

An Introduction to Buddhist Practice

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***An Introduction
to
Buddhist Practice***

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Table of Contents

<i>An Introduction to Buddhist Practice</i>	7
<i>The Basis of Practice</i>	17
<i>The Importance of Samādhi</i>	23
<i>Developing Meditation</i>	33
<i>A Life of Meditation</i>	41
<i>Investigation for Wisdom</i>	53
<i>The Wisdom of Samadhi</i>	69



An Introduction to Buddhist Practice

When a person is introduced to Buddhism for the first time, the first thing he should do is to forget all about his background of Christianity – and his Christian views and other similar views – and start from scratch.

The story of the Buddha begins like this. The Buddha found that he had a problem and he left home to try to find the answer to this problem. He went searching for teachers, he went to this teacher and then that teacher but he found he still had the problem. Finally he had to go off on his own to search for the solution, because he could not find anyone who knew about it. And he found the answer within himself, and he found the way to get to the state where he got the answer to his question and got free from his problem.

This problem is a fundamental problem that we all have. It is the problem of discontent. You can call it discontent, or suffering, or pain, or sorrow, but here we shall use the word discontent. All the time we are discontented. All the time we are wanting things, and we only want things because we are not contented. If we were contented then we would not want these things. So automatically our wanting is a sign of discontent. Not only wanting of things, but our wanting to move about, go here, go there, do this, do that, wanting to cure all our little irritations, to scratch here and scratch there. We are very much like a dog with a sore on its head. The dog runs about all over the place trying to find a cure for this sore which is on its own head. You also cannot get rid of that problem by running about searching for the answer in the world outside yourself.

So the Buddha said that the cause of this trouble is in fact our own doing. It's our own craving, our own wanting and all the time we are searching for the answer to this in the wrong way. We are searching for it outwardly when we should be searching for it inwardly.

Thus the Buddha taught the Four Noble Truths culminating in the path or the way people should follow to realise the truth. First there is the truth of dukkha, which is discontent or suffering. This is the cornerstone. The second truth is the cause of dukkha, which is craving or wanting. The third truth is the cessation of dukkha, and the fourth one is the path leading to the cessation of dukkha. If we look at these, first there is dukkha which is the problem that we are trying to get rid of. Then there are the causes of our problems. The third is the ceasing of the problems which is the goal we are trying to attain. And fourthly there is the way and the means we must practice in order to attain this goal. It is rather like an illness. If you have an illness, first of all you have to define that illness, then you have to look for the causes, then you have to see the possibility of its complete cure and lastly you have to prescribe and take the right medicine. These are the Four Noble Truths.

The Noble Eight-fold Path is the medicine. The first factor is the factor of Right Understanding or Right View, because as one's understanding or view is, so one reacts. A person who is a capitalist acts in one way, while a communist will act in another way, just due to their differing views of life. So Right View is the right view of life, the right understanding of one's aims and objectives, and the right understanding of the way one should practice.

The second factor is Right Attitude or Intention. This is an attitude of mind which aims at the cessation of dukkha. It is an attitude that is not easily caught up in the world, an attitude that sees what is important in terms of the path one must follow. The realisation of what is essential and what is not, and that the fundamental thing which is important is one's own heart.

The next three factors of the Noble Eight-fold path are Right Speech, Right Action, and Right Livelihood. These are the moral factors. The Buddha gave these because they are causes which will bring about happiness and to some extent undo the discontent we

experience. The difficulty is that the average person cannot see the reasoning behind this. Therefore the Buddha had to give these as a preliminary teaching for people to practice so that they can gradually clean up whatever is causing the trouble inside them and so gradually come to see the connection between their behaviour and the discontent they experience.

Right Speech is speech which is appropriate in the circumstances where it is spoken, speech which is modest and truthful.

Right Action for people living in the world means the five precepts. These are the precepts of training oneself to refrain from killing, to refrain from stealing, to refrain from indulging in wrong forms of sex, to refrain from lying and slander, and to refrain from taking intoxicants of any kind. These are the basic elements of Right Action.

Right Livelihood refers to making a living in such a way as does not involve harming other living beings. It is a livelihood which does not require one to break any of the five moral precepts mentioned above.

The remaining three factors are Right Effort, Right Mindfulness and Right Samādhi. Right Effort means, in fact, the effort one puts forward to both promote one's mind and cure one's mind. It is the effort to get rid of doing evil things and promote doing good things. It is also the effort to avoid evil things which are already there in the mind and also the promotion and development of good things which are already there in the mind.

So Right Effort is the effort to cultivate those things which tend to lead us toward the path, toward the goal. This is often quite an effort. If for instance we are sitting in meditation practice and we feel that we would like to go to sleep but at the same time we realise that we are not really tired, without effort we tend to lie down and go to sleep. Right Effort is the effort to overcome that tendency. Effort here means a mental effort, not merely a physical exertion, but an effort just the same. This is the nature of Right Effort, the effort to see those things which can lead us astray as well as those leading to the path. It is often very easy to get diverted into doing something which we feel is very important for leading us toward the path, such as reading a book about meditation, instead of actually

doing the meditation practice. So lacking in right effort we put the practice to one side.

Right Mindfulness is the keeping of one's mind in the present and on oneself in the sense that one does not forget oneself. One does not let one's mind go out daydreaming, wandering about as if one had forgotten one's own existence. One keeps oneself always in the present, in the here and now, with whatever one is doing. In meditation practice this means keeping one's undivided attention on the object of one's meditation.

Right Effort and Right Mindfulness lead us to Right Samādhi. Samādhi is a technical term which means a state of deep absorption of mind where the mind is completely concentrated on one object. When it is absorbed like this the mind goes very calm, thoughts stop and a brightness arises. It can happen that the whole body disappears until one is left with just pure knowing and nothing else. This is a state of happiness which is more than one has ever experienced before. But this Right Samādhi is not the end result. This is a state where the mind is very clear, very sharp. Coming out of this state one can then use this clarity and sharpness to examine and investigate what one's true nature is.

These last three factors of Right Effort, Right Mindfulness, and Right Samādhi are the basis for Buddhist meditation practice. The first aim is to try to develop Right Samādhi. Samādhi can also be called calm, developing calm. But it is not a calm which the average person knows about. The average person may very occasionally just by chance get into a state of samādhi, but it is rare. And if they do it is usually just a flash and then it is gone. This calm is a state of essential calm where everything has stopped and there is complete stillness. All the disturbances of the mind, running here and running there, stop completely. One realises then that this state is a state of real happiness. After that experience one is never really satisfied until one can get back to that state.

Meditation practice requires a lot of hard work. The instructions for meditation practice make up about 0.01%, the rest of it is a lot of individual effort. There are several meditation techniques but the one perhaps best suited to Westerners is the one in which the breath is used. One pays attention to one's breathing. This is not

a breathing exercise in which the breath is forced or manipulated but one lets the breath go its own way and one just becomes aware of it going in and out. Keep your attention on that point where you feel the breath passing in and out most strongly and try to keep your awareness on the feeling of the breath at that position all the time. If you go on at it for some time, first of all the mind will begin to jump away, thinking about this, thinking about that, all over the place. So when it wanders you have to pull it back again, then it jumps away again and you have to pull it back again. You have to keep on pulling the mind back to the breathing all the time, until eventually it begins to settle down a little bit. Then, when it begins to settle down, you will find a sense of calm which begins to increase and there is no enthusiasm for other things. Then there is less of a tendency for thoughts to jump about. But this does vary from day to day. Some days the mind jumps about all over the place and you cannot do anything to stop it, while on another day it is much better. It varies a lot like that.

Then if you continue in this way you may get a point or a spot appearing. The point may not be visible, it may be just a knowing at a point. Then you should put your attention entirely on the knowing at that point. If you keep your attention on that you will come to realise after a time that this point or knowing and the heart are the same. Then if you can go on further you will find that the “citta” will drop down to the heart. When it drops to the heart there is absolute stillness. That is what we call the attainment of samādhi. Coming out of that state the mind feels absolutely fresh and sharp and clear.

At first this attainment of samādhi is likely to last only a brief moment, and then you may not experience that state again for months. So you must keep at it and try and try again. This happens because instead of putting the attention on the breath and fixing it there, one thinks about that previous state which one attained. So the mind is on the wrong thing. One tends to think about that from experience which is in the past, and this becomes a distraction. It is only when one gives up thinking about that and comes back to the breath in the present with the determination that whatever happens I am going to keep the mind here, that one begins to get results again.

People often get into difficulties because they are looking for experiences that they have had before, instead of trying to do what is necessary here in the present. In other words, they are looking at the effects instead of the causes.

Going on with the practice one can gradually get some measure of control over samādhi. It requires a long time and a great deal of practice until one reaches a point where one can drop into samādhi quickly and easily.

But one must realise that samādhi is not the end result. It is a wonderful state, a wonderful experience, and it makes some people believe that there is a god. But it is not the end result by any means. The reason being that when you get into samādhi it is wonderful while you are there but when you come out you are back in the same old world again. It is not permanent and because it is not permanent it is not the real thing.

One always has to be very analytical in these matters to see whether, in fact, this is a state free of discontent or not. One must contemplate: Have I actually got rid of this discontent or not? Invariably one will find discontent in that state and one must be careful not to get caught.

Wisdom is the only way to seek a permanent solution, free from discontent. In order to gain wisdom the mind must be sharpened up, much as if you want to cut down a tree you must sharpen up the axe. So when the mind is sharp then you can begin attacking whatever burdens the mind and overcome it. It is our own ignorance all the time which leads in the wrong direction, searching for every thing out in the world, always looking the wrong way.

Ignorance or avijjā is the root of the problem and its servants spread out from it. These are the so called kilesas – or defilements, which in their root form consist of greed, hate, and delusion. But they spread out from these three into a whole range of derived qualities including anxiety, worry, slothfulness, laziness, jealousy, stinginess, selfishness, arrogance and so on. The kilesas are always waiting, ready to adapt any of these modes to our thoughts, emotions and actions. But we do not realise that they are there and we do not understand what a burden they are. These are what leads us out into the world, and they act almost like demons. When we are

doing meditation practice, the more success we gain in the practice the more these kilesas will resist and try to stop us.

The reason for this is that these kilesas are in the heart, and Dhamma, the way of truth, is also in the heart. So there is a battle going on. Because the kilesas are situated in the heart they try to use the power of the human mind to force it to go out in the wrong direction. And by using the power of the mind the kilesas are very subtle and they are very clever in their ways of doing this. They act just like demons.

The root of all these kilesas, the big one, is Avijjā or fundamental ignorance. The source of this fundamental ignorance is very deeply rooted in the mind. It is almost as if it is the root of what we are, as though what we are is that fundamental ignorance. So we have to cut this root out, and cutting it out is a very big task. It is as if everything that we are has to be chopped away and something entirely new has to appear. That “new” one is really there all the time but it is covered up and concealed from us underneath a lot of rubbish. The rubbish of the kilesas, the rubbish of avijjā. Only when we get rid of that rubbish will that “new” one become exposed. Only then are we truly free. Only then is the way of the Buddha complete.

As far as the actual meditation practise is concerned people vary in their abilities and their approach, but the sort of ideal way is when we come out of the samādhi practise, the mind is fresh, calm, wieldy, it is flexible and it is fit to be worked. So you can turn it to investigating in the way of wisdom. The first thing to investigate is the first factor which makes up oneself – this body. So investigate the nature of this body, because this body we inherently and automatically think of as self, more than any thing else. So we have to question this body. What is this body? Is it me? Is it mine? Who does it belong to? What is it's nature? Is it beautiful or not? What is it made up of? How does it work? We question this body, we go through it, back and froth, back and forth, until insight comes.

The body is the first thing to look at, this is the big deceiver. In the Bhikkhu ordination ceremony the newly ordained monk is always given five subjects of meditation. Kesa, Loma, Nakhā, Danta, Taco. Hair of the head, hair of the body, nails, teeth, skin. All of these body parts are really leading up to one thing – the skin

which is the biggest deceiver. It deceives us as to what we are, what this body really is. The object of the meditation practise here is to understand the body, to see the body for what it really is. When one can come to the realisation that this body is not me, it does not belong to me, it has a way of it's own and at best one is in charge of it for a short time, then one can come to realise that whatever happens to this body does not really happen to me. It is as though it could be happening to someone else. To the extent that we are successful here, to that extent discontent and suffering will disappear. Concerns about the body, concerns about death, this whole lot will disappear.

The body is something which we grasp at conception, and cling to and become attached to. We want this body because this is a base, a sort of anchor for us. The body itself is neither good nor evil. It is neutral. It is just part of the world, part of nature. The good or evil is not in the body, it is in the heart.

The Buddha divided what we call a “person” up into a.) the body as being the physical base, and b.) the mind which is made up of feeling, memory, thought and consciousness. Simply put, these are the five factors which make up a person. The body is the material side, the other four factors are modifications of what we call the citta. Explaining the citta is quite difficult because there is no true comparison to it in the world at all. To get some idea of this, we may say that the body is the hardware whereas the citta is the software. But it is non-material and there is no way in which one can point to it, because it is the one that is doing the pointing. Its modifications give rise to the phenomena of feeling, memory, thought, and consciousness, but these are all the one changing citta. Thus the citta slits about taking on the characteristics of “consciousness”, then changing and becoming “thought” – or “memory” – or “feeling”. These characteristics are unstable in the same way as the body. So when the body dies these all fall away as well. This means that the mind is also not part of the person. In fact the body and mind are just like tools, like a pair of hands which we make use of. But there is the one inside which is the volitional one, the one that acts intentionally, which is the one which is infected by the kilesas or defilements. This is the one that makes them go in the ways that are evil or the ways that are good.

It is important to understand what is good and what is evil, and thus what is moral for these are often misunderstood. The basis of morality is discontent. Bad or evil are those causes in the world through body or speech which lead to more discontent, more suffering, more pain, more unsatisfactoriness. Those cause which lead to less discontent, less suffering, more contentment, more happiness are what we call good. A problem arises here because most people cannot see the link between the action and the result. It is because of this that the Buddha gave a set of moral precepts for people to follow – for those who cannot see the ways of cause and effect.

From the point of view of the true citta these things are peripheral. The true citta is the citta free from defilements and avijjā. It is difficult to realise how everything we do, think, or remember of feel requires the activity of the citta. Mostly we are so involved with things in the world that we forget ourselves and we forget the citta and the fundamental basis of our existence. For it is the function of the citta which knows, cognises, and experiences everything, rightly or wrongly as it may be. Therefore, the citta is the centre and everything else is peripheral. Usually people think that they have a citta, but this is the wrong way around. We should perhaps ask whether the citta has the person.

So the task we have is to get down to the meditation practice in order to cure those faulty and wrong understanding which cause us so much trouble. Assuming you are doing the breathing practise, you should put your full attention on the breathing. Follow the in and out breaths and wherever you feel the breath most strongly, pin your attention to that point and feel the breath going out and coming back in again. It is like sawing a piece of wood, you must keep your attention right at that point where the saw blade cuts the wood. You do not follow the saw blade moving back and forth, but keep your attention solely on the one point, the point where it makes contact. It is the same with the breath, you watch just at the point where it makes contact. As you continue doing this the breath at that point may become more and more refined. If eventually you reach a point where you feel that the breath goes very, very fine until you can no longer feel it, then continue to keep your attention on that point and it will come back again. When you find that your attention has wandered from this point and thoughts come in,

pull the mind back again quickly. Always try to be aware that the mind has wandered and bring it back quickly to the breath. You really have to develop a monitor within yourself which is constantly on guard and warns you when the mind has gone astray. Sound is one difficult obstacle. The mind will tend to follow sounds and wander away from the meditation object. So when meditating and you hear a sound, this monitor will tell you to beware, so when a sound tries to pull your attention away you resist and hold firmly to the meditation.

In fact, it is necessary to realise that the prime purpose of this practice is to arise mindfulness, and it has been said by teachers that one is only effectively doing the practice when mindfulness is present. If mindfulness is absent one has ceased to do the practice.

There will be many different kinds of distraction to overcome along the way, but if you persist the rewards do come. And when they come they are well worth it. As you progress you will find good results coming in many different ways. You will find that your attention span increases. You will notice that when you are talking with other people, those people cannot keep their mind on the subject. Their minds seem to be jumping all over the place. Once your attention span becomes longer you can see this fault clearly in other people and realise that once “I was just like that myself.” So you begin to realise there was something missing in your outlook which is now self-evident. Gradually you will notice that you see through things in the world, the reasons and the motives behind the things people say and the way people act. You see the deceitfulness which permeates practically everything in the world, and you are no longer fooled by it so easily.

So try hard all the time to keep your mind firmly fixed on the breathing, or whatever your subject of meditation is, resist the distractions which can lead you astray, and keep yourself solely on the path of practise. This is your job. If you do your job well the rewards will come of themselves.



The Basis of Practice

When one begins doing Buddhist meditation it is important to know the reason why one should do it, otherwise one easily becomes confused.

To begin with the Buddha saw that there is one problem which all of us have, the problem of discontent. Everybody is discontented in one way or another. They are always wanting this or wanting that, and wanting means that they are discontented, never satisfied. All of us are like that – we are always wanting things, we are always discontented and we are always trying to cure this discontent. We are forever trying to find some way to cure it. Now if one really has enough wisdom one can cure it, but mostly people go the wrong way about it and they create more discontent for themselves all the time.

So what we have to do is learn the way to understand this process. When one has this discontent, inside one there are things which automatically tend to make one go in the wrong direction. These are greed, hate, and delusion. These are the reasons why we always go in the wrong direction rather than the right direction. It is because these factors are constantly coming up to lead us to do wrong things. So we have to learn about greed, hate and delusion. We have to learn to see them in ourselves. When we realise that the things we do come back on us to produce more discontent, more suffering, then we want to find a way to cure it. People always want to cure their suffering but they are rarely prepared to go out and find the proper way of doing it. Because of that people go about in the world doing the wrong thing time after time and they never do cure themselves, they never get rid of their suffering.

When we realise that this discontent that we have had throughout our lives is caused by ourselves then we realise that we can also cure it. If it was put on us by a God or some other entity, then we would not be able to do much about it. But the fact is, it is we who have done it and we always make our own future. What we do, our actions, lead us to become what we will be in the future. So we must learn to do the right actions and not the wrong ones.

When we want to overcome this problem, we have to employ three factors to begin with. Firstly, we must have good moral behaviour. Moral behaviour in this case means that we practise the five precepts. We train ourselves to avoid killing anything. We train ourselves to avoid stealing, or taking anything that has not been given to us. We train ourselves to avoid wrong forms of sex. We train ourselves to avoid wrong speech. And we train ourselves to avoid taking drinks or drugs which distort the mind. All of these five are actions of body or speech. This is basically what is meant by morality in Buddhism.

Morality in Buddhism is designed to bring us to a sense of happiness, a sense of contentment in this world. It will not reach a very high sense of contentment but it will make us content in the ordinary way of the world. If we go against these moral precepts we make more trouble for ourselves and we find that there is fire inside the heart. So morality is an essential thing because it sets us right with the world.

After morality, the second factor we must develop is the training of our mind. We must train the mind because although we behave properly in the world and do the correct things, our mind is not under control. Our thoughts are wild, they jump here and there all over the place. If we try to control them we find that they are very difficult to control and before long they have jumped away. The meditation practise is in fact involved with the controlling of thoughts. This is what we have to do in meditation practise. The reason why we have to do this is to make the mind strong. When the mind is distracted and jumping about it is not very strong. If we wish to find out things which are necessary to be found out it becomes difficult because the mind refuses to stick on them.

The sort of things which it is necessary to find out about are re-

ally the answer to the question: “who and what am I?” To find the answer we must start by looking at ourselves, looking at the body and the mind. When we do the meditation to control the mind, we will find that as we continue on doing it we gain a sense of contentment and happiness. It is rather like doing work. Say you have a job to do which you must do even though you do not particularly like doing it. So you get down to it and to begin with the going is rough and progress is slow because the mind jumps about and will not stick on it. As time goes on the mind gradually remains more and more on that work until it starts to become interesting. When interest comes it is easy to keep the mind on the work. Eventually it may become so absorbing that you forget everything else.

Meditation practise is like this too. We have to put our mind onto a particular object and keep it on that. At first the mind does not want to do it and it jumps about. Then after a time, as we put more effort into it and it becomes more habitual, the practise becomes a little more interesting, until we reach a point where we look forward to doing the meditation practise. At this stage a sense of happiness and contentment will arise in connection with our practice. This is the way of what we call “samādhi”, the meditation practice which makes the mind strong. The reason we develop samādhi is that when the mind is strong then we can develop wisdom.

Wisdom is the investigation of this body to understand what actually this body really is. Is it something which is beautiful or not beautiful? If we think that it is beautiful, suppose we take the skin off, would it be beautiful then? Look inside at the internal organs, the bones, everything inside this body. We will come to see that this body is not quite what we thought it was. We have to ask: who does this body belong to ? Is it mine? When we investigate this carefully we see that, no it is not ours. The body comes from the world, it relies on the world and it goes back to the world. The world is the owner of this body, not me. So the body is something which is separate from us. If we can realise this very deeply, then we will find that a lot of our troubles disappear because the concern for the body disappears. The belief that when we die everything is gone, that goes as well because we realise as well that when death comes it is just the body which dies. The body dies and goes back to the world, but the one that really matters does not die, it stays

the same. If we can come to this realisation then we will really gain some deep understanding.

As we go on with this practice of developing wisdom, the factors of greed, hatred, and delusion begin to die away. They die away because the one thing they cannot stand is being seen. It is like a dark room, if one turns on a light the room is immediately bright, regardless of how long it may have previously been dark. It is the same within ourselves. If we can see the true nature of this and realise the truth in a deep way, then the things which have deluded us for a long, long time just disappear. After all, delusion is something which can be eliminated just by realisation. And this can happen very quickly. Once we are in the right state to understand the realisation will come, simultaneously the delusion will go. When the delusion goes these three factors – greed, hatred, delusion – tend to die away gradually. Bit by bit they disappear. Problems we have had in the past just dry up. This is the purpose of the practice because when these delusions start disappearing within us there is a sense of lightness and buoyancy. We feel bright and we know where we are going. We feel quite confident about the future. We know that what ever happens our future will be good. This is very important.

This is basically the way of Buddhism, the path that it goes along. The fundamental cause of why we should practice Buddhism is the fact that we all have discontent, we are not satisfied. And so we can see that the cause of this discontent is ourselves. We have produced the causes and we have produced them because of delusion and ignorance. It is out of ignorance which is very deeply rooted and cannot be eliminated merely by learning or knowing about it. With the ordinary ignorance in the world we just learn about that thing and the ignorance of it disappears. But fundamental ignorance will not disappear so easily because it is so very deeply rooted. It is a kind of blindness where we cannot see, even when we have ignorance, because of which we are always going and doing the wrong things. And although we are doing the wrong things we think those things are right. We think that this is the way to overcome our discontent. But our fundamental understanding is wrong so it does not turn out that way. Instead, the wrong things we do we accumulate for our future. So that in the future we will experience

the bad results that come from wrong actions, which equals more discontent. So we have to learn to overcome these delusions, the greed and the hate within us. If we can accomplish that then all of our problems will disappear automatically.

As to meditation practice itself, probably the best approach for Westerners is to do the breathing practice. This is not a breathing exercise. It merely uses the breath as a convenient object to pin ones attention on. If you can sit comfortably cross-legged then do so, but in any case sit down comfortably in any manner which suits your best, being careful to sit upright and not to slouch. It should be a sitting posture which you can maintain for quite a long time. Then you should put your attention on your breathing somewhere in the area of the nose or the upper lip, wherever you feel the passing of the breath the strongest. Keep your attention right on that point and watch carefully as the breath comes in and goes out, constantly in-out, in-out all the time. After a short time you will find that the mind jumps away, thinking of this and that, and so your attention is no longer on the breath. You must strive to recognise this as soon as you can and bring the mind back to the breath. Soon it jumps away somewhere else and again you have to bring it back, over and over again, bring the mind back to the meditation practise. As you become more practised try to anticipate distractions arising before the mind actually jumps away or while it is experiencing distraction so that you can stop these thoughts before they have a chance to drag you away.

The factor which is essential here all the time is what we call mindfulness. It means keeping ones attention on what one is doing in the present, here and now. When practising breathing meditation you should strive to notice the feeling of the breath the whole of the time it is going out and the whole of the time it is coming in. Keep your attention right there and be aware of it continuously. As you become more skilled at this it becomes more interesting and your attention becomes more acute until you become engrossed in an effort to make it more and more precise, more and more exact so that your mind remain solely on the breath to the exclusion of all else. This is where the interest comes up. You can continue doing this until all you have left is breathing and nothing else. When you reach that stage then the mind is becoming very well concentrated.

It can then go further where your point of attention drops to the heart and breathing stops. If you find that the breathing stops, do not worry. The breath will come back again. If you can reach that point where your attention drops down to the heart you will find that this state is the happiest moment that you have ever experienced. This is a point, a state, where everything else disappears and there remains just knowingness and nothing else at all. Such is the state that you will not be satisfied until you can get back to it again.

This however is not the end result. This is a state of deep samādhi. If you can get to that state then the mind becomes very concentrated. Coming out of that state your mind is calm and wieldy, very flexible, and you can turn the mind to investigating the body or whatever you like and the mind will go into it very easily. Because the state of samādhi is so very pleasant there is a tendency for the mind to become attached to it to the exclusion of the investigation practice. If that should happen you must make an effort to do the work at hand which is the investigation of the body. You have to turn your mind to the investigation practice once it has become well rested in samādhi.

The important thing to realise about meditation practice is that it is keeping your attention on the practice, keeping your attention on what you are doing. The attention is what matters. Without the attention it is not meditation practice. Meditation is really training your attention, training yourself not to let the mind wander to distant things, or into the past or future. Keep your mind here and now.

The trouble is that ever since birth we let our minds wander about all over the place. It has become habitual. It has come to the point now where we are taught that this incessant thinking is desirable, that we should be up with all the latest news on everything which is happening. Consequently our minds are jumping about all over the place. The more they jump about, the more unhappiness we experience, because concentration, contentment and happiness are all the same thing. If we are concentrated, we are happy. Happiness comes from controlling our minds. Then we have a refuge firmly established within ourselves.



The Importance of Samādhi

Samādhi is a Buddhist technical term which means a state of deep absorption of mind where the mind is completely concentrated on a single object to the exclusion of all else. This state is attained through the practice of meditation. It is experienced in practice as a state of profound calm which has many levels and variations depending on the degree of absorption of the mind with the meditation object. When the mind attains a level of absorption in samādhi, the mind becomes completely still and unperturbed. As this happens all thoughts will stop and a brightness will appear. Everything stops and there is total stillness. Samādhi represents a state of ease and contentment greater than anything that a person has experienced before.

Herein lies the great value of samādhi. By focusing the mind on one solitary object and holding it there constantly one can gain a temporary respite from the vicissitudes of this world and the inevitable discontent which follows from them. Happiness and peace of mind are things which everyone in the world desires, and rightly so. And the search for a meaningful state of happiness begins with samādhi.

In the development of samādhi the value of good, solid moral behaviour cannot be overestimated. Morality means bringing our actions and speech into line with a high moral standard and maintaining that standard of behaviour throughout our daily lives. Moral behaviour creates in the mind a sense of freedom from contention with others and a freedom from guilt within oneself. This in turn brings one a feeling of harmony with everything in ones environment. It is this feeling of harmony which is important for develop-

ing samādhi. This harmony is a degree of happiness which arises within oneself. But in order for happiness to arise, one must change oneself internally and that process begins with the self-restraint of good moral behaviour.

Morality is the foundation of samādhi because once one has managed to develop sufficient restraint at the grosser levels of action and speech then one can more easily tackle the subtle level of restraining the mind. Restraining the mind properly involves training the mind so as to gain some measure of control over it. Morality provides a firm basis for this but no more. So one must start to train the mind, because although one behaves properly in the world one's mind is still not under control. One's thoughts are always jumping wildly about from one sense stimuli to another without ever coming to a rest. They are so overwhelming that they carry one's mind along willy-nilly resisting every attempt to rein them in. The practice of samādhi is in fact concerned with bringing these wandering thoughts under control. In order to reduce the power of one's thoughts and bring them gradually to a halt one must get the mind to a point where it no longer wants to go out searching for sense stimuli, a point which brings a sense of ease and fulfilment to the mind so that it settles down and no longer hankers after external things.

Normally the mind is hungry. It wants sensation and it is searching around all the time trying to satisfy this craving for sensation. It wants to think about all sorts of distracting things because it is hungry for external sense stimuli. The mind is constantly striving for happiness by going out into the world. But this is looking in the wrong direction because these sensations, no matter how abundant, are not really satisfying. A person can indulge them on and on indefinitely and never find any true satisfaction. In fact they just increase the hunger for sense gratification and the accompanying feeling of discontent.

So one must turn one's attention inward and cut through all of that mess of thoughts and stop them temporarily through meditation. By this method one can develop samādhi and gain satisfaction internally. When that happens the mind becomes absolutely still so there is no tendency for it to go wandering out searching

for sense stimuli. When it is satisfied in this manner the mind is pliable and adaptable so that it can easily be turned to do the work of contemplation. When one turns it to do the meditation practice it will stay on that subject where you place it. The mind is then a powerful weapon which can be used to cut through the defilements and really make an impact on them.

In taking up the practice of samādhi one must cut off all sense objects and give the mind just one object to attend to. Mindfulness is the essential factor here. Mindfulness is what holds the mind in place on the object. At first it is very difficult to hold the mind in place. Force of habit inclines it to wander about and jump at sensation as it always has. But as one perseveres using mindfulness one gets into it and interest arises, then the mind becomes gradually more absorbed in the practice until all of the external distractions start dropping away automatically. The mind goes inward and remains there quietly at rest. A sense of satisfaction arises in the heart and all the hunger subsides. It is fully prepared to remain there calm and contented. Even when withdrawing from this pleasant state the fulfilment remains so that the mind no longer feels hungry for sensation at that time.

Samādhi practise is comparable to a young calf which has been taken away from its mother and tied by a rope to a post. At first the calf is greatly disturbed as it brays and jumps about trying to get away. But because it is tied firmly to the post, try as it will it cannot escape. After a time its resistance weakens and gradually accepting the situation it lies down and goes to sleep at the foot of the post. The mind engaged in samādhi practice is like this too. It wants its mother — its external objects — because it believes that these represent a way to happiness. But if one withdraws the mind from those objects and fixes it firmly to the post of the meditation object with mindfulness, which is the rope holding it, then it will gradually go quieter and quieter until it gives way and goes into samādhi.

There are several different methods which are recommended for those taking up the practice of samādhi. These methods are a means to an end, and that end result is a state of calm. These methods all use a meditation object which is known to be appropriate to a broad range of people. This kind of object and the meditation

practice based on it are referred to as the parikamma, which means the preparatory meditation. It is called preparatory because it gives the mind something firm to latch on to and this prepares the ground work for the meditation to develop correctly.

The parikamma perhaps best suited to Westerners in general is ānāpānasati or mindfulness of breathing which uses the breath itself as an object. Ones attention is focused on ones breath. This is not a breathing exercise where one forces the breath to do anything in particular, but rather one merely becomes aware of it going in and out naturally. This practice simply uses the breath as a convenient object to pin ones attention on. One should keep ones attention focused on that point where the breath passes in and out, somewhere in the area of the nose or the upper lip, wherever one feels most strongly the sensation of the passing breath. Keep attentive right at that point and watch carefully as the breath comes in and goes out continuously. The mind does not want to stay put at first so after a short time it will jump away, thinking of this and that, so that ones attention is no longer with the breath. One must try to recognise this drifting of the mind as soon as possible and bring it back quickly to the breath. Soon it will jump away again and again it must be brought back, over and over again.

One must continue to pull the mind back to the breathing all the time, until eventually it begins to settle down. When it does begin to settle a sense of calm will appear and begin to increase until there is little enthusiasm for other things. With the increased calm there is less of a tendency for ones thoughts to jump about.

One should keep ones attention right at that point of the breath where the calm begins to appear and be aware of it continuously. As one becomes more skilled at attending to this point it becomes more interesting and ones attention becomes more acute until one becomes engrossed in an effort to make it more and more precise, more and more exact, until the mind remains solely on the breath to the exclusion of everything else. When one reaches this stage the mind has become very well concentrated.

Then one must learn how to repeat this process again and again, so as to be able to attain a state of deep concentration whenever one wants to. The time will then come one day when ones centre

of attention gravitates to the heart and remains there for a time in absolute stillness. When the citta integrates down into the heart like this then everything stops, even the breath. This complete calm and stillness in the heart is the full attainment of samādhi.

Whichever parikamma one uses to prepare the mind to attain samādhi, the end result will be the same – a state of calm in the heart. Another common parikamma method to achieve this result is the use of a word to hold ones attention. This entails the repetition of a single word, saying it silently and internally over and over again, focusing only on the sound of that one word. The most common words used in Buddhist meditation are: “Buddho, Dhammo, and Sangho”. All three of these words have a spiritual and emotional content where Buddhist are concerned and are therefore suitable as parikammas because they carry connotations which pull one toward the Dhamma.

Let us assume that one does the practice for samādhi using the word Buddho. One should focus on the continuous repetition of “Buddho” simply being aware of each repetition. One should not think about anything else except “Buddho, Buddho, Buddho”, repeating it over and over again in the mind. One should forget all about the past and future and resist any temptation to speculate about the results which may arise from the Buddho practice. Simply work at the repetition of the parikamma. This creates the appropriate causes, step by step, which will gradually produce the results of samādhi. This is an important principle to remember.

The use of a meditation word such as Buddho is very much a personal matter. It can be repeated quickly or slowly according to what seems suitable at any particular time. It can be broken up into two syllables – “Bud” and “dho” – and these can be used in conjunction with the breathing practice. For instance, “Bud” on the in-breath and “dho” on the out-breath. Whatever suits ones particular needs and focuses ones mind in on the practice this is the way one should go.

People who practice the way of Buddhist meditation must necessarily be a bit inventive. Most cannot get very far without working out their own methods. People have all sorts of peculiar ways which suit just them, methods which they have devised for themselves.

Seeing specific problems they have found ingenious ways of overcoming them which are not necessarily suited to anyone else.

This applies to one's choice of meditation object itself, whether it be "Buddho" or the "breathing practice" or some combination of the two. One should investigate for oneself to discover which practices best counteract the wayward tendencies of one's own mind. For example, some people find that the repetition of "Buddho" is very effective for suppressing words and thoughts. Concentrating on the one word "Buddho" quells all other thoughts at that time.

The spiritual and devotional connotations of "Buddho" can be important to develop here as well. For a person with a certain rigidity of character which easily turns into scepticism, faith is the factor which is required to overcome this tendency. If the "Buddho" can help to develop faith then it will probably help to get past the blockage. Ultimately, "Buddho" represents the pure citta, the "one who knows" personified in the Buddha himself.

In general one should choose a practice, whether "Buddho" or the breath, and stick to it faithfully until results begin to appear. If however one is experiencing trouble with the chosen object of meditation the one should try changing that object for something new. Conversely, if the practice is already going well enough then one should not change unnecessarily. It is not beneficial to chop and change about too much. And one should experiment with one system as thoroughly as possible before rejecting it as ineffective and switching to another. But if, after applying concerted effort to a system for a sufficient length of time one gains no confidence in that practice, then one should consider other options – say switching from the breath to "Buddho" or vice versa.

A word of caution here concerning various states of meditative absorption collectively referred to as jhāna. Jhāna states are often mentioned in the Buddhist sutta texts and some people wonder why they are not more emphasised by teachers today. In fact, unlike states of samādhi that one normally experiences, the jhānas are extremely difficult to get into and maintain in any way. Someone who does not possess the natural ability to attain these states should not attempt to develop them. If a person possesses an innate ability to develop these states so well and good. They will come naturally

as a product of ones own development in meditation. But for the great majority of people the straight forward method of developing samādhi gradually for a basis of calm and then using that basis of calm to develop wisdom is the natural way. For these people to try to get into Jhāna would be a waste of time. On the other hand, if a person does have the ability to attain Jhāna naturally then he must follow that way.

If a person actually has an experience of Jhāna then a qualified teacher can discuss it with that person individually, but otherwise just discussing it in a general way would not be appropriate because it is too high. Jhāna is a very high state which is beyond the average person to contemplate meaningfully. So it is wrong to equate states of samādhi that are normally experienced with Jhāna since there is not necessarily any connection at all. Jhāna is not essential to the development of wisdom and freedom from the kilesas.

The factor that is absolutely essential all the time in meditation practice is mindfulness. Without mindfulness present one cannot call it meditation. Mindfulness is the rope which secures the mind firmly to the meditation object and as such is really the foundation of samādhi practice. Mindfulness, presence of mind, keeping ones attention in the present, here and now – this is central to training the mind. Mindfulness means keeping ones attention on the practice to the exclusion of everything else. Attention is the main thing. One should learn to be attentive, constantly increasing ones attention span until there are no gaps where the mind drifts away. If one keeps on the one object everything extraneous to the practice is forgotten because interest is focused solely on that object.

When taking up the practice it is very important to recognise the obstacles to samādhi. They are the enemy and one must learn to know them well. These obstacles are the factors which prevent one from getting into samādhi. Probably the most prevalent obstacle is just lack of attention, which means a lack of mindfulness. Mindfulness here is the quality which simply keeps the mind on what it should be doing without letting it wander here and there. The factor that most people need is the effort to restrain the mind from wandering about in order to keep it focused where one wants it to stay. It is the effort to watch the mind closely, keeping in mind that

distractions are on the horizon and not giving in to them. It is almost as if one fixes ones attention on the meditation object but out of the corner of ones eye one is watching vigilantly for any distracting thoughts which may be arising, checking and rechecking constantly.

Persevering with mindfulness in this way the mind reaches a point where it is no longer interested in distractions so it settles down and enters in a state of samādhi. Ultimately, with constant practise, one should be able to develop samādhi until one can go into it easily anytime. Not everyone can develop samādhi this far, but ideally one should be able to attain a certain expertise with it. Once one has gained a certain expertise with samādhi one can use this calm, undistracted mind to develop wisdom. The ultimate purpose of the samādhi practise is the development of wisdom. It is necessary to have the samādhi initially in order to get to the wisdom stage, so samādhi is the firm foundation of the whole meditation practise.

After accomplishing a certain proficiency with samādhi one must the turn away from samādhi and its attractive sense of contentment and turn deliberately to investigating for wisdom. Samādhi by itself will not automatically turn into wisdom and understanding. Wisdom must be cultivated – one must work at it and it is hard work. It is hard work because the mind which has been lulled into contentment by samādhi does not want to be burdened with the work of researching, investigating and analysing which are essential for the development of wisdom. The mind with samādhi does not wish to be disturbed from its calm so it resists making the effort required to solve its problems. Because of this there is a danger that someone who has attained a fair degree of success with samādhi will then become stuck in samādhi without any desire to extricate himself from this attachment.

Since samādhi will not develop wisdom on its own, it is important to realise that one must make a firm determination to put down the samādhi practice and pick up the wisdom practice. One has to turn to the basic fundamentals of investigation and analysis, starting from scratch as it were. It is almost like starting from the beginning again with wisdom, as one did when developing the samādhi practice. It is not that one abandons the samādhi practice but rather that one uses it to complement the investigation for wisdom. One still uses

the samādhi practice periodically as it is required to keep the mind in a calm, bright, flexible state so that it may better do the work of examination step by step.

Then when one wants to find out the truth about the body or the mind one can direct ones attention easily to where investigation is required and it will remain on that point and do the work in a reasonable fashion. Whereas if one does the investigation in ordinary consciousness then it will not settle on any one object long enough to probe deeply into it. Instead the mind jumps from object to object because it is still hungry for sensation. So everything gets jumbled and a reasonable understanding does not arise.

Although samādhi and wisdom are complementary, while one is still learning the two are not necessarily very much together, which means to say that they are practised separately with very little overlapping. One practices samādhi until the mind is refreshed and invigorated, and then one takes up the separate task of examining oneself. Samādhi is quiet and pleasant, unperturbed by the normal vicissitudes of the mind, while investigating seems rather unpleasant by comparison because it requires a lot of thinking. It requires that the mind think about things that it would naturally rather avoid thinking about, such as the nature of the body, the nature of the senses and the nature of our pervading sense of discontentment. This is a type of thinking and reflecting which goes directly against the grain of the kilesas.

It is only when one develops the wisdom practice until one sees really profound results in oneself that one realises that in fact, as far as happiness is concerned, the sense of contentment that comes from developing wisdom is far superior than that experienced in samādhi. The samādhi tends to come and go but the wisdom one develops remains there all the time, it is not easily lost. Once wisdom is fixed in the heart it affects every thing one does, and because it steadily destroys the kilesas, calm and happiness automatically increase as those factors which create the agitation and discontent are gradually reduced.



Developing Meditation

Fundamentally, the Teaching of Buddhism concerns oneself. One has a problem, a big problem, and the whole of the Teaching is to correct this problem. The problem is that one has discontent or suffering and this discontent is always there, all the time. In little things, big things, always we are in some way dissatisfied. You may think how, whenever you want something you only want it because you do not have it and that means there is dissatisfaction until you get that thing.

When you feel a state of disharmony which arises as “*dukkha*”¹ there is discontent so you search for something to overcome that disharmony. Then, because disharmony is continually arising, you and all the rest of us suffer and so we are always searching, always looking for things. This constant searching all the time is a symptom of our problem, the problem of “*dukkha*”, of suffering and how we can find a satisfactory solution to it. This is in fact the problem of everybody not just Buddhists but everybody throughout the world. It is the problem of animals also in much the same way.

Because of this discontent we search around. The way in which we do this always involves the use of cause and effect. We have a problem and we think “how or what will be effective or what will be the ‘cause’ to overcome this state”. And so we always use cause and effect, which is right, but we lack wisdom and because we lack wisdom we are always doing the wrong thing. Usually we put ourselves into a situation that was worse than we were in before. This is because we cannot see the way things work and it so happens that the way we usually do things is just the opposite of what we should do. You can see the truth of this in any newspaper. You can

see the way people act and you may think, “Is that the right way to act? Is that the way to get rid of their suffering and discontent?”

People go stealing, mugging, killing others and all the rest, and their reason for doing this is that in some way they are searching for happiness for themselves. They do it in this way because they believe that this is the way for them to get happiness. It should be obvious how, because of their ignorance, they do all the wrong things and they only bring more trouble to themselves than they had before, while at the same time causing trouble and disturbance to other people.

Therefore in Buddhism the first thing we have to learn is to realise what our own situation is. We have to see that this discontent is always with us and we have to realise that the usual ways in which people go about curing it in the world are rather ineffective. If these ways were effective people would know it and they would all be following them. But, in fact, it is the way of people in the world to think, “this is the good and wonderful way” until they find it does not work. They try another way. It does not work. They try yet another way, it does not work either and the reason is that they are doing things based entirely on their feelings and emotional reactions. They think “that sounds good, I’ll do this” and it’s like a goat going along thinking, “I’ll have a nibble of this, I’ll see if this will do”. It doesn’t taste very good and he tries something else. A nibble at that. There is no reason behind it, it’s just what he feels and this is the way people act where discontent is concerned. So what we have to do is try to find some way to gain wisdom. Then we can really come to know what way we should act so that our wisdom tells us what we should put into action. But it may be quite a long time before we are able to do that, so in the meantime we should out of faith act in those right ways that were taught by the Buddha. To start with this means the practice and maintenance of moral behaviour.

We want to have wisdom so as to know just how we should act at all times, but what do we do if we haven’t got wisdom? We don’t know where to start, so we have to train ourselves gradually. In the meantime we have to have a certain code of action which will tide us over until we can see for ourselves. This replaces faith in

the sense of “belief” because we see for a fact that what we have done works and we see why it works. We see for ourselves what is good and bad, what is helpful and what is right, what is baneful and what is completely wrong. Thus for instance, our constant restless thoughts running here and there thinking of this and that in a most uncontrolled way. Most people are not even aware of them for they are flowing on all the time like a stream going on and on. After we have done a lot of training even though such thoughts still arise in us because of habit which is very strong, yet we will see and know that these thoughts are bad and that these thoughts are all going in the wrong direction.

So one must control them and restrain them until one reaches a state of calm and steadily as one goes on doing these results come, insight develops and one comes to see for oneself what is right and what is wrong. One also sees the discontent one has in the present and when this becomes apparent the desire to cure it becomes stronger.

When one sees these things one also finds that the attractions of the world become less attractive. The world takes on a rather shabby appearance. Those things that once seemed to be so good in the world then make one think, “well, what are they?”. For example, think of food, a really good meal. How long does it take you to eat it? Twenty minutes? Where is it then? It’s gone. You have wanted and looked forward to food for such a long time and then you get it and in 20 minutes it’s all gone. Nothing is left, nothing but the memory.

It’s the same way with life. Life is like that, always wanting to look forward to things, always wanting to go and find and get these things that we desire all the time. But usually when we get them and there they are, they last a very short time and then they are gone.

Even if one wants to do things over and over again to try to get satisfaction from it, what happens? One gets used to it and before long one no longer finds any “taste” in it and then one easily gets into trouble because one gets caught by it like the cigarettes and drugs that people take. See how people take them and think, “what a wonderful sensation” and they want it again. They think, “Oh, this is a good thing” and they take it again and again and again.

After some time it doesn't have the same effect and they have to take more and more and in the end it kills them.

That's the way life is, but when one sees the world and the way it is the desire for it tends to drop away and eventually one sees that there is really nothing to do except to train oneself. Everything else is playing around, just playing games which are pointless. To begin with you must train yourself where you can and where you understand what is the right way.

The right way is the teaching of the Buddha. So when one finds out about the dukkha or discontent that is in oneself one will want to cure it, so one takes on the moral precepts. One resolves to practice those things which make for restraint in oneself. One practises the moral teaching as a basis, but beyond this there are higher forms of training which need to be developed.

In Buddhism we divide training into three levels. First there is body, second speech and third mind and the way of training the body and speech are the Five Precepts², the basis for the moral training for the lay person.

These are the basic rules and restraints which make our relationship to the world and to other people correct and orderly. They make for freedom from contention with others and from guilt within oneself. So in themselves these moral rules bring harmony and happiness to us in this world. They are the correct way of behaviour with regard to speech and action.

Beyond this there is the training of the mind. Earlier on we talked about the need to develop wisdom but unfortunately this cannot be done directly, just by wanting wisdom. Although there are some people who have innate wisdom, they will not be able to bring it out and use it properly without having enough mindfulness to support and control it. Nor should one think that wisdom means intellectual thought, for wisdom is of quite a different order and can only arise from an internal state of calm. Therefore the first necessity of mental training is to attain a state of calm.

Calm and samādhi³ are the same thing. "Samatha" means calm and its practice is the practice of samādhi. This is what practically everyone has to develop if they want to attain wisdom and a state

of happiness beyond what is normally possible in this world. Having attained calm or Samādhi the way is then clear for the development of wisdom.

Developing Samādhi can be put like this. Normally the heart is hungry, it wants something and it is searching around all the time. The only way it knows how to search is through the senses and in the world because this is what it has learnt. It wants this, searches for that, looks for this, wants to hear that, and so on all the time. It goes out and what it gets from the world and what it gets by doing this never satisfies the hunger. In fact it tends to increase it if anything.

The heart is still hungry after all the searching one has done, so the way to satisfy the heart is not by going out but by going in the opposite direction. One must withdraw one's attention away from sense stimuli, memory and thoughts both discursive and playful, and one must give the mind as little as possible to hold onto. One allows one's attention to remain only with the subject of meditation, such as the repetition of "Buddho" or watching one's breathing. The mind is given only this one thing to hold onto, one anchor.

At first it is very difficult for the mind still wanders and jumps about, but as one goes on it becomes more used to it, and interest starts to arise. When interest arises the tendency to run around does not take place so much. You have probably noticed how when you have had some work to do, something which at first you did not want to do but you had to do it, when you got deeply into it the work started to become interesting. After that it was no longer such a hard task. It was much easier and could be done without much hardship.

It's like that with meditation practice. At first it's hard work but once you get into it then interest arises and once that happens the mind becomes more and more absorbed in the practice. When it becomes absorbed then the external things all start dropping away automatically. The mind goes right inward and when it goes inward and stays there it gets complete rest, and the heart is fulfilled internally and it feels quite satisfied. Because it is satisfied, when it comes out of that state it no longer wants to search so it no longer searches around looking for things. It is prepared to remain just there — still.

Withdrawing from this state of absorption the mind is replete, satisfied, as though it has had a good meal. It is also wieldy and pliable and this state can be turned to good advantage by developing wisdom because the main obstacles to its development are quelled for a time. Instead of being restless, fluctuating and wandering, the mind is in a suitable state which can be used for investigation and it can go very, very deep. This is true wisdom and this wisdom gives results.

In the normal way of life it is possible for one to have insight and gain a lot of understanding by using reason and discursive thought. Sometimes one may feel that such insights are deep and important for they may reveal things about life and people which one had never realised before. Yet that understanding, when one reviews it does not really have much effect on oneself internally. It is, so to speak, on the surface. It may be quite true, but it does not alter one's outlook or nature.

To give an illustration – the type of understanding that does alter one's nature is like that of a young child who sees something hot, like a red hot coal and he goes to pick it up. Once he touches it he never does it again. He learns quickly and deeply, it penetrates, it is effective. That sort of wisdom is not easily lost, however the wisdom which we must work for is of a much more subtle nature and can only be attained when we have a basis of Samādhi. In Samādhi the heart is still, it is open so to speak and whatever is penetrated by wisdom will go straight into it.

Normally the heart is covered over with all sorts of garbage, as though it's wrapped up and nothing can get through, but when Samādhi is developed the heart can be reached quite easily. It is quite open and then whatever wisdom is developed goes right in. That wisdom is then effective in giving results and can be effective in quite extraordinary ways. It can even reverse long-standing habits of people quite easily.

Those obstructive qualities which are like “sand in the gears” are called “kilesas”⁴ or defilements. They wrap around the heart and prevent the calm from penetrating. They are the things which we have to try to get rid of and they are the things which we must come to know. Mainly they consist of greed, hatred and delusion

but there are a whole heap of other things which spring from these three. They have endless ramifications and endless tricks. They trick us in all sorts of ways. Let me give an example. When doing meditation practice and a thought arises, something not very good and one catches it and then thinks, "I've caught that one, the kilesas didn't get me there." Then one congratulates oneself in this, but while congratulating oneself one does not realise that this is also the kilesas and one has been caught in another direction.

These are the sort of tricks that they play all the time. One must learn their tricks and be up to them all the time with understanding. One must not think that these kilesas are little things which are just tacked onto oneself somehow. They are extremely important and are very deep in the heart. It is just these kilesas that cause all the trouble in the world, nothing else. Atomic bombs don't let themselves off, they require people to do so and bullets are not fired from guns without people behind them, and that which is behind each person is his own kilesas all the time.

So the whole trouble in the world springs from these kilesas which are quite subtle, extremely resourceful and ever-present. They are resourceful because they dwell there in each person's own heart which they usurp. They use its inherent cleverness to further their own ends. The word "heart" which I have used here is not the physical heart but the "Citta"⁵.

The kilesas are there in the heart and Dhamma is there also, all mixed up and it depends on circumstances which one dominates at any one time. Because they are there in the heart all the time these kilesas are continually floating out and displaying themselves in action, speech and thought. In fact, we may say that the average person is the kilesas almost entirely. It is not that sometimes they are there and sometimes they are not for they are there all the time, colouring our outlook, causing our understanding to be deluded and distorting the basic principles of truth. Therefore the views which we hold about the world, other people, ourselves, religion and endless other things are all distorted because they all come under the baneful influence of kilesas.

For this reason everything that we do in ordinary life is, to some extent, false or wrong because it is mixed up with kilesas. There

is nothing that we can do perfectly until we get rid of the kilesas. At the same time we must not be too worried about this because although everything we do is false, there are two ways in which we can go. There is one way that is wrong and another that is right, so we must learn how always to choose the right direction even though it may be far from perfect and coloured by these kilesas all the time. Yet there are these two directions, and the right direction means that if we go that way the kilesas steadily get thinner and the understanding that undermines the kilesas gets stronger.

If we go in the wrong direction we become more deluded and more caught up until there is no hope in anything. You only need to look and see people who do bad things all the time and see what they become. They become coarse and gross and they don't understand anything subtle at all. This is because their kilesas are growing fast and the reason their kilesas are growing fast is because they are going in the wrong direction all the time.

Those people who go in the right direction gain happiness as if there were a shadow of happiness around them all the time. They are not concerned about things and they don't worry like other people do. The world to them is not an unpleasant place and all the problems in it do not really touch them because they are good inside, for the troubles in the world are always troubles in oneself, while external troubles are mere occurrences which just take place. It is within one's own internal state that all troubles exist and if one can only learn to cure oneself all troubles and problems will recede into the background.

As to the details of what you should do, you know already what is meant by meditation practice, so you should try to maintain which ever one you find works best. As far as wisdom is concerned it is good to use wisdom in the sense of thinking about things, seeing how things work in the world and in one's life. Steadily this does have an effect although it is slow and takes a long time to penetrate deeply. In other words, thinking about the right kind of things in the ordinary way of thinking can develop wisdom but only very slowly, for it takes a long time to penetrate internally in depth. Generally speaking there is little alternative to the development of samādhi.



A Life of Meditation

When we look at life we have to ask ourselves what is the main problem that we experience in our lives? And what is the thing that we are always trying to aim for? What is our purpose, our goal? Our goal in all cases no matter who we are is the attainment of happiness which means, contentment. And this goal points to the problem, the fault, which is discontent. Everybody is discontented. They are discontented with little things, they are discontented with big things. If there is nothing to be discontented with then they find something to be discontented with. Always there is discontentment. Every day from minute to minute, from hour to hour we all experience discontent while the thing we really desire is happiness, which is contentment.

This purpose is also our motive for acting. Whatever we do, we do it because we think that it is going to bring us more happiness than if we do not do it. If we were very wise and could understand the ways of cause and effect, then we would always do those things that would bring us true happiness. The fact of the matter is that we have a lot of ignorance in us, a lot of stupidity, and because of this we always do the wrong things. We create causes which do not bring us happiness but rather bring us suffering and discontentment. We are always putting ourselves into the same trouble that we are trying to get out of. We are constantly looking for happiness in the wrong way and consequently finding just the opposite.

In Buddhism it is said that the cause or basis of this discontent is wanting or craving. We want this, we crave that, all the time. We are always wanting something because we feel deficient. We feel we are lacking, and when we feel we are lacking we want things

to make up the deficit. No matter how many things we acquire the deficiency is still there and so we are never satisfied. So this wanting is bound up with discontent the whole time. When we want we feel deficient and we think that the thing we want will make up this deficiency by making us whole. But it does not work because that thing which we desire is outside, it is external to us, whereas the deficiency is inside ourselves. Even if we gain the object of our desire, that thing still remains outside. So that even if we say we own that thing, it does not internally belong to us, it is not really a part of us. It still remains separate, and because of that it is never really satisfactory getting those things, whether goods, position, status or whatever.

So the Buddha said that the underlying basis of our discontent is this craving. This craving then arises because of ignorance. We do not understand how cause and effect work, we do not know the way things are in the world. We know a great deal about science and the external world, but when it comes to ourselves we are absolutely ignorant. We do not know about ourselves at all. And we do not even like looking deeply into ourselves because we may find things which are disturbing to us. So we keep our minds outside in the world. We are full of knowledge of the world and admiration for the things of the world and the latest advances of science, but these things do not really bring us contentment or true happiness. Because, of course, contentment and happiness arise within ourselves, not out there. In order to make contentment arise within ourselves we have to change ourselves internally, which requires a lot of hard work. Morality is part of this effort which we have to make and maintaining a high standard of moral behaviour is often very difficult. It requires a lot of restraint, a lot of control, a lot of doing without, a lot of putting up with criticism from associates who feel we should do as everyone else does.

Before people begin meditating they should realise the importance of morality, because without a solid basis in moral behaviour the meditation practice is likely to go wrong. One may get results from meditation but they will not be the right results. Some even teach today that one can just do the meditation without bothering about morality, that morality does not matter. This is real nonsense. It means that these people have not understood the meaning of

morality. One must have a basis of morality. At least one should be practising a moral way of life in the present, even if one has been morally bad in the past.

It is easy to suggest to people how they should behave in the world in order to further their meditation practise, but are they willing to put up with the difficulties that restraining themselves entails? The trouble is that when people have to apply restraint to themselves, they do not like it. It is something which they find unpleasant because their pleasures are bound up with sensual desires all the time. When their pleasures are bound up with sensual desires like this, the tendency is to see any restriction as being something unnecessary, unpleasant. They wonder: "Why should we do this? What for?" And they do not see the results of their behaviour because the results are not necessarily immediate, they come later on. But the results are very important.

So, before undertaking a certain mode of behaviour, one should have some reason why one is going to do it. And frankly, concerning proper behaviour, concerning morality, people in the West do not seem to have any idea why they should be moral. The point is, in the West people have been brought up with an idea that there is some God up there who is looking down on us and writing down everything we do good or bad in his black book. Then when we die he comes along and tallies up the score and meets out justice accordingly like a judge in the court.

This is of course not the real view of Christianity, the real Christianity is something much deeper than this. But it is the popular concept that we have in the West. Even though many people realise that this view is rather naive, at the same time it is still lurking there rather like a childhood concept which they have never bothered to get rid of or change. So the concept lingers on, and we are then always looking over our shoulders trying to see how much we can get away with. But the difficulty with morality is that we cannot evade it, because it is not a God up there who writes it down in a black book it is ourselves who write it down. The one person who always knows about it is oneself. Whatever we do goes in to us and it lurks there. It goes in as a cause and later on in one way or another that cause is going to bring a result. If it is immoral behaviour the

results will come up to haunt us in the future. People who do immoral actions are loading themselves up with trouble. It is they who load themselves up, it is not someone else who brings the trouble back on them, but rather from themselves that the trouble comes.

A way to see this clearly is in a person who does bad actions very frequently. When a person is engaged in evil behaviour all the time, the doing of those bad actions changes their character. For instance, people who are always slaughtering animals are dull, stupid people. This is a direct result of the actions that they have done. Or those people who take drugs all the time and are “deadbeat.” When a person is deadbeat like that, or dull and stupid, the results they gain are going to be bad and unpleasant. In that stupidity, there is a lot of suffering. So they themselves suffer because of what they have done.

In other words, true morality is a practice which maintains a proper human status. It maintains it because we keep our actions within the bounds of what is going to bring reasonable results to ourselves in the future. If we insist on doing things which will bring bad results to ourselves we are just going to go down and down and down. The more we go down the more stupid we become, the more dull, and the less we are able to see our own faults. And so more bad actions follow until the end result is a downward spiral leading to a very bad state. If you want to see one of the results that this can culminate in, just go into any mental hospital and have a look around. Take a look at the really burnt out cases and see what they are like. This is the sort of result that can come about due to evil.

So morality is a form of mental hygiene. We are always careful to wash and bathe in order to keep strong and healthy so that we can avoid disease. We are forever on guard against diseases of the body but we do not even concern ourselves with diseases of the mind. And we all have diseases of the mind lurking within us right now. These diseases of the mind come from bad states of morality more than anything else. So morality is very important.

In Buddhism the practice of morality is based on the five precepts. To train ourselves not to kill, whether human beings or animals, not to steal, not to indulge in any forms of wrong sex, not to use false speech, lies, slander, gossip and so on, and not to take

drinks and drugs which muddle the mind. This is the practice which is really the basis of the human being. If we cannot even keep these we become less and less human, and the end result is more and more suffering, more and more discontent.

These are some of the underlying causes of discontentment. Now if we can say that there are definite causes to discontent, then it must be possible to stop it. If discontent is caused by ourselves, by our own misunderstanding and wrong actions, then we should be able to do something about it. The Buddha has taught, in fact, that we can come to the cessation of this discontent by getting rid of those defilements in ourselves which constantly lead us in the wrong direction. The way to get rid of these defilements is firstly practising morality so that we can gain a feeling of freedom toward the world. Secondly, training our minds so that they become stronger, more powerful, more capable and more unified. Thirdly, using that mind to develop wisdom to search and investigate to find out all about ourselves – what we are, what we are made of, how we work and what our problems are. We investigate ourselves in order to get rid of those problems because it is wisdom which actually does this work. But it is no use trying to develop the wisdom without a basis of calm and concentration. Wisdom is to be developed at three levels. The first is the level of listening to the words of a skilled teacher of Dhamma, or by reading suitable books. The second level is when we ponder and think about what we have learnt. The third level is the true nature of wisdom and it is aided and supported by the first two levels. This third level is brought about by the development of meditation and it is this level that steadily eliminated the defilements and the ignorance.

Wisdom is essential to probe into the defilements which constantly lead us in the wrong direction, so that we may come to know their make-up and understand their power over us. The defilements are what cause all the trouble so we must strive to understand them. We must realise that we are always under their influence and they never leave us any peace.

The fundamental basis of the defilements is greed, hatred, and delusion. From this basis they expand into a whole myriad of factors such as conceit, vanity, pride, arrogance, envy, stinginess, worry,

stubbornness, complacency, laziness, restlessness, shamelessness, and all sorts of more subtle variations which tend toward the production of bad and unwholesome states of mind. Defilements are also involved in completely wrong views which come under the heading of delusion.

We learn from the teaching of Buddhism that the whole world is based on supposition. We suppose almost everything. We suppose that the world is like this, we suppose that people are like that. When we look at the views and opinions that people believe in we see that it is all based on supposition. Even science is always engaged in supposing. And people tend to cling to their suppositions with little regard for what the truth really is. In other words, the whole world is relative. There is no concrete basis, there is no underlying, solid groundwork which we can rely on. Because of that people's outlook on the world and their outlook on the relationships in the world are all distorted. This distortion based on supposition is the work of the defilements.

These defilements stem from a fundamental ignorance which is lodged deep within us all. So it is important to keep in mind that the defilements are always present within our hearts and minds. They are present there in every thing we think, everything we say and everything we do. In fact we are for all practical purposes made up of defilements. What we think of us as our "self" is in truth a creation of the defilements, and it is false. What we truly are is something entirely different, something which we do not recognise as such. Because of this Buddhism teaches "anatta", in other words "self" is an impostor and everything that we recognise as "self" is complex and changing dynamically.

When people are bound up with defilements and the accompanying wrong view, they look on the world and themselves in completely wrong ways, they get false ideas of what they are, what their purpose is and what they should be accomplishing in this world. When this happens then the views, purposes, and modes of people's behaviour become antagonistic to one another because they are based on these defilements. So selfish views arise and self interest and self-orientated actions prevail. When two individuals with selfish motives and self-promoting actions can find no way to

harmonise, then trouble arises. All the time it is just these defilements egging people on, causing all the trouble in the world. Without these defilements there would not be any trouble. All the social, political, and economic troubles everywhere in the world stem from just these defilements in human beings.

To sort out the many problems in the world it is necessary for each individual to at least try to make an effort to cure his or her defilements. Instead, people in the world seem to be going in the opposite direction by promoting selfishness and glorifying self-seeking behaviour. Modern consumer societies are prodding people continuously into increasing their greed. The media is constantly bombarding people with enticements to buy more products, to accumulate more material things. This invitation to greed then inflames people's defilements, and this encouragement of the defilements in turn promotes the discontent in people. In fact advertisers try to create a need, a feeling of deficiency, a feeling of discontentment in people so that they will then go out to buy a certain thing believing that it will fill that emptiness which they feel inside, believing they will gain some contentment. The whole world is being taught the false hope of self-indulgent greed, and more and more discontentment in people everywhere is the only meaningful result.

How can we counteract this? We must examine our defilements, we must examine our attachments. The main object of this self-indulgent behaviour is the gratification of the human body. Our examination should begin here.

People today know all about the world. They are very clever with science and if you ask them the reason for doing this or that in science, or the way something works, they can go into great detail with the answer. Even if they themselves do not know they can easily find someone who does or find the appropriate book to look it up. But when it comes to themselves what do they know? Almost nothing. Even if a person knows physiology in the medical sense they tend only to consider someone else's body – just a body in a text book, not one's own.

Surely this body that each of us has is extremely important. Without this body where is the world? It is only this body that knows the world, so the body is really our outlet into the world. Certainly it is

worthwhile knowing this thing and finding out what its real nature is. In order to find out about the nature of this body we should question ourselves as to what sort of a thing it really is. Is it such a nice thing or not? Without having any preconceived ideas about it we can say to ourselves: “Is it a pleasant thing or not?” Let’s have a look at it. Most people in the world think the human body is a most desirable, beautiful sort of object. So we look at it carefully to see whether or not it is. What happens if you neglect to wash it for a few days? You have to keep washing the thing otherwise it begins to stink before long. Suppose you were to peel all the skin off the body, how would you feel about it then? Beautiful? Desirable? After all, the skin is only a superficial layer, the great majority of what constitutes this body is hidden underneath. If we wish to truly come to know this body then we must examine everything right the way through. This is being “scientific”, being thorough. Otherwise we allow ourselves to be deceived by the surface veneer. There are many sorts of thing which we have to look at in our bodies to see whether they are nice things or not, to see whether they are truly beautiful or not. We must search for the truth of the matter.

Most people believe that they are the body. If you believe that this body is actually you, then surely you should want to know more about yourself. You have all this knowledge about the world and how it functions, so why do you leave out the one thing that is most important – yourself? Why not try to get to know yourself? And the first step is to question the physical body because it is the most gross part of oneself.

If we contemplate the body in the proper way we eventually come to see clearly that this body is not oneself. It comes from this world, it returns to this world, it is part of this world. It is all made of atomic structure – atoms, molecules and chemicals – and it does not exist apart from these things. So if we look properly we can see that in fact this body is not “me”. It is not “myself”. It does not even really belong to me because I cannot control it completely. The body is derived from the earth and it returns to the earth, and I cannot do anything to stop this process.

While we are associated with this body we are constrained by it constantly. We must look after it, feed it, clothe it, minister to its

many needs and put up with its many deficiencies. It is almost as if we are confined in a sort of prison house. This body is like a prison house which keeps us here and keeps us in certain conditions that we are never free from. We have to look at this body and understand that this body is not me but it is holding me in a situation which may not be at all desirable. So we have got to see what the truth of this matter is.

The person who has examined the body and realises that it is not himself is not as concerned if anything unpleasant happens to his body as the person who thinks that the body is himself. He knows that whatever happens to his body is not happening to him. He knows that although something is happening to this body it is not me, although it is unpleasant, the unpleasantness is that of the body only, it is not me that is affected. The person who can realise that clearly has a great strength. And when the body dies, he knows that it is not himself that dies. So contemplation of the body can give one a great deal of moral – emotional strength.

This kind of strength can be of untold benefit in everyday life. Lay people must understand that whatever type of life they lead in the world they can still practise the way of meditation, they can still practice the way of Dhamma. If one performs whatever one does with attention, effort, carefulness and mindfulness, regardless of whether one is doing the most mundane daily chores, or enjoying recreational activities, one will be incorporating the way of practice into one's life. So one should look on everything one does as a training. Even when things are difficult and painful one can look on that situation as a training in patience.

If one trains oneself like this in every thing one does, then the more formal meditation practice will progress much easier when one has a chance to get down to it. Feeling that the lay-life presents too many difficulties to allow one to practice the way meaningfully only makes one complacent and strengthens the defilements.

It is certainly possible for a lay person to develop the calm and the wisdom just as a monk is able to do. There need not be such a great distinction between monks and lay-people, after all in both cases we are dealing with human beings. Monks and lay people take on different rules and different modes of life, and in so far

as these rules and these modes of life are important it is easier to achieve these goals as a monk. Monks do not have the restless activity that the average lay person does. Monks need not involve themselves in the endless hassles of ordinary family life. A monk is in a position where he can do the practice best because he does not have all the worries of a lay person. He does not have to go out and make his living by working in the world, he does not have to search for money, he does not have to do all the duties of the lay person. He has no family to look after or a house or responsibilities in the world so he is free to follow the Path. Because of this the monastic environment is naturally more calm, so it is much easier to cool off and get into oneself. Whereas the layperson has more difficulty in that way.

The lay person is not one person, it is a whole range of people with different characters and different temperaments. There are those lay people who can undoubtedly develop calm, concentration and wisdom while living in their lay life. But they are few and far between. There are some, but not many. There are other lay people who, try as they will, will never be able to accomplish this, because they are too involved in the world. The world takes hold of them and they cannot stop themselves. Between these two types there are lay people who can develop in Dhamma but much more slowly. It is not easy for the average lay person to actually see the way clearly and make the effort to cure himself. The world tends to take all. The world grabs everything of a person – their body, their interest, their mind and their heart – until really they have nothing left.

Whatever one's situation is in life, it is of necessity where one's position has to be and one has to make do with whatever situation one is in. One has to accept this and learn to practice appropriately in that situation. If one finds that things are annoying and troublesome, then one has to realise that life everywhere is difficult and one must strive to do one's practice regardless. After all, the difficulties that one experiences are all empowered by one's defilements.

Control of the mind is a very difficult state to achieve. To achieve it mindfulness is absolutely essential. Mindfulness, presence of mind, keeping one's attention in the present, here and now – this

is the real training. Generally speaking, if a person does not gain any success in meditation practice, it is simply because there is not enough mindfulness present. Mindfulness is the quality which must be present every time.

This applies to every activity that one undertakes in one's everyday life. If one keeps one's mind just on what one is doing at the present moment, then there is no time for any annoying or troublesome thoughts. One has no time to indulge in these preoccupations because mindfulness has become a full-time occupation. Then one is practising the way and that is enough.

There are people who are well developed in the practise who live an ordinary lay life. Some of them do very well, their practice is very commendable. These people learn to do the practice so that they maintain the focus of their attention in the heart most of the time. When mindful attention is focused inside oneself, then distracting thoughts do not arise easily while the mind is firm and concentrated. They can still think and function normally in their various social situations but the usual restless thoughts and daydreams do not intrude to bother them. If one turns one's attention to the meditation practice it is always valuable. And whatever activities one does with mindfulness are all actually a form of meditation practice.



Investigation for Wisdom

Meditation practice is the key to understand the nature of the body and the mind. Most people are familiar with the term meditation, but very few have a clear understanding of what it entails. They often take up meditation with only a vague idea of what it means and what its real purpose is. They read something or listen to a teacher, and they get confused because they cannot relate the method to themselves and their own experiences.

What most people fail to realise when they take up meditation practice is that the actual practice itself is very much an unknown path. One has a concept of what it entails due to reading or listening to a teacher's instructions, but when one actually gets down to doing the practice it becomes a bit like travelling through an unknown country using a map. The map tells one which directions to proceed in to get from one point to another, but it does not tell the traveller anything about the countryside he passes through along the way. On the ground the country does not look anything like the map.

In much the same way, when one meets with actual experiences during the practice of meditation, they do not necessarily appear the same as one read about them in the books. The formal teaching of Buddhism often explains the practice using a set of technical terms, the meanings of which are usually rather vague to the meditator. Because of this books are best referred to after one has gained some experience in meditation in order to compare and contrast ones own experiences with the descriptions given in the books. Used in this way books can serve as a useful reference in meditation, but they can never be considered as a substitute for making the effort to come to a clear understanding in oneself.

Buddhist technical terms such as *samādhi*, *paññā* and *kilesas* may be puzzling to the meditator at first because their exact meaning is unclear. In fact the meanings of the technical terms used to describe various aspects of the practice are not really definitions which try to pin the word down. The meanings of these terms are presented more as descriptions which are open to interpretation by the one who realises their nature within himself. The only way we can come to the true meaning is by seeing directly by experience how that aspect of the Dhamma fits in with everything else and how it relates back to all other aspect of one's experience.

It is important before turning one's attention to investigating for panna or wisdom that the meditator has a basis of *samādhi* to work with. True wisdom can come only if the meditator already has a suitable degree of *samādhi*. So the foundation of wisdom is *samādhi*. And the foundation of *samādhi* is mindfulness. The meditator must first cultivate mindfulness and train himself to keep his attention firmly focused on one meditation object, free from all manner of distraction, until his mind reaches a satisfactory state of calm. With the mindfulness and calm as a basis, if one wants to find out about aspects of the body or the mind then one can easily direct the mind to wherever one wants to investigate and it will respond accordingly and do the work in a reasonable fashion.

A state of *samādhi* is the ground from which a state of wisdom can arise easily. But this state will not arise unless a person does the work to develop the wisdom within himself. In fact *samādhi* and wisdom tend to go in opposite directions. The wisdom investigation tends to break up the calm, whereas the calm of *samādhi* tends to lull one away from any wisdom. It is only when these two factors can come together and work in a harmonious manner that results can be seen very quickly.

Most people have to do a lot more work on the *samādhi* practice to begin with, but they should not neglect wisdom. One should not think that one must develop *samādhi* fully before beginning to use wisdom. This is not the case at all. We all have our own innate wisdom and we must use that wisdom in whatever way is appropriate under any of the many circumstances that we find ourselves in regardless of whether we have developed *samādhi*

or not. We must always strive to correct our current situation by improving and developing our practice continually with our own natural wisdom. This principle can be applied comprehensively to our lives in general and to all of our actions of body, speech and mind. There are these three factors – moral behaviour, *samādhi*, and wisdom – and in any particular situation which arises we have to use whichever one of these, or any combination of them which is suitable to the circumstances at that time.

It is when we specifically turn our attention to the practice of investigating the body and the mind for the sake of developing wisdom that the significance of a basis of *samādhi* becomes apparent. Without *samādhi* our investigation will probably be very superficial and our wisdom rather weak. So we develop *samādhi* so as to be able to go very deep in order to reach a true state of wisdom.

A state of wisdom arises when we suddenly see that thing we are investigating in a different way. Investigating here means attacking a problem from every possible angle, turning it over, turning it upside down and inside out, constantly examining it from every perspective. Wisdom is the seeing of the implications of what one is investigating. True wisdom is a profound state of realisation which penetrates deeply into the meaning and significance of what is being investigated and sees clearly its relationship to all other things. This is quite different from a state of thinking, because thinking is jumpy and does not remain for long on any one object. A state of wisdom is a deep, meditative state in which we ponder one object intensively while being in a completely calm state without any distraction. It is said that we see the implications of what we are investigating because in many ways we are seeing something which we have seen before, but seeing it from a different perspective.

The real aim of any investigation in meditation practice is to undermine the kilesas or defilements. Cutting off and destroying the defilements is the work of wisdom. The root basis of the defilements is greed, hatred, and delusion, but they spread out into a whole range of factors such as conceit, vanity, arrogance, envy, worry, obstinance, laziness, and a whole host of other defiling factors. These kilesas arise all the time in the mind, continually affecting our thoughts and our actions. They are things which we must come to

know and try to get rid of. It is for this reason that we should keep our investigation focused on undermining or exposing the kilesas so that wisdom can cut them off.

When we have a suitable basis of *samādhi* and we begin to investigate for wisdom we should keep our contemplation to either the physical body, the khandhas of feeling, memory, thought and consciousness, or those things in the world to which we have emotional attachment, in other words, objects of attachment as perceived in the mind. In general the body is an easier subject for investigation because its nature is more gross and tangible, whereas the mental factors are much more subtle and nebulous. So it is with the body that we should begin our investigation.

The human body is something which we know a fair amount about already, which makes our task that much easier. The body is an object about which we actually know enough so that we can think of parts of it and keep them in mind. We can visualise them, turn them around mentally, think about their nature, see their various attributes, and generally see the ways of cause and effect in them. The contemplation of the body alone can give very good results because our attachment to it is so strong.

We in fact have a lot of fond illusions about our bodies. They are part and parcel of our life in this world and because of this our whole world depends on this body. If we think of our lives and what they consist of, practically the whole of it depends in some way on these bodies. Our houses are built according to the size of the human body. Our cars are built the same way. The whole design of our towns and cities are constructed and based on the needs of these bodies. The tools and utensils we use and even the way we prepare our food, all depend on basic bodily requirements. When we realise this and start braking down some of our illusions with body contemplation, we are actually breaking down our basis of self and the things that are important in this world where self is concerned. We begin to question: if the body and this world break down then where am I?

Basically there are four approaches to investigating the body. One is to contemplate the body as it is – a combination of various organs and parts which have their own separate characteristics apart

from the whole. Another is to contemplate the loathsome, unattractive nature of every part of the body. A third way is to contemplate a dead, decomposing body to see exactly what happens to this body when we die. The fourth way is to contemplate the body in terms of the four primary elements which make up all forms of matter.

To begin with consider the various parts of the body and see how they are all just parts, how the body is not a complete, indivisible entity at all. Each of the parts of the body can be separated out individually and so you should do just that. Mentally take the body to pieces. Go through the internal and external organs one by one, back and forth over and over again until you find one that holds your interest more than the others. Focus in on this one part and investigate it in greater depth. Look at it closely, turn it over to see it from all angles, think about it and try to understand what its real nature is. Is this part me? Can I truly say it belongs to me? What if I were to cut this part away, would this diminish my sense of self in any way? If so which part is really me? This arm? That leg? The liver? The kidneys? The lungs? Is any part of this body capable of knowing or deciding anything? You will see that the body with all of its parts is just like an old piece of wood which has no knowing faculty at all.

If we can see the implications of this for any one part, then the implications for all other parts will become clear at the same time and our attachment to the body will gradually drop off. To begin with we may know theoretically what the implications of having a body are, but we do not really see them profoundly because we always relate our bodies to a sense of self. When we finally see the body as it actually is with a state of wisdom it is almost as if we can stand back and see it from a detached point of view. At that moment we see absolutely clearly that this thing which we call our body is not the “self” entity that we believed it to be. There is a complete knowing that this is the truth.

For example take the skin which covers the whole body. The skin is a great deceiver because it covers up all the other parts and makes them look presentable. What if we were to take this skin off and look underneath — we would get a completely different picture. But we see only the outside layer and deduce that the body is beautiful

and desirable. At the same time skin is an essential factor in how this body functions – without it we would die. All of this we may know perfectly well in theory, but we fail to see the implications of skin as far as our sense of self is concerned.

In fact skin is just something which belongs to this world – it comes from the world and it goes back to the world. Skin is not “me”. It has nothing to do with who I truly am, so how can it be me? You should call up that rather vague idea of what you are and then compare it with skin. Are these two really the same thing? When you see what its true nature is unequivocally with a direct knowing you will gain a full appreciation of the implications of that which is known. The attachment to the body will then become weaker.

Contemplating the body by going through its various parts – perhaps visualising them, perhaps placing the mind at the bodily location of a certain part – this is a training for wisdom, but it is not yet that wisdom which arises from “bhāvanā”. Thinking and reflecting are the preliminary work we must do in order to discover where resistance to the truth of the body lies within us. This resistance is the defilements and mostly delusion. They are what cause the unreasonable attachment to the body, and only wisdom can deal with them effectively. But the defilements are difficult to catch because they do not arise in a nice, orderly fashion. They arise unpredictably, without warning, in every possible shape and form. So we must always be prepared with whichever method is suitable, to deal with them as they arise so as to neutralise their effects and reduce their strength.

The middle way is the path taught by the Buddha for counteracting the kilesas under all circumstances. Most people understand the Middle Way as some sort of compromise in which one should keep oneself in the middle between two supposed extremes. Unfortunately, under the defiling influence of the kilesas this can be a recipe for taking the easy way out. In fact the middle path implies that one takes whatever means are necessary to counter the kilesas in any particular situation.

Some people, because of the very insidious nature of their defilements, must undertake a regime of strict austerity in order to counterbalance the tenacity of those kilesas. For such people strict

austerity is the middle way. Others will require varying degrees of austerity or relative comfort to counteract the varying intensities of their particular kilesas. In all cases the kilesas must be met with an appropriate force and determination in order for that person to deal with them successfully. You should not think that strict austerities as such are against the Buddha's teaching. This attitude can become merely an excuse for not putting forth sufficient effort. Austerities are wrong only if they are undertaken to a degree completely unnecessary to an individual's practice of eradicating his own kilesas.

Following the middle path is a way of striking a balance between the work one must do and the effort one must put forth to accomplish it. If, for instance, a person investigates himself and discovers that he has a very greedy nature where food is concerned, then that person might deliberately take food which he feels is unpleasant and not to his taste. Considering only what is required for nutrition, he might reduce his diet to a bland, simple selection of food, something which gives greed nothing to look forward to. This becomes a means of bringing his practice back to the centre. The desire to indulge in the taste of food disturbs such a person's equilibrium by pulling him off balance all the time, so a counterweight must be found to restore that balance. In this way, when we have a problem with a certain defilement of our character we must search to find a suitable antidote for that problem. This is the path where the Buddha's Middle Way lies.

Contemplation of the loathsome nature of the body is a very good example of this. We have a deeply rooted attachment to this body as being something beautiful and desirable based on our assumptions about what the body is. If we peel off the skin and examine what lies beneath, we become easily disgusted by a repulsive mess of flesh, blood, bones and sinews. The resistance to this that arises within us is very strong in accordance with the strength of our identification with the body. The middle way here is to balance the identification with the body against the practice of contemplating its loathsome nature so as to bring the mind to see the truth.

In the final analysis the truth is that the body is neither attractive nor unattractive but just a part of this world, much like a lump of

wood. In the meditation practice our attachment and attraction to the body is cancelled out by seeing its loathsome nature, creating a balance between the two which brings us to the centre and an understanding of the truth. In order to find this balance it is necessary to go in the opposite direction from our natural inclinations which are the inclinations of the kilesas. Our natural inclination is to identify ourselves with the body and cherish it as something precious, so we must concentrate on its unattractive nature to bring oneself back into balance.

One of the most difficult things to realise is how incredibly strong our attachment to this body really is. One way to realise this is to see the effect that the intense contemplation of the body's loathsomeness can have on the mind. Often a meditator will find while doing this practice that he gets states of depression coming up due to the fact that the mind is being forced to see the unattractiveness. For this reason a person who undertakes this practice needs a firm *samādhi* practice to complement it and keep the mind calm.

The results that come from maintaining the practice of body contemplation are rather peculiar. The results are often difficult to pin down and define. One continues on working at the practice day in and day out, and yet one feels that one is not doing very much. The results are slow to come and one does not get into any sublime states of *samādhi*, yet as time goes on the results do gradually manifest themselves. One's attitude changes as one begins to view the body from a different angle. This is a subtle sort of change. One may go on doing the practice for quite a long time without noticing any obvious shift in one's attitude, and when the results do begin to show they are often so subtle that one does not immediately realise it. They are quite likely to appear outside of the time when one is doing the meditation practice. The change of perspective is a gradual breaking down of the hard and fast views that one has about the body.

It is said that those who practice body contemplation constantly are mindful of the body in every posture. They know the body and keep their attention there to the point where they never forget themselves. As a consequence of this their minds are much less likely to wander off aimlessly. This practice grounds them firmly in the body

and greatly assists in the development of mindfulness. In the end it helps them to adopt a completely different, more valid outlook on life. People who have not yet seen the results of the body practice tend to identify themselves with their bodies and suffer accordingly, thinking that every pain and every unpleasantness that happens to their bodies is happening to them. Because this identification with the body brings much suffering and discontent, it is obviously a bad thing. As the aim of Buddhism is the eradication of all discontent, so this identification of the body as self is contrary to the way of the Buddha. It follows that this identification is quite false and should be overcome. To the extent that a person can break free from this view of the body and realise clearly that it is not me or mine, that it is just a part of this world, to that extent he loses the fear of death and the fear of illness or bodily injury. The idea of loss where the body is concerned becomes minimised.

From an early age we identify ourselves with our physical body and as we do so we create an image of this body in our minds. It is fair to say that with our own body there are really two bodies: the gross physical body and the subtle mental body. The subtle mental body is that image that we have in mind which corresponds to the physical body. This is the body which is responsive to feelings, sensations and emotions. The physical body is the one that has the mechanism which produces the data for the mental body. Both of those aspects of the body exist concurrently.

The subtle body tends to be predominant in our outlook. In fact it is the subtle body that we think of when we consider ourselves, and it is not always quite the same as the physical side. In the same way, when we think of other people we tend to consider them in terms of our own mental body because this is the only one we know. Actually we do not know other people except through our mental image of them. We have to identify other people in terms of our own experience saying: this person is like that or that person is like this. When we say this, we mean those things in terms of what we know and experience in ourselves, comparing them with our own mental image.

Feeling is another area in which the mental body plays a prominent role, so we can investigate feeling by seeing this connection.

When we feel an external object or aches and pains we can call it feeling by analogy. If we feel a pain in our finger what we really mean is that there is a sensation or there is something happening in the finger which gives a reaction that is felt as pain. But the sensation and reaction do not become pain until they have gone right into the centre, that is, the mental side.

When we receive any feeling then we assess that feeling in the mental body as to location, intensity and so on. Then we transfer that understanding to the physical body and we see it there. The feeling body is really just something in our minds. It is merely an image based on a set of experiences which together give us a symbol for the physical body, but which is really located in the mind. So when any sensation arises in the physical body it is associated with the corresponding part of the internal image and is seen as either pleasant or painful depending on its nature. In truth we can say that all feeling exists right there in the centre and what we experience in the physical body is merely a reaction. The emotional feelings that we experience in the body are actually productions of the mental body which cause a reaction to take place in the physical body. The whole process involves a very complicated interchange of body and mind.

So really speaking feelings are always experienced in the mental body because that is where they are known. But we superimpose this feeling body on the physical body so that they become fused together which leads to the belief that feelings arise in the physical realm. This doesn't mean that there is some sort of shadowy body inside of this physical one, but rather that the mental body is an image of the body that we carry in our minds — much as we have mental images of all the important things in our immediate environment. As the body is the most essential part of our personal environment it is the mental image of the body which dominates all others. Our misunderstanding of the true nature of body and feeling can cause all sorts of problems and difficulties, because when we believe that feelings exist in the body, then we become concerned with this body all the time.

This becomes most evident with the pain and discomfort that we experience with this body. Painful feelings are a regular part of

daily life and they cause us endless suffering and concern. In this regard it is very important that we be able to separate the painful feeling from our sense of “self”. But it must be realised that in order to be able to make that separation, the mind must drop into a state of wisdom because in ordinary consciousness it cannot achieve this. And the nature of our investigation is the key to attaining a state of wisdom. We must establish a practice of analysing the pain thoroughly from all angles until we can break through to a state of wisdom.

This is accomplished by looking directly at painful feelings where they arise and questioning their nature. Wherever a pain is felt the strongest, place your attention, your mindfulness at that point and investigate. What is its location? In which specific part of the body does it arise? Pinpoint it and investigate further. Are this pain and the body the same thing? If it appears that they are then dig in and ask: is the pain the bone? Or the flesh? Or the skin? What happens when the body dies, does it feel pain then? Who is it that experiences this pain? And what knows it as pain? Keep probing in this way, over and over again, comparing the pain, the body and the one who knows the body until you can see clearly that pain is merely a phenomenon which arises and ceases separate from the body and the mind. They are all there together but they are not the same thing. Due to the kilesas, due to attachment to the body and feeling, these things are equated with a sense of self. When you investigate thoroughly with a state of wisdom, then you will know clearly that these things are not your self and your self is not these things.

It is the kilesas all the time that deceive us into seeing the nature of things in a false way. The underlying basis of the mind, the citta, has become like something bright and clear wrapped up by a lot of mess and because of this we cannot truly see the citta and get at it. When we cannot truly get at the citta, we cannot see the real nature of things such as the body and pain, and we cannot see the difference between them and self. What is necessary is to use wisdom to penetrate through the kilesas which wrap around the citta, and thereby see the truth.

It is essential to learn as much as possible about the kilesas, which are really like the enemy within oneself. You should think about them quite a lot and try to see them in yourself and realise how deep and subtle they are in their ways. In particular you should contemplate what you must do to counter these demons within your heart. This applies not only to formal meditation practice but to your ordinary, daily life as well. This is where many people lack faith in Buddhism since they want to do meditation practice very much but they are not prepared to undertake it in order to correct their lives and the corruptions of their minds.

We must undertake the meditation practice for the right purpose and keep at it until the proper results come. The kilesas create attachment, but non-attachment is not a practice which can be developed in itself. Many people say that with the kilesas all one has to do is let go, but this is not true. We cannot just let go like that because we do not know how to let go, since we do not even know what it is we are clinging to. Rather, when we do the practice properly, step by step, and develop wisdom until understanding comes, then the letting go takes care of itself. Until we reach that point of understanding we cannot even see what we should be let go of. Letting go will come of itself naturally as a result of developing sufficient wisdom. Otherwise letting go of our kilesas is more like running away from them – if we keep running away from them we will always run back into them again.

Another important way to investigate for wisdom is to contemplate the three characteristics that are invariably found to be natural to all phenomena. Anicca or impermanence is the unstable, transient nature of everything in this world. Dukkha or discontent is the unsatisfactory, unfulfilling nature of all things. Anattā or non-self means that there is no presiding self-entity to be found anywhere within the five khandhas or the citta.

The world and everything in it are in constant dynamic state of flux, changing all the time. Our minds and their concepts are so constructed that we think of things as being real. Even though we know theoretically that everything is changing, still we think of those things as having some real solid existence. When we see something change then we try to explain why that thing has changed without

admitting its impermanence. By explaining the process of change satisfactorily to ourselves we are attempting to deny the true nature of change. In fact, everything is in a continuous process of change the whole time and nothing is permanent, no matter how we may try to explain it away. For this reason, nothing in the world has any reality. Everything is in a constant dynamic state of flux and this constant state of flux is, in fact the essence of existence because without this nothing could possibly exist. This is true both physically and mentally. The mind is in a state of constant, dynamic change the whole time. Sensations, thought and consciousness are all absolutely dependent on change – without it the mind could not exist because there would be no duality at all.

Living in this world of change is never really satisfactory. Even if we receive the utmost satisfaction from any one moment, it then changes. This cannot be anything but unsatisfactory, so where there is change there is discontent. In this way discontent follows naturally from change. Clinging to things which are by nature always changing brings discontent and anything which brings discontent is always unsatisfactory. It is not the real, reliable thing we are looking for.

What we are looking for is definitely not discontent, and yet wherever we look we cannot find anything which is a state of contentment. Because of this everything is not that “self” which we think of as a state of happiness. We want self because we look on it as being a refuge, a place where we can rest and be completely happy and yet wherever we look we cannot find that self. There is no basis for any real self or refuge anywhere in the whole universe. If we try to make a refuge for ourselves in the world, then that refuge is unstable – it must break up and pass away. We become attached to people, to places, to pursuits, to possessions, to life and endless other things, but since all of these things change they can never be a reliable refuge. We identify with these things as an extension of self but we cannot find a true refuge in any of them.

If we attempt to look for a refuge in this body we cannot find it there either. If we look at any of the five khandhas we see that they are all impermanent, always changing the whole time. Nowhere in these khandhas is there anything which equates with a true self or refuge. So the Buddha taught non-self and he taught it in the sense

that it applies to the five khandhas, to this world, to the universe and to everything we know.

If we try to discover introspectively what is meant by “self”, we come up against formidable difficulties. Most people just accept that they have a self, feeling that there is a rather vague “something” there which is the “essence of me”. They accept this and cannot face the obstacles which obstruct any deeper investigation. Generally, people accept emotionally that the body is self or the body in association with feeling is self. Neither of these views will stand up to scrutiny, because to believe that the body is self is to believe that self is a thing of this earth. There is no part of the body that has not come from the material of this world and it is constantly being replenished by food, drink and air derived from this world. Where can we find any centre in this body that we can say is “me in essence”? If we cannot find such a centre the only alternative is that the self is the whole body. But what if we were to lose an arm or a leg, would the self be diminished as well? And what about when we die, what sort of a self would this be?

The view that self is feeling is also false because all types of feeling are changing – they are never still as they rely on change for their very existence. Which feelings are we to call self then? If we believe that one set of feelings represents self, when they die away and change where is that self? In a similar way, investigation shows that memories, thoughts and consciousness are all changing and so are not a suitable basis for any self entity.

In the final analysis we must accept that this self is nothing but an impostor which is derived from the kilesas. In fact we can learn to diminish self by coming to realise that this body is not me nor does it belong to me. It is the property of this earth, of nature, and whatever I am it is not this body. With this the kilesas are weakened and there is a subsequent freedom from concern about the body and its eventual death. Contentment and happiness are increased because we then know that whatever happens to this body does not actually happen to me. Pain of course can still be present, but anxiety and worry concerning the welfare of the body will not arise.

For most people this situation never occurs because they understand self and the body to be almost one and the same thing.

Even though some people may accept the viewpoint of anattā that the body, feeling, memory, thought and consciousness are not self, their thoughts, actions and emotions all show that there remains an underlying belief that the body is self. Consequently, whatever happens to the body is of great concern to them. They understand that “this body is me” so whatever happens to the body happens to me and any real harm to the body becomes a very personal matter. This is the state in which people everywhere find themselves. They are very attached, even addicted, to the body and concerned about accidents and all the various health problems that afflict people today. But if people investigate properly with wisdom they can see that all of this is merely a delusion put up by their own defilements.

The defilements are there in the hearts of people and they are always trying to promote our belief in self. We can say that the kilesas are equivalent to self, that the idea of self – which means having in mind this personal entity within that relates to the world outside – is made up entirely of kilesas.

If the self were really a true thing, then there would be nothing wrong with greed, hatred and selfishness since they would all spring from truth. But we all know perfectly well that these things are wrong because they spring from delusion and not truth. In fact they stem directly from the promotion of self, which suggests that self is a false concept.

Some people like to claim that the self being described here is merely the “lower” self, but that there is also a “higher” self or true self. Of course people are quite free to use words as they like, but those who practice the way of Buddhism prefer to keep to what is practical. The word self is just a symbol in the same way that all words are symbols. Word symbols such as self have commonly understood meanings which can be found in any reliable dictionary. For practical purposes we must stick to the common meaning – to insist on any other meaning is liable to lead to confusion and misunderstanding.

We may try to find a self entity among the other khandhas of feeling, memory, thought and consciousness, but all of them are unstable and changing about all the time. About the best we can find is some degree of continuity which relies heavily on memory

and feeling. But nowhere among the khandhas can we find any sort of unchanging identity which could truly be called self.

The only way we can come to know the truth about ourselves is by investigating thoroughly with wisdom until we can break through the kilesas and destroy that fundamental ignorance which is “knowing wrongly.” If we persevere with wisdom, eventually we can reach the final result of meditation practice. This final result, the end product of Dhamma, must be such that we can find absolutely nothing further to investigate, and we cannot even find the one who is investigating. When there is nothing to investigate at all, then no questions can arise because there is absolutely nothing that we can ask a question about. This is the end product, the unconditioned — nibbāna. The nature of it is that all distinctions disappear. It is not so much that we do this or that or gain anything in particular, but that the one who would do it or gain it has disappeared. Words cannot express this state accurately, so it is by nature undefinable. When we say that one comes to the end of all questions, it’s not so much that all questions have been answered, but there are no more questions that one can possibly ask.



The Wisdom of Samadhi

In the training of the mind there is the need to develop wisdom. Unfortunately, this cannot be done directly, just by wanting wisdom. There may be some people with innate wisdom, but they will not be able to bring it out and use it properly, unless there is enough mindfulness to support and control it. Wisdom does not simply mean intellectual thought, it is of quite a different order and can only arise from an internal state of calm. Therefore, the first necessity of mental training is to attain a state of calm.

Samadhi, the state of calm attained by meditation practice, has many levels depending on the degree of absorption of the *citta* with the object of meditation. The word, *citta*, means the mind, heart or consciousness; it is the basis in a person which is 'central', whereas everything else, including the five *khandhas* is peripheral. Practically everyone has to develop the practice of *samadhi*, if they want to attain wisdom and a state of happiness beyond what is normally possible in this world. Having attained *samadhi*, the way is then clear for the development of wisdom.

Developing *samadhi* can be put like this. Normally, the heart is hungry, it wants something, and it is searching around all the time. The only way it knows how to search is through the senses and in the world, because this is what it has learnt. It wants this, searches for that, looks for this, wants to hear that - and so on, all the time. It goes out continually, but what it gets from the world and what it gets by doing this never satisfies the hunger. In fact it tends to increase it if anything. The heart is still hungry after all the searching one has done.

Now the way to satisfy the heart is not by going out, but by going in the opposite direction. One must withdraw one's attention away from sense stimuli, memory and thoughts - both discursive and playful - and one must give the mind as little as possible to hold onto. One allows one's attention to remain only with the subject of meditation, such as the repetition of "*Buddho*", or watching one's breathing. The mind is given only this one thing to hold onto, one anchor.

At first it is very difficult for the mind still wanders and jumps about but, as one goes on, it becomes more used to it and interest starts to arise. When interest arises there is less tendency to run around. You have probably noticed this with work; how, when you had something which at first you did not want to do, when you got deeply into it the work started to become interesting. After that, it was no longer such a hard task. It was much easier and could be done without much hardship.

It's like that with meditation practice. At first it's hard work, but once you get into it then interest arises and, once that happens, the mind becomes more and more absorbed in the practice. When it becomes absorbed, the external things all start dropping away automatically. The mind goes right inward, and when it goes inward and stays there, it gets complete rest and the heart is fulfilled internally and feels quite satisfied. When it comes out of that state, it no longer wants to search around looking for things, because it is satisfied. It is prepared to remain just there - still.

Withdrawing from this state of absorption the mind is replete, satisfied, as though it has had a good meal. It is also wieldy and pliable; this state can be turned to good advantage by developing wisdom, because the main obstacles to its development are quelled for a time. Instead of being restless, fluctuating and wandering, the mind is in a suitable state which can be used for investigation, and it can go very, very deep. This is true wisdom and this wisdom brings results.

In the normal way of life, it is possible for one to have insight and gain a lot of understanding by using reason and discursive thought. Sometimes one may feel that such insights are deep and important, for they may reveal things about life and people which one had

never realised before. Yet when one reviews that understanding, it does not really have much effect on oneself internally; it is, so to speak, on the surface. It may be quite true, but it does not alter one's outlook or nature.

To give an illustration: the type of understanding that does alter one's nature is like that of a young child who sees something hot, like a red hot coal, and he goes to pick it up. Once he touches it, he never does it again. He learns quickly and deeply - it penetrates, it is effective. That sort of wisdom is not easily lost. However, the wisdom which we must work for is of a much more subtle nature, and can only be attained when we have a basis of *samadhi*. In *samadhi*, the heart is still, it's open, and whatever is penetrated by wisdom will go straight into it.

Normally, the heart is covered over with all sorts of garbage as though it's wrapped up and nothing can get through, but when *samadhi* is developed the heart can be reached quite easily. It is quite open, and whatever wisdom is developed goes right in. That wisdom is then effective in giving results. It can be effective in quite extraordinary ways - it can even reverse long-standing habits of people quite easily. Those obstructive qualities, which are like "sand in the gears", are called *kilesas* or defilements. They wrap around the heart and prevent the calm from penetrating. They are the things which we have to try and get rid of, and they are the things which we must come to know. Mainly, they consist of greed, hatred and delusion, but there are a whole heap of other things which spring from these three. They have endless ramifications and endless tricks too, they trick us in all sorts of ways.

Let me give an example: when doing meditation practice and a thought arises - something not very good - one might catch it, and then think, "I've caught that one, the *kilesas* didn't get me there." So then one congratulates oneself, but while congratulating oneself one does not realise that this is also *kilesa*, and one has been caught in another direction!

These are the sort of tricks that they play all the time. One must learn their tricks and be up to them all the time with understanding. One must not think that these *kilesas* are little things, which are just tacked onto oneself somehow. They are extremely important

and are very deep in the heart. It is just these *kilesas* that cause all the trouble in the world - nothing else. Atomic bombs don't let themselves off, they require people to do so; bullets are not fired from guns without people behind them; and what is behind each person is his own *kilesas* all the time.

So the whole trouble in the world springs from these *kilesas*, which are quite subtle, extremely resourceful and ever-present. They are resourceful because they dwell there in each person's own heart (or *citta*), which they usurp. They use its inherent cleverness to further their own ends.

The *kilesas* are there in the heart, and Dhamma is there also, all mixed up; it depends on circumstances which one dominates at any one time. These *kilesas* are there in the heart all the time, and so they are continually flowing out and displaying themselves in action, speech and thought. In fact, we could say that the average person is almost entirely the *kilesas*. It is not that sometimes they are there and sometimes they are not – they are there all the time, colouring our outlook, causing our understanding to be deluded. Our basic perceptions of the world, other people, ourselves, religion and endless other things are all distorted, because they all come under the baneful influence of *kilesas*.

For this reason, everything that we do in ordinary life is to some extent, false or wrong. There is nothing that we can do perfectly, until we get rid of the *kilesas*. However, we must not be too worried about this because, although everything we do is false, there are two ways in which we can go; there is one way that is wrong, and another that is right. What we must learn is how always to choose the right direction, even though it may be far from perfect and coloured by these *kilesas*.

If we go in the right direction, the *kilesas* steadily get thinner, and the understanding that undermines them gets stronger. However, if we go in the wrong direction, we become more deluded and more caught up until there is no hope in anything. You only need to look and see people who do bad things and see what they become. They become coarse and gross, and they don't understand anything subtle at all. This is because their *kilesas* are growing fast, because they are going in the wrong direction all the time. Those

people who go in the right direction gain happiness, as if there was an aura of happiness around them all the time. They are not concerned about things, and they don't worry like other people do. The world to them is not an unpleasant place; all the problems in it do not really touch them, because they are good inside. This is because the troubles in the world are always troubles in oneself, while external troubles are mere occurrences which just take place. It is within one's own internal state that all troubles exist and, if one can only learn to cure oneself, all troubles and problems will recede into the background.

As to the details of what you should do, you know already what is meant by meditation practice, and you should try to maintain whichever technique you find works best. As far as wisdom is concerned, it is good to use wisdom in the sense of thinking about things, seeing how things work in the world and in one's life. Steadily this does have an effect, although it is slow and takes a long time to penetrate deeply. In other words, thinking about the right kind of things in the ordinary way of thinking can develop wisdom but only very slowly, for it takes a long time to penetrate internally in depth. Generally speaking, there is little alternative to the development of *samadhi*.