entertainment. And they can bring up anything. For example, when you sit in meditation for two hours, pain comes up. But as soon as you stop meditating, the pain suddenly goes away.

Have you ever investigated why that happens? It's because the *kilesas* brought up pain to stop you practising, and this is something you have to come to understand.

Don't fall for the tricks of the *kilesas*. They're always painting pictures: "Look at what we've created — isn't it pretty? Isn't it fascinating?" Be particularly cautious about believing the inner "commentator" who tells you that something is pretty or fascinating. As soon as you think something is desirable, you want more of it; as soon as you think something is horrible, you want to get rid of it. Instead, just see things as they are. Don't get attached to them; don't attach in a negative way (not wanting) or a positive way (wanting more). In meditation, people become calm and feelings of tranquillity or happiness arise, but then they latch onto them and the feelings disappear as a result. This happens because they've not yet understood the processes underlying the experience. Some of you will remember the old mechanical pocket watches that could be opened at the back to reveal their inner workings. From the back, all that could be seen were wheels going round; it was a mechanism without meaning. From the front, however, with the face, hands and numbers visible, all of a sudden the meaning was clear — hey presto, you had the time.

Well, if you opened up your own "watch", you'd see five gears (the *khandhas*), one gear turning another and another turning another. They revolve all the time: a feeling brings up a thought, which sparks off a memory, which comes along with other feelings, and so on until an emotion arises. Seeing it at this level, there's no me or mine to it all, is there? There are just *khandhas* interacting. But because the "watch" is closed all the time, we think feelings, thoughts and memories belong to us and have to be defended. You have to understand the mechanism, and that needs *sati* and wisdom (*paññā*). But of course you all find meditation practice tiresome, don't you? You love to live in your own little world, your private virtual reality, right? Thoughts and memories provide an escape from the tedium, as well as a relief from the sense bombardments of the everyday world, and that's why it's so difficult to stop them. But virtual reality is not reality — it's a fabrication.

When things get difficult in meditation — and the practice can become a little more difficult over time — people tend to let their minds drift into thoughts and memories. And once they realise this happening, they can get disheartened. But where does disheartenment come from? From the *kilesas*. They whisper, "You're useless; you can't even focus on one little *buddho*; there's no point meditating; you'll never get anywhere," and people believe these comments because they don't know any better. Of course you can be aware of one *buddho*; why can't you be? Is it impossible to be aware of one breath? Of course not. But the *kilesas* want to dishearten, so you'll give up and leave practice until the next life. But I guarantee you one thing. If it's too difficult to practise in this life, it'll be even more difficult in the next. The longer you go in the wrong direction, the harder it is to get back on track. Remember the old saying: the deeper a car is driven into mud, the longer it takes to pull it out? Well, now is the best time, now is the proper time to get the car out. Motivation decreases while going the wrong way, but it increases as you realise that the car can be freed from the mud little by little. I promise you that with constant pulling things do get easier each time. Of course, there are sometimes boulders in the way and they need to be removed. It can take some time but the car gets free in the end. In the same way, as long as you keep doing meditation practice and stay with it, it'll become easier. Then you'll start to understand more clearly and, importantly, start to see how the "pocket watch" works.

I like using the metaphor of the pocket watch because it seems nice and simple — just open your "watch" and see the gears turning, noticing whatever's coming next as they turn and turn. However, things are a little more complicated with the *khandhas*. Meditation brings up mainly negative thoughts and feelings, as well as unpleasant memories. And what happens then? There's usually an immediate thought that we don't like a particular feeling or memory, that we ought to think about something else, something nicer. Of course, most people can't catch this happening because the mind moves at great speed, akin to a very fast computer. The Lord Buddha said that there are three thousand mind-moments in the blink of the eye.

I can't remember what the equivalent units are in computer language — megabit instructions per second or some such? In any case, we have several thousand "instructions" in one blink of an eye, and they fly by like an express train, taking us wherever they're going. Do you realise now how fast the mind works and how dangerous a train of thought can be? The only way to get up to its speed is to have *sati*, to be aware of what's going on at every moment. Then we can catch the thief in the act, the thief who, without our permission, took *sati* away by bringing up a thought. We'll only see how this happens when awareness is at top speed, however. Taking the express train as an example, what do you see when the train passes you by at three hundred kilometres an hour? A blur of colour, that's all. Now start running; the faster you run, the more you see, and when you reach the speed of the train, you can catch everything. You can see who's in each compartment, what they're doing and whether they're talking to each other. That is the speed of *sati*.

If the speed of *sati* reaches the speed of the mind-moments, it's possible to catch everything occurring in the *citta*. And then everything becomes clear. You suddenly understand the processes running in the background, and can begin to correct them and be the master of your own life rather than the victim of the *kilesas*. But you have to have some motivation to overcome the *kilesas*. Take the five hindrances to meditation identified by the Lord Buddha himself.[1] They have to be overcome, otherwise you'll never make progress. The first step is to accept them. With hatred, for example, look at the feeling it brings up, let that feeling go through the whole body, and stop resisting it. Then interrogate it, asking, "What is this feeling? Where does it come from? Where is it located?" and so forth. If you do this intently, you'll see the hindrances dissolve before your eyes. You can also try replacing a hindrance with something else. For instance, boredom can be overcome by bringing up interest in the meditation object, and restlessness can be quelled by bringing your attention back to *buddho*. Most of the hindrances vanish as soon as

1. The five hindrances (*nīvaraṇa*) to meditation are sensual desire; anger and ill will; sloth and torpor; restlessness; and worry and doubt.

you stop believing the tricks that the magician, *avijjā*, conjures up in the mind. You have to understand its tricks. If you feel an emotion such as restlessness and think you can't meditate any more, you're believing the false information from *avijjā* and its *kilesas*. You could call it "fake news." Actually, everything that the inner commentator brings up is fake news. People believe the fake news from newspapers or television, and in the same way we believe the fake news from the *kilesas*. But the *kilesas* are much closer to ourselves than any external media outlet, so how can we *not* believe them? How can we *not* agree to follow their orders and stop meditating, giving in to boredom, restlessness or pain time after time?

If the Lord Buddha hadn't come to teach the Dhamma, we would have to believe every piece of fake news spouted by the *kilesas*. But now we don't; we can strike back. We can stop saying, "You're right, my Lord. Yes, I need this; Yes, I want that; Yes, I like this but not that; Yes, my Lord, whatever fake news you bring up in me, I'll believe it like a good little servant." The *kilesas* whisper that we have to eat something, dislike this person, go on holiday, or fly to the moon or mars or whatever. And every time, we say "Yes, my lord. You're absolutely correct. You're my master and have driven me from life to life, and you know what to do." We're like the owner of a company who carelessly signs any cheques that come across his desk. The staff bringing the cheques can spend money as they please, but they don't have to pay the bill – the owner does because he signed. When the *kilesas* suggest that you break one of the five precepts and you obey, you're the one suffering the kammic result, not them, They'll just wait patiently until you're released from hell and start their nonsense all over again. So stop buying into their tricks. Get rid of your inner tyrant. Stop believing the fake news that *avijjā* and the *kilesas* spout at you all the time. They tell you that you can't meditate because it's too hot or too cold, because you're bored, because your concentration is poor today, because your legs are painful, and so on. Start disbelieving them. Start calling them fake news.

In this forest monastery, people undertake intensive practice and are expected to meditate for ten hours a day or more. But when they

go home, all the energy they've acquired in their short stay vanishes pretty quickly. So how can you maintain at least a certain level of calmness? The answer is to make meditation your number one priority. Tell yourself to put the practice before anything; practise before going to work and then practise as soon as you come home before doing anything else. Forty-five minutes of meditation after you wake up will completely clear the mind of all the stupid dreams during the night. Clear them out and make the mind completely calm, and then continue with the rest of the day. Also, while going to work or sitting on the bus, remember to try to remain as focused as possible, to have as much *sati* as you can. And don't get involved with unnecessary things, like reading newspapers or magazines, or listening to all the broadcast media available nowadays. The idea is to stay focused, stay concentrated. You'll have to think at work, of course, so practice won't be continuous, but once back home, the first thing to do is sit down and meditate. Let the whole day go away. Clear the mind of everything that's happened during the day. This is really important. Don't keep thinking about what happened at work or what you still have to do. No! You can think about that tomorrow. Clear the mind first. Then carry on with the rest of your evening — or better still, start doing investigation or daily reflection.

Daily reflection is really important, and it involves recollecting each evening whatever you've done during the day. Start by asking yourself what happened when you got out of bed. What did you think? What happened then? What were you thinking while brushing your teeth or washing your face? What happened after that? What kind of feelings were there? Then go through the whole day, every moment that you can remember. If you can't remember something, just jump to the next moment. But don't judge what happened; don't ever think that something was good or bad. Ask yourself how you reacted when meeting a particular colleague. Just ask that question, and then go back to the memory of how you reacted, and how he reacted — and just leave it at that. If you met someone in the street, what did you say and do? How did she react? And how did I feel, and what did I do then? Ask yourself what you thought before doing something; what was on your mind that made you do it? It's really

important to get a handle on every moment of the day, right up to the moment when the daily reflection began.

Later, you may want to do another fifteen or twenty minutes of meditation before going to bed, but the important point is to remember to meditate before doing anything else. If you keep saying that you don't have time for meditation – that's the downfall. The state of the *citta* will deteriorate and, as a result, the mind's calm and peacefulness will diminish. However, if you really do make meditation your first priority, if you put it before anything else, peacefulness will remain in the heart. There will be a level of calmness and awareness that stays all the time, helping you to see things more clearly. You'll begin to see your characteristic habits and where they come from, and then begin to correct them. This kind of practice – knowing what you're doing, why you're doing it and what the results are – helps to develop *paññā*. You'll soon realise that you do most things to avoid or get rid of *dukkha*. People watch television or play with smartphones to get rid of boredom, and they get up and walk around or go for a jog to overcome restlessness. Look and see for yourself, because every person ticks differently, everyone has different characteristic traits, but there's one thing common to us all. If we take up meditation – and keep going with it – we can get a handle on it. And if you really undertake the practice, seriously get down to it, especially the kind of reflection I've described above, allied to meditation morning and evening, something within yourself will change over the next two years. I've no doubt about that. If you don't have any commitments or a family to take care of, you can do four, five or six hours of meditation every day, and more at weekends. What else is there to do? If you do daily reflection faithfully, you'll begin to see that most of your time is spent just killing the time you have. Everyone does it, as if they have so much time on their hands that it has to be killed! Do something useful with your life instead of killing it, wasting time and waiting to die.

I started meditating as a layman, and my work involved many appointments every day, sometimes until ten o'clock at night. I never seemed to have spare time. But after a year of meditation, I had lots of time. After doing daily reflection, I could see for myself that lots of

activities were unnecessary, meeting this person, interviewing that one, and so on. Through daily reflection, I came to see that these things didn't have the expected results, and certainly didn't bring happiness. And then I was free. When I came home from work, I had lots of free time, and when friends would call I could go and meet them right away. Before that, I'd have to arrange to meet them weeks ahead. Your usual day may be as crammed as that – but you can change it. But you won't change it by thinking, "I don't want a life crammed full of things." That doesn't work because the desire to get involved with everything is still there. Rather, the *citta* really has to see, to understand at a deep level, that its actions have unwanted and unwholesome consequences. Making daily reflection a core part of your life can greatly help with that. If a habit is engrained, you might have to reflect on it many, many times before the *citta* really gets the point that it's harmful and unnecessary. But once the *citta* finally gets the message, it lets go, just as a child touching fire immediately retracts its hand. There's no desire to repeat the action.

The same principle applies when doing intensive meditation practice involving investigation of the body. Once the *citta* understands that the body is a repulsive mess – full of blood, sweat, pus, urine and faeces – and that it brings nothing but a heap of *dukkha*, it lets go. It doesn't want a body anymore. But this investigation can take a very long time, even many lifetimes, because our attachment to our own bodies is very deep-rooted. It's much more than an ingrained habit, and that's why body investigation is the most difficult of tasks. If successful, however, it will lead to three stages of enlightenment: *Sotāpanna*, *Sakadāgāmi* and *Anāgāmi*. Only the *Anāgāmi*, the non-returner, has finished with this investigation, since he has completely demolished the illusion of the body and destroyed the greed and hate in his heart forever.

For most of us, the body is the main obstacle. We're all so attached to it. To be blunt, we love having one! Think about it: almost all the concerns of life are related to the body – feeling hungry, being sleepy, getting tired, catching a cold, becoming sweaty, and so forth. When meeting someone, we present them with the body, don't we? There was a short time in the twentieth century – around the Hippie

movement — when young people didn't much care about their dress. It didn't last long, of course, because the look became absorbed into the fashion and style of the day. But we care a lot about our bodies. We use so many products to cleanse and beautify the body; perfumes and soaps to get rid of the stink, deodorants to stop the sweat, and so on...

Please take my recommendations to heart. When you get back home, before you slip back into the mindlessness of everyday life, resolve to put meditation practice first. Don't believe the fake news of the *kilesas* that want you to forget all about it. As soon as you return from work, spend at least ten minutes doing daily reflection. Sit down and calm the mind, and then reflect on what you did during the day, why you wanted to do it, and what the results were. I know it's difficult. None of us like it! The *citta* just wants to play; it doesn't want to reflect on what's happened. But once you get the hang of it, reflection becomes easier, and you'll find that many things in your life will change for the better.

Ajahn Martin Piyadhammo answering Questions in the Morning after the Meal

Questions and Answers

Answers given by Ajahn Martin

1. What Is Meditation?

Answer: Meditation involves putting the mind on one object, just one object, and letting it stay there without allowing it to drift off. Once it's willing to stay on one object, the mind will automatically become contented and calm, and if it is very calm it will enter samādhi. All the activities that we do in the world lead to restlessness, and the more we follow them the more restlessness there is. The simple activity of putting the mind on just one point reduces restlessness and leads to calm.

There are two basic methods that I teach. The first is *ānāpānasati* or awareness of breathing, fixing the attention on the breath at the tip of the nose and knowing it as it comes in and goes out. The second method, for people who think a lot, is the mental repetition of a *parikamma* word, usually *buddho* although *Dhammo* or *Sangho* can also be used. If people find either method difficult on its own, they can combine them by thinking "Bud" on the in-breath and "dho" on the out-breath while keeping their attention on the movement of the breath at the tip of the nose. To develop awareness (*sati*), it's essential to have a point of reference — *buddho* or the breath — so that you know when the mind is wandering off. The moment you notice the mind going off the object of meditation, pull it back. Don't ask yourself why the mind is going out, for that is its nature. Just keep pulling it back, no matter how important the thought seems to be. The aim is to keep your awareness on the object of investigation.

Meditation can be done sitting or walking, but it's sometimes easier to concentrate the mind while walking because the *citta* is involved in controlling walking whereas sitting meditation requires all the focus of the *citta* to be on the object of investigation. For walking meditation, find a path about fifteen or twenty metres long and walk up and down at a normal pace, although if the mind is restless

you can also walk fast. The faster you walk, the less effort is needed to concentrate the rest of the *citta*, but don't run, just do fast walking. When the mind gets concentrated, your pace will slow down, but don't get too slow because then you might become dreamy and the mind will drift off. Just keep your attention on the breath or *buddho* while walking, and fix your eyes about one metre ahead of you without looking left or right. The moment you turn, reflect on how long you've been aware of the *buddho* or the breath, and then determine to be with the *buddho* or the breath for the next one path length. Then when you next turn, reflect again (without condemning yourself if your awareness had drifted off) and repeat the process. While being with the *buddho* or the breath, you can also be aware of the movements of the body, but that only comes when a certain level of concentration has been reached.

Using these techniques, it is very easy to get the mind calm. Think about what the other people in the world are doing to find contentment. They work, work and work like mad but never find contentment, or find it only in snatches. However, putting the mind on one object of attention is a simple way of reducing the restlessness that makes the monkey mind jump from this to that. Over time, when thoughts and memories stop, you'll be happy, peaceful and still. Then you'll be in the world of experience alone, and that's what we call *samādhi*. The important thing is not to give in to feelings of restlessness, boredom, tiredness or pain. Just keeping going, and focus on the breath or *buddho* until you drop into *samādhi*.

2. Is Stable Samādhi Necessary for Investigation?

There seems to be some debate about this in the West.

Answer: Well, let's take the fourth Noble truth — the path leading to the end of suffering — which the Thai Forest Tradition describes as having three pillars: morality (sīla), concentration (samādhi) and wisdom (paññā). Senior forest monks who speak about the path usually focus on samādhi and paññā. They can take sīla for granted as they themselves undertake the higher sīla, the two hundred and twenty-seven precepts of a *Bhikkhu*. However, when speaking to

laypeople, they stress the importance of morality since it's very difficult to make good progress along the path without it. Sīla is a vital protection, as it ensures people have a clear conscience when they come to meditate.

Than Ajahn Mahā Bua was always clear that the only thing that leads to freedom is investigation leading to insight (*vipassanā*). However, he also said that *vipassanā* without the stability of *samādhi* will have little effect, as the mind will just drift around in thoughts and memories. In fact, he himself was so skilled in *samādhi* that his meditation practice remained stuck there for five years until his teacher, Than Ajahn Mun, forced him out, and made him turn his attention to investigating the body. After three days, he couldn't sleep because he was so absorbed into this investigation, and Than Ajahn Mun said, "See, now you're stuck in thoughts and memories." After this, he balanced investigation with *samādhi*, and finished his work after eight months, becoming an *Anāgāmī*, free from greed and hate.

You can compare wisdom (*paññā*) to a knife and *samādhi* to sharpening the blade. The sharper the knife, the easier it is to cut through and the easier any investigation will be. Look at it like this: with a sharp knife, it's easy to cut vegetables cleanly into pieces with just a little pressure, whereas cutting them with a very blunt knife is difficult and usually makes quite a mess. Similarly, the sharper concentration is, the easier investigation and the development of *paññā* will be. Without *paññā* sharpened by some level of *samādhi*, you won't get very far. To start investigating successfully, the mind must already be stable enough to stay with the object of investigation for at least ten to fifteen minutes without getting distracted by thoughts or memories. However, general reflections (on death, rebirth, *kamma*, our everyday lives, or on what went well or badly during the day, for example) that don't require much *samādhi* can help at the beginning to foster determination to walk the path and live a moral life. In general, people should reflect on these things once they've cleansed the mind with at least forty minutes of *samatha* practice, such as awareness of breathing or the repetition of *buddho*.

So, *samādhi* alone won't lead to wisdom, but it will bring calmness and concentration. *Vipassanā* — taking the body as its object of

investigation initially — will lead to insight and wisdom. Investigation without *samādhi* just wanders around in thinking and memory. And if we could get released from suffering by thinking alone, we'd certainly save ourselves a lot of time and trouble — but we can't. I'll give you a useful analogy using the three pillars mentioned above. A structure built on only one column (*paññā*, say) falls over in any direction. Even with two columns (*samādhi* and *paññā*), it remains shaky and can collapse quite easily. But with three columns (*sīla*, *samādhi* and *paññā*), it stays stable in all directions. To build a structure capable of taking you all the way to freedom, to *Nibbāna*, you need all three columns evenly in place. Actually, *sīla*, *samādhi* and *paññā* work hand in hand; it's not that they have to be developed one after another. For instance, the practice of *samādhi* increases awareness of any lapses in morality, and it also sharpens the ability to investigate. As *sīla* improves, *samādhi* becomes deeper and allows obstacles to be overcome more easily. As *paññā* increases, it supports *samādhi* and helps refine *sīla*. However, it's wise to develop first the one you lack the most, and for most people today this is the ability to concentrate on one thing, which is actually the ability to be aware of what's happening from moment to moment. I hope that's clear.

3. What Gets Reborn?

In Than Ajahn Mahā Bua's teachings, the answer seems to be the *citta*, which sounds similar to the Christian idea of a soul enduring beyond death, while others maintain that only the fruit of *kamma* (*kammaphala*) is reborn.

Answer: Than Ajahn Mahā Bua called the *citta* the eternal tourist which goes from life to life and — used in that sense — he means the "conventional" *citta*, the *citta* of the ordinary person. It wouldn't be wrong to call it a soul or to speak of souls. On the other hand, he sometimes answered this question by referring to what actually goes from one life to the next — the fruit of *kamma*.

Isn't that mind boggling? And what's the difference between *kamma* and the "conventional" *citta*? Well, the "conventional" *citta*

is really just a name for the *kamma* adhering to the *citta* that might be called the self or the soul. However, *kamma* isn't only attached to the *citta*: it's also integrated into the five *khandhas* at the time of rebirth. In the case of the *Arahant* who has destroyed *avijjā* (fundamental ignorance) in this life, the adhesion of *kamma* to the *citta* has been destroyed — thereby removing the possibility of future rebirths — but not the *kamma* that has given rise to the five *khandhas*. The *kamma* that remains in the *khandhas* retains the appearance of a self that others can recognize as a personality. For this reason, the *Arahant* doesn't lose his personality, and the *kamma* he has accumulated continues to operate until the end of his life. He doesn't generate any more *kamma*, however, because *avijjā*, the prerequisite for making *kamma*, has been destroyed.

The problem we normally have is that *kamma* seems rather impersonal, while the *citta* seems more like a personal thing. But it's actually quite the opposite; remember the Lord Buddha's teaching on *anattā* — this is not me, this is not mine, this is not my self. As long as *avijjā* is in control, we have the illusion of a self, and we'll be under this illusion until *avijjā* has been completely destroyed. I like the term eternal tourist because it puts the onus on us to get our own spiritual life in order, to work out our own salvation as the Lord Buddha advised. If we take the other view that *kamma* is something impersonal — akin to the law of gravity — we can deny responsibility for our own situation, believing that we can avoid meditation practice and simply see through the illusion of self to become liberated. Some people say that, but who, may I ask, is this "I", this ego, who thinks this and claims to be liberated? Let's compare Dhamma practice with a trip from New York to Beijing. The journey starts in New York, but the ego still exists even when we've arrived in Vienna; in fact, it's there until the precise moment we enter Beijing. Even with one foot on the threshold of Beijing and the other in the air, the "I" still exists. Only when both feet are on the ground in Beijing has the ego gone; it goes with the lowering of the foot, even though the attachment to the "I" may become weakened during the journey as practice progresses.

But what exactly is this "I"? In fact, it's just the view that we are the combination of five *khandhas* — the body, feeling, memory and association, thoughts, and consciousness. Only through the continuous and complete investigation of these five groups — from the body all the way up to consciousness — can we dispel the illusion that they belong to us or are ourselves. Outside of these groups, there is nothing we can refer to as me, mine or myself, so the investigation of the five *khandhas* is fully sufficient for us to rid ourselves of this illusion.

Once the investigation of the physical elements (body, physical feelings and bodily senses) has been completed and greed and hate have been destroyed, the stage of *Anāgāmī* will have been reached. Thereafter, we examine delusion, which can be thought of as an electrical food blender that completely and perfectly mixes memory together with thought and imagination. Then, after memory and thought have been fully ripped apart and investigated completely, delusion falls away and we'll come face to face with *avijjā*, the master of delusion itself. *Avijjā* is also *anicca* (impermanent), full of *dukkha* (suffering) and without a form of self (*anattā*), but we have to investigate *avijjā* itself to find this out. Only by entering through one of these three doors (*anicca*, *dukkha* or *anattā*) can *avijjā* be completely be destroyed.

At that point, we'll finally realize that everything has always been impersonal. It's just like being in a cinema — one life leads on to the next just as one movie gives way to another. We've identified ourselves with the characters on screen, cried or laughed, been teased or inflamed, forgetting that we are, in fact, sitting on a seat in the dark. It's also like playing a computer game and forgetting that someone, who does not exist on the screen, sits squatting on the chair observing what is going on.

4. Can Fear Affect My Meditation?

Answer: Let's think about this more broadly. The first thing to say is that fear "shrinks" the heart, the *citta*. An anxious heart is closed and doesn't allow anything in. When you meet a dangerous animal, for example, your physical heart contracts because you're afraid of

physical pain or death. The same thing happens with threatening situations; people are unable to face them openly. Fear is a basic emotion that's generated by the *kilesas* (defilements) to control us. Fearing the ageing process, people go for medical checkups or take out insurance. And the fear of death makes them avoid travelling in cars, planes or trains, for example. Fear makes everyone avoid unpleasant situations, dodge people they don't want to meet or avoid dealing with upsetting situations. Of course, the opposite of fear is courage, not fearing anything or anyone. But which creatures aren't afraid? All beings live in fear, especially human beings. When we see someone who's sick, we're afraid that we might get ill too. If we see someone die, we're afraid that death might take us as well. Subconsciously, such fears are always there. You can say that fear cuts us off from life, narrows our focus. The opposite is an open heart which openly accepts all situations. Whatever comes, whether a tiger, a tsunami or a plane crash, if we could face the situation with a heart that is open, then ... But who can do that? Can you really find a person who isn't afraid of death? To overcome fear, you have to become aware of it, really aware of whatever is happening inside yourself from moment to moment.

The basic fear people have in meditation is of losing themselves. This is why most people don't get into deeper states of meditation; they're afraid that their existence will stop if the thoughts stop. Descartes said, "*cogito ergo sum*" (I think therefore I am), which implies that "I am not" if I don't think. The fear of letting go of thinking, the fear of letting go of anything – that's all fear. People can't be really open, because they're always afraid. Some are afraid they'll be exploited, afraid of being different, afraid of being blamed or becoming scapegoats, afraid of losing their jobs, afraid of losing their partner. In fact, fear determines people's lives, more so in Westerners than in Asians.

At the same time, however, everyone wants to be free of fear and free of *dukkha*, and some of them turn to meditation to wake up from the nightmare. But they all have greed, hate and delusion, and aren't yet ready to abandon the various things they still possess or cherish. While fear is not one of the basic *kilesas*, it hides

within the major *kilesas* of greed and hate and is mixed up with them. The Lord Buddha clearly said that greed, hatred and delusion keep people trapped in the cycle of existence, but he didn't say that fear, angst or arrogance keep them trapped there. Actually, at the moment greed and hate are overcome, fear is gone. Why should you be afraid if you've nothing to lose or don't care about winning or losing? When you accept things as they are, how can fear arise?

Someone who awakes from the illusion of a nightmare is fearless. They're afraid while they're dreaming, but once their eyes open they can see that the monster wasn't real. There's really no need to be frightened, yet people see monsters at every turn, and they don't have to be ghosts or fiends; fear of the future is a monster and fear of disease is another. These fears whisper that we have to die. But someone without fear no longer clings to life — that's a fearless person. He knows things as they really are. And someone who has awakened, who is enlightened, can see much more, though he can't reveal everything he knows because people would think him crazy.

Is it possible to make yourself fearless? No, you can't; you can only try to overcome your own fear. But awareness (*sati*) is a prerequisite for that, and you can bring up *sati* by trying to open your heart at moments of anxiety. For the first few times, you'll notice how "tight" the feeling is, how everything feels really cramped. Then you can begin to resolve the inner blockage — think how a tight fist starts to relax as one finger after another gets released — and at some point you'll suddenly realise you can breathe again.

Without awareness, you won't be able to overcome fear. If you don't notice that your heart is cramped, you can't even begin. You'll just react automatically and immediately: you'll meet a threatening situation and ... whoosh, all of a sudden you'll feel fear. But if you can be self-aware and can recognise your fear, look at your heart and try to make it open. This won't be easy, I can tell you! It won't be easy because opening the heart hurts more than keeping it cramped. Put it like this: a cramped heart is cramped because it wants to hide all the hurtful emotions buried within it. A cramped heart hurts, and opening it releases the hurt. And once released, all the hurtful emotions that have been stored in the heart come to the surface.

But you need to trigger an intention to open the heart: wanting alone isn't enough. You can want and want and want, but if you don't send a signal to trigger the intention for a fist to open, it won't open. Desire alone doesn't make anything happen. Only with aim, drive and execution can we open our hearts. Of course, it's much easier to open a fist than a heart, but it can be done if the will is there. Why don't people do it? Because it hurts, and they have to experience the pain that has been blocked by their cramped heart. They have to feel the fear, the angst and the pain!

Can it be a useful exercise for people to expose themselves to frightening situations? Yes, of course. For example, putting oneself in the path of a tiger, meditating on the brink of a precipice or living alone in isolated areas that everyone else shuns make all kinds of fears come up. These are things that Buddhist monks have done in the past to confront their fears. The Lord Buddha didn't say that we should all live in monasteries; he advised *rukkhamūla-senāsanaṃ*, retreating into the forests and mountains to find places conducive to the practice. If you read the stories in the Buddhist literature, *Arahants* and Buddhas attained realisation in caves or under trees, and these were all lonely places. A meditation group is certainly not the place to reach enlightenment.

Without solitude, you can't become truly fearless because you can't look at your fears and imaginings – they don't arise and show themselves in company. In solitude, there is no way to project fears and desires onto other people. Yet greed and hate arise nonetheless and you have to learn to deal with them. You can't nip down to the village to buy chocolate or ice cream or have a chat, and then run back into the forest. As a *Bhikkhu*, you can't just run away, and secluded places are often one or two hours away from civilization. It's there, in these isolated, lonely places that he has no other choice than to face his fears.

5. Mind and Consciousness: What's the Difference?

What's the difference between consciousness *(viññāṇa)*, which is one of the five *khandhas*, and the mind? Thinking is one of the six senses, but the other five have a physical basis. So where is the "base" for mind?

Answer: I think might be helpful to straighten out the definitions. The Lord Buddha identified five "heaps" or *khandhas* that make up what we think of as ourselves: the body, feelings, memory and association, thought, and consciousness. The *khandhas* can either be the tools of the defilements (*kilesas*) or the tools of Dhamma; whichever sits on the "throne" is in command of the *khandhas* at that time. However, when we start practising, the *kilesas* and the Dhamma compete to sit on the throne — one side sits for a while, then the other pushes it off. In the average person, the *kilesas* sit undisputed on the throne most of the time.

The body has six senses, namely, sight, hearing, smell, taste, touch and thought, all of which have a sense base in the form of an eye, ear, nose, tongue, skin and brain. *Viññāṇa*, which you mention, is simply aware of a sense contact, that's all. It doesn't label the sense data coming in from sight, sound, smell, taste or touch. So what's the problem? The problem is that the *citta* doesn't have a "base" because it doesn't belong to conventional reality. We can only experience the *citta* when we enter *appaṇā samādhi* or attain *Arahantship* and become enlightened.

The *citta* that we are experiencing here and now is the *citta* cloaked with *avijjā* and loaded with *kamma*, and it's the driver of the *khandhas*. If the *citta* moves, the *khandhas* move; if the *citta* is quiet, the *khandhas* are quiet. You can think of the five *khandhas* as a biological robot and the *citta* as the programmer, so that when the programmer orders the robot to act, it moves and when the programmer sleeps, the robot just stands still.

Now, when we talk about the "mind" or the "heart", we are normally referring to two qualities of the *citta* stained with defilements, namely, the rational aspect of the *citta* or the emotional aspect of

the *citta*, respectively. This is why the *citta* is sometimes referred to as the "heart–mind." It's not difficult to see that the "base" of this heart–mind is *avijjā* and *kamma*. Without *avijjā* there would be no consciousness and no *kamma*. This is illustrated in the classical Buddhist doctrine of dependent origination (*paṭiccasamuppāda*), in which fundamental ignorance (*avijjā*) is the condition for all phenomena to arise; phenomena are the conditions for consciousness (*viññāṇa*) to arise; consciousness is the condition for form and meaning to arise, and so on. I know it's very difficult for ordinary people to understand these matters. They can, however, take them on trust – until the moment when they realise the truth for themselves.

6. The Development of Buddhism in the West?

What Is Your Opinion on the Development of Buddhism in the West?

Answer: Well, maybe I've got it all wrong, maybe I've misunderstood, but a letter I received from a layman in Germany some time ago made me ponder. I sometimes get the impression that Buddhism in Germany, and probably in the West generally, proceeds in a different way from Buddhism in Thailand. In Germany, laypeople seem to have claimed ownership of the Dhamma and the *Vinaya* (the monastic rules), and seem to think they're authorities on the matter. I often hear them say, "This is the Dhamma and that is not" or "Buddhist monks (*bhikkhus*) must behave like this and not like that." Some even claim that a *Bhikkhu* shouldn't even teach the Dhamma, as his main role is meditation practice to cleanse himself of the *kilesas*. In a sense, their views are understandable because the Dhamma was brought from Asia to Europe by laypeople, mainly through academic books or translations of certain scriptures. So the situation in the West is the reverse of the historical situation in Asia, where *bhikkhus* were the carriers of the Dhamma and the *Vinaya* and authorities on the teachings. In Asia, *bhikkhus* carried the teachings from one country to another during the spread of Buddhism.

Of course, maybe the Asian world has misunderstood the situation all these years! Maybe the Lord Buddha himself wasn't a monk

at all, but some kind of layman who taught the Dhamma only to those laypeople with "a little dust in their eyes" so it could be preserved in that way. And maybe the remaining, less insightful, laypeople had to become *bhikkhus* to cleanse themselves rigorously before being able to receive the Dhamma and become laypersons full of wisdom! This may be the view of some Western scholars, who knows? If so, it might explain why some Buddhist laypeople who look after *bhikkhus* and provide them with the four requisites feel free to criticise and tell them what they can or cannot do. There's a beautiful old German saying that as long as you have your feet under our table, you have to behave yourself and do what we think is right. Maybe that's the way laypeople in the West think about *bhikkhus* today. If the Buddha wasn't a *Bhikkhu* and was primarily teaching laypeople, then this all makes sense: a layperson is allowed to find fault because he already has an exalted status, whereas a *Bhikkhu* isn't allowed to criticise because he still has to cleanse himself of the dust that remains in his eyes. Maybe there are actually people who think like that.

This raises an interesting question for me as a *Bhikkhu*. Why do people in the West feel the need for a monastic Sangha if they think they're so better informed about the Dhamma and the *Vinaya*? Personally, it makes me feel like a cheap replica or a Buddhist statue that exists simply to complete the Buddhist picture. Interestingly, you can come across this kind of effigy-like monk in smaller Thai Buddhist temples in Germany. Their role is to sit quietly and receive gifts from laypeople who want to obtain merit (which, apparently, cannot be acquired unless there are *bhikkhus* sitting there), or to chant blessings to bring good luck to people, their homes or even their cars.

For me, this is evidence that things are the wrong way round. But, as I said, maybe I'm not seeing things correctly; perhaps the majority of laypeople don't act like this. For me, the Lord Buddha was the first *Bhikkhu*, and his Sangha was the communion of Noble

ones (*sāvakas*) along with ordinary *bhikkhus* and nuns. The Lord Buddha taught the Dhamma and the *Vinaya* to his Sangha, the *bhikkhus* themselves recited it and preserved it orally, and it was later written down. It was the Lord Buddha and his *bhikkhus* and nuns who passed the Dhamma on to the laity. In fact, the Lord Buddha allowed only *bhikkhus* who had finished their work, i.e. who were *Arahants*, to carry his Dhamma to other regions to teach the people there.

The Lord Buddha didn't impose the monastic *Vinaya* on the laity, but he made it the duty of *bhikkhus* to recite the *Vinaya* rules every two weeks to ensure that the monastic rules were respected by them. He also advised *bhikkhus* not to stay in regions where they would be unable to comply with the *Vinaya*, as the people in these places would not have enough merit for the Dhamma to flourish. In the West, however, the teachings have arrived in the opposite way. The cart has come before the horse. The Dhamma and the *Vinaya* wasn't brought to the West by *bhikkhus* but by laypeople, so the laity today sees itself as the guardian of the monastic rules and the teacher of the Dhamma. To me, it seems like the Western world has started off on the wrong foot. Whether this can be changed, or whether it is desirable to change it, is a matter for Western Buddhist laypeople themselves to decide. Buddhist teachings can help laypeople to improve their lives and their societies, but they don't in themselves lead to the end of *dukkha*. Only celibacy and asceticism, in accord with the practice of *sīla*, *samādhi* and *paññā* (exemplified by monastic Buddhism), leads to the realization of the supreme goal, namely, freedom from *dukkha* and the attainment of *Nibbāna*.

Please forgive my critical view of these things, but this is my deepest conviction. Every one of you is free to choose what to do with your life – whether to improve or deteriorate, to continue going round in the cycle of rebirth or to try to break out in this lifetime. Everyone has to decide, and take responsibility for his or her own life.

7. How do I Deal With Aversion?

I know there are five hindrances to meditation[1], but my biggest problem is something else – aversion. How do I deal with strong aversion?

Answer: Aversion isn't easily seen. If you are aware, if you have *sati*, you know something is wrong when you feel a very slight contraction of the heart. If the heart isn't completely open, something is wrong. The centre of the *citta* is located close to the physical heart, so if your attention isn't on the *citta* at the time something happens, have a look at your physical heart because people feel most comfortable when their hearts are completely open. In the morning, you can sometimes observe your heart hardening up, and that means something is wrong. There's something you don't want to see. When the heart closes, it tunes out everything around it, and that's not the way to be. So the state of the physical heart can be a good barometer of our innermost feelings. If it contracts and pumps faster, you know something is wrong; if it's quiet everything is fine. Through the action of the heart and lungs, the *citta* manipulates the body. So if you don't yet have the ability to stay within the *citta* and know your real intentions, you can observe the state of the physical heart.

The problem we have with boredom or restlessness is our aversion to them, and that manifests in the physical heart. But when you see aversion, tell yourself that you now have a wonderful object to investigate. You have to get used to all the irritations and painful feelings that arise in meditation. The *kilesas* come with all sorts of tricks: tiredness, worry, pain, and so on. Restlessness is a very difficult hindrance to deal with because it has no focus, whereas pain is a definite object. There are lots of difficulties to overcome at the beginning, but you have to face them and deal with them in a skillful way. But remember – meditation isn't about pushing things away; it's about accepting rather than turning away. I usually talk about dealing with pain, but the process is the same for all kinds of feelings. The first step is to accept the feeling – aversion or anything

1. Traditionally, the five hindrances (*nīvaraṇa*) to meditation are sensual desire, anger and ill will, sloth and torpor, restlessness and remorse, and doubt.

else — wholeheartedly, ask what it feels like and get to know it. Once you can do that successfully, you can calmly investigate what it is.

I used to tell my heart to open up, and that was painful. In German there's a saying that we want to see the truth but we don't want to know it, and that's because it's painful. When the heart closes, it doesn't want to know about the things it fears or doesn't want to see or remember. However, when it opens up, it starts to feel them, and it feels them as pain. If you can be patient and become calm, you'll be aware of just the reality of experience. In that state, if you ask the right question, you might get an answer. But the answer doesn't come in the form of thoughts but rather as a knowingness. And, by the way, the answer from the knowingness doesn't come as an "ah-ha" moment. The moment you think "ah-ha", the knowingness is gone. If you think you know something, that's only a thought, and thoughts and views can change over time. But in the knowingness, you just know, and it never goes away.

Now, we as ordinary human beings can't distinguish between knowingness and thought. Knowingness is like a small bird twittering while thought is like an express train, and as long as thoughts are there we'll never be able to experience the knowingness. The Western mind is trained to look for solutions, but in the spiritual life the solution is to become calm and stop the thoughts in *samādhi*, for then we won't have a problem. Most of our so-called problems come from thoughts and memories, and when they stop happiness arises. The longer we stay in *samādhi*, the longer we have a connection to the knowingness, to the truth. But we can't solve our spiritual problems with thought.

8. How to Deal with Disturbances During Practice?

I can practise alright when alone but not when there's a lot of disturbances around. What can I do?

Answer: Well, be calm. You can have awareness (*sati*) under any conditions. For instance, you can be aware while you're talking or listening — it's amazing. Annoyance comes up because you don't want people or events to bother you. And because you don't want

things, you try to block them out, and that's where the problem comes. In fact, you're enshrining yourself in a prison. But if you don't block things out and instead be really aware of whatever is happening, you can begin to get a handle on the situation. It's similar to observing pain that arises during meditation: you first have to turn your attention to the pain, then examine it, and then get down to understanding it.

When workmen were building a new meditation hut (*kuti*) recently, there was noise in the monastery all day, and this was a problem for some people who tried to push against it. But pushing experiences away creates *dukkha* because you're resisting things as they are. The truth is that you really have to have a lot of *sati* to notice your annoyance with things happening in the environment. As long as you have aversion, you have a problem. *Sati* is just objective; it knows there's a sound, and that's all. But as soon as you put a label on it — for instance, "Someone is speaking" — the next thought is, "Why are they speaking; it bothers me," and then there's a problem. However, it's possible to be completely calm when people speak. Then, instead of listening to the words, you can listen to their heart talking, and that experience is on a completely different level. People can be talking about the weather but their heart might really be saying that they're bored and are only talking to relieve the tedium. *Sati* is the most important thing, and you have to apply it under any circumstances. Actually, for success, you need to have *sati* at every moment during the day. But the *kilesas* don't like that; they want to have fun running after big goals, not to be aware of stretching out a hand or the breath going in and out.

I remember a story about a Zen master in the middle of a crossroads in Japan saying that if his students were disturbed by the noise they didn't yet know how to meditate. In my own practice, my motto was that if something was disturbing me, there must be something wrong with my own meditation. So bring up that thought when external things bother you; approach the problem in a skillful way. Years ago, as a layman, I was on a retreat and there were roadworks going on outside, but after three days of fighting against the noise I asked myself why I didn't just give in to it and accept it. After that,

everything was fine. Fighting against the noise really hurt, and my annoyance with it blocked out any awareness of what was really going on. Thereafter I used this technique for lots of things, and I remember going to a party and being completely calm and aware of everything happening. As soon as your greed or hate pulls you into a situation, you become affected, but if you remain objective there's no problem. Things are just what they are, whether you stay in a quiet or noisy place. All that's needed is some wisdom and skillful means to deal with the different circumstances that arise.

Of course, it's easier to learn meditation in a quiet environment, but sooner or later you'll have to face the challenges of living in the world and interacting with different people. You'll see aversion coming up to this or that person, but remember — it's your aversion. It has nothing to do with the other person. Whatever comes up is simply showing you your own faults, and that's something people don't understand. The *citta* is a kind of slide projector that casts its images out onto other people, but what we see are our own inner slides. In effect, we're seeing ourselves in the other people. There are things we like in the world and things we hate, and we associate them with different people. But that's the wrong way to look at it because greed and hate come from inside. We think that someone else is the cause of our love, loneliness or fear, but really that person is just a trigger setting something into motion inside the *citta*. Similarly if someone says you have a problem, the problem is actually inside that other person; their criticism is coming from inside themselves and they are projecting onto you. So don't be fooled.

This is why meditation practice is all about going inside, not outside. People wonder how *samaṇas* can resolve their problems while staying alone in a cave. The answer is that all the problems are in the *citta*, and that becomes clear when you look inside. If you stay in a cave or an isolated forest long enough, you come to hate trees, and that doesn't make sense! Once you realise how silly that is, you can start looking inside for the root of the problem. If you live in the world and interact with lots of other people, you'll never get the message that your feelings about them are actually coming from inside yourself. But when staying alone in a cave you begin to realise

that the images appearing on the walls of the cave — and they can be pictures of anything — must be coming from yourself, from your imagination. Once you realise that everything arises within the *citta*, you can become self-sufficient, not lacking anything and not worrying about anything at all. Everything is already there, whole.

9. What's the Difference Between the Citta and the Ātman?

Than Ajahn Mahā Bua said that the *citta* is never born and never dies. Isn't this just another way of reintroducing the Vedic concept of the *Ātman*?

Answer: I'm not familiar with the concept of *Ātman*, so it's difficult to give an answer. The best thing is for you to enter *appaṇā samādhi* — then you'll know for yourself! However, if the *Ātman* is similar to the soul as understood in the West, then it might be analogous to what Than Ajahn Mahā Bua calls the "conventional" *citta* — the *citta* of the ordinary person — that travels from one birth to the next. *Avijjā* is attached to the *citta*; we can say that the *citta* of the ordinary person is cloaked with *avijjā* — a cloak called "self" — and loaded with *kamma* that drives it from life to life. But once *avijjā* is removed only the pure *citta* remains. So the pure *citta* cannot be the same as the *Ātman*.

The *Pāli* term *attā* means self or soul, but the Lord Buddha teaches *anattā*, the principle of not-self. *Nibbāna* is described as a fire that has gone out. When that happens, what's left? Just try it for yourself: light a fire and extinguish it. What's left? As long as an *Arahant* lives, the ingredients for making a fire (the five *khandhas*) are still there, but the fire has gone out. Don't mix up the "conventional" *citta* with the pure *citta*. The *citta* never dies, but the cloak that covers the *citta* and makes it an individual "self" can be destroyed. This doesn't mean that the *citta* dies. Think of raindrops; as long as they're single raindrops they have individual forms, but once they drop into the ocean the cloak of individuality is destroyed, and they become one with the water. A raindrop is called a raindrop, but its essence is the

water or the ocean where it came from. Does the raindrop completely cease to exist when it falls into the ocean? Does the pure *citta* ever die? In the biography of Than Ajahn Mun, we're told that he received Dhamma teachings from Buddhas or *sāvaka Arahants* who appeared to him in *samādhi*.[2] How could that happen if everything just vanishes forever?

Actually, people are grasping the term *citta* wrongly. They think that every being has a *citta*, but that's not right. The correct view would be that every being is part of the one eternal *citta*. Now, why do people come to believe that a *citta* that belongs to them? It's because they think of themselves in terms of their five *khandhas,* personalised and individual. People can't grasp the idea of the *citta*, so they don't know it and confuse it with consciousness (*viññāṇa*). Consciousness is one of the *khandhas* so it's not eternal, and it doesn't go from one life to the next. *Avijjā* gives people the delusion of self in the same way that a virtual reality game gives players the feeling that a person on the screen is playing: if nobody plays, there's no person.

People who argue that the pure *citta* is self, most probably fall to the wrong view that after enlightenment there is nothing. But why then would the Lord Buddha describe *Nibbāna* as the supreme happiness? And why, in the *Saṁyutta Nikāya*, would the Lord Buddha say that it's incorrect to claim that after death the *Tathāgata* either is, or is not, or neither, or both? Nothing can be usefully said. But this doesn't conflict with the idea of a pure *citta* according to the Thai Forest Tradition.

I realise that people just don't understand this. It's because they can't grasp something beyond their understanding that the Lord Buddha taught; the Noble eightfold path and the signs to follow to reach the end of the road, namely, *Nibbāna*. *Appaṇā samādhi* is the way to experience the pure *citta* as opposed to the "conventional" *citta* we all experience day in and day out.

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2. See *Venerable Ācariya Mun Bhūridatta Thera – A Spiritual Biography* (page 176), available on the Luangta website (www.luangta.eu).

10. Why Is Meditation More Difficult at Home?

My mind just wanders off all the time.

Answer: Ordinary life is full of distractions — work, travel, family, and so on — so it can be very difficult to meditate. Actually, to be successful in meditation, the fewer distractions the better.[3] If you really want to attain *samādhi*, you need to talk and interact with others as little as possible, and have *sati* (awareness) as much as possible throughout the day. The aim of calmness meditation (*samatha*) — mentally repeating the word *buddho* or observing the breath coming in and going out at the nose — is to reach one-pointedness, and don't forget that. During the day, if your mind constantly goes into distraction, whether with feelings or anything else, you won't become one-pointed, for the mind will be reaching for many different points.

To reach one-pointedness, you have to be able to throw out all the things that arise in your heart (*citta*). I'm referring mainly to objects called *ārammaṇa* in the *Pāli* language, which are often emotional states. Human beings have a lot of different ones — painful feelings, negative feelings, moods, and so on — but don't seem to know how to deal with them. In meditation, we are learning how to handle them. It doesn't matter which label you give them — fear, anger, pain, greed or anything else. The idea is just to watch them as they come up, without interfering, and then go back to the breath or the repetition of *buddho*. This has to be done from moment to moment if you want to develop awareness of these objects. The longer you can stay with this practice, from the moment you open your eyes to the time you close them again at night, the better will be the results and the faster they'll come. Please don't forget this. Whatever comes up, let it come, and then either pay no heed to it or throw it out. If whatever arises is stubborn, just leave it to one side for the moment and carry on with your practice. The *kilesas* don't like to observe the breath or repeat the word *buddho* — they want to play, play with all their toys, with objects in the mind, with sounds at the ear, with sights at

3. See Ajahn Martin's talk, *The need for simplicity*, in his book, *Forest Leaves*, available on his website (www.forestdhammatalks.org).

the eye. But if you don't show any interest, don't pay any attention and just keep focused on the meditation object, the *kilesas* will be starved of energy and will have to fade away. Another thing is to be careful to live a moral life since progress in meditation is difficult if you're breaking the five precepts. Successful practice needs a clear conscience.

So put some effort in. Imagine you're drifting on the high seas and need to cling onto a plank of wood that keeps you afloat. You wouldn't let go of the plank, would you? The word *buddho* or the breath is the plank keeping you above water, so keep tight hold of your meditation object. If you do this properly, it'll take you to *upācāra samādhi*. And from there you can go even deeper, into *appaṇā samādhi* for a preview of *Nibbāna*. You'll definitely like the experience. I've no doubts about that; I've never met anyone who didn't like it. However, very few people really put determined effort into achieving it because the world, their *kilesas*, get in the way.

11. Why Do You Rarely Mention Mettā?

Why do you rarely speak about developing mettā (loving kindness)? Teachers in the West often emphasise it, so why don't you?

Answer: Actually, *mettā* is a fundamental principle of the heart (*citta*), and *samādhi* itself can help to become acquainted with it. Happiness, peacefulness and contentment are already there; everything is there in the *citta*. And the more filth is removed from the heart through the practice of investigation, the more *mettā* naturally radiates through. *Mettā bhāvanā* is certainly one of the many meditation subjects suggested in the *Pāli* texts, and it can be developed, but at the early stages this is only "artificial" *mettā*, which has little in common with the "true" nature of *mettā*.

In the Thai Forest Tradition, the body and its thirty-two parts are recommended as the initial objects of investigation – since the plant of greed and hate is rooted in the body – followed at the next stage by investigation of the four mental *khandhas*. These are given as the primary meditation subjects, because the emphasis is on combating

the *kilesas*, which Than Ajahn Mahā Bua called sugar-coated poison, sweet tasting but with deep and bitter after-effects. He always pointed out the dangers of the *kilesas* and the hazards of falling into their trap, and that's why our task as spiritual warriors is to fight and overcome them.

It might be useful to think about what *mettā*, loving kindness, really is. In my experience, teachers who are very strict actually have a lot of *mettā*, for they want their pupils to reach their full spiritual potential. It took me a long time to understand that. Than Ajahn Mahā Bua always seemed to single me out for criticism when other *bhikkhus* were doing similarly unwise things. I wondered why, until I realised that he had *mettā* for me, and thought that I might actually be able to understand. We don't normally think of *mettā* in this way. We associate it with a teacher who's cuddly, smiling and encouraging. But stroking people's *kilesas* doesn't help them get enlightened, does it? In the case of medical doctors, we all know that they're trying to help, so we bear some pain while they're doing their work, and once it's gone we're grateful. On the spiritual path, however, it's very difficult to know what our "spiritual doctor" is doing. He seems to be inflicting a lot of pain, so we ask why he doesn't smile and why he doesn't seem to have any *mettā*. But he really does.

So maybe you should revise your view of *mettā* as it applies to the spiritual life. Someone who criticises and scolds you isn't necessarily lacking in *mettā*; maybe he's the kindest person you know. In the long run, of course, whether teachers have *mettā* or not is shown by the success of their pupils. Isn't that true?

12. Can We Work With the Kilesas?

Instead of resisting them, which sometimes seems a hopeless task?

Answer: No. The way of practice is to fight the defilements (*kilesas*), namely, greed, hate and delusion, along with all their subtle variations such as arrogance, envy and laziness. If you're nice to them, if you have compassion for them, you'll never get out of the

prison of *saṁsāra*. You can't have compassion for the forces that keep you in prison, can you?

I suspect that your question's referring to something else: "positive" desires with wholesome outcomes. Certainly, desires — *kilesas* in this sense — aren't necessarily all bad or negative. For instance, people have to want to reach the end of suffering, to attain *Nibbāna*, otherwise they'd never begin practising meditation. That kind of wanting can be positive, and it can be put to work to help reach the goal. But wanting has to be used skillfully; there's no use wanting to become an *Arahant* without putting in the effort to act on it. There's nothing wrong with wanting if it's directed towards a wholesome path; it's fine to have the desire to end *dukkha*, for instance. But the vast mass of defilements are negative and have devastating consequences. Look at the greed and hate inside your own heart — is it pretty? It's these *kilesas* that have to be resisted and overcome.

Remember this: the *kilesas* know you much better than you know yourself since they've been with you for countless lifetimes. So they can conjure up a lot of different things — anger, greed, likes and dislikes, fear of death, fear of the unknown — and catch you with them. In Westerners, they usually bring up doubt, often about whether this or that meditation practice is worthwhile, causing them to drift from one practice to the next. It's only when people look back, possibly after many years, that they realise they've been fooled. Actually, the *kilesas* have fooled us all our lives, tricked us into wanting this or not wanting that. They've made all the decisions, and we've just said, "Alright, go ahead, and I'll pay the price." It's when we develop *sati* that we can begin to see this happening and start to resist the power of avijjā, the fundamental ignorance that drives the *kilesas*, which has kept us in prison for aeons. If we don't stand up against the prison wardens, we'll be chained up for ever, won't we? They won't let us go without a fight, so we have to learn how to fight back, how to trick them and overcome them. Tricking them needs determination and effort to stay on one point. This is what the *kilesas* loathe most because they find awareness of the breath or the word *buddho* awfully boring. So, be interested in your meditation object, and focus all your attention on one point. It's the act of being interested

that keeps you on one point, and if your interest diminishes the *kilesas* have the opportunity to take power. They whisper that you can be doing something more interesting and more important, and they can be very persuasive — so persuasive that you believe whatever they say. You've believed them for millions of lifetimes, and now it's time to fight.

When Than Ajahn Mahā Bua talks about the fight against the *kilesas*, he compares it to getting into a boxing ring.[4] The first time you get into the ring and fight against the champion (*avijjā*), he will knock you out. But once you regain consciousness, you get back in the ring. It takes all your effort to go back, but you must if you're ever to understand the moves of *avijjā*. Once you've been in the ring for a while, and have been able to observe the champion's tactics, you may be able to duck from a blow. And after a while, you can begin to see the places where *avijjā* is vulnerable and land a blow yourself. The first blow against *avijjā* is a great victory; you'll feel very happy but will get hit again very soon. And this will go on and on until you're finally able, through investigation, through awareness (*sati*), to land the final blow and reach enlightenment. If you don't have enough *sati* to observe where *avijjā* is landing the blows, you'll never know how to duck and never see its weak spots.

We all have to develop *sati* to observe the techniques and tactics the champion is using. Then we can hit back, and the fight goes on and on and on until we give *avijjā* the blow that knocks it out of the ring and destroys it. And so, from the day we start on the path until the day we give the final blow to *avijjā*, we're in a boxing ring. Of course, at the beginning it's very unpleasant to get all the blows, but once *avijjā* is destroyed we'll have gained our freedom. Nothing in the universe will be able to trouble us again because *avijjā*, the source of all our troubles and all our *dukkha*, will have been eliminated. So, if you want to take the shortest path of practice from ignorance to liberation, get back into the boxing ring and fight every minute, every hour, every day. *Avijjā* can't just be persuaded to go

4. See Ajahn Martin's talk, *The teaching of Ajahn Mahā Bua*, in his book, *Forest Leaves*, available on his website (www.forestdhammatalks.org).

away; whatever you give it, it takes and keeps hitting you. It has reigned over you, over all of us, for such a long time that it won't give up its rule peacefully; you have to fight your way out. There's nothing else for it but to resist.

13. Is My Body Really Not Mine?

Why do you keep saying that my body's not mine, when it clearly is?

Answer: Because it's not. The belief that "I" and the body are one and the same thing is one of the fetters (*saṁyojana*) binding everyone to the cycle of rebirth, and it's difficult to break.[5] To use the metaphor of the body as a car, this fetter is the assumption that the car and the driver are the same. If you think this, you have a problem, but once you see that the driver can get in and out of the car, you understand that they really are two different things. You realise that the driver is responsible for driving the car while the car itself just goes forward and back or left and right as instructed. In the same way, the body and the *citta* are two different things; the *citta* is the one who commands the body. If it goes out into a different realm, the body just lies where it is; the heart still beats, the lungs still function and the other processes continue, but that's all. This is what happens when people sit in *samādhi*, for seven days at most; the body still breathes but it doesn't move at all.

It's not enough to know this with the intellect. We can conceptualise or assume that the *citta* and body are two different things, but this doesn't help to eliminate this fetter. We have to see the truth with our own inner eyes. One famous Buddhist scripture, the *Milindapañha*, uses the simile of a chariot to explain this. Once broken up into its bits and pieces, where is the chariot? There are only wheels, axles, reigns, a frame and a broken seat: the chariot has disappeared. The illusion of "chariot" has vanished since "chariot" itself was always only a concept. And the same thing happens when investigating the body. If you do your meditation practice correctly, you can break the body up into its parts and visualise them in a heap before your

5. A list of the ten fetters (*saṁyojana*) is given in the Appendix.

eyes. Where is the body? All you see are parts. As soon as you've put all the parts of the body out in front, without any part remaining behind, you'll realise that something remains, something still sits there observing. Then your belief that the body and the "I" are one and the same will "crash", fall away for a certain time, even for just a moment. When this happens, you'll have understood for the first time.

You have to repeat this process over and over and over again until the *citta* truly understands that it and body are two different things. Then, once the first three fetters have been undermined, there will come a time, when you rest in *samādhi* or when *sati* is at full strength, that these fetters are cut. And once they're broken, you'll have entered the stream, becoming a *Sotāpanna*. This means that you'll reach *Nibbāna* within seven lives at most, and will never fall back into the lower realms.

14. Why Don't You Teach "Letting Go"?

Some teachers particularly in the West teach "letting go" of whatever comes to mind, but why do you never mention it?

Answer: It's certainly possible, by controlling the mind in some way, to let go of unwholesome things and develop wholesome ones. This kind of "letting go" can be compared to cutting the leaves of a tree. If it's a large tree with lots of leaves, we can't see what is underneath, but when the leaves are removed the trunk and branches become clearer. Controlling ourselves like this is a way of pruning back and removing the leaves. However, trees grow back their leaves over and over again, so we have to keep cutting them back over and over again. I hope you can see that these efforts are ultimately useless, as the capacity of the tree to regrow is left untouched. In the same way, the underlying causes of the unwholesomeness in our hearts are untouched by simply controlling the mind or by "letting go" alone. The practice of not following desire is equivalent to cutting the leaves. The leaves have to be cut, but that's all we'll manage to do unless we practise meditation and investigate. Investigation

allows us to see the branches which give rise to new leaves, and they can then be cut off one by one until the whole tree of rebirth is uprooted.

We can think about "letting go", letting go of our own greed and hate for the rest of our lives, but it won't change anything; greed and hate will still reside in the heart. If memories and thoughts helped us reach the end of *dukkha*, we wouldn't need to come to this monastery and go through all the hardships of practice, would we? Only if we understand the nature of the pot of earth (the body) that supports the plant of greed and hate, can we destroy it. And when it's completely destroyed, greed and hate can't grow any more. The body has to be completely understood, stripped down to its bits and pieces and into the four elements, over and over again. Once we see it clearly with our inner eyes, with the *citta*, understanding will arise. Then the *citta* will know the danger of the body and will let go of its own accord. We don't have to tell it to let go; once the *citta* understands the true nature of the body, it lets go of it immediately, just like a little child touching fire and immediately retracting its hand. We can't force the heart to let go; the heart lets go of its own accord!

Than Ajahn Mahā Bua used the example of an ant[6] to illustrate the problem with "letting go." The ant is crawling across the ceiling and it wants to get to the floor. You can tell it to let go, just let itself drop, but it won't know how to do that. It knows only how to take one step at a time, and if it goes step by step it will eventually reach the floor. Similarly, we can't just let go to reach the end of the path, the end of *dukkha*. If we could, we would all be enlightened in a flash, wouldn't we? Do you think fundamental ignorance (*avijjā*) will allow itself to be let go of – bye-bye – just like that? It can't be done; greed and hate can't just be let go of in that way. We can, of course, tell ourselves not to buy into greed and hate when they arise in the heart, and this makes them a little weaker, but it won't destroy them at the root.

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6. See Ajahn Martin's talk, *The tradition of Than Ajahn Mahā Bua*, in his book, *The Way to the Heart*, available on his website (www.forestdhammatalks.org).

15. Why Am I Not Getting Anywhere in Meditation?

I've been using the breath as a meditation object for a long time, but I never seem to get anywhere. What can I do?

Answer: Where are you trying to get? People who come from the West or have studied a lot are impatient. If something doesn't work within a week, they drop it, saying it's useless, and wander off to try something else. It's like digging a hole and finding that digging at one place is too difficult for some reason; maybe the ground is very stony. So people start digging somewhere else which seems to have softer earth, but if the going is hard, maybe there are lots of stones, they give up. In the end, they'll dig at thousands of places but never get a hole. However, if they keep digging at one point, through all the difficulties, they will eventually get a hole. The hole I'm speaking about is *samādhi* and once you get there, you'll experience the disappearance of the whole world.

But we all look for the easy way out, don't we? That's how we've been trained. It's not a fault in itself: we come into this world believing what we've been told by society, parents and teachers, and we follow their example. But there are no easy ways out with meditation. Actually, it's like learning to walk: you try and fail and try again until it seems to come naturally. It takes a while to learn to walk, but in the end you get there. Similarly, calming the mind just involves placing your attention on an object, such as the breath at the tip of the nose or the internal repetition of the word *buddho*. Every memory or thought that comes up gets replaced by the attention on the object. It's that simple. But you have to practise it over and over again, maybe thousands and thousands of times. If the mind drifts off into thoughts while focusing on the breath, bring it back, and when it drifts off again bring it back, and do the same over and over again until your awareness stays with the object and things become quiet. It's not that you have to "get" anywhere.

People, particularly Westerners, all love to think. The West has think-tanks which take specific issues and mull them over and over and over again. Imagine all these people sitting around in tanks

thinking; it's bizarre, isn't it? But very few people ever think seriously about the meaning of life, do they? They just get on with living, doing whatever they think they need to do whether it's moral or not. My point is that it's important to understand the situation you're in, and why you're practising meditation. Unless you do something about your situation, you'll just go down the drain, falling into the lower states of deprivation. People die and get reborn over and over again, though no-one remains in one realm forever. Than Ajahn Mahā Bua used to describe his various rebirths as a roller-coaster ride at a carnival, now going up and now going down depending on the *kamma* at the time. He was down in hell, then up to the *deva* realms and back down again before being reborn again as a human being. Is that what you want, turning round and round in *saṁsāra* on the wheel of rebirth, going from realm to realm but never breaking out of the cycle? This is why I often use the metaphor of the hamster wheel. Ever seen a hamster in a wheel, running and running but never getting anywhere? Well, that's us, and we need to be aware of that horror. If we don't find the way out, we'll be trapped forever. There's only one way out, and we know that for sure because the Lord Buddha found it. Many of his followers walked the same path to liberation and became *Arahants*, exiting the cycle of birth and death. So please reflect on that if you become disillusioned with the practice and think you're going nowhere.

All I can give you are suggestions; you have to do the work for yourself. Don't get involved with hindrances such as boredom, disenchantment or pain when they come up; they are created by the *kilesas*, which are the enemy. Just stick with the meditation object until you reach *samādhi*. First feel comfortable and then just observe. Be the observing nature – that's all you have to do.

16. How Does Sati Differ From Normal Awareness?

Answer: *Sati* is pure awareness in which there is no judgement, no association, no thought and no labelling of things as good or bad; there's just knowingness, whether of the body, feelings, memories or

thoughts.[7] This isn't the same as normal awareness which is fleeting or intermittent, and clouded by thoughts, memories and fantasies. Even when we think we're doing walking or sitting meditation, the mind can be off in a dream much of the time.

Sati has an objective quality, and it lets us see what is happening. It's not the same as seeing a tree and deciding whether we like it or not – that's not *sati*. Having *sati* means that we see colour and form, and know that they're matched within the brain to a certain kind of object, whether a leaf, flower, tree or person. The eye, ears and other senses only receive sense inputs, but the mind identifies and knows them. It seems to do this instantly, but what really happens is that consciousness (*viññāṇa*) has identified a sense impression which is then processed and recognised, after being matched with sample data stored in the memory (*saññā*). This is a sequential process, similar to what happens in a very fast computer. *Sati* is knowing that this is happening. If we don't have *sati* at this level, we're really just robots controlled by an internal program that runs on and on and on. In our case, the program is conditioning, and it can be very difficult to go against it because people don't want to escape their conditioning.

We need *samādhi* to train *sati*, and *samādhi* means focusing attention on just one point, on a meditation object such as the breath at the tip of the nose or the mental repetition of the word *buddho*. We need to be clearly aware that the breath is long or short, deep or shallow, or that the *buddho* is fast or slow, clear or unclear. This training develops *sati*; the concentration is on the *buddho* or the breath, but the sharp, clear awareness of the meditation object is the thing that develops *sati*. We should aim to know everything about the meditation object and not let go of it until thoughts quieten down and disappear. This is all hard work, of course, and most of us don't want to do it. It's much easier to live in a world of fantasy, of idle dreams, wondering about the state of our meditation practice or

7. This subject is explained more fully in Ajahn Martin's talk, *Sati is the key to practice*, in his book, *Forest Leaves*, available on his website (www.forestd-hammatalks.org).

whether we'll become enlightened this year or next. Such dreams are useless.

The aim is to concentrate on one point until *sati* goes back to the heart. This is the level of *sati* we must have to advance in practice. It's not the same as mindfulness, which is related to the "mind" being "full" of one thing at one time without knowing anything else. Of course, initially we're aware only of the meditation object but then awareness widens to knowing that there's a thought, a feeling or a memory. When that happens, we're aware of these things and can bring the concentration back to the meditation object. The crucial thing is that we *know* — that's the point. In time, thoughts, feelings or memories don't bother us; they pass by like clouds, though we still know them. This knowingness is a function of the *citta*, and it's what we have to develop. Without it, we're blinded by whatever comes in through the senses and by thoughts that come up. When *sati* goes back to the heart in *upācāra samādhi*, it's an amazing experience, even though no-one is taking hold of it. There's no-one to say, "I'm having this wonderful experience" or "This experience is marvellous, just awesome." It's just a pure experience, for there are no *kilesas* to take hold of it or comment upon it. Normally, the *kilesas* are like fog obscuring our ability to see clearly, but once they're gone things can be seen as they are. And remember: a moment of *sati* is a moment without *kilesas*.

Are you beginning to get some inkling of the relationship between *samādhi* and *sati*? Training in *samādhi* develops and nurtures *sati*, because *sati* is simply the knowingness that we discover when everything else has dropped away. That knowingness is there all the time; it has always been there and will never disappear, and it is the only true home we really have. Everything else is fake, like the hairpieces, spectacles or false teeth that we attach to our bodies. These items make us appear to be something we are not, just as wearing a white coat makes us look like a doctor, or driving a Mercedes makes us look rich. It's stupid, isn't it? These are all external things and they change, but the *citta* does not change.

17. How Do I Control Emotions When Meditating?

Meditation seems to bring up lots of emotions that I can't control. What can I do?

Answer: Well, there's a big difference between controlling or suppressing an emotion and restraining it. A big problem for many meditators, particularly people from the West who can be control freaks, is trying to control.

Take anger: you can't control it, but you can stop yourself being angry, and that's a whole different story. It's something a lot of people don't understand. They try to control their anger by suppressing it, but that's not right. You have to let it come up, but restrain yourself — don't follow it. Do you understand that? Don't try to "control" the situation. If there's anything I want you to understand from my teachings it's "observe, observe, observe." And restrain yourself. Restrain yourself from delving into the thoughts and emotions that come up — but don't try to control or suppress them otherwise they'll come back again in a way that you can't control.

For instance, anger can explode. So restrain yourself; don't allow anger to take control of the heart. That's the only thing you can do. If anger arises, observe it and watch it go away. I'm mainly referring to Western people who really try to suppress emotions, including anger: "I'm a Buddhist so I shouldn't have anger and I'm not going to let it come up." That's not the way. The way is to see the anger, feel the full heat of it and not to dive into it. This is what I mean by restraint — not letting anger take over. You can recognise the anger as it comes up, and then say, "Hey! You know you're really unpleasant, you know that, right?" And then just watch how it fades. To suppress anger or any kind of feeling is to push it back with energy, but that means bringing your own energy to the party, with the result that the energies mix. And the more you suppress, the more energy the anger or emotion has. Eventually it explodes like a volcano erupting. Remember this. In meditation, we're not there to control; we're there to observe, and we have to keep ourselves from diving into feelings or emotions. This is a crucial point to understand.

I love to put my finger on sore points. When I see people repressing a lot, I love to stick my finger in, and — whoa — out comes the emotion. I see them; they're so "controlled" that all I need to do is press on their sensitive point and they go bananas. They're unable to control that explosion because the attack has come from behind, from deep within themselves. Then they become furious with me, of course, but I'm only showing them their own anger, the anger deep inside. Sometimes they think that I'm angry, but I'm not. I just want to help. That's my only motivation, to teach you, to help you, to help you understand what's going on inside yourself, and to warn that unwholesome things lead to harmful results.

My venerable teacher Than Ajahn Mahā Bua was always stepping on my toes — figuratively — asking "does it hurt?" But actually he was showing me all the places that could hurt. So in your own practice you have to look at the places where it hurts. Don't look at me; I'm only pointing out where that might be. The right attitude is to thank the spiritual teacher for showing you something you didn't want to see, not to be angry with him for revealing it. In fact, in everyday life many people show us things we don't want to see, and the wisest thing is to turn the situation around and thank them for doing that. If we could all act on that advice life would be so simple, wouldn't it? It would certainly make our relationships with others much easier.

18. Why Do You Emphasise Kamma So Much?

It's something other teachers rarely mention, particularly in the West, and I'm not sure I really believe it.

Answer: I emphasise *kamma* and rebirth because they're central teachings of the Lord Buddha.[8] *Kamma* is the force that drives the cycle of rebirth, the cycle we want to escape from, so how can I not mention it? The Lord Buddha was clear in the *suttas*: he said we

8. For a more detailed discussion of this topic, see Ajahn Martin's talk, *Kamma and rebirth*, in his book, *Forest Leaves*, available on his website (www.forest-dhammatalks.org).

should view the physical body as deeds of the past that have come now to fruition — as our past actions made flesh, if you like — and that all beings are beautiful and ugly, inferior and superior, fortunate and unfortunate according to their *kamma*. In fact, nearly everything we experience is the result of past *kamma*, whether the physical form, the gender or the things that happen in our life. People usually think that rebirth involves the current "personality" being be reborn, but that's not right. What is reborn is a part of the *kamma* from the past. The *citta* — or whatever you want to call the "One who knows" — is driven into the next life along with its *kamma*. Actually, *kamma* is attached to the *citta* and is integrated into the five *khandhas* at the next rebirth.

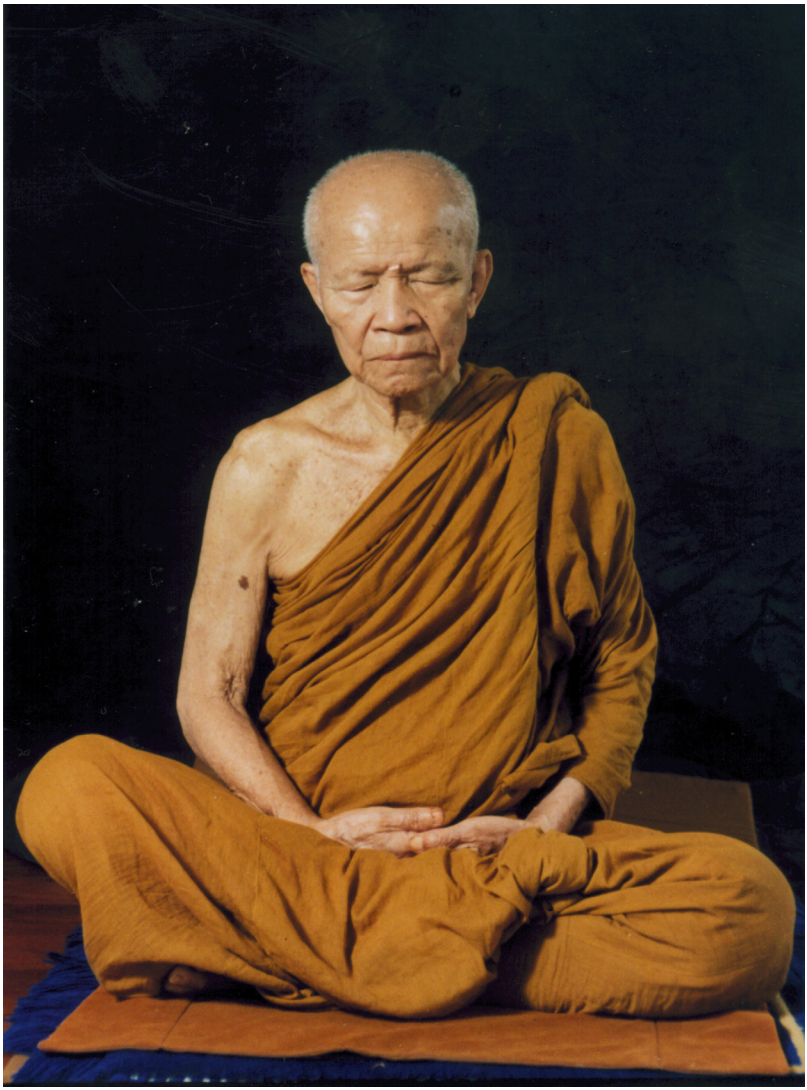
In general, the *kamma* that's ripe at the time of death is the *kamma* people reap in the next life, meaning that their destination is determined by their *kamma*. You can think of *kamma* as being just like the legal system. When people break the law, they are sent to prison for a length of time that depends on the severity of the crime, but they become free again on release. Similarly, if people have broken the five precepts (*sīla*) to a small extent, they might go down to the lower realms of existence for a short time; if they've committed lots of evil acts, they might go down for a long time. However, nothing is eternal and when the sentence or punishment is over, they can come back up to the higher realms.

My teacher Than Ajahn Mahā Bua used to bang the drum about *kamma*, and I like to do the same. It's important that people be aware of what they're doing and the consequences of their actions. Your next life can be anywhere in *saṁsāra*, not necessarily in the human realm, and it's very easy to end up in hell. How long you've there depends on the grievousness of your deeds. So resolve to make the best *kamma* you can to ensure that you'll reap a lot of good *kamma* in future. The Lord Buddha recommended that we keep the five *sīla* to help make positive *kamma*, and avoid rebirth in the lower realms. In that way, we may still receive some bad *kamma* from previous lives, but future lives will be much brighter because we've made good *kamma* going forward. Of course, going upwards to the higher realms, the *deva* realms, requires the development of some

additional virtues. These are generosity, respect and gratitude, and they also help us on the path of practice. All in all, good *kamma* is the best insurance — it's far more valuable than any insurance policy that the world can offer.

And remember: the training we undertake today will come with us into future lives. Someone who develops *mettā* (loving kindness) in this life, for example, will carry this trait over into the next. Similarly, if we train the ability to meditate, we'll still have it after ten years, in the next life, or in ten lifetimes to come. The memory of everything we've done is within the *citta* — it is complete. That's why an *Arahant* can remember his previous lives, all the times he went to hell, all the professions he had, and so on. He knows the actions that led him to hell and those that led to the *deva* realms. He can remember his previous lives because everything that was kept in the dark by *avijjā* has been revealed, while we remember only parts of our present existence.

Please reflect on this. I know that *kamma* and rebirth are difficult for the Western mind to grasp. They are becoming more accepted, of course, but most people still don't really understand what they really mean or how important they really are. The Lord Buddha spoke about the thirty-one realms of existence. Well, these realms do exist, and the law of *kamma* ensures that all your actions of body, speech or mind will have results in the future. You don't need to believe in *kamma* and rebirth, but as long as you don't know them for yourself, you should just accept on trust, for the moment, the word of wise people like the Lord Buddha who pointed out the way to enlightenment.



The Venerable Teaching Master of
Ajahn Martin Piyadhammo:
Than Ajahn Mahā Bua Ñāṇasampanno

Appendix

Saṁyojana

The *saṁyojana* are a list of ten factors or fetters that bind people to the endless round of birth and death. They are:

1. *Sakkāya-diṭṭhi*: the belief that the body *(kāya)* is self.
2. *Vicikicchā*: doubt of a sceptical nature based on delusion. This includes doubt that heaven and hell exist, beings in heaven or hell exist, and doubt about *kamma*, fruits of *kamma* and rebirth.
3. *Sīlabbata-parāmāsa:* inconsistency in keeping the moral precepts. It is often translated as "attachment to rules and rituals", but this is incorrect, for the word *sīla* refers to morality and moral precepts.
4. *Kāma-rāga*: craving for sense desires. Although this is a correct translation, amongst those who practise the main emphasis is on sexual craving and all that proliferates from it.
5. *Vyāpāda*: ill-will, malevolence.
6. *Rūpa-rāga*: attachment to or craving for form; the desire for the exalted states of the *rūpa* realms.
7. *Arūpa-rāga*: attachment to or craving for non-form; the desire for the exalted states of the *arūpa* realms.
8. *Māna*: conceit; the belief that one is better, worse or equal to others.
9. *Uddhacca*: restlessness. This term does not refer to worldly restlessness but to going overboard in the investigation for release, thereby forgetting to rest the *citta* in *samādhi*.
10. *Avijjā*: blind unknowing; blinding ignorance; wanting to know but not being able to know in line with the truth.

The fundamental mover, the so-called "will", lies hidden in both the ninth and tenth fetters. It is mainly hidden in the ninth, but its most subtle aspect is hidden in the tenth. In the final stages of practice, a person can be blinded by the extreme brightness of *avijjā*, yet there remains the very subtle will to overcome *avijjā*. It is only after overcoming *avijjā* that the will to do something or know something disappears. These ten fetters are overcome progressively. Thus the Sotāpanna has overcome the first three; the Sakadāgāmī has reduced the fourth and fifth; the Anāgāmī has overcome the first five; and the Arahant has overcome all ten fetters. These ten fetters need to be understood rather well and the best detailed explanation for them can be found in the last chapter of Luangta Mahā Bua's book "A Life of Inner Quality".

The Five Khandhas

The five *khandhas* consist of the aggregates of body, feeling, memory and association, thought and imagination, and consciousness. It is difficult to appreciate the depth and subtlety of meaning within these five groups, so in order to give the reader some basis for contemplation, a list of similes is given. These similes were taught by the Buddha, and can be found in the section on the *khandhas* in the Saṁyutta Nikāya.

1. The body (*rūpa*) is likened to a lump of foam floating down the river Ganges.
2. Feeling (*vedanā*) is likened to rain falling into a puddle of water. As each raindrop falls, it causes a splash and a bubble which quickly bursts and disappears.
3. Memory (*saññā*) is likened to a mirage seen in the desert. It has no substance to it; it is merely appearance.
4. Thought and imaginative thinking (*sankhāra*) are likened to a plantain tree. When the outer layers of the trunk are peeled off, no substantial pith or hardwood is found inside.

5. Consciousness (*viññāṇa*) is likened to a magician who stands at the crossroads and displays all sorts of magical illusions, which are devoid of any real substance.

When talking about the *nāma khandhas* (mental groups), we tend to think of them as being separate things or entities but, in fact, they are all aspects of the *citta*. It is therefore more correct to think in terms of the *citta* performing the functions of feeling, memory, thought or consciousness, for all of them are thoroughly dynamic and so not static entities at all.

Descriptively, the five *khandhas* can be thought of as a toolbox that either the *kilesas* or the Dhamma, which both reside within the *citta*, can use to their advantage or as a playground.

Memory (saññā)

In the past, it was popular in the West to translate the *Pāli* word *saññā* as "perception", but this is a misleading translation. In the forest tradition *saññā* is translated as Memory and Association. If for instance you tie up your shoe laces or open a door you need memory to do it otherwise you will have to learn it each time anew. If you see something you need memory or association in order to categorize it as woman, man, house, or tree etc.

The Five Precepts (Pañca-Sīla)

The five precepts are the rules of training observed by all lay Buddhists who practise the Dhamma. The precepts are often recited along with the three refuges (Buddha, Dhamma and Sangha) in a formal ceremony. In the Theravāda tradition, lay Buddhists visiting temples during uposatha (lunar observance) days will often observe an additional three precepts – making eight precepts in all – and on these occasions the third precept is strengthened to require the strict abstinence from all sexual activity.

1. To refrain from killing and harming living creatures. Every living being values its own life, so no one should destroy that intrinsic value by taking the life of another creature.
2. To refrain from taking things not given. All beings cherish their own possessions. Regardless of its worth, nothing belonging to another person should be debased by theft or taking without permission.
3. To refrain from sexual misconduct. This precept relates to all forms of illicit sex, not just adultery. It means being faithful to a spouse or partner, and not using one's power over dependent people for one's sexual pleasure. This includes the power teachers have over students, parents over children, employers over employees, and so on.
4. To refrain from untruthful or harsh speech. As well as lies and deceit which destroy other people's trust, this precept includes slander and speech not beneficial to the welfare of others, and it also includes white lies.
5. To abstain from intoxicating drinks and drugs which lead to heedlessness. Alcohol and drugs increase delusion, and damage physical and mental health. They also make people do things they later regret, such as breaking the other four precepts.

The Lord Buddha gave the five precepts to the laypeople as their protection. If they don't keep them, they are sure to spiral down and down, to the animal, ghost (peta), demon (asura) or hell realms. Keeping them, however, ensures wholesome results in this and future lives, for good kamma is the best insurance policy.

Glossary

The table below gives a list of *Pāli* terms, and a few Thai terms, used in this collection of talks, together with a brief explanation according to the Thai Forest Tradition, which may differ from definitions found elsewhere.

Ācariya	Teacher, mentor; a term of respect for a senior *bhikkhu*.
Ajahn	(Thai) A polite way of addressing a senior monk with more than 10 years in the Sangha.
Akāliko	Timeless, not dependent on time. It is a traditional epithet for the Dhamma.
Anāgāmī	Non-returner; a person who has abandoned the five lower fetters *(saṁyojana)* that bind the *citta* to the cycle of rebirth, and who after death will appear in one of the worlds called the Pure Abodes (*suddhāvāsa*), there to attain *Nibbāna*, never again to return. It is the third of the four stages of the noble path culminating in *Arahantship*.
Ānāpānasati	Awareness of breathing in and out. It is one of the most common meditation practices recommended by the Buddha.
Anattā	Not-self; the truth that all phenomena are devoid of anything that can be identified as "Self". It implies that the five *khandhas*, individually or collectively, are not-self, and that a self-entity cannot be found anywhere within the heart (*citta*). *Anattā* is one of the three universal characteristics of all phenomena, the others being *anicca* and *dukkha*.
Anguttara Nikāya	The book of Gradual Sayings (Discourses) in the *Pāli* Canon.
Anicca(ṁ)	Impermanence; the unstable, transient nature of all things in all realms of existence. *Anicca* is one of the three universal characteristics of existence, the others being *anattā* and *dukkha*.

Anupādisesa	Without remainder. It refers to the state of an *Arahant* after the death of the body.
Anupādisesa -Nibbāna	*Nibbāna* with no fuel remaining (analogous to an extinguished fire whose embers are cold); the *Nibbāna* of the *Arahant* after the death of the body.
Appaṇā	Fixed, directed. *Appaṇā* refers to the deep state of *samādhi*, also called one-pointedness.
Arahant	A liberated person; an "accomplished one"; a person who has abandoned all ten of the fetters (*saṁyojana*) that bind the *citta* to the cycle of rebirth and who is thus not destined for future rebirth; one who is enlightened and has attained the final stage of the noble path.
Ārammaṇa	A foundation, a support or that on which something depends. In general, this "something" refers to the state of the citta and what flows out of it. As a supporting condition for mental states, the *ārammaṇa* may be an externally sensed object or an internal condition arising from feeling, memory, thought or consciousness. Amongst those who practice the way of *kammaṭṭhāna*, the word *ārammaṇa* is often used to refer to an emotional mental state, either good or bad.
Ariya puggala	A noble one; a supreme person; one who has attained any of the four transcendent paths of *Sotāpanna*, *Sakadāgāmī*, *Anāgāmī* and *Arahant*.
Ariya-sacca	Noble (*ariya*) truth (*sacca*); in this context, *ariya* means noble and *sacca* objective or universal truth. The four noble truths are *dukkha*; the origin of *dukkha*; the cessation of *dukkha*; and the path leading to the cessation of *dukkha*.
Āsava	Commonly translated as effluents or outflows. *Āsavas* are those defilements that "flow out" from the heart (*citta*) into sense desires, into perpetuating existence, into views and opinions, *Āsavas* are born out of fundamental ignorance (*avijjā*).

Asubha	That which is unpleasant, loathsome, contrary to what is usually desired. *Asubha* practice involves contemplation of the repugnance of the body.
Attā	Self; the opposite of *anattā*.
Avijjā	Will, intention; not knowing or understanding correctly, but wanting to know and understand; fundamental ignorance; delusion about the nature of the *citta*. *Avijjā* is the lack of any knowledge that is higher than the level of mere convention, or lack of insight. It is ignorance so profound that it is self-obscuring, turning everything upside down, making us believe that what is wrong is right, what is unimportant is important, and what is bad is good. Ignorance here does not indicate a lack of knowledge but rather a lack of knowing, or knowing wrongly. *Avijjā* is that which must be overcome and transcended to realise enlightenment.
Baan	(Thai) village.
Bhāvanā	The development of the *citta* by meditation.
Bhikkhu	Buddhist monk; a fully ordained member of the Sangha who has gone forth into homelessness and received the higher ordination.
Brahmacariyā	Celibacy and the general training of living the holy life.
Brahmās	A class of deities which inhabit the heavens of form or formlessness.
Brahmavihāras	The four meditative states of *mettā* (friend-liness), *karuṇā* (compassion), *muditā* (gladness at the wellbeing of others) and *upekkhā* (equanimity).
Buddha	Literally, an awakened or enlightened one. In the present day, the term refers to Siddharta Gautama, the teacher and founder of Buddhism, but it can also refer to others who have achieved Buddhahood in the past.
Buddho	A *parikamma* (preparatory) word used for the recollection of the Buddha during meditation practice.
Caṅkama	To walk back and forth during walking meditation.

Citta	The essential knowing nature. When associated with a physical body, it is referred to as mind or heart. The pure *citta* is radiant and bright and is a state of knowingness, but the *citta* of a person who is not an *Arahant* is under the power of *avijjā*. As long as there is *avijjā*, there is intention. Intention creates *kamma* that attaches itself to the *citta*. Everything we know originates within the *citta*. The *citta* can be understood as the driver or programmer of the body, which is a complex biological robot. If the *citta* intends to think or walk, feel, memorise etc., it will do so using the functions of the body (including the brain).
Dāna	Giving, making gifts, generosity.
Desanā	A talk on Dhamma; the exposition of the doctrine.
Deva	Literally, "shining one". A *deva* is an inhabitant of any of the heavens of sensual bliss which are immediately above the human realm.
Dhamma	The supreme truth; the way things are in and of themselves, and the basic principles which underlie their behaviour. Dhamma is also used to refer to the teachings of the Buddha.
Dhammo	A *parikamma* (preparatory) word used for the recollection of the teaching (Dhamma) during meditation practice.
Dhutanga	The *dhutangas* are a set of thirteen specialised ascetic practices that Buddhist monks voluntarily undertake.
Diṭṭhi	Views, opinions.
Dosa	Hatred or ill-will
Dukkha(ṁ)	Disease, discomfort, discontent, suffering and pain. *Dukkha* refers to the unsatisfactory nature of all phenomena, and is one of the universal characteristics of existence, the other two being *anicca* and *anattā*. The existence of *dukkha* is the first of the four noble truths.

Ehipassiko	An invitation to come and see to know for yourself. Ehipassiko is a traditional epithet for the Dhamma.
Evaṁ	Thus, in this way. This term is used in Thailand to formally close a Dhamma talk.
Jhāna	Various states of meditative absorption, including the four *rūpa* and the four *arūpa-jhānas*.
Kāma	Desire of the senses, especially sexual desire.
Kamma	The law of cause and effect; intentional acts of body, speech and mind which result in becoming and birth. Actions can be good, bad or neutral, and so have good, bad or neutral kammic results.
Kammaṭṭhāna	Literally, *kamma* (action) and *ṭhāna* (a region or place). The accepted meaning of *kammaṭṭhāna* in the Thai Forest Tradition is "the basis of work" for a practicing Buddhist monk, namely, the training of *sati* and *samādhi*, and the contemplation of certain meditation themes that are conducive to uprooting the defiling forces of greed, hatred and delusion from his *citta*.
Khandha(s)	Literally, heap, group or aggregate. The term *khandhas* usually refers to the five physical and mental components of personality, namely, *rūpa, vedanā, saññā, saṅkhāra* and *viññāṇa.* See appendix
Khaṇika	Momentary. The initial stage of *samadhi* in which the *citta* "converges" into a still calm state for only a moment before withdrawing on its own.
Kilesa(s)	Normally translated as defilements, *kilesas* are negative psychological and emotional forces existing within the hearts and minds of all beings. The usual list includes greed, aversion and delusion in their various forms: passion, hypocrisy, arrogance, envy, conceit, stinginess, worry, laziness, and all kinds of more subtle variations. All *kilesas*, however, are the fangs or soldiers of *avijjā*.
Lobha	Greed.

Magga	Path, usually referring to the eight-fold path leading to *Nibbāna*, namely, right view, right thought, right speech, right action, right livelihood, right effort, right mindfulness and right concentration. When it is used in the phrase "*magga*, *phala* and *Nibbāna*", *magga* refers to the four path moments leading to *Sotāpanna*, *Sakadāgāmī*, *Anāgāmī* and *Arahant*. The path leading to the cessation of *dukkha* is the last of the four noble truths.
Mahā	Great, superior. In Thailand, a person with a degree in *Pāli* studies is granted the title Mahā.
Majjhima	Middle, appropriate, just right.
Māna	Conceit.
Māra	Temptation; the evil one, the personification of evil or the devil.
Mettā	Friendliness, pure love, loving kindness.
Moha	Delusion.
Muditā	Gladness at the wellbeing of others. It is one of the four *brahmavihāras*, along with *mettā*, *karuṇā* and *upekkhā*.
Nāma	Literally, ''name'', as in *nāma-rūpa* (name and form), one of the links in the *Paṭiccasamuppāda.* It is also used to refer to the mental components of personality (*nāma-khandhas*), which include feelings, memory, thought and consciousness, in contrast to *rūpa-khandha* which is the strictly physical component.
Nibbāna	Literally, "extinguished"; liberation; the release of the *citta* from mental outflows (*āsava*) and the 10 fetters (*saṁyojana*) which bind it to the round of rebirth. As this term is also used to refer to the extinguishing of fire, it carries connotations of stilling, cooling and peace. *Nibbāna* is the ultimate goal of Buddhist training; it is the deathless, a state without conditioned aspects, beyond space and time.
Nimitta	A sign; a mental image, usually visual, that arises in meditation practice.

Nirodhā	Cessation. The cessation of *dukkha* is the third of the four noble truths.
Nīvaraṇa	Hindrance. The five hindrances to meditation are sensual desire; anger and ill will; sloth and torpor; restlessness; and worry and doubt.
Pāli	The ancient language in which Theravāda Buddhist texts (the *Pāli* canon) are written. Most of the terms italicised in this book are *Pāli* words.
Paññā	Wisdom, discernment, insight, common sense, ingenuity.
Pāramī	Perfection, perfect fulfilment. Ten virtues to be perfected to become a Buddha; spiritual practices conducive to liberation. In Thailand, the term *pāramī* refers to virtues and spiritual techniques which one has trained for lifetimes and which then form the basis of one's practice in this life.
Parikamma	A preparatory meditation object. The most common *parikammas* are the inflow and outflow of the breath around the tip of the nose, or the mental repetition of the word *buddho*.
Parinibbāna	Final (total) *Nibbāna* attained at the death of the Buddha or any of the *Arahants*.
Paṭicca-samuppāda	Dependent Origination. The *paṭiccasamuppāda* is a concise statement of how fundamental ignorance (*avijjā*) conditions the rise of the whole cycle of repeated existence.
Peta	The dead, departed; a hungry ghost. The *peta* realm is below the human realm in the thirty-one realms of existence.
Phala	Attainment, realisation, fruition, results. Specifically, *phala* refers to the fruition of any of the four paths leading to *Sotāpanna*, *Sakadāgāmī*, *Anāgāmī* and *Arahant* (see *magga*).
Piṇḍapāta	The daily alms round of *bhikkhus*.
Pīti	Enthusiasm, rapture, joy, delight.

Pūjā	Homage, devotion.
Pure Abodes	See *Suddhāvāsa*.
Rāga	Lust, attachment, desire.
Rukkhamūla	Dwelling at the foot of a tree.
Rūpa	Physical phenomena in general; bodily form; all material form both gross and subtle. In contrast with *nāma* (mental phenomena), *rūpa* is the strictly physical component of personality.
Rūpa-jhāna	Meditative absorption on a single mental form, bodily feeling or image.
Sacca	Truth, true, real.
Saddhā	Faith, belief, conviction.
Sakadāgāmī	Once-returner: a person who has abandoned the first three of the fetters (*saṁyojana*) that bind the *citta* to the cycle of rebirth, and has weakened the fetters of sensual passion and malevolence, and who after death is destined to be reborn in this world only once more. It is the second of the four stages of the noble path culminating in *Arahantship*.
Sālā	A meeting hall.
Samādhi	Meditative calm; tranquillity; firmness and stability; an absorbed concentration which has many levels, from *khaṇika* (momentary *samādhi*) through *upācāra* to *appaṇā* (the deepest state of *samādhi*).
Samaṇa	A contemplative who follows a life of spiritual striving. At the time of the Buddha, a *samaṇa* was considered to embody the ideal of the wandering ascetic.
Sāmaṇera	A novice.
Samatha	Calm, tranquillity.
Sammā	Right, correct.
Sammuti	Convention, relative truth, supposition; anything conjured into being by the *citta*. Conventional reality.

Saṁsāra	The round of rebirth without beginning, in which all living beings revolve. The attainment of *Nibbāna* marks the complete transcendence of the world of *saṁsarā*.
Samudaya	Origin, arising. *Samudaya-sacca* is the truth of the cause of *dukkha,* the second of the four noble truths.
Saṁyojana	Fetter. There are ten fetters or factors that bind the *citta* to the cycle of rebirth: the belief in a self; doubt or uncertainty, especially about the teachings; not keeping the five precepts; sensual desire; ill will; craving for material existence; craving for immaterial existence, for rebirth in a formless realm; conceit; restlessness; and ignorance. See Appendix
Sandiṭṭhiko	Self-evident, immediately apparent, visible here and now. *Sandiṭṭhiko* is a traditional epithet for the Dhamma.
Sangha	The community of the Buddha's disciples. On the conventional level, Sangha refers to the Buddhist monastic order. On the ideal level, it refers to those of the Buddha's followers, whether lay or ordained, who have attained at least the first of the four noble paths culminating in *Arahantship*.
Sankhāra	Formation; condition. As a general term, *sankhāra* refers to all forces which form or condition things in nature and to the formed or conditioned things which result. Most often, *sankhāra* refers specifically to the fourth *khandha* — thought and imagination.
Saññā	Memory and association; recognition of physical and mental phenomena as they arise. The third of the five *khandhas*, *saññā* both recognises the known and gives the meaning and significance to all of our personal perceptions.
Sati	Awareness, mind-emptiness, truly objective seeing. A moment of *sati* is a moment without *kilesas*. *Sati* is often mistranslated as mindfulness.

Satipaṭṭhāna	The practice and method of developing *sati*. It usually refers to the four foundations of *sati* (or awareness) — body, feelings, mind, and phenomena, viewed in and of themselves as they occur.
Sāvaka	A hearer (of the teaching). A disciple of the Buddha, especially a noble disciple.
Sīla	Morality, moral behaviour, moral precepts.
Sotāpanna	Stream-enterer: a person who has abandoned the first three of the fetters (*saṁyojana*) that bind the *citta* to the cycle of rebirth and has thus "entered the stream" leading to *Nibbāna*. The *Sotāpanna* will be reborn seven more times at most, and only into human or higher realms. It is the first of the four stages of the noble path culminating in *Arahantship*.
Suddhāvāsa	The Pure Abodes of the *Anāgāmī*. After death, if the *Anāgāmī* has not yet cut any of the higher fetters, he will appear successively in each of the five Pure Abodes of the *deva* realms: the *aviha*, *atappa*, *sudassa*, *sudassī* and *akaniṭṭha* realms. On the journey he will overcome the higher fetters and attain *Arahantship*.
Sukha	Pleasant, happy, contented.
Sutta	A thread; a discourse of the Buddha in the *Pāli* canon.
Taṇhā	Craving. *Taṇhā* is the cause of *dukkha*, and it takes three forms: craving for sensuality, for becoming and for not becoming.
Tathāgata	Literally, "one thus gone"; one of the epithets a Buddha uses when referring to himself.
Than	(Thai) Venerable; normally used when addressing a monk.
Thera	An elder; a *bhikkhu* who has been in the Sangha for ten or more years.
Theravāda	Literally, "The ways of the Elders". The southern school of Buddhism as found in Thailand, Sri Lanka and Burma.

Thudong	(Thai) The practice of wandering in forests, usually alone, to cultivate meditation practice. It is one of the ascetic austerities (*dhutangas*) practiced by Buddhist monks.
Ti-lakkhaṇa	The three characteristics of existence that are invariably found to be natural to all phenomena, namely, impermanence *(anicca)*, suffering *(dukkha)* and non-self *(anattā)*.
Ti-Piṭaka	The earliest Buddhist canonical texts consisting of three sections: the discourses of the Buddha (*suttas*); the disciplinary rules (*Vinaya*); and the higher Dhamma (*Abhidhamma*).
Upācāra	Approach, access. *Upācāra* refers to the second stage of *samādhi*.
Upekkhā	Neutrality, equanimity, indifference.
Vāsanā	Merit. *Vāsanā* is translated as inherent virtuous tendencies or resources of merit, and it refers to virtues developed in past lives which become part of an individual's ongoing spiritual legacy experienced in the present life.
Vedanā	Feeling; the sensation of pleasure, pain, or neither pleasure nor pain.
Vijjā	Knowing, knowledge; *vijjā* contrasts with *avijjā* (ignorance).
Vimutti	Freedom, deliverance.
Vinaya	The code of conduct and discipline for Buddhist monks, and the scriptures relating to it.
Viññāṇa	Consciousness; cognisance; the act of taking note of sense data, external and internal, as they occur. *Viññāṇa* is the fifth of the five *khandhas*.
Vipāka	Result, fruition; the consequence of action (*kamma*).

Vipassanā	Insight, based on a clear and quiet citta and of such a type as is deep and effective in curing the defilements. It is clear intuitive insight into physical and mental phenomena as they arise and disappear, seeing them as they are in terms of the three universal characteristics and the four noble truths.
Vīriya	Energy. *Vīriya* is one of the seven factors of enlightenment.
Wat	(Thai) Monastery.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The gold that we're looking for doesn't exist anywhere outside of ourselves. Wherever we go, we take it with us, along with the filth covering it. Anything you do to remove the dirt hiding your inner treasure is worthwhile, because the riches will reveal themselves wherever you go. And they'll reveal themselves to the extent they are uncovered. But as long as you don't recognise their presence, you'll be blinded by the world of greed, hate and delusion. So find the treasure inside yourself.

Ajahn Martin Piyadhammo

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