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HEART-WOOD FROM THE BO TREE



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by

BUDDHADĀSA DHIKKHU

FOREWORD

'Heart-wood from the Bo Tree' is a collection of three talks given by Ven. Ajaan Buddhadasa to the Dhamma study group at Siriraj Hospital in Bangkok in 1961. In these talks the Ven. Ajaan proposes that the 'heart-wood' or the pith or essence of the Buddhist Teachings is the practice of non-clinging, the dwelling with a mind empty of the feeling of 'I' and 'mine'. He masterfully shows how this practice may be developed and how taking emptiness as the fundamental principle one has a wonderful tool to understand and make use of every one of the many concepts and skilful means that lie within the Buddhist tradition, and also how to distinguish those things that are alien to it. Drawing fluently from material in both the Pāli canon and the teaching of the Chinese Zen Masters he makes terms and concepts that often seem dauntingly abstract, immediate and practical.

Inevitably this revivification of technical terms has entailed the inclusion of a number of Pāli words in the text, but I hope those readers who find this somewhat irritating will have the patience to stay with the argument and benefit from the points being made. In the past it seems that a desire to make Buddhist works accessible to even the most general reader has led to unfortunate misunderstandings of even basic principles. Words like 'Dhamma' and 'Dukkha' have such a wealth of meanings and associations that no single English rendering could hope to do them justice.

I have tried hard to faithfully present the meaning of the original text, but if some have crept in and any unclear passages remain, I ask the forgiveness of the reader. Any merit that has accrued as a result of this work of translation I humbly offer to my Venerable Upajjhāya and to my parents.

The Translator

Suan Mok

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**THE ESSENTIAL POINTS
OF THE BUDDHIST TEACHINGS**

On this occasion of giving a special talk, I feel I should deal with those important subjects which most adequately sum up the principles of **Dhamma**.¹ So I have resolved to speak on "The Essential Points of the Buddhist Teachings" in a hope that a grasp of them will greatly facilitate a wide-ranging advance in your studies. If these points are not grasped, it will be confusing. You will feel that there are a great number of things to be known and that they keep increasing until there are too many to remember or understand or practice. This is the root cause of failure, for it results in discouragement and an interest that becomes more and more unfocussed and imprecise. In the end, it's as if one is carrying a great load of knowledge around on one's back without being capable of studying or practising so as to make use of it.

So please set your mind on some revision, in order to grasp the essential points of the Buddhist Teachings, so as to realize the knowledge that is the foundation for a correct understanding of Dhamma. I emphasize that it is the foundation, because there is knowledge which is not a foundation, just as there is incorrect understanding - understanding of the sort that deviates little by little until it's no longer Buddhist teaching. Or if it is still Buddhist teaching, it is an offshoot of it that is continually branching away from the trunk.

To call something a foundation of the Buddhist Teachings is only correct if firstly, it is a principle which aims at the

1. Ultimate truth; the truth of nature; the duty of all that lives; the teachings of the Buddha.

extinction of **Dukkha**¹ and, secondly, it has a logic that one can see for oneself without having to believe others. These are the important constituents of a foundation.

The Buddha refused to have any dealing with those things which don't lead to the extinction of Dukkha. Take the question of whether or not there is rebirth. What is reborn? How is it reborn? What is its kammic inheritance?² These questions are not aimed at the extinction of Dukkha. That being so, they are not Buddhist teaching and they are not connected with it. They do not lie in the sphere of Buddhism. Also, the one who asks about such matters has no choice but to indiscriminately believe the answer he's given, because the one who answers is not going to be able to produce any proofs, he's just going to speak according to his memory and feeling. The listener can't see for himself and so has to blindly believe the other's words. Little by little the matter strays from Dhamma until it's something else altogether, unconnected with the extinction of Dukkha.

Now, if one doesn't raise those sort of problems, one can ask instead, "Is there Dukkha?" and "How can Dukkha be extinguished?". To these questions the Buddha agreed to answer, and the listener can see the truth of every word of his answer without having to blindly believe them, see more and more clearly until he understands. And if one understands to the extent of being able to extinguish Dukkha, then that is the ultimate understanding. One knows that, even at this moment, there is no person living; one sees without doubt that there is no self or anything belonging to a self. There is just a feeling of "I" and "mine" arising due to the foolishness whereby one is deluded by the beguiling nature of sense-experience. There-

1. The suffering, unsatisfactoriness or imperfection of every experience or state clung to as being "I" or "Mine"

2. Kamma is Volitional action by means of body speech or mind.

fore, there being no one born here, there is no one who dies and is reborn. So, the whole question of rebirth is utterly foolish and nothing to do with Buddhism at all.

The Buddhist teachings aim to inform us that there is no self and nothing belonging to a self, there is only the false understanding of the ignorant mind. There is merely body and mind, which are nothing but natural processes. They function like a mechanism that can process and transform data. If they do so by the wrong method, it gives rise to foolishness and delusion, so that one feels that there is a self and things which belong to a self. If they do so by the correct method, those feelings do not arise; there is the primal truth-discerning awareness (*satipaṇṇā*), the fundamental true knowing and clear seeing that there is no self and nothing belonging to a self.

This being so, it follows that in the sphere of the Buddhist teachings there is no question of rebirth or anything of that nature. Rather, there is the question "Is there *Dukkha*?" and "How can it be extinguished?". Knowing the root cause of *Dukkha*, one will be able to extinguish it, and that root cause of *Dukkha* is delusion, the wrong understanding that there is a self and things belonging to a self.

The matter of "I" and "mine" is the single essential point of the Buddhist teachings. It is the one thing which must be completely purged. It follows that here lies the knowing, understanding, and practice of all the Buddhist Teachings without exception. So please pay full attention.

In regards to the foundations or the root principles of Dhamma, there aren't a great deal. The Buddha said that there was a single handful. A sutta in the *Samyutta Nikāya* makes

this clear. While walking through the forest, the Buddha picked up a handful of fallen leaves and asked the monks who were present, which was the greater amount—the leaves in his hand or all the leaves in the forest. They all said that the leaves in the forest were much more, so much so that it was beyond comparison. Even now, try to imagine the scene and see the truth of this, how much more they are. The Buddha then said that, similarly, those things which he had realized and which he knew were a great amount, equal to all the leaves in the forest—but that which was necessary to know, those things which should be taught and practiced, were equal to the number of leaves in his hand.

So from this it can be taken that, compared to all the myriad things that are to be found in the world, the root principles to be practiced to completely extinguish Dukkha amount to a single handful. We must appreciate that this “single handful” is not a huge amount, it’s not something beyond our capabilities to reach and understand. This is the first important point that we must grasp if we want to lay the foundations for a correct understanding of the Buddhist teachings.

Here we reach the phrase, “the Buddhist Teachings”. Please understand this phrase correctly. These days, that which is labelled as the “Buddhist Teachings” is a very nebulous thing—that is to say it is extensive without much definition. In the Buddha’s time, a different word was used, the word “dhamma”; it referred specifically to the dhamma which extinguishes Dukkha. The dhamma of the Buddha was called Samana Gotama’s dhamma. If it was the dhamma of another sect—say, that of Nigantha Nātaputta¹—it would be called Nigantha Nātaputta’s dhamma. One who liked a particular dhamma would try to study it until he understood it and then practice accordingly. It was called

1. A contemporary of the Buddha and founder of the Jain religion.

dhamma and that is what it was, real pure dhamma without trappings, without any of the numerous things which have come to be associated with it in later times. Now we call those appendages "Buddhist Teachings". Due to our carelessness the "Buddhist Teachings" have become so nebulous that they include within them many things foreign to them.

The real Buddhist Teachings alone are already abundant – as many as all the leaves in the forest – but that which has to be studied and practised is merely a handful, and that's already plenty. But nowadays we go and include those things which are associated with the Teachings, such as the history of the religion and an expanded psychology. Take *Abhidhamma*¹ – some parts of it have become psychology, some parts philosophy, it's continually expanding to fulfill the requirement of those disciplines. And there are many more offshoots, so that the things which are associated with the Teachings have become exceedingly numerous. They have all been swept in together under the one term, so that there have come to be a large number of "Buddhist Teachings".

If we don't know how to take hold of the essential points, then it will seem like there's a great amount and we won't be able to choose between them. It will be like going into a shop selling a great variety of goods, and being completely at a loss what to take. So we will just follow our common sense – a bit of this, a bit of that, as we see fit. And mostly we will take those things which agree with defilement (*kilesa*) rather than let ourselves be guided by truth – discerning awareness. Spiritual life becomes a matter of rites and rituals, of making merit by rote or to insure against some fear or other. There is no contact with the real Buddhist Teachings.

1. The third of the three "baskets" of the Buddhist scriptures. Compiled after the Buddha's death, they are a complex analysis of mind and matter into their constituent parts.

Let us know how to separate the Buddhist Teachings from those things which have merely come to be associated with them and included under the same name. Even in the Teachings themselves, we must still know how to distinguish the root principles, the essential points, and it is of these things that I have resolved to talk.

Coming into this hospital has inspired me to think of a feature of the commentaries, namely that of calling the Buddha the "Spiritual Doctor". Following the meaning of some of the Buddha's teachings and their subsequent explanation in the commentaries, there arose a principle that recognized two kinds of disease - physical disease and mental disease. In the texts, the term "mental disease" is used, but there it does not have the same meaning that it does today. In the time of the Buddha, "mental disease" referred to an illness of view or desire. These days, however, it refers to ordinary mental ailments that have their base in the body and are mixed up with physical disease. To prevent this hindering our understanding of the term illness of the spirit, I would like to establish a third term. Let us consider physical and mental diseases as both being physical, and use the term "spiritual disease" as an equivalent of the term "mental disease" used in the Buddha's time.

The words "spiritual" and "mental" have widely divergent meanings. "Mental" refers to the mental factors that are connected to and associated with the body. If we suffer from mental illnesses, we go to a psychiatric hospital or an asylum - it's not a spiritual matter. The word "spirit" here doesn't mean spirit in the sense of a ghost or a being that takes possession of people or anything like that, but it refers to the subtle aspects of the mind that are ill through the power of defilement, in particular through ignorance or wrong view. The mind composed of ignorance or wrong view suffers from the "spiritual disease"; it sees falsely. Seeing falsely causes it to think falsely, speak falsely, and act

falsely, and the disease lies right there in the false thought, false speech, and false action.

You will see immediately that everyone, without exception, has the spiritual disease. As for physical and mental diseases, they only occur in some people at some times. They are not so terrible. They don't give people the constant suffering with every inhalation and exhalation that spiritual disease does. Thus, physical and mental diseases are not dealt with by the Buddhist Teachings, which are the cure for the "spiritual disease", or with the Buddha, who is the "Doctor of the Spirit". Thus there remains only that which the commentators called "mental disease" and which we have decided to call "spiritual disease".

Remembering this point, that the commentators called the Buddha the "Spiritual Doctor", I feel that taking up this term as a way of exposition will make the matter easier to understand, for everyone suffers from the spiritual disease and everyone has to cure it spiritually. It is Dhamma which is the cure, the "single handful" of the Buddhist Teachings that must be realized, used, and digested so as to overcome the disease.

What you must pay further attention to is the point that, these days, mankind pays no heed to spiritual disease and so it is getting worse, both in terms of the individual and for the whole. For when everyone has the spiritual disease, then the whole world has it. It's a diseased world, both mentally and spiritually, and rather than lasting peace we have permanent crisis. However we strive and struggle, we can't find peace even for a moment. It's a waste of breath talking of lasting peace because all sides have the spiritual disease—all sides say that they are in the right and that the others are wrong. All sides have the spiritual disease, so it's all just a matter of creating Dukkha for themselves and others. It's as if a machine manufacturing Dukkha has appeared in the world. How then can the world find peace?

The solution lies in ending the spiritual disease in all the people of the world. What can cure it? There must be an antidote for this disease. It is the one handful of Dhamma of the Buddhist Teachings that must be used.

This then is the answer to the question of why, today, the Teachings are not as much of a refuge for people as the monks intend, even though it is held that Buddhism is developing and spreading much more than previously, and that those who have a correct understanding of it are more numerous than before. It's true that there is much study of the Teachings and a greater understanding of them, but if we don't realize that we have the spiritual disease, how will we take them and make use of them? If we don't realize that we are ill, we won't go to see the doctor and we won't take any medicine; anyone can see that. For the most part people don't see their illness, so that there has developed a mere fad for medicine. We go and listen to Dhamma and study it as a medicine, without feeling that we are ill. We just take it in order to store it away and clutter up the place, or else we use it as a subject for discussion, or in some cases for argument and dispute. This then, is why Dhamma is not yet an effective means to cure the world.

If we are going to establish a Buddhist society here and now, we should know its ultimate aims, so that the work can proceed decisively: that is, in a way that Dhamma can help to treat spiritual diseases directly and speedily. Don't leave the aims so undefined that you don't know in which direction to go. Let there be one handful of "sacred nectar" used correctly and used decisively. Let's make it really beneficial, not a subject of ridicule even to the slightest extent.

Now, the point as to what is spiritual disease and how it can be treated with a single handful of Dhamma will be explained.

Spiritual disease is the disease whose germ lies in the feeling of "we" and "ours", "I" and "mine" that is regularly present in the mind. The germ that is already in the mind develops first into the feeling of "I" and "mine" and then, acting through the influence of self-centeredness, becomes greed, hate, and delusion, causing upset for both oneself and others. These are the symptoms of the spiritual disease that lies within us. To remember it easily, it may be called the disease of "I" and "mine".

Every one of us has the disease of "I" and "mine", and we absorb more germs every time we see a form, smell an odor, touch a tangible object, taste a flavor, or think in the manner of an ignorant person. In other words, there is the reception of the germ, those things surrounding us that are infected and cause the disease, every time there is sense contact.

We must recognize that the germ is clinging (*upādāna*) and that it is of two kinds : clinging to "I" and clinging to "mine". Clinging to "I" is the feeling that "I" is an entity, that I am like this or like that, that I am the equal of any man. Anything of this sort is called "I". "Mine" is taking that as belonging to me, that which I love, that which I like. Even that which we hate we consider to be "my" enemy. This is called "mine".

In Pāli, "I" is *attā* and "mine" is *attaniyā*; or, if one uses the terms in general use in Indian philosophy, *ahamkāra* meaning to have the feeling of "I" (stemming from the word *aham*, "I"), and *mamamakāra*, meaning to have the feeling of "mine" (stemming from the word *mam*, which means "mine").

The feelings of *ahamkāra* and *mamamakāra* are so dangerous that they are called the spiritual disease, and every branch of philosophy or *dhamma* in the Buddha's time wanted to wipe them out. Even though they were followers of other

teachings, they all had the same aim of wiping out **ahamkāra** and **mamāmkāra**. The difference lay in that when they eradicated those feelings, they called what remained the True Self, the Pure **Ātman**, the Desired. As for our Buddhist teaching, it refused to use those names because it did not want to give rise to any new clinging to a self or things belonging to a self. It was just left a perfect emptiness, which was called **Nibbāna**, as in the phrase, "**Nibbānaṃ paramāṃ suññaṃ**" – "Nibbāna is supreme emptiness" – that is to say, absolutely empty of "I" and empty of "mine", in every respect, without remainder. That is **Nibbāna**, the end of spiritual disease.

This matter of "I" and "mine" is very hard to see. If you don't really concentrate, you won't be able to understand that it is the force behind **Dukkha**, the force behind spiritual disease.

That which is called "**attā**" or "self" corresponds to the Latin word "ego". If the feeling of self-consciousness arises, we call it egoism because once the feeling of "I" arises it naturally and inevitably gives rise to the feeling of "mine". Therefore, the feeling of self and the feeling of things belonging to self, taken together, is egoism. Ego can be said to be natural to living beings and, moreover, to be their center. If the word "ego" is translated into English, it must be rendered as soul, a word corresponding to the Greek "**kentricon**" which in English means center. Ego and **kentricon** being the same thing, the soul (**attā**) can be regarded as the center of living beings, as their necessary nucleus, and therefore is something that the ordinary person cannot rid themselves of or refrain from.

So it follows that all unenlightened people must experience this feeling of egoism arising continually. Although it's true that it doesn't express itself all the time, it manifests whenever one sees a form, hears a sound, smells an odor, touches a tactile object or has a thought arise in the mind. On every occasion

that the feeling of "I" and "mine" arises, we can take it to be the disease fully developed, regardless of whether it's dependent upon seeing a form, hearing a sound, smelling an odor, or whatever. When at the moment of contact, the feeling of "I" and "mine" arises, it is the disease fully developed. The feeling of selfishness has strongly arisen.

At this point we no longer call it egoism but selfishness, because it's an agitated egoism that leads one into low, false ways, into a state of thinking only of oneself without consideration for others, so that everything one does is selfish. One is completely ruled by greed, hatred, and delusion. The disease expresses itself as selfishness and then harms both oneself and others. It is the greatest danger to the world. That the world is currently so troubled and in such turmoil is due to nothing other than the selfishness of each person, of each of the factions forming into competing groups. That they are fighting each other without desire to fight, but through compulsion, is because they can't control this thing; they can't withstand its force, and so the disease takes root. That the world has taken in the "germ" which has then caused the disease, is because no one is aware of that which can resist the disease, namely, the heart of the Buddhist Teachings.

I would like you to understand this phrase, "the heart of the Buddhist Teachings". Whenever we ask what the heart of the Buddhist Teachings is, there are so many contending replies that it's like a sea of mouths—everyone's got an answer! But whether they are correct or not is another matter, for people just answer according to what they have remembered or what they have worked out for themselves. Please, look and see for yourselves how it is these days. Who truly knows the heart of the Buddhist Teachings? Who has truly reached it?

Whenever we ask what the heart of the Buddhist Teachings is, someone will probably say the Four Noble Truths¹, others *aniccamdukkhamanattā*², and others may cite the verse :

Sabba pāpassa akaranam

Kusalassūpasampadā

Sacitta pariyodapanam

Etam Buddhānasāsanam

or, "Refraining from doing evil, doing only good, and purifying the mind, that is the heart of the Buddhist Teachings." That's correct, but only very slightly so because it's still something repeated by rote; it's not something that has been truly seen for oneself.

As to that which is the heart of the Buddhist Teachings, I would like to suggest the short saying, "Nothing whatsoever should be clung to". There is a section in the Majjhima Nikāya where someone approached the Buddha and asked him whether he could summarize his teachings in one phrase and, if he could, what it would be. The Buddha replied that he could : "**Sabbe dhammā nālaṃ abhinivesāya**". "**Sabbe dhammā**" means "all things", "**nālaṃ**" means "should not be", "**abhinivesāya**" means "to be clung to". Nothing whatsoever should be clung to. Then the Buddha emphasized this point by saying that whoever had heard this core - phrase had heard all of the Teachings, whoever had put it into practice had practiced all of the Teachings, and whoever had received the fruits of practising this point had received all of the fruits of the Buddhist Teachings.

Now, if anyone realizes the truth of this point that there is not a single thing to be clung to, it means that there is no "germ" to cause the disease of greed, hatred and delusion, or of

1. Dukkha, its cause, its extinction and the path leading to its extinction.

2. Impermanence, unsatisfactoriness and selflessness.

wrong actions of any kind, whether of body, speech, or mind. So, whenever forms, sounds, odors, flavors, tangible objects and mental phenomena crowd in, the antibody "Nothing whatsoever should be clung to" will strongly resist the disease. The "germ" will not enter or, if it is allowed to do so, it will be only in order to be completely destroyed. The "germ" will not spread and cause the disease because of the antibody continually destroying it. There will be an absolute and perpetual immunity. This then is the heart of the Buddhist Teachings, of all Dhamma. Nothing whatsoever should be clung to : '**Sabbe dhammā nālaṃ abhinivesāya**'.

A person who realizes this truth is like someone who has an antibody that can resist and destroy disease. It is impossible for him or her to suffer from the spiritual disease. But, for the ordinary person who doesn't know the heart of the Buddhist Teachings, it's just the opposite, like someone who hasn't even the slightest immunity.

You probably understand by now the meaning of the "spiritual disease" and who the doctor is who heals it. But it's only when we see that we ourselves have the disease that we become really serious about healing ourselves, and in the right way too. Before we know, we just enjoy ourselves as we please. It's like someone unaware that they have some serious illness, such as cancer or TB, just indulging in pleasure-seeking without bothering to seek any treatment until it's too late, and then dying of their disease.

We won't be that foolish. We will follow the Buddha's instruction, "Don't be heedless. Be well-filled with heedfulness." Being heedful people, we should take a look at the way in which we are suffering from the spiritual disease and examine the "germ" that is its cause. If you do this correctly and unremittingly, you will certainly receive in this life the best thing that a human being can receive.

We must look more closely into the point that clinging is the “germ”, as well as the way that it spreads and develops into the disease. If you’ve observed even to a small degree, you will have seen that it’s this clinging to “I” or “mine” that is the chief of all the defilements.

We can divide the defilements up into **lobha**, **dosa**, and **moha** (or **raga**, **kodha**, and **moha**) or group them into sixteen or as many categories as we want—in the end they are all included in greed, hatred and delusion. But these three, too, can be collected into one—the feeling of “I” and “mine”. The feeling of “I” and “mine” is the inner nucleus which gives birth to greed, hatred, and delusion. When it emerges as greed, as desire and craving, it attracts the sense-object that has come into contact. If at another moment it repels the object, then it’s hate or **dosa**. On those occasions when it’s stupified and doesn’t know what it wants, hovering around the object, unsure whether to attract or repel, that is **moha**.

Defilement behaves in one of these ways towards sense-objects, i.e., forms, sounds, odors, flavors, or tangible objects, depending on what form the object takes—whether it is clearly apprehendable or hidden, and whether it encourages attraction, repulsion, or confusion. But, though they differ, all three are defilements because they have their roots in the inner feeling of “I” and “mine”. Therefore, it can be said that the feeling of “I” and “mine” is the chief of all defilements and the root cause of all Dukkha, of all disease.

Having not fully appreciated the Buddha’s teaching regarding Dukkha, we have misunderstood it. We have taken it to mean that birth, old age, and so on are themselves Dukkha, but in fact those are just its characteristic vehicles. The Buddha summarized his teaching as, “**Sankhittena pañcupādānakkhandā-dukkhā**” which translates as, “In short, Dukkha is the five

clung – to *khandas*"¹. This means that anything which clings or is clung to as "I" or "mine" is *Dukkha*. Anything which has no clinging to "I" or "mine" has no *Dukkha*. Therefore, birth, old age, sickness, death or whatever, if they are not clung to as "I" or "mine", cannot be *Dukkha*. Only when birth, old age, sickness, or death are clung to as "I" or "mine" are they *Dukkha*. The body and mind are the same. It's not that *Dukkha* is inherent in the body and mind. It's only when there is clinging to "I" and "mine" that they are *Dukkha*. With the pure and undefiled body and mind, that of the *arahant*,² there is no *Dukkha* at all.

We must see that this "I" and "mine" is the root cause of all forms of *Dukkha*. Wherever there is clinging, then there is the darkness of ignorance. There is no clarity because the mind is not empty; it is shaken up, frothing and foaming with the feeling of "I" and "mine". In direct contrast, the mind that is free of clinging to "I" and "mine" is serene, filled full of truth-discerning awareness.

So, we must firmly grasp the fact that there are two kinds of feeling : that of "I" and "mine", and that of truth-discerning awareness, and that they are totally antagonistic. If one enters the mind the other springs out. Only one can be present at a time. If the mind is brimful of "I" and "mine", truth-discerning awareness cannot enter; if there is truth-discerning awareness, the "I" and "mine" disappears. Freedom from "I" and "mine" is truth-discerning awareness.

Thus, if one speaks intelligently – which is to say, concisely, although it is somewhat frightening, one says along

1. The five 'groups' or 'aggregates' of existence : form, feeling, perception, mental formations, and consciousness.

2. One freed from all greed, aversion and delusion.

with Huang Po, along with the Zen sect, that Emptiness is the Dhamma, Emptiness is the Buddha, and Emptiness is the Primal Mind. Confusion, the absence of Emptiness, is not the Dhamma, not the Buddha, and not the Primal Mind; it is a subsequent confection. There are these two opposing feelings that arise. Once we have understood them, we will understand all Dhamma extremely easily.

Right now, you who are sitting here listening are empty, you are not confecting the feeling of "I" and "mine". You are listening, and you have truth – discerning awareness; the feeling of "I" and "mine" cannot enter. But if on another occasion something impinges and gives rise to the feeling of "I" and "mine", the emptiness or truth – discerning awareness you feel here will disappear.

If we are empty of egoism, there is no consciousness of "I" and "mine". We have the truth – discerning awareness that can extinguish Dukkha and is the cure for the spiritual disease; At that moment the disease cannot be born, and the disease that has already arisen will disappear as if picked up and thrown away. At that moment, the mind will be completely filled with Dhamma. This accords with the remark that emptiness is truth – discerning awareness, emptiness is the Dhamma, emptiness is the Buddha, because in that moment of being empty of "I" and "mine" there will be present every desirable virtue in the whole *Tripitaka*.¹

To put it simply, there will be perfect *satisampajañña* (mindfulness and self – awareness); perfect *hiri* (sense of shame); perfect *ottappa* (fear of evil); perfect *khanti* (patience and endurance); and perfect *soracca* (gentleness). There will be perfect *kataññūkatavedi* (gratitude) and perfect honesty right up to *yathābhutañānadassana* (the knowledge and vision according to reality) that is the cause for the attainment of Nibbāna.

1. The Buddhist scriptures.

I've come down to basics, saying that there must be *satisampajañña*, *hiri*, *ottappa*, *khanti*, *soracca*, and *kataññūkata-vedī*, because these things are also Dhamma. they too can be a refuge for the world. Even *hiri* and *otappa* alone, the aversion and shame towards doing evil and the fear of doing evil, with just these the world would be tranquil with lasting peace.

Nowadays there seems to be nothing but callous people who have no sense of fear or shame with regard to doing evil, and being that way they are able to do unfitting things and insist on doing them continually. Even when they see that it will create disaster for the whole world, they still persist, and so the world undergoes destruction because it lacks even this small virtue.

Or, we may take an even humbler virtue, that of gratitude. With just this one virtue, the world could be at peace. We must recognize that every person in the world is the benefactor of everyone else. Never mind people; even cats and dogs are benefactors of humanity, even sparrows. If we are aware of our debt of gratitude to these things, we will be unable to act in any way that harms or oppresses them. With the power of this one virtue of gratitude, we can help the world.

So it follows that those things which take the name of virtue are, if they are real virtues, of an identical nature. Their identity lies in that every one of them has the power to help the world. But, if virtues are false, they are totally obstructive, a completely disordered mass of contradictions. When there is true virtue, empty of "I" and "mine", there is all of the Dhamma, all of the Buddha, all things are present within it, in that one mind which is the true mind, the mind in its true state. On the other hand, the mind that is feverishly proliferating with "I" and "mine" is without virtue. In those moments, there is no mindfulness or self-awareness. The mind is in a rash, hasty state; there is no forethought and consideration, no restraint.

There is **ahiri** and **anottappa**, no shame and no fear of evil. One is completely callous as regards evil action, and one is utterly without gratitude. The mind is so enveloped in darkness that one can do things that cause destruction to the world. There's no need to talk about **nanadassana** (clear-seeing) **aniccam-dukkham-anattā**, or anything of that nature; it's impossible.

We must first be aware of these two categories, "empty of I" and "not empty of I". The former is called "empty" and the latter is called "disturbed", and to save time that is how they will be referred to from now on.

Here your common sense may say straightaway that nobody likes being disturbed. If I were to ask those people who like being disturbed to raise their hands, if anyone did so it would have to be a joke. Everyone likes to be empty in one way or another. Some people like the lazy emptiness of not having to work. Everyone likes to be empty of annoyance, not having the kids coming to bother you. But that emptiness is an external thing, it is not yet true emptiness.

Inner emptiness means to be normal, to have a mind that is not scattered and confused. Anyone who experiences this really likes it. If it develops to its greatest degree, which is to be empty of egoism, then it is **Nibbāna**.

The disturbed mind is just the opposite. It is disturbed in every way – in body, speech, and mind. It is totally confused, without the slightest peace or happiness. For people whose minds are disturbed by "I" and "mine", even if they go and take refuge in the Triple Gem, receive the precepts, offer alms and make merit, there can be no Buddha, Dhamma or Sangha present – it is all just a meaningless ritual. For the true Buddha, Dhamma and Sangha abide in the empty mind. Whenever the mind is empty of "I" and "mine", then the Triple Gem is present

right there. If it is for a short while, then the Buddha, Dhamma and Sangha are there temporarily. If it is fixed and unalterable, then there are the Buddha, Dhamma, and Sangha which are real and enduring.

Please keep making the effort to empty your minds of "I" and "mine", and the Buddha, Dhamma and Sangha will be regularly present. Keep doing it until it is perfect, until it is absolute. This is to take Dhamma, which is simultaneously the cure of the spiritual disease and the antibody, and put it to use in your mind, so that there is no way for the disease to be born

Here we should speak a little more about the treatment, to make it clearer that in protecting against the disease or in its treatment, there must be the principle previously mentioned – that of allowing no involvement with "I" and "mine". How is one to go about it? There are many methods. Even with physical and mental diseases one ailment can be treated in a variety of ways without having to rely on a single fixed method; but although they differ, the aim and the results are the same. Similarly, in treating the spiritual disease, the Buddha spoke of a great number of practices in order to answer the needs of different people, times, places, and occasions. So we have heard of a great number of practices, many names, and perhaps we have been frightened to hear that he established 84,000 **dhammakhandas** (main subjects of Dhamma). Now, if there were truly 84,000, you would all feel discouraged. You would die before you learned them all: it can't be done. You would learn some and then forget and then have to learn them again only to forget again, or else they would get completely mixed up in your mind. In fact, there is merely one handful, merely one subject which the Buddha summarized in one phrase, "Nothing whatsoever should be clung to". To hear this point is to hear all points. To practice this point is to practice all points, and to receive the fruits of this point is to be cured of all disease.

Every one of the many methods for wiping out the disease of "I" and "mine" works. It depends on how you wish to practice. One of the many ways is to constantly contemplate "I" and "mine" as *māyā*, an illusion or hallucination. This will enable you to see that the feeling of self, a seemingly solid entity that we are familiar with as "I" and "mine", is in fact a mere illusion. This is achieved by contemplating self in terms of the **Paticcasamuppāda**.¹

To explain the Paticcasamuppāda theoretically or technically takes a long time. It could take one or two months for just this single matter, because in the field of theory it's been expounded more and more as a subject of psychology and philosophy, until it's reached a state of excessive complexity. But in the field of practice, the Paticcasamuppāda is, as the Buddha said, just a handful. When there is contact with forms, sounds, odors, flavors, or whatever at one of the sense-doors, that contact is called, in Pāli **phassa**. This **phassa** develops into **vedanā** (feeling). **Vedanā** develops into **tanhā** (craving). **Tanhā** develops into **upādāna** (clinging). **Upādāna** develops into **bhava** (becoming). **Bhava** develops into **jāti**, which is "birth", and following on from birth there is the suffering of old age, sickness, and death, which are Dukkha.

Please see that as soon as there is contact with a sense-object there is phassa, and that the subsequent development of phassa into vedanā, tanhā, and so on is called Paticcasamuppāda, i.e. the process by which various things, existing in dependence on one other thing, condition the arising of another thing, which in turn conditions the development of a further thing, and so on. This process or state is called Paticcasamuppāda. It is dependent arising with no self to be found, merely dependence followed by arising. The Paticcasamuppāda is the process of dependent arising or dependent origination.

1. The process of dependent origination.

The way of making use of it is not to allow the dependent arising to take place; cutting it off right at the moment of sense-contact, not allowing the development of *vedanā*, not allowing feelings of satisfaction or dissatisfaction to arise. When there is no production of *vedanā*, then there is no birth of the craving and clinging that is the "I" and "mine". The "I" and "mine" lie right there at the birth of the craving and clinging; illusion lies right there. If, at the moment of sense-contact when there is nothing but *phassa*, it is stopped just there, there is no way for the "I" and "mine" to arise. There is no spiritual disease and no *Dukkha*.

Another method. For the average person, it is extremely difficult to prevent *phassa* from developing into *vedanā*. As soon as there is sense-contact, the feelings of satisfaction or dissatisfaction always follow on immediately. It doesn't stop at *phassa* because there has never been any training in Dhamma. But there is still a way to save oneself; namely, when *vedanā* has already developed, when there are already feelings of satisfaction and dissatisfaction, to stop it right there. Let feeling remain as merely feeling and pass away. Don't allow it to go on and become *tanhā*, wanting this and that in response to the satisfaction or dissatisfaction. Because, if there is satisfaction, then there will be desire, craving, indulgence, possessiveness, envy, etc., in consequence. Once there is dissatisfaction, then there is the desire to beat to death, to devastate, and kill. If there are these sorts of desires in the mind, it means that *vedanā* has already developed into *tanhā*. If so, then you must suffer from the spiritual disease of *Dukkha*, and nobody can help. All the gods together cannot help. The Buddha said that even He cannot help. He has no power over the laws of nature, He is merely the one who reveals them so that others can practice in accordance with them. If one practises wrongly one must have *Dukkha*. If one practises correctly, one has no *Dukka*. Thus it is said that if *vedanā* has developed into *tanha* then nobody can help. As soon as any form of craving has arisen, there must inevitably be *Dukkha*.

In that turbulent wanting that arises in the mind, see how to distinguish the feeling of the desirer, of "I", of the self that wants this or wants that, wants to do it like this or like that, or who has acted in that way or this, or who has received the results of those actions. That one who desires is "I"; wanting things, it grasps them as "mine" in one way or another – as "my" status, "my" property, "my" safety, "my" victory – and in all of those feelings the "I" is also present.

The feeling of "I" and "mine" is called upādāna. and arises from tanhā. Tanhā develops into upādāna. If the Patīccasamuppāda has progressed as far as tanhā and upādāna, the germ that enters through the eye, ear, nose, tongue, or body has matured to the extent that it can express itself as the symptoms of the disease, because upādāna is followed by bhava. Upādāna conditions the arising of bhava. Bhava means "having and being". The having and being of what? The having and being of "I" and "mine". **Kammabhava** is the action that conditions the arising of "I" and "mine". If it is called simply "bhava", it means the condition of "I" and "mine" full-blown, the disease full-blown.

In our practice we must stop it right at the point of preventing phassa from developing into vedanā or, if we fail there, by preventing vedanā from developing into tanhā. After that, it's hopeless. We try to have Dhamma right there at the meeting of eye and forms, of ear and sounds, of tongue and flavors, etc., by continually training in the point that nothing whatsoever should be clung to. With ordinary people, once phassa takes place, then vedanā arises followed by tanhā, upādāna, bhava and jāti. This is a path so well-worn that it is extremely easy to follow. But we don't take that path. As soon as there is sense-contact, we turn around and take the path of truth-discerning awareness. We don't take the path of "I" and "mine" or, even if we do follow it as far as vedanā, we still turn back there to the path of truth-discerning awareness. We don't just float along with the stream of "I" and "mine". In this way, there is never any

dukkha. If we can do it well, and follow the correct method perfectly, we can realize Arahantship.

If we wish to go by the Buddha's words, there is an easy principle that the Buddha taught to a disciple called Bāhiya. "O Bāhiya, whenever you see a form, let there be just the seeing; whenever you hear a sound, let there be just the hearing; when you smell an odor, let there be just the smelling; when you taste a flavor, let there be just the tasting; when you experience a physical sensation, let it merely be sensation; and when a thought arises, let it be just a natural phenomenon (feeling) arising in the mind. When it's like this there will be no self (no "I"). When there is no self, there will be no moving about here and there, and no stopping anywhere. And that is the end of Dukkha. That is Nibbāna." Whenever it's like that, then it is Nibbāna. If it is lasting, then it is lasting Nibbāna; if it's temporary, then it's temporary Nibbāna. In other words, it is just one principle.

Whatever method of practice you adopt, it should lead to equanimity with regards to the sense-objects which you contact, or to their cessation. Whatever sort of insight meditation you do, if you do it correctly without deceit, it will be in this same one form, that of not letting sense-data be compounded into the feeling of "I" and "mine". Then it's not difficult to destroy defilements since, when you practise like this, they are destroyed as a matter of course.

To make a simple comparison it's like when we keep a cat to prevent rats coming around and disturbing us. All we have to do is look after the cat, and the rats will disappear without our having to catch them ourselves. The cat just goes about its business and there are no more rats. Because of the cat, the undesirable thing is no more.

If we merely oversee eyes, ears, nose, tongue, body, and mind in the proper manner, the killing of defilements occurs naturally. This is to speak in conventional terms. It is the same as in the Buddha's teaching, "If you live in the the right way, the world will not be empty of arahants". Pay close attention to this. Just live in the right way—you don't have to do anything more than that—and the world will not be empty of arahants. This is not a minor point. Just before his death, the Buddha said **"im ce bhikkhave bhikkhū sammā vihāreyyum asuñño loko arahantehi assa"**. or "Bhikkhus, if you live rightly, the world will not be without arahants." "Sammā vihāreyyum" means "to live rightly".

How is it to live rightly so the world will not be empty of arahants? To live rightly is to live untouched by forms, sounds, odors, flavors and physical sensations. In other words they are experienced, but they do not enter and confect *vedanā*, *tanhā*, and *upādanā*. We live wisely. We live with truth—discerning awareness, empty of "I" and "mine", as has already been explained. For we have studied sufficiently, we have practised until we are sufficiently adept. Thus, having come into contact, the sense-object dies like a wave breaking on the shore, or as if we have a cat in the house that kills the rats that enter from other houses or the forest.

If we live in the right way – according to the principles of non-clinging – forms, sounds, odors, flavors and physical sensations cannot harm us. We experience them and associate with them, but treat them with truth—discerning awareness. Then we can eat them, consume them, possess them, or keep them without resultant *Dukkha* because it is as if they don't exist. It's the same as if we don't use them, don't eat them or keep them, because there is no "us" or "ours".

On the other hand, when everything is done with "I" and "mine", then there is *Dukkha* all the time. Even before

consuming or keeping there is already Dukkha, and while actually consuming or keeping there is more. It's all Dukkha. This is called not living rightly. We are vexed with the disease of Dukkha.

But, when we live rightly, there is no way for the disease to arise. To explain this point further, if we live rightly, then the defilements have no food to sustain them. They get thin and die. It can be compared to caging a fierce tiger in a pen where there is no food. We don't have to kill it, it will die of its own accord. We encircle forms, sounds, odors, flavors, physical sensations, and mental phenomena right at the point where they contact the eyes, ears, nose, tongue, body, and mind. We cage them right there. Practising rightly towards those things at that point, the defilements have no way to get food, will not be born, will not spread, and the germ will die.

The Buddha taught that if we live rightly, just live in the right way, then the earth will not be empty of arahants. This is called practising according to the principle of the Paticca-samuppāda. It is the kind of right living by which defilements cannot arise, the seeing of "I" and "mine" as mere illusion, due to the fact that they only arise when sense-contact gives rise to feeling, which develops into craving. If the development of craving is avoided clinging to "I" and "mine" does not take place. Therefore, you should understand correctly that "I" and "mine" is a product of confection, it's not real. It's an illusion in the same way as a wave that arises due to the blowing of the wind is an illusion. The water is real and the wind is real, but the wave is an illusion. This is to compare it with a material phenomenon, and the comparison is not perfect. It is meant merely to indicate the illusoriness of a wave that arises due to confection—the wind blows across the water, and a ridge of water arises and then disappears. The feeling of "I" and "mine" that arises over and over in a day is like a wave. The water of the sense-experience is contacted by

the wind of delusion or ignorance, and waves of "I" and "mine" are formed over and over throughout the day. A single emergence of the feeling of "I" and "mine" is called one *jāti*, one birth.

The real meaning of the word "birth" as the Buddha meant it is not the birth from a mother's womb, that's too physical. The birth that the Buddha was pointing to was spiritual, the birth of clinging to "I" and "mine". In one day there can be hundreds of births; the amount depends on a person's capacity, but in each birth the "I" and "mine" arises, slowly fades, and gradually disappears and dies. Shortly, on contact with a sense-object, another arises. Each birth generates a reaction that carries over to the next. This is what is called the *kamma* of a previous life ripening in the present birth. It is then transmitted further. Every birth is like this. This is what *kamma*-fruit and the reception of *kamma*-fruit is meant to refer to. Such an interpretation agrees with the Buddha's own words. If we don't take it that way then we stray from the point. We must understand birth, *kamma*, and the fruits of *kamma* in this way. For example, there can be birth as the desirer of some pleasing object and then death followed by birth as a thief or robber, and then a further death followed by birth as the enjoyer of that object. In a short time there is birth as a prisoner in the dock and then, having been found guilty, birth as a convict in jail. These sorts of birth are many and muddled, many threads and strands tangled together. But if you look closely, you will understand that at any time one stops birth, then at that moment there is *Nibbāna* which is not born, does not get old and sicken, and does not die. If there is still birth, still the feeling of "I" and "mine", it just goes on being the Wheel of Birth and Death, a continual chain of *Dukkha*.

But we shouldn't go thinking that absence of birth means that one is so empty that there is no feeling at all. It is not sitting stiffly like a log of wood. On the contrary, one is

extremely active. Being perfectly empty of birth, empty of "I", is to have perfect truth-discerning awareness, and so whatever one does is completely fluent. There being no false thinking, false speech, or false action, one acts swiftly and surely. There is no possibility of error because one's truth-discerning awareness is natural and spontaneous. This state of mind is called 'empty of "I"'. That one who is empty of "I," who is Nibbāna, can do anything and do it without error. His actions are many, and they are extremely swift and greatly beneficial.

Don't go thinking that if this sort of feeling has arisen you won't be able to do anything – that you'll just stop everything and be totally lethargic and weary, completely indifferent. That's your own idea. Your foolishness makes you afraid of emptiness, afraid of Nibbāna, afraid that ending your craving will be unpleasant.

In fact, the ending of craving is the ultimate pleasure and the greatest happiness. It is real pleasure and happiness. It is not harmful, deceitful, or illusory. The pleasure of the ordinary unenlightened person is false; it is deceitful and illusory, and fills one with Dukkha. It is like a bait: once we swallow it, we get caught on the hook. This is called falling into the hands of the devil. There is unceasing confusion. One is trapped on the Wheel of Birth and Death, in the chain or the whirlpool of Dukkha, unable to get free. So, seeing the "I" and "mine" as an illusion through practising according to the Patikkasamuppāda is one path. I will give more examples. Another method is seeing that even the sense-objects-forms, sounds, odors, flavors, tangible objects and mental phenomena – are illusions, through an understanding of aniccaṃ – dukkaṃ – anattā.

We must not take the subject of aniccaṃ, dukkhaṃ and anattā lightly. It's not just something for old people, or merely something to be chanted when someone dies. It is a subject that the living must take up and use in their everyday

lives. Anyone capable of utilizing their understanding of aniccaṃ - dukkhaṃ - anattā to superintend their daily life is one who has the ultimate antibody : forms, sounds, odors, flavors, etc. cannot turn to poison. We have security (khema). It is noticeable that the Buddha didn't use the word "happy" for that can be somewhat misleading; "secure" is good enough. It means free and at peace. To make this a little clearer so that it can't be a cause for delusion, it means "secure from the *yogas*¹ (yokes)". Yoga means "that which disturbs", and to be secure from the things that disturb us is to be empty, Nibbāna. If you want a secure life, you must rely on a thorough understanding of aniccaṃ - dukkhaṃ - anattā. Then you will be able to resist the forms, sounds, odors, flavors, and physical sensations that are experienced without getting lost in aversion or attraction. There are just two kinds of confusion - getting lost in attraction and getting lost in aversion, the causes of laughter and of tears. If one sees that laughter is just one form of panting and gasping and crying another, and that to remain evenminded is better, that is called security. We don't become the slaves of sense - objects, laughing and crying according to their enticements. We are free, at rest, secure. That is better. It is the using of aniccaṃ - dukkhaṃ - anattā as a tool to govern our daily lives. We are capable of seeing that sense - objects are an illusion. Just as with the seeing of "I" and "mine" as illusion because they are conditioned by sense - objects, so through the seeing of the sense - objects themselves as illusory through the principle of aniccaṃ - dukkhaṃ - anattā, the disease of Dukkha does not break out.

Here we will look at *sukhavedanā*, i.e. pleasure and enjoyment. *Sukhavedanā* is an illusion because it's like a wave that periodically arises; there's no reality to it. I am making this point because every single thing in every single world is

1. A synonym for *āsava*s. To be distinguished from the word 'yoga' meaning spiritual endeavor.

valued according to the sukhavedanā it provides. Really think about this—why are you studying? Why are you doing the job that you do, why do you amass wealth and status, fame and followers? It's solely for the sake of sukhavedanā. If we understand just this one matter and deal with it correctly, every matter will come right. So we must see sukhavedanā in its true light, as one sort of illusion.

We must deal with sukhavedanā in accordance with its illusory nature. To develop an aversion towards it would be utterly foolish, as would be getting infatuated with it and becoming its slave. To deal with it correctly is Dhamma, and to do so is to be a disciple of the Buddha, for one can thereby defeat Dukkha and not be forced to suffer from the spiritual disease. It is achieved by the method of contemplating the illusory nature of sukhavedanā, that it is like a wave that arises due to the wind blowing across water. In other words, when forms, sounds, odors and flavors have entered, the foolishness of ignorance and delusion goes out to receive them. From that contact, the wave of sukhavedanā arises and then breaks up and disintegrates. If we look at it like this, we won't be a slave of sukhavedanā. We will be capable of dealing with it in a way free from Dukkha. Our family will be without Dukkha, our neighbours will be without Dukkha, and the whole world will be without Dukkha, all with ourselves as the root-cause. If everyone was like this, the world would have a lasting peace, a true and enduring happiness. This then, is the benefit of recovering from the disease through the various methods : one does not suffer from the disease of "I" or the disease of "mine".

These three examples I have given are sufficient, for time is running out. We can see the illusoriness of "I" and "mine" through the principle of Paticcasamuppāda; the illusoriness of sense—objects through the principle of aniccaṃ—dukkhaṃ—anattā or the illusoriness of sukhavedanā. For any of these ways to be

effective, we must look closely, be attentive, have mindfulness and self-awareness at the moment that sense-objects come into contact by way of eye, ear, nose, tongue, body, and mind, in the same way the Buddha enjoined the Venerable Bāhiya : to let seeing be merely seeing and hearing be merely hearing. Don't produce *vedanā* or, if *vedanā* has already developed, don't let that develop into *taṇhā*. Also, be really attentive to this matter of "empty" and "disturbed".

Having heard this just once and for the first time, you must now go and observe yourself until you can grasp that, in fact, we ourselves are frequently empty, at the times when we are unconfused and there is a great deal of mindfulness and self-awareness. Disturbance, the feeling of "I" and "mine", comes every now and again, and its periodic arising is called birth. Whenever there is birth there is *Dukkha*. But there are also many moments when there is no birth and so no *Dukkha* at all. However, people stupidly skip over them and overlook the everpresent *Nibbāna*, and so are unaware of its presence.

Even if it is only a very small *Nibbāna*, merely a taste, it's exactly the same thing as true, lasting *Nibbāna*; it differs only in duration. It doesn't last because we don't know how to protect ourselves from the disease and how to destroy it. Consequently, every now and again the disease penetrates and interrupts *Nibbāna*.

If anyone has the boon of intelligence to the extent of knowing that, in truth, the mind is fundamentally empty, that it's already *Nibbāna*, then the only thing that has to be watched out for is not to let it be infiltrated by new things. So, don't let them in. Drive them out! If we don't let them into our house, it can be empty all the time.

The way of driving them out is to practice Dhamma according to the Buddha's teaching. This causes the arising of

energy and inspiration, **chanda** (firm faith in Dhamma), **virīya** (sincere effort in Dhamma), **citta** (absorption in Dhamma), **vīmaṁsā** (unceasing alertness).¹ Then one will succeed without difficulty.

If we start off foolishly, it is extremely difficult, harder than rolling a mortar up a mountain. But if we approach it in the right way, it's easier than rolling a mortar down a mountain.

Also, we must have unceasing self-awareness. Don't be forgetful and don't be heedless. Keep observing the emptiness and disturbance which are arising daily. Let the mind love and be satisfied with emptiness, the ever-present Nibbāna. Don't let it incline into wrong understanding and get lost in things that disturb.

Right now, the greatest problem is that nobody is fond of ending Dukkha. It has reached the point that people don't dare affirm that we are born in order to be free from Dukkha. It has become that we are born for anything at all, just so long as it's to our liking and good fun. We just blindly follow whatever's going. Actually, the ending of Dukkha is not difficult, it's not beyond our capabilities, any more than any other job of work. But we don't understand, we turn our backs on it, and so suffer continually.

Therefore, the ending of, or freedom from, the spiritual disease lies in knowing how to prevent the arising of "I" and "mine", and that freedom from disease is called the greatest gift. That was the sales talk of the medicine sellers of the Buddha's time; "**Arogya paramā lābhā**" was the phrase that they called out as they travelled along the highways and byways: "Freedom from disease is the greatest gain. Good health, great wealth!" It doesn't refer to freedom from such ailments as toothache, or anything like that. The spiritual disease that the Buddha was referring to is the disease that is the greatest suffering, the real disease; and the cure of the disease must be correspondingly effective.

1. These are the Four Iddhipāda or "Roads to Success"

These days our usual escape from the disease occurs, often without our being aware of it, when the dhammas causing our suffering are replaced by their opposites; in Pāli this is called **tadangavimutti**. On the occasions when we resolve to oversee the mind it can be emptier than that, freer from the disease and that is called **vikkhambanavimutti** (deliverance by suppression) because we keep the mind under control.

If we can handle it with complete competence and take out the root, extract the germ, then this is called **samucchedavimutti** (release by cutting off). This means we kill it dead, it's not just a fluke or a temporary suppression.

So, usually we feel the results of at least **tadangavimutti**, and that is already a big gain. If it excels that, then it's **vikkhambhanavimutti** or **samucchedavimutti**, which is the highest level. Then we don't dwell in greed, hatred, delusion, and the various desires but live with security, full of truth-discerning awareness, free of suffering and agitation. It is like the freshness of innocent youth. That is the recovery from the spiritual disease.

Finally, I would like to ask all of you who have gathered here as a buddhist group to be mindful of the real purpose of our meeting. If you think that it is a good and true endeavour then help in harmony to renounce that which is cheap and poor in order to acquire that which is better, more valuable, most excellent. Keep up the work, don't let it fail; make it develop and progress so as to be of benefit both to yourselves and to all humanity. Then you can take it that, in this life, you have done the best thing that a human being can do, and have received the best thing that a human being can receive. And there is nothing beyond that. That's all there is.

It means that we have completed all that needs to be studied, done, or experienced as a result of our actions. Our lives

are totally free of Dukkha, both at the time of seeking and at the time of consuming. When we perform our daily tasks of seeking - including both our study and our jobs - there is no Dukkha. When we receive the fruits of material wealth, status, prestige, and fame to enjoy, we have no Dukkha. There is no Dukkha in any kind of situation. We are truly exalted beings.

It's like catching a fish without getting caught by its barbs and then eating it without getting the bones stuck in the throat. Catching the fish, there is no Dukkha, and eating it there is no Dukkha. That's all there is to it.

May you all thoroughly understand physical disease, mental disease, and spiritual disease. If you don't allow your knowledge to be deficient in any way, then it can treat and cure all illness. Then you will be one who is free from disease and will really know the truth of the words, "True health is the greatest wealth".

EMPTINESS

In the previous talk I spoke of emptiness as being an important subject but the occasion didn't permit me to give it the special attention necessary for a thorough understanding. So as some aspects of this subject of emptiness remain obscure, today I have come to talk about it specially.

Emptiness is the most difficult to understand of all the Buddhist Teachings because it is their innermost heart. Being called a heart it must obviously be something subtle and profound. Its understanding does not lie within the scope of mere conjecture or the sort of pondering that ordinary people are accustomed to. It can only be understood by determined study.

The most essential meaning of the word 'study' is of the unceasing, dedicated observation and investigation of whatever arises in the mind, be it pleasant or unpleasant. Only one familiar with the observation of mind can really understand Dhamma. One who merely reads books cannot understand and what's more may even go astray. But one who tries to observe the things going on in the mind and always takes that which is true in his or her own mind as a standard has no way to get muddled. Such a person will be able to comprehend Dukkha and the cessation of Dukkha and ultimately will understand Dhamma. Then if books are read they will be understood well.

From the moment of birth to the time of death we must train ourselves in this way, examining the contact of the mind with the objects that surround it and the nature of the results of that contact, for in that natural process there will inevitably be both pleasure and pain and observing them will make the mind wiser and more resilient. To keep observing the nature of our thoughts generates a mind emptied of Dukkha, and so is the

very best knowledge there is. Through it we gain familiarity with the realization or awareness of emptiness.

Please think back to the point made in the last talk that the Commentators all called the Buddha the 'Spiritual Doctor' and divided disease into two kinds : that of the body/mind and that of the spirit. Both diseases of the body and those of the mind such as are treated in mental hospitals were considered to be Physical Disease. Spiritual Disease, or Mental Disease as they called it, refers to the disease that must be treated with Dhamma. So I would like to make the point that if you are really to understand disease you must make this division : take diseases of the body and of the mind (the mental body) as being both physical disease. As for spiritual disease it is not a disease of the brain or nervous system but is an illness affecting truth-discerning awareness (*satipaṇṇā*), that which knows our life and the world as they truly are. So it refers to Ignorance or the wrong understanding that springs from ignorance and causes the wrong actions that lead to *Dukkha*, even if physically and mentally we are quite healthy.

When we are suffering from Spiritual Disease with what must we treat it? We must treat it with emptiness. What's more, emptiness (*suññatā*) is not only the cure of the disease but is also the freedom from disease. There is nothing beyond emptiness.

The medicine which cures the disease is the knowledge and practice that gives birth to emptiness. When emptiness has appeared it will be the cure of the disease and after recovery from the disease there will be nothing save emptiness, the state void of *Dukkha* and void of the mental defilements that are the cause of *Dukkha*. This emptiness, which has that wide breadth of meaning, is self-existent : nothing can come to touch it, develop it, improve it, or do anything to it. Thus it is a timeless state,

for it knows neither birth nor death. Its 'being' is not the same as the being of things which are born and die but since we have no other word to use, we say that it has being characterized by immutable emptiness.

If anyone realizes, that is to say if anyone's mind realizes this thing, then it will be the medicine that cures the disease and the immediate recovery from disease, a state timelessly empty. It is true health.

Please keep trying to grasp the meaning of this word emptiness, or *suññatā* as it is in Pāli, as I explain it point by point.

Firstly, consider the point that the Buddha declared that every word that he, the *Tathāgata*¹, spoke referred to the subject of emptiness. He spoke of no other matter, either directly or indirectly. Any talk unconnected with the subject of emptiness is not the speech of the *Tathāgata* but of disciples of a later time who liked to speak at great length to show how clever and articulate they were.

One can, if one wants to, add much more, for example: that emptiness is the absence of self or what belongs to self, for the word emptiness has a whole host of applications. Although the characteristic of emptiness remains constant, its expressions are innumerable. That being so, we will aim to examine emptiness only as absence of *Dukkha* and the defilements that are the cause of *Dukkha* and as the absence of the feeling that there is a self or that there are things which are the possessions of a self. This is emptiness as it relates to our practice of Dhamma.

If we enquire which of the Buddha's utterances dealing with this matter can be taken as authoritative statements we

1. One who is 'gone to suchness', the term used by the Buddha when referring to himself.

will find that in many places the Buddha taught us to know how to look on the world as being empty, as in the phrase “*Suññato lokam avekkhassu mogharāja sadā sato*” which means “You should look on the world as being empty. If you can be always aware of the emptiness of the world, death will not find you”

These words of the Buddha enjoining us to see the world as being empty show that it is the highest thing. Anyone who wants to be without problems concerning Dukkha and death, should look on the world, ie. on all things, as they truly are, namely as empty, neither ‘I’ nor ‘mine’. The statements of the Buddha that follow on from show the benefits : ‘*Nibbānaṃ paramaṃ suññaṃ*’ and ‘*Nibbānaṃ paramaṃ sukhaṃ*’, which translate as ‘Nibbāna is the supreme emptiness’ and ‘Nibbāna is the supreme happiness’. You must understand that Nibbāna, the remainderless extinction of Dukkha, means the same as supreme emptiness, and that it is possible to know and realize an emptiness that is not supreme, an emptiness that is in some way deficient or false. The truth-discerning awareness must be so impeccably clear that one has not the slightest feeling of ‘self’ or ‘belonging to self’ for it to be called *paramaṃ suññaṃ*, supreme emptiness. Supreme emptiness is Nibbāna because it completely extinguishes the things that are on fire, the stream or whirlpool of flowing and changing phenomena. Thus the supreme emptiness and the supreme extinction are one and the same thing.

As for the saying that Nibbāna is the supreme happiness, it is an expression in the language of relative truth, a sort of enticing propaganda in the language of the common man used because in general people are infatuated with happiness, they want nothing else. So it is necessary to tell them that Nibbāna is happiness and what’s more it’s the supreme happiness. But truly speaking Nibbāna is greater than happiness, beyond it. It is emptiness. It can’t be said to be either happiness or suffering because

it lies beyond both the suffering and the happiness known by the common man. But when one speaks like this, people don't understand, and so it's said instead, in the language of the worldly, that it is ultimate happiness. This being so, when using the word happiness you must be careful to use it in its proper sense. It is not the happiness that people generally see or aspire to. It is a different sort of happiness, it is the state empty of every single thing that proliferates, flows and changes. Thus it is truly lovely, truly refreshing and truly desirable. For if there is still flowing and changing, a constant swaying and rocking, how can there be happiness?

Thus the feelings of pleasure arising from contact with the various sense-objects are illusory, they are not the ultimate happiness. The happiness of the common man is not the supreme happiness of Nibbāna that is emptiness. So in hearing the phrase 'Nibbāna is the supreme happiness', don't go jumping to the conclusion that Nibbāna is exactly what you're looking for and start dreaming about it without taking into consideration that it is also supreme emptiness.

The saying of the Buddha which deals with the practice in regard to emptiness is the one that is the heart of the Buddhist Teachings: '*Sabbe dhammā nālaṃ abhinivesāya*' which translates literally as 'No dhamma whatsoever should be grasped at or clung to'. If one amplifies the meaning a little it may be rendered as 'no one should grasp or cling to anything as being I or mine'. 'No one' means that there are no exceptions; 'should grasp or cling' means to give rise to ego-consciousness; 'as being I' refers to the feeling called *ahaṃkāra*, the grasping at a (non-existent) soul or abiding ego-entity; 'as being mine' refers to the feeling called *mamaṃkāra*, the grasping at phenomena as being connected to ego. So don't have *ahaṃkāra* or *mamaṃkāra* with regard to anything at all starting from a worthless speck of dust up to valuable objects such as diamonds, sapphires, gems and the objects of sensual desire, and on to things higher

than that – Dhamma, its theory, practice and attainment, the Path – Realizations, their Fruits¹ and Nibbāna. Nothing whatsoever should be grasped at or clung to as being 'I' or 'mine'. This is the heart of the Buddhist Teachings and was affirmed to be so by the Buddha himself.

He said that to have heard the phrase *sabbe dhammā nālaṃ abhinivesāya*, is to have heard every phrase of the Teachings, to have put it into practice is to have done every practice; and to have reaped the fruits of that practice is to have reaped every fruit of the Buddhist Teachings. So we don't need to be afraid that there is too much to understand. The Buddha made the comparison that the things that he had realized were as many as all the leaves in the forest but those which he had brought out to teach were a single handful. The 'single handful' he was referring to was this principle of not grasping at or clinging to anything as being self or as belonging to self.

To have heard this phrase is to have heard every phrase because all subjects are condensed within it. Of all the things that the Buddha taught there wasn't one that didn't deal with Dukkha and the elimination of Dukkha. Grasping and clinging are the cause of Dukkha. When there is grasping and clinging there is Dukkha. The practice is to make the non-arising of grasping and clinging final and permanent, so that the mind is unceasingly empty. Just that is enough. There is nothing else to do.

'This practice is every practice'. Try to think if there's anything that remains to be practised. At any moment that any person, whether it's Mr. Smith or Mrs. Jones or anyone at all, has a mind that is free of grasping and clinging, what will there

1. Magga - Phala. There are four Path - Realizations and four corresponding Fruits. They refer to the attainment and experience of the stages of 'Stream Entry', 'Once Returner', 'Non-Returner' and 'Arahant'.

be present in their minds? Please think it over. We can take it step by step from the Triple Refuge to virtuous conduct, samādhi and the discernment of truth, on to the Path Realizations, their Fruits and Nibbāna. At that moment they have reached the Buddha, the Dhamma and the Sangha for to have a heart free of the mental defilements and Dukkha is to be one with the heart of the Triple Gem. They have reached them without having to shout out **Buddham saranam gacchāmi**¹ or any of the rest of it. Crying out **Buddham saranam gacchāmi** and so on is just a ritual, a ceremony of entrance, and is an external matter; it doesn't penetrate to the Buddha, Dhamma and Sangha in the heart. If at any moment any person at all has a mind empty of grasping at and clinging to 'I' and 'mine', even if it's only for an instant, it means that the mind has realized emptiness. It is pure, radiant and at peace. It is one and the same thing as the heart of the Buddha, the Dhamma and the Sangha. Thus at any moment that one has a mind empty in this way one has taken refuge, one has reached the Triple Gem.

To move onto giving **dāna** (alms) and making donations. The meaning of giving **dāna** and donations is to relinquish, to end all grasping at and clinging to things as being 'I' or 'mine'. As for giving in order to receive a much greater reward, such as giving a tiny amount and asking for a mansion up in heaven, that's not giving, it's just a business deal. Giving must be without strings attached, a casting off of things that we grasp at and cling to as being 'I' and 'mine'. At the moment that one has a mind empty of ego-consciousness then one has made the supreme offering, for when even the self has been given up, what can there be left? When the 'I-feeling' has come to an end then the 'mine-feeling' will vanish by itself. Thus at any moment that a person has a mind truly empty of self, when even the self has been completely relinquished, he or she has developed giving to its perfection.

1. The traditional Pāli formula for taking refuge in the Buddha.

To move onto **Sila** (Virtuous Conduct), one who has an empty mind, free of grasping at and clinging to a (non-existent) self or to things as being possessions of a self, is one whose bodily and verbal actions are truly and perfectly virtuous. Any other sort of sila is just an up-and-down affair. We make resolutions to refrain from this and abstain from that and then we can't keep them. It's up-and-down because we don't know how to let go of self and the possessions of self right from the start. There being no freedom from self there can be no real sila, or if there is, it's inconsistent. It is not **ariyakantasila**, the virtuous conduct that is of contentment to the Noble Ones, it is worldly sila, continually up and down. It can never become transcendental sila. Whenever the mind is empty, if it's only for a moment, or if it's for a day or a night or however long, for that length of time one has true sila.

As for **samādhi**, an empty mind is the supreme samādhi, the supremely focussed firmness of mind. The straining and striving sort of samādhi isn't the real thing and the samādhi which aims at anything other than non-clinging to the five **khandas** is **micchāsamādhi** (wrong or perverted samādhi). You should be aware that there is both micchāsamādhi and **sammāsamādhi** (right or correct samādhi). Only the mind that is empty of grasping at and clinging to 'I' and 'mine' can have the true and perfect stability of sammāsamādhi. One who has an empty mind has correct samādhi.

Here we reach **paññā** (the discernment of truth). It is clearly indicated that knowing or realizing emptiness, or being emptiness itself is the supreme paññā because at the moment that the mind is empty it is supremely keen and discerning. In contrast, when delusion and ignorance enter and envelop the mind, causing grasping at and clinging to things as self or possessions of self then there is supreme foolishness. If you think it over you will easily see for yourself quite clearly that when these

things have left the mind there can be no foolishness. When the mind is empty of foolishness, empty of 'I' and 'mine', there is perfect knowing or paññā. So the wise say that emptiness and paññā, the discernment of truth (or satipaññā – truth – discerning awareness) are one. It's not that they are two similar things, they are one and the same thing. True or perfect paññā is emptiness, absence of the foolish clinging of delusion. Once the mind is rid of delusion it discovers it's primal state, the true original mind which is paññā or truth – discerning awareness.

The word mind (*citta*) is being used here in a specific way. Don't confuse it with the 89 cittas or 121 cittas of the Abhidhamma. They are a different matter. That which we call the true original mind, the mind that is one with paññā refers to the mind that is empty of grasping at and clinging to self. Actually, this state shouldn't be called mind at all, it should be called emptiness, but since it has the property of knowing we call it mind. The various schools call it by various names but strictly speaking it's enough to say that the true fundamental nature of mind is satipaññā, truth – discerning awareness, absence of grasping and clinging. Thus in emptiness lies perfect paññā.

Now going on to the Path Realizations, their Fruits and Nibbāna. Here the progressively higher levels of emptiness reach their culmination in Nibbāna, which is called **paramasuññatā** or **paramam suññam** – supreme emptiness. So now you may see that right from taking refuge onto giving dāna, sila, samādhi and paññā there is nothing other than emptiness, non-clinging to self. Even the Path Realizations, their Fruits and Nibbāna itself do not exceed emptiness, but are its highest, supreme level.

Consequently, the Buddha declared that having heard this teaching is to have heard all teachings, to have put it into practice is to have done all the practices and to have reaped the fruits of that practice is to have reaped all fruits. The meaning of the

word 'emptiness' is an essential point that you must try to keep in mind.

Now let us consider that all things are included in the term 'dhamma'. 'Dhamma' means 'thing', sabbe dhammā means 'all things'. You must be clear when you use the term 'all things' as to what it signifies. 'All things' must refer to absolutely everything without exception, whether worldly or spiritual, material or mental. Even if there was something outside of these categories it would still be included in the term all things and would still be a dhamma. So I would like you all to observe that :

The worlds of material objects i.e. all realms of material objects are **dhammas**. The mind that is aware of all worlds is a **dhamma**. If the mind and the world come into contact, that contact is a **dhamma**. Any result of that contact, be it feelings of love, hate, dislike or fear or satipaṇṇā, the clear seeing of things as they truly are, these are all **dhammas**. Right or wrong, good or bad, they are all **dhammas**. If satipaṇṇā, gives rise to various interior knowledges, those knowledges are **dhammas**. If those knowledges lead to the practice of sila, samādhi and paṇṇā or any other type of practice, that practice is a **dhamma**. The results of practice, abbreviated as the Path Realizations, their Fruits and Nibbāna, even these are **dhammas**.

To sum up, all these things are dhammas. 'Dhamma' encompasses everything from the truly peripheral, the world of material objects, up to the results of Dhamma practice, the Path Realizations, their Fruits and Nibbāna. Seeing each of these things clearly is called seeing 'all things' and regarding all things the Buddha taught that none whatsoever should be grasped at or clung to. This body cannot be grasped at or clung to. Even more so the mind ; it is an even greater illusion. Thus the Buddha said that if one is determined to cling to something as self it would be better

to cling to the body because it changes more slowly. It is not as deceptive as the mind, that which we call **nāmadhamma**.

'Mind' here does not refer to the mind previously spoken of as being one and the same thing as emptiness, but to mentality, the mind known by ordinary people. The contact between the mind and the world results in the various feelings of love, hate, anger and so on. These are dhammas which are even less to be grasped at or clung to than the dhammas of form because they are illusions, born of an illusion arising in the realm of defilements. Grasping at or clinging to them is extremely dangerous.

The Buddha taught that even truth – discerning awareness should not be grasped at or clung to because it is merely a part of Nature. Attaching to it will give rise to fresh delusion; there will be a person who has truth – discerning awareness, there will be MY truth – discerning awareness. Due to this attachment the mind will be weighed down with grasping and clinging, and lurch about in accordance with the changes that those things undergo; then there will be Dukkha. Knowledge should be looked on as being simply knowledge. If one deludedly grasps at or clings to it, it will give rise to the various kinds of 'Attachments to Rites and Rituals'¹ and one will experience Dukkha without realizing why.

Practising Dhamma is similar – it's just practice. It is a truth of nature that results always arise in proportion to the practice done. If one grasps at or clings to it as being 'I' or 'mine' then one falls into more error, creates another spurious self, and experiences Dukkha no differently than if one were clinging to something as gross as sexual desire.

1. The third of the ten 'fetters' (**samyojana**) that bind beings to the Wheel of Birth and Death.

Reaching the Path Realizations, their Fruits and Nibbāna; They are dhammas, parts of nature that are 'such-as-they-are'. Even emptiness is a part of nature. If one grasps at or clings to it then it is a false Nibbāna, a false emptiness because Nibbāna, true emptiness, is ungraspable. Thus it may be said that on grasping at Nibbāna or emptiness one deviates from it immediately.

All these examples demonstrate that there is absolutely nothing at all apart from dhammas.

The word dhamma signifies nature. This interpretation is in line with the etymology of the word, for the word dhamma means 'a thing which maintains itself'. Dhammas are divided into two categories – those which flow and change and those that do not. Those that flow and change due to some generative force maintain their existence within that very flow and change i.e. they are the stream of transformation itself. That which being devoid of the necessary causal factors does not flow and change is Nibbāna or emptiness. It is able to maintain itself without change i.e. it is the state of changelessness itself.

But the sort of dhamma which undergoes transformation and the sort that doesn't are both merely dhammas, things which maintain themselves in certain states. So there is nothing more than nature, nothing more than the elements of nature, and how can mere dhammas be 'I' or 'mine'? In this context 'dhammas' means nature, the natural, or in other words, dhammas are *tathatā*, they are as they are, they can't be any other way. There are only dhammas. 'All things' are nothing but dhammas, there are no dhammas apart from 'all things'.

True Dhamma, no matter what part, topic, level or kind must be one with emptiness, completely void of self. Therefore

we must look for emptiness in all things, or as we call them for short, in dhammas. To speak in terms of logic :

all things = dhammas

all things = emptiness

∴ dhammas = emptiness

It can be put in a number of ways, but the important point to understand is that there is nothing apart from empty nature. Nothing whatsoever should be grasped at or clung to as being 'I' or 'mine'. So from this it can be clearly seen that emptiness is the nature of all things. It is only by ending every kind of delusion that it can be discerned. To see emptiness there must be **pañña** that is undeluded and undefiled.

There is a further category of dhammas—the dhammas of **avijjā**, of false knowing, reactions arising from the contact of the mind with the world of materiality. As was said earlier, when the dhamma which is mind, comes into contact with the dhamma which is materiality, a reaction takes place in the form of feeling. In regards to that feeling one may follow either the path of **avijjā** or of **vijjā** (clear knowing). Its form will depend on the external conditions and the nature of that group of **sankhāras** (dhammas). Thus it's just another dhamma, a dhamma of ignorance, the grasping and clinging to an illusory self and to things as belonging to self. Don't forget that it's just a dhamma. It's true essence is emptiness.

Avijjā is emptiness just as much as are **vijjā** or **Nibbāna**—they are all equally dhammas. If we look on them in this way we will see their emptiness of self continually. Dhammas of this level, even though they are one and the same thing as emptiness may still result in **avijjā**, may still cause the illusion of self to arise in consciousness. So we should be aware of the dhammas of grasping and clinging and ignorance, which are also included in the phrase 'all things'.

If we really know all things, this ignorant grasping and clinging won't take place. If we don't know them and just blindly follow our stupid and deluded animal instincts, it opens the doors to the dhammas of avijjā over and over again.

We who have grasping and clinging like an inheritance that has been passed down for an immeasurable time may see that from the moment of birth we received training from those around us, some intentional and some unintentional, solely in the ways of ignorance, solely in the ways of grasping at self and the belongings of self. Never once have we trained in the ways of selflessness. Children never receive that sort of training. They are taught only in terms of self. Originally, at birth a child's mind doesn't have much sense of self, but it learns it from its environment. As soon as it opens its eyes or is conscious of anything, it is taught to cling to it as being **my** father, **my** mother, **my** home, **my** food and even the dish that it eats from has to be **MINE**, no one else can use it. This unplanned process, the arising of ego-consciousness and its continual development and growth, follows its own laws. As for the contrary feeling of selflessness, it never arises. Thus by the time that the child has grown up and aged he is stuffed full of grasping and clinging and the mental defilements which are their cause, so that for him or her **ego is life, life is ego**. When the instinct of clinging to self is the ordinary life, that life is inseparable from Dukkha; it is heavy and oppressive, entangling, constricting, smothering, piercing and burning, all symptoms of Dukkha.

So it follows that if there is grasping and clinging, even if it's to goodness, then that is Dukkha. In this sense that which the world assumes to be goodness is false or evil. Goodness is still Dukkha, it has the Dukkha appropriate to it, because it's not empty, it's still disturbed. Only where there is emptiness and one is beyond goodness can there be freedom from Dukkha.

Therefore the main principle of the Buddhist Teachings, as elucidated in the phrase '*sabbe dhammā nālaṃ abhinivesāya*' is nothing other than the complete elimination of the grasping at or clinging to things as being self or as belonging to self. There is nothing beyond that.

When we are completely identified with grasping, when we and grasping are truly just one thing, what can we do? Who can help the mind when it is in such a state? The answer to this question is again nothing else but mind. It's already been stated that there is nothing other than dhammas: falseness is a dhamma, correctness is a dhamma, Dukkha is a dhamma, the extinguishing of Dukkha, the tool to remedy Dukkha is a dhamma, the mind is a dhamma and the body is a dhamma. Therefore, there being nothing other than dhammas, the answer must lie in the mind itself, depending on a mechanism compatible to it.

Whether there is merit or demerit is up to us.

If contact with the world leads to truth-discerning awareness then it is merit (*puñña*).

If contact with the world leads to an increase in foolishness and delusion then it's demerit (*pāpa*).

If we observe, we can see that everyone is born equal—each and everyone of us have eyes, ears, a nose, a tongue, a body and a mind and outside each one of us, there are forms, sounds, smells, tastes, tactile and mental objects; everyone of us has the opportunity to contact those things and we all contact them in exactly the same way. So why is there this division between those who follow the path of foolishness, of demerit and harm, and those who follow the path of wisdom, of merit and benefit?

There is a good side to it in the sense that these harmful dhammas are a real protection for people, on the principle that if we experience suffering we become chastened, we remember it. It's like the child who tries to take hold of fire. Once it has seen the consequences it is unlikely to do it again. With material things it's easy, but as for taking hold of the fire that is grasping and clinging, the fires of greed, aversion and delusion, most of us aren't even aware that we're taking hold of fire at all. On the contrary we misguidedly believe them to be lovable and desirable and so we are not chastened, we don't learn our lesson.

There is only one remedy and that is to be aware of the true nature of these dhammas, to know that **THESE DHAMMAS ARE A FIRE**, that they cannot be grasped at or clung to. This is to be on the path of truth—discerning awareness, learning one's lesson, remembering that whenever anything is grasped at as "I" or "mine" fire is ignited. It is not a fire that burns the hand, but a fire that consumes the mind and heart. Sometimes it burns so deep that we aren't aware that it's a fire at all or that it is burning, and so we sink into the fiery mass that is **Vattasamsāra** (the round of birth and death). It is the very hottest fire there is, hotter than an electric oven. If we don't look on things like a child who has tried to take hold of fire and refuses to do so again, it can be like that.

Thus the Buddha explained that when the painful consequences of grasping and clinging are seen, the mind will relax its grip. So the question is, have we seen the painful consequences of grasping yet? If we haven't, then we haven't relaxed our grip and if we haven't relaxed our grip then we are not empty. On another occasion the Buddha taught that whenever one sees emptiness, then one finds contentment in Nibbāna. Only when one begins to see the non-existence of self will the mind learn to find contentment in the **āyatana** of Nibbāna. Anything which

can be known through the eyes, ears, nose, tongue, body or mind is called an āyatana. Nibbāna is called an āyatana here because it is merely an object of knowledge. How can we be so foolish as not to see it? We will be able to know it from the moment that we see the state empty of self, because on the relaxation of grasping and clinging we will be content with the āyatana of Nibbāna. But it's difficult, for as I've said, our life is one of constant grasping and when there is no abatement of that grasping there is no emptiness and so no contentment with the āyatana of Nibbāna.

We can see the truth of this point by taking a look at other religions. Other religions do not have the word **attavādupādāna** (grasping at and clinging to dhammas as being 'I' or 'mine'). Why is this so? It is because they teach a self to be grasped at and clung to. Not regarding such grasping as wrong it becomes right, in fact it becomes the goal of the religion or sect. They teach the attainment of Self. In the Buddhist Teachings however, attavādupādāna is specified as a defilement, as foolishness and delusion, and the Buddhist practice lies in its complete relinquishment. Consequently the teaching of anattā, is found only in Buddhism. Unlike the sects which teach a self to be grasped at or to be attained, we teach the complete destruction of self-consciousness so as to perceive the state of anattā, the state empty of self in all things.

So anattā is talked about only by Buddhists. Knowledge and understanding can arise only in those people who have been taught that all things are anattā and should not be grasped at or clung to. If one is taught that there is a self that must be grasped at and clung to, then there is no way that one can practise to realize the non-existence of self.

Thus we must examine the point that just as it is necessary to see the danger of fire in order to be afraid of being burnt,

so also must we see the dangers of those things which are the root-causes of all fires, the fires of greed, aversion, and delusion, of grasping and clinging, in order to become gradually bored with and averse to them, and be able to relax our grip on them without thought of lighting any more fires.

Here we reach the word 'emptiness' of which it was said that having seen it one will find contentment in Nibbāna. We must thoroughly understand that on the first level emptiness is absence of the feeling of 'I' and 'mine'. If those feelings are still present then the mind is not empty, it is 'disturbed' by grasping and clinging. We will use these two words to help our memories: 'empty' meaning free of the feeling of self or that things belong to self; and 'disturbed' meaning confused, depressed, in turmoil with the feeling of 'I' and 'mine'.

What are the characteristics of the state empty of ego-consciousness? In the scriptures there is a teaching of the Buddha which lists four points:

Na ahaṃ kavacini – feeling that there is nothing that is me.
Na kassaci kiñcanaṃ kisminci – without worry or doubt that any thing might be me. This makes one pair, the second pair is:
Na mama kavacini – feeling that there is nothing that is 'mine'.
Kisminci kiñcanaṃ natthi – without worry or doubt that anything might be 'mine'. (Aneñjasappāya Sutta, Majjhima Nikāya)

We are aware that there is nothing that is 'me' but sometimes there is a remainder of anxiety that there is something that is 'mine'. We feel that there is nothing that is mine but we can't help doubting that there may in fact be something. There must be an absolute, unshakeably clear awareness that there is nothing that is self and nothing that we need to worry about as possibly being self; that there is nothing that belongs to self and nothing we need to keep worrying about or doubting or waiting for as being ours.

At the moment that anyone's mind is freed from these four things the Buddha held that to be emptiness. The commentary sums it up concisely as 'na attanena' – not taking things to be self and 'na attaniyena' – not taking things to belong to self; and that is sufficient. When this sort of grasping consciousness is not present try and imagine what it would be like. One doesn't look on anything anywhere as ever having been, as currently being, or as having the potential to be self or belong to self. There is no self in the present and no basis for anxiety regarding self in the past or future. The mind has realized emptiness through seeing clearly that there is nothing at all that can fulfill the meaning of the words 'self' or 'belonging to self'. All things are dhammas, simply parts of nature. This is the mind that is identical with emptiness. If we say that the mind has attained or realized emptiness it leads some people to understand that the mind is one thing and emptiness another. To say that the mind comes to know emptiness is still not particularly correct. Please understand that if the mind was not one and the same thing as emptiness, there would be no way for emptiness to be known. The mind in its natural state is emptiness, it is an alien foolishness that enters and obstructs the vision of emptiness. Consequently, as soon as foolishness departs, the mind and emptiness are one. The mind then knows itself. It doesn't have to go anywhere else knowing objects, it holds to the knowing of emptiness, knowing nothing other than the freedom from 'self' and 'belong to self'.

It is this emptiness that is the single highest teaching of the Buddha, so much so that in the Saṃyutta Nikāya the Buddha says that there are no words spoken by the Tathāgata that are not concerned with *suññatā*. He says in that sutta that the most profound teaching is that which deals with emptiness, any other subject is superficial. Only the teaching of *suññatā* is so profound that there must be a Tathāgata enlightened in the world for it to be taught.

In another section of the Saṃyutta Nikāya the Buddha says that emptiness is the dhamma that is always of the most benefit

and support to lay people. There is the account, one that I have related many times in other places, of a group of wealthy laypeople going to visit the Buddha and asking for a dhamma that would be of eternal benefit and welfare to householders, those hampered by wife and children, wearers of sandalwood paste and perfumes. In reply the Buddha taught them this sutta, taught about suññatā. When they objected that it was too difficult he came down only to the level of *Sotāpattiyamka* – the practice leading to ‘stream-entry’¹ i.e. the genuine realization of Buddha, Dhamma and Sangha, and of ariyakantasīla – the virtuous conduct that is of contentment to the Noble Ones. In fact they were being lured into a trap by the Buddha and were neatly caught in the snare. To speak in coarse everyday terms he completely swindled them. They said they didn’t want suññatā so the Buddha gave them instead something which could not escape it, the lasso that would pull them into it. For there is only one way to truly realize the Buddha, Dhamma and Sangha and to have the virtuous conduct that is of contentment to the Noble Ones, and that is to be continually seeing the futility of grasping and clinging.

Now do you think the Buddha was wrong in saying that suññatā is a matter for laypeople? If He was right, then these days we must be crazy, utterly wrong, because we believe that suññatā is not a matter for us householders, but is a matter for those who are going to Nibbāna, wherever that is. That’s how people talk. But the Buddha is talking in a different way, saying that this subject of suññatā is of direct benefit and welfare to laypeople. So who is right and who is wrong? If the Buddha is right then we must agree to investigate the truth of His words and the way to do so is to examine which people have the most suffering and distress, whose minds are most in the middle of the blast furnace. It’s none other than laypeople. That being so, who

1. Entry into the stream that flows to Nibbāna i.e. attainment of the first stage of holiness.

most needs something to extinguish that fire, to completely destroy Dukkha in its every aspect? Again, it is laypeople. Those that are in the heat of the fire must look for the means of extinguishing it there in its midst, because there is no place to struggle and escape to, everything is fire. Thus one must find the point of absolute coolness right there in the midst of the fire. That point is emptiness, the absence of self and belongings of self, *suññatā*.

Laypeople must try to discover *suññatā* and dwell within its sphere. If one is unable to live right at its central point, at the very least one should dwell within its sphere, have a reasonable knowledge of it. This then is counted to be of eternal benefit to laypeople.

This group of people asked what would be of eternal benefit to them and the Buddha answered: '***suññatāppatisaṃyutta lokuttarā dhammā***' – dhammas endowed with *suññatā* transcend the world. To transcend the world is to transcend the fire. To be endowed with *suññatā* is to be empty of clinging to things as self or as belonging to self. So the saying ***suññatāppatisaṃyutta lokuttarā dhammā*** is a gift from the Buddha directly to laypeople. Please consider anew how necessary it is that one gives attention to this subject and whether it is in fact the only subject that needs to be spoken of. In the *Saṃyutta Nikāya* it is clearly affirmed that *suññatā* is Nibbāna and that Nibbāna is *suññatā*, the freedom from defilements and Dukkha. Therefore Nibbāna, too, is a fit subject for laypeople. If laypeople still don't know the meaning of Nibbāna, if they have not yet dwelt within its sphere, then they live in the midst of the fire more than any other group.

The meaning of the word Nibbāna clearly extends to the absence of mental defilements, the cause of Dukkha. So that at any moment that our minds are empty of 'self' and 'belonging

to self' then that is Nibbāna. For example, at this moment as you sit here I will attest that everyone, or almost everyone, has a mind empty of the feelings of 'I' and 'mine' because there is nothing engendering them. In listening attentively you give no opportunity for self-consciousness to arise. So look and see whether or not the mind is empty of 'I' and 'mine'. If there is some emptiness (and I merely use the word some, it's not completely or unchangingly empty) then you are dwelling within the sphere of Nibbāna. Even though it is not absolute or perfect Nibbāna, it is Nibbāna just the same.

Dhammas are of many meanings, levels and stages. The Nibbāna - dhamma lies in the minds of each one of you at the moment that you are to some degree empty of the feeling of 'I' and 'mine'. So please be aware of this ego-less feeling, remember it well and keep it with you when you return to your home. Sometimes when you have arrived home it will feel like you've entered someone else's house, or doing some work at home you will feel like you are helping out with someone else's work, at someone else's home. This sort of feeling will increase more and more and the Dukkha that used to be associated with home and work will be no more. You will abide with a mind empty of 'self' and 'belonging to self' at all times. This is to take Nibbāna or suññata as the holy charm constantly hanging from our neck.¹ It is a protection against every kind of suffering, danger and ill-fortune. It is the genuine holy charm of the Buddha, anything else is just a fake.

Speaking like this you will soon be accusing me of giving you a big sales pitch. Don't think of me as someone hawking the wares of the Buddha in the marketplace, think rather that we are all companions in Dukkha, in birth, old age, sickness and death and that we are all disciples of the Lord Buddha. If anything is spoken

1. The wearing of charms to ward off dangers is a superstitious practice common in Thailand.

to stimulate interest it is with good intentions. But if anyone has any truth – discerning awareness they will be able to see for themselves without having to believe me, and that seeing will more and more open the way for further study towards the ultimate truth. If that is the case, then we must move our study onto the subject of **dhātu** (elements).

The word **dhātu** has the same meaning as the word 'dhamma'. Etymologically the words have the same root '**dhr**', which means 'maintain.' A **dhātu** is something that can maintain itself. Just as with dhammas, changing dhatus maintain themselves through change and unchanging dhātus maintain themselves through changelessness.

What sort of elements do you know of that could correlate to emptiness? Students of physics and chemistry know only about the material elements, the pure elements of which there are over a hundred, and more being discovered all the time. It's impossible for these elements to be emptiness, or at least it would take a profound interpretation of those things to see them as empty, because they are merely material elements or **rūpadhātu**. But there are also immaterial elements, **arūpadhātu**, elements of mind or consciousness, which lie beyond the domain of physics and chemistry. One must study the Buddha's science before one can know the immaterial, formless elements, which are a matter of the mind and heart. So far then we have ascertained two groups of elements.

In which element will that which is called emptiness abide? If anyone thinks that emptiness is a material element his friends will die laughing. Some people may think that it is an immaterial or formless element and here the Noble Ones will die laughing. Emptiness is neither a material nor an immaterial element. There is a third kind of element which lies beyond the ken of ordinary people. The Buddha called it '**nirodhadhātu**.' The words **vatthudhātu** or **rūpadhātu** refer to materiality whether

visible forms, sounds, odors, tastes, tactile objects or whatever. **Arūpadhātu** refers to the mind and heart, to mental processes, the thoughts and feelings that arise in the mind. There is only one kind of element not included in these two categories, an element that is their complete antithesis and annihilation. Consequently the Buddha sometimes called it '**nibbānadhātu**' sometimes '**nirodhadhātu**' and sometimes '**amatadhātu**.'

The words **nirodhadhātu** and **nibbānadhātu** both mean extinguish, it is the extinguishing element, the element that extinguishes all other elements. **Amatadhātu** means the 'element that does not die'. All other elements die, it is their nature to die. **Nirodhadhātu** is not tied to birth and death but is, on the contrary, the utter extinction of the other elements. **Suññatā** is that which dwells in this element and so it might also be called **suññatadhātu**, for it is the element that brings all elements to emptiness.

If one is to understand those things called dhātu well enough to understand the Dhamma they must be studied in this way. Don't be deceived into thinking that knowing the elements of earth, water, wind and fire is sufficient, they are a matter for children. Those elements were spoken of and taught before the time of the Buddha. One must go on to know **viññānadhātu**, the immaterial consciousness - element, **ākāśadhātu**, the space element and **suññatadhātu**, the emptiness element that is the utter extinction of earth, water, fire, wind, consciousness and space. The element of emptiness is the most wonderful element in all the Buddhist Teachings.

To sum up: earth, water, wind and fire lie in the group of **rūpadhātu**. The mind, consciousness and mental processes lie in the group of **arūpadhātu**. As for Nibbāna, this **suññatadhātu**, it lies in the group of **nirodhadhātu**. You must find a quiet time to sit and look at all the elements and see clearly that there are

only these three kinds. Then you will begin to discover Nibbāna-dhatu and understand more of that anattā or suññatā that we are presently discussing.

So we may lay down the principle that in the grasping at and clinging to 'I' and 'mine' there is rūpadhātu and arūpadhātu and in their absence there is nirodhadhātu. To reverse it one may say that if nirodhadhātu enters the mind one sees only emptiness the state free of 'I' and 'mine' manifests itself clearly. If another element enters one will see it as form, name, visible object, sound, smell, taste, tactile object, feeling, memory, thought, consciousness and so on, the whole confusing crowd, each one having a part to play in the arising of clinging, if not as love then as hate.

Thus we all have just two dominant moods – satisfaction and dissatisfaction. We are accustomed to only these two. We have only been interested in gaining that which is felt to be desirable and to flee from or destroy that which is felt to be disagreeable. It is unceasing disturbance, the mind is never empty. For the mind to be empty we must go beyond, overcome all the disturbing elements and come and dwell with the element of emptiness.

Another way that the Buddha talked about elements in order to show their properties was to make a threefold division. He spoke first of **nekkhamadhātu** (the element of renunciation) as the cause for the withdrawal from sensuality; secondly of arūpadhātu as the cause for the withdrawal from materiality and thirdly of nirodhadhātu as the cause for the withdrawal from the conditioned. Seeing nekkhamadhātu, the element of renunciation, is the cause for the withdrawal from sensuality because it is its antithesis. Seeing the element that is the antithesis of sensuality is called seeing nekkhamadhātu. Being unconsumed by the fire of sensuality is nekkhamadhātu. The

mind that withdraws from sensuality is a mind that contains *nekkhamadhātu*.

Beings that are able to free themselves from sensuality attach to the beautiful and pleasurable things that are unconnected with gross sensuality but are still in the realm of form, albeit on a refined level, as for example rishis, munis and yogis who get attached to the pleasures of *rūpajhāna* (absorptions of the Fine-Material Sphere). Or on a more mundane level perhaps we see old people attached to antiques or exquisite potted plants. Although these things are unconnected with the crudest sensuality, such people may be even more lost than those lost in sensuality, they are attached to material form and unable to give it up.

So what else will one get attached to if one can free oneself from the attachment to materiality? One will attach to the causally conditioned things that lie beyond it, i.e. all the beneficial *dhammas*. We don't have to talk of the harmful *dhammas* here, nobody wants them, but of the virtues and virtuous actions that one projects will earn one rebirth as a wonderful being up in heaven. People dream about this endlessly. But being born in heaven is *sankhata* (a conditioned state). We are all so caught up in being this and that kind of self and having this and that kind of possession of self. Being the self of an animal is no good so we want a human self. Seeing that being a human is no good we want to become a celestial being. That's no good so we want to become a brahma-god. Seeing that being a brahma-god is no good we want to become a mahābrahma-god. There's a self there all the time, it's all *sankhata*. Only on the discovery of *nirodhadhātu* can we withdraw from the conditioned.

Thus *nirodhadhātu* is the final element, it is the element of extinguishing. It is the utter extinguishing of 'I' and 'mine'. If there is an absolute and final extinction (*anupādisesanibbānadhātu*) then one becomes an arahant. If the extinction is incomplete

(sa - upādisesanibbānadhātu) then one becomes one of the lesser Noble Ones, for there is still a remnant of ego, it is not the true ultimate emptiness of paramamsuññam..

To summarize : we must know the dhātus, the true constituents of all things. Please understand them according to the main principle whereby there is rūpadhātu : elements with form; arūpadhātu : elements without form; nirodhadhātu : the element which is the extinguishing of both the form and formless elements. We can confidently assert that there is nothing outside the scope of these three words.

We are learning something about the Buddha's science, the science that encompasses the physical, mental and spiritual spheres. It enables us to have an utterly thorough knowledge of all things that precludes any further grasping at them. And it is this that must be the meaning of emptiness for us.

Now I'll expand on a few points in order to round off our understanding of emptiness. In the Uppannasaka Sutta of the Majjhima Nikāya the Buddha calls suññatā 'mahāpurisavihāra.' This translates as meaning that emptiness is the abode of the Great Man. The Great Man does not have a wandering, restless mind that spins this way and that as does the mind of an ordinary man. The Great Man has a mind that dwells in emptiness, with emptiness, is itself emptiness. That being so, suññatā is the abode or temple of the Great Man i.e. of the Buddha and the arahants. To say that emptiness is their abode means that they live it and breathe it.

The Buddha stated that He, the Tathāgata, dwelt and passed His life in suññatavihāra. When He was teaching Dhamma His mind was empty of "self" and "belonging to self". When He was on alms-round or doing his daily tasks His mind was empty.

When He was resting or enjoying Himself in His free time¹ He was dwelling empty of "self" and "belonging to self". Thus He affirmed to Sāriputta that the Tathāgata passed His life in *suññatavihāra*

Here we are not talking about the ordinary unenlightened person but of the Great Man, of the Buddha – how He lived and in what abode He dwelt. If you want to see the Buddha's dwelling place, don't go thinking that it's a building made of bricks and mortar or something in India. You should think of the abode called *suññatavihāra* or *mahāpurisavihāra*. It must be supremely empty.

The supreme emptiness is not the momentary flash that we may experience sitting here, which has disappeared by the time we get home. *Suññatavihāra* refers to the ultimate emptiness and so another word is used, a rather long one, *paramānuttara-suññatā*. It is composed of three words: *parama* + *anuttara* + *suññatā*, and means "supreme unsurpassable emptiness". In the technical literature of Dhamma, this point relates to the *cetasamā-dhi* devoid of *nimittas*,² where the mind lacking any nimitta is radiantly pure to the extent of being free of the *āsavas*.³ This condition may be of a kind that can be regressed from or it may be permanent. If at any moment that there is the kind of *cetasamā-dhi* where there are no *nimittas* to be clung to as self or as belonging to self, then that radiant mind, free of the *āsavas*, is called *paramānuttarasuññatā* and is the natural, unforced state of the arahants.

1. *diṭṭhavihāra* or *sukhavihāra*

2. Mind-created phenomena that may occur when the mind is concentrated.

3. Cankers, intoxicants, outflows, Mental defilements defined in terms of the way they flow out in response to conditions.

The four *āsavas* are listed as the *āsaves* of sense – desire, for existence, views and ignorance

If we unenlightened people are ever going to be true adepts we must be able to attain this cetosamādhī. Even if we don't end the āsavas once and for all it will be an occasional freedom from them. It will be borrowing something of the Buddha and the arahants to have a look at so that we don't lose heart. For that which is called emptiness or enlightenment or Nibbāna is both of the sort that is obtained absolutely and finally and of the temporary, uncertain sort that we ordinary folk may know. There is even a third sort, which occurs by coincidence. At times when our surroundings are particularly conducive the mind may be empty for an hour or two. But the important thing is that we set our minds on practising to the best of our abilities to make the mind empty.

The term paramānuttarasuññatā as used by the Buddha means the utter destruction of greed, aversion and delusion, the grasping at and clinging to things as self or as belonging to self, and thus has the same meaning as **samucchedapahāna** or 'final abandonment'. Consequently when speaking of the highest level of suññatā the Buddha used this term, supreme unsurpassable emptiness.

If we gradually lower our eyes from this summit of emptiness we will be able to understand its lesser levels. Directly below the peak of paramānuttarasuññatā are the following :

nevasaññānasaññāyatana
ākincaññāyatana
viññānañcāyatana
ākāsānañcāyatana
pathavisaññā
āraññasaññā.

Looking downwards from the summit it is hard to understand so we will start from the bottom and gradually raise our eyes to the peak.

The very first level is **āraññasaññā**, which means the perception of forest. If where we live it is noisy and confusing we imagine it to be a forest, as if it truly is one and we really have entered it. We may imagine the forest to be empty and tranquil, free from disturbing noises. Merely imagining a forest is already one sort of emptiness, but an emptiness that is child's play.

Higher than **āraññasaññā** is **pathavisaññā**, whereby we create the perception of earth. We become conscious of all phenomena as being merely the earth element. **Pathavisaññā** can eradicate craving for the sense pleasures of visible forms, sounds, odors, tastes and tactile objects. It is something the young should try.

Here if we wish to ascend further we must create the perception of **ākāsānañcāyatana**, i.e. create the feeling that there is nothing but infinite space. Space is indeed one kind of emptiness but it is not true **suññatā**. **Suññatā** is of a higher order than vacant, empty space. You don't have to be interested in that sort of emptiness. Pay attention to the subtler level of **suññatā** such as that whereby we create the perception that there is nothing but infinite consciousness. The perception that there is nothing but the infinite consciousness – element is called **viññānañcāyatana**. If we ascend even higher we reach the kind of **suññatā** called **ākincaññāyatana** whereby we mentally create utter nothingness. We don't allow the mind to focus on anything, we fix it on nothingness. However there still remains the feeling that there is nothingness.

One step further on lies **nevasaññānasaññāyatana**, non-perceiving perception. It's said that it is neither like being alive nor being dead. To say that there is perception would be false. To say that there is no perception would also be false. There is no labelling or interpretation of experience. There is awareness without perception. It is so subtle that to call a person in this

state alive would be false, to call him dead would be false. This too is a kind of emptiness.

These six levels of emptiness are not the same as paramānuttarasuññatā. The Buddha spoke of them merely to demonstrate the various gradations of emptiness. None of them are the emptiness that is the abode of the Great Man. They are the sorts of emptiness that rishis and munis had been groping after since before the time of the Buddha. Once having discovered them they would get stuck in them, unable to get beyond them. It was like that until the Buddha found the true suññatā which is the abode of the Great Man, the supreme unsurpassable emptiness that I have been speaking of.

The commentaries call the experiences of suññatā, 'suññataphassa'. We know only of the contact (phassa) of the eyes, ears, nose, tongue, body and mind with visible forms, sounds, odors, tastes, tangible and mental objects. We have never had suññataphassa, the contact with suññatā because we know only of rūpadhātu and arūpadhātu, we know nothing of nirodhadhātu.

When we come to know nirodhadhātu we will experience a new sensation, that which the commentators call suññataphassa. It is the name of the Noble Path on the level that truly destroys mental defilements. When we have developed our practice to the point that it is destroying defilement, there is suññataphassa. It is like touching suññatā with our hand, our minds come into contact with emptiness.

Emptiness as contact relates to the Noble Path of one for whom **anattānupassanā** (the insight that there is no self nor anything belonging to self, that there are merely dhammas and natural processes) is growing continually. If the Noble Path is of this nature it is called suññato and any contact which takes place on that Path is called suññataphassa. Anattānupassanā, the

cause of that state, is a consequence of **Dukkhānupassanā**, the insight into Dukkha. **Dukkhānupassanā** is like having once tried to take hold of fire knowing that it's not at all something to put your hand in, or knowing that no dhammas whatsoever should be grasped at or clung to because once taken hold of, they become a fire. If spiritually we are well conversant with the way that fire burns and consumes, how it constricts, envelops, pierces and entangles then that is **Dukkhānupassanā**.

Here we must consider that some people object that if you haven't reached Nibbāna you can't know anything about it, just as if you've never been to Europe you can't ever have seen it. But Nibbāna is not a material object, it is a matter of the mind and heart. As I have said, right now most of your minds are empty. This is already a taste. Be diligent in seeing that.

Consequently in the scriptural exposition of the practice of mindfulness of breathing, in the section dealing with **cittānupassanā** where it discusses the method of looking intently at the mind, it says that if the mind has lust one knows that the mind has lust; if the mind has aversion one knows the mind has aversion; if the mind has delusion then one knows the mind has delusion; if the mind is depressed then one knows that the mind is depressed; if the mind is not depressed then one knows that the mind is not depressed; if the mind is released then one knows that the mind is released (**vimutti**); if the mind is not released then one knows that the mind is not released.

If the mind is released then it is empty. If it is not released then it is not empty. Let us look at our mind that is either released, i.e. empty of all things or caught, i.e. grasping at and clinging to something. Even at the initial level of practice the teaching is to look at the mind that is empty or **vimutti**. It is something that is there to be seen within, it is not something to be figured out according to books that we've read.

Nibbāna or suññatā is there for us to see, even while we are still unenlightened. There is the emptiness called **tadangavimutti** that just happens to arise, as it is now, when the external conditions are right. If we concentrate the mind in the correct way so that it's completely undisturbed and at ease (more so, one may say, than when experiencing any kind of worldly pleasure) then this is **vikkhambhanavimutti**, release by suppression. So even without the **samucchedavimutti** or final release of the arahant, we still have a sample of emptiness to examine, a sample of the wares of the Buddha. If you are interested you can find such a sample in yourself.

Therefore, we should practice mindfulness of breathing stage by stage, developing **kāyanupassanā**, **vedanānupassanā**, **cittānupassanā** and **dhammānupassanā**.¹ It is a constant tasting of emptiness from start to finish. Finally, we will understand emptiness through seeing the painful consequences of grasping and clinging.

Then the mind will immediately turn to find contentment with the āyatana of Nibbāna. So in this way we are able to see emptiness continually, before actually reaching its supreme level. There is a progress that follows its own law or the law of nature itself. When having firmly comprehended something by oneself the resulting knowledge is firm. It does not sway unstably like false knowledge or knowledge gained by listening to others.

We don't have to do anything very much to make ourselves happy, we don't have to go to any great trouble. All we have to do is to empty our minds of greed, aversion and delusion, or in other words to make it empty of grasping at and clinging to 'I' and 'mine.' When the mind is empty of greed,

1. The Four Foundations of Mindfulness : Contemplation of body, feelings, mind and dhammas (internal).

aversion and delusion then it's truly empty and all Dukkha comes to an end. Even kamma will of itself come to an end.

In the Anguttara Nikāya, the Buddha states that when the mind is empty of greed, aversion and delusion, empty of 'I' and 'mine' then kamma ends by itself. This means that kamma, **vipāka** (its result), and the mental defilements which are the cause for the creation of kamma, spontaneously and simultaneously come to an end. So we don't have to be afraid of kamma, to fear that we must be ruled by our kamma. We don't have to be too interested in kamma. Rather, we should take an interest in emptiness. If we have created emptiness with regards to 'I' and 'mine', kamma will utterly disintegrate and there will be no way that we will have to follow its dictates.

It's due to this very point that someone like Angulimāla could become an arahant. Don't explain wrongly, as is often done, the Buddha's reply to Angulimāla, "I have already stopped. It is you that have not stopped". Don't explain that 'not stopped' means that he was still killing people and that Angulimāla became an arahant because he stopped murdering. Anyone who explains like that is badly misrepresenting the Buddha because when the Buddha used the word 'stop' here, He was referring to the stopping of 'I' and 'mine', to the stopping of grasping and clinging, or in other words to emptiness. So it is emptiness that is stopping and it is the only kind of stopping that could have made Angulimāla an arahant. If it was stopping murdering why aren't all people who don't kill arahants? It is because cessation, the true stopping, is the emptiness where there is no self to dwell anywhere, to come or go anywhere or to do anything. That is true stopping. If there is still a self then you can't stop.

So, we should understand that the word 'empty' is the same word as 'stop', the single word by which the Buddha was able to enlighten Angulimāla, even though the killer's hands

were still red with blood and around his neck hung the 999 finger bones of his victims. For kamma to end by itself, to reach the stopping, we must rely on this single term: empty of 'I' and 'mine', not grasping at or clinging to dhammas.

This action of making the mind empty may be called Buddhist yoga, for ensuring that there is emptiness in our action is **rāja yoga**, the highest level or summit of yoga (spiritual endeavor). But although we borrow the word **rāja yoga** from *Vedānta*,¹ in that tradition it is concerned with the realization of an ultimate self. However the Buddha taught that yoga means **ariyasaccadassana**, which means that there is a yoga in the Buddhist teachings but it is the clarification of emptiness, making it manifest. So any action that is conducive to the manifestation of emptiness may be called yoga. If anyone wishes to use the word yoga or is interested in it in any way it should be understood in this manner for it to be Buddhist yoga i.e. causing the manifestation of ultimate truth. It should be taken and used in our every mental action, so as to stop the grasping at and clinging to 'I' and 'mine'. Thus we take the word yoga from another tradition and adapt its meaning appropriately. Take for example the word **kammayoga** – being unselfish, acting unreservedly for the benefit of others, we too have this yoga. If there is no ego-consciousness then whatever we do will be kammayoga. Even with this very basic yoga – making merit, doing good, sacrificing for others and helping mankind, these actions must be performed with a mind empty of 'I' and 'mine'. So we don't have to seek after other kinds of yoga for they all come down to this one yoga, the spiritual endeavour of putting an end to self and the belongings of self, or in other words making emptiness manifest.

All of this rather lengthy explanation has been aimed at elucidating the single word emptiness. To be empty of defilements

1. The Indian religious tradition whose teachings are considered to be the essence of the *Vedas*, the ancient scriptures of the Hindus.

is to be empty of the feeling of 'I' and 'mine' and then the emptiness that is the freedom from Dukkha is ensured, for to be empty of defilements is to be empty of Dukkha. To be empty of 'I' and 'mine' alone is to be empty of all things. That state of emptiness is not the element of earth, water, fire or air or ākiñcānāyatana, ākāśānāñcāyatana or any of those things. The Buddha denied that it was any of those things. It is only nirodhadhātu, voidness of 'I' and 'mine', the extinction of kamma, the defilements and Dukkha.

The last point that we must consider is that, as was said at the beginning, emptiness exists in relation to all things. Don't forget that 'all things' are nothing other than dhammas and that dhammas are nothing but nature or suchness. They are already empty of self or the belongings of self. The dhammas of foolishness, delusion and ignorance emerge continually, because our culture and the way that we live encourage the dhammas of ego and unknowing. They don't encourage the dhammas of knowledge. Consequently we undergo the punishment for our 'original sin', our original misguided action, continually and automatically from the time of its occurrence without ever learning our lesson. The young aren't conscious of it, the middle-aged aren't conscious of it and even many of the old are unconscious of it. We should at least be able to realize it in middle age or old age so as to escape the punishment, emerge from the cage of vattasaṃsāra and reach that boundless place of clarity and space.

When the Buddhist Teachings spread to China, the Chinese of those days were intelligent and wise enough to accept it, and there arose teachings such as those of Hui Neng and Huang-Po in which explanations of mind and Dhamma, of Buddha, the Way and emptiness were extremely terse. There emerged the key sentence that mind, Buddha, Dhamma, the Way and emptiness are all just one thing. This one sentence is enough, there is no need to say anything more. It is equivalent to all the scriptures. Now,

that is a statement that particularly those of us studying and practising in the old style have no way at all of understanding. It might be beneficial for us to feel a little ashamed on this account. The Chinese went on to say that 'emptiness is by nature always present, but we don't see it'. I may prove this by saying once again that at this moment everyone sitting here has a mind that is by nature empty but not only do you not see it, but what's more, you will not accept that this is emptiness.

Huang Po scolded that this is to be like someone having a diamond attached to their forehead without knowing it, who goes searching all around the world or perhaps outside the world in hell, heaven or the Brahma worlds, making an offering of a penny and expecting to go to heaven and satisfy every desire. Not seeing that which is stuck to our forehead, we seek all around the world or if that's not enough in the other realms. So please, just for a while, look very closely to see what is there at your forehead, and how to go about putting your hands on it.

When speaking of the way to take hold of the diamond the Chinese teachers spoke even more profoundly, "There's no need to do anything. Just be still and the mind will become empty by itself". This phrase, "Just be still. There's no need to do anything", has many meanings. Our minds are naughty and playful. The mind wanders out of the eyes, ears, nose, tongue and body, gathering sense-objects, and having accepted them within, is stupid enough to allow the dhammas of ignorance to 'climb into the driver's seat', so that there is nothing but grasping and clinging to "I" and 'mine'. This is called being naughty, refusing to be still.

'Being still' means not admitting sense-objects into the mind but being content to let them founder like waves on the shore. For instance, when the eye sees a form, if there is merely seeing, then that is called not admitting visible forms into the

mind and similarly with the other sense organs. If you can't do that and *vedanā*, feeling of satisfaction and dissatisfaction arise, let it stop just there, don't allow desires based on those feelings to develop. If it stops there it's still possible to be still. But if we act to extend a feeling of satisfaction then in a moment the 'I' and 'mine' emerge. Or if we act in response to a feeling of dissatisfaction then there will be *Dukkha*. It is called not being still.

So the 'being still' of Hui Neng refers to that very practice that the Buddha taught, of seeing that nothing whatsoever should be grasped at or clung to as being 'I' or 'mine'. If there is nothing whatsoever to be clung to, what possible purpose can there be in busying and confusing ourselves, rushing about after the things that disturb, rather than just being still?

We must look for this emptiness that is truly worthy of our aspiration. To say that there is a kind of emptiness that gives rise to cessation, purity, clarity and peace is still to be speaking in the realm of convention. Truly speaking, there is nothing other than emptiness, there is only this one thing. It is not the cause of anything else. It is Buddha, it is Dhamma, it is Sangha, it is the Way. It is purity, clarity, and peace. All these things are present in emptiness. If we still say that emptiness is the cause of this or that it shows that we haven't yet reached the supreme emptiness, because if we have reached the supreme then we don't have to do anything. By being still the Buddha, Dhamma, Sangha, purity, clarity, peace, Nibbāna—everything will be present in that very immutable state.

An extremely simple method that Huang Po used to teach dull people how to recognize emptiness was to give them a riddle, 'Look at the mind of a child before its conception'. I would like to present all of you with this riddle. Look at the child's mind. Before it is conceived in the womb where is it?

If you can find it you will easily be able to find emptiness, just as if taking hold of that which is already there at your forehead.

To sum up—this one subject of emptiness covers all of the **Buddhist Teachings**, for the **Buddha** breathed with emptiness. Emptiness is the theoretical knowledge, it is the practice and it is the fruit of the practice. If one studies one must study emptiness; if one practises it must be for the fruit of emptiness, and if one receives the fruit it must be emptiness, so that finally one attains that thing that is supremely desirable. There is nothing beyond emptiness. When it is realized, all problems end. It is not above, it is not below, it is not anywhere—I don't know what to say about it, better to shut up! Suffice it to say that emptiness is the supreme happiness.

But you must be very careful regarding the phrases 'Nibbāna is the supreme happiness' and 'Nibbāna is the ultimate emptiness'. You must grasp their meaning correctly, don't take the word happiness to mean the happiness that you've formerly enjoyed, like the sect before the Buddha's time who took the height of sensual pleasure as Nibbāna or others who took the happiness of refined states of meditation as supreme. The Buddha wanted us to completely withdraw from those things, to use nekkhamadhātu as the means to withdraw from sensuality, to use arūpadhātu as the means to withdraw from absorptions of the fine-material plane, and finally to use nirodhadhātu as the means to withdraw from the conditioned, so that all the manifold types of confusion converge in emptiness.

Whether or not you understand and whether or not you practise must be your own affair: it is my duty only to explain the way things are. The knowing, the understanding and the practice are the duty of all of you,

I will end the talk at this point.

**THE WAY TO PRACTISE
IN ORDER TO ABIDE WITH EMPTINESS**

In the last talk I explained all the various principles associated with emptiness. Now there remains only to speak of the ways to practise in order to abide with emptiness, ways that will be useful to all people, even those who are uneducated or haven't studied the texts for themselves.

Regarding this matter of 'abiding with emptiness' we will have to look at the meanings of a number of words in some detail, in particular the words 'know' and 'realize' and the phrases 'see clearly', 'abide with' and 'to be empty'. To speak in everyday language we know = we know emptiness.

we realize = we realize emptiness

we see clearly = we see emptiness clearly

we abide with = we abide with emptiness

we are empty = we are empty with emptiness

i.e. we are emptiness itself.

How do all these phrases differ in profundity? In what way can they be looked at so as to have the same meaning or level of meaning?

First of all, to take the phrase 'we know emptiness', most people will think that that means that we have studied and discussed it. If our knowing is merely that much then we don't know emptiness correctly. The word 'know' in Dhamma-language doesn't refer to the knowing that comes from study or listening or anything like that. Such knowing, even if we are sure that we fully understand, is not complete. The words 'know' and 'understand' in ordinary everyday language are solely a matter of reading and listening, of thought and logical consideration. Those

techniques cannot be employed to know emptiness. The knowing of emptiness refers to the awareness of emptiness in a mind that is truly empty. For there to be the knowing of emptiness, emptiness must be experienced at the moment of knowing, it must be a moment of direct realization. This then is called 'knowing emptiness'.

After we've heard something a couple of times, going off and thinking about it and then considering logically that it should be possible or that it may well be like that, is not yet the knowing that is meant here, it is the knowing and understanding of worldly language. Please take the word 'know' as it is used here in the particular sense it has in the Buddhist Teachings.

To know Dhamma means that Dhamma is truly present and that we are aware of it. Similarly to know emptiness means that emptiness is manifest in the awareness. So I have encouraged people over and over again that in any moment that the mind has any measure of emptiness, even if it's not finally or perfectly empty, to keep recognizing it. Actually, on any one day emptiness is there repeatedly and even if it's not a fixed, absolute emptiness it's still very good, if we take the trouble to observe it. If we take an interest in this sort of emptiness right from the start, it will generate a contentment with emptiness that will make it easy to practise to attain the real thing. Therefore the phrase 'we know emptiness' refers to having emptiness manifest in the awareness.

The phrase 'seeing emptiness clearly' is the same. It is seeing with more and more clarity and precision. When we have become aware of the mind's emptiness we contemplate it, focus our awareness on it until there is a clear penetrative seeing of it, or in other words a thorough knowing.

The meaning of the phrase 'we realize emptiness' is once again the same. It refers to the moment of realization. In conventional terms it's said that 'we' realize emptiness but in

fact it's the mind that realizes, it is the awareness that is the 'one who is aware' and that realizes emptiness.

As for the phrase 'abiding with emptiness' it refers to **suññatavihāra**. Living and breathing with the constant awareness of emptiness is called 'abiding with emptiness'.

The phrase 'being empty' means that there is no feeling of 'self' or 'belonging to self', there is no feeling of 'I' and 'mine', the creations of craving and grasping. Being void of these things is 'being empty'. What is it that is empty? Once again it is the mind that is empty, emptied of the feelings of 'self' and of 'belonging to self', both in their crude and subtle forms. If the mind is empty to the degree of being free of even the refined self it is said that the mind is itself emptiness. This agrees with the teaching of some other Buddhist traditions that mind is emptiness, emptiness is mind; emptiness is Buddha, Buddha is emptiness, emptiness is Dhamma, Dhamma is emptiness. There is only one thing. All the myriad things that we are acquainted with are nothing but emptiness. I will make this clear by looking into the word empty once more.

The word 'empty' or 'emptiness' is pointing at two things, two characteristics.

Firstly, it refers to the characteristic of all things. Please fix in your minds that the characteristic of all things is emptiness. This phrase 'all things' must be understood correctly as encompassing every single thing, both rūpadhammas and nāmadhammas, everything from a speck of dust up to Nibbāna. It must be well understood that in a speck of dust there is emptiness or absence of self, absence of a permanent, independent entity. Gold, silver and diamonds have the characteristic of absence of a permanent, independent entity. Going on to the mind and heart, thoughts and feelings, each thing is characterized by emptiness, absence of

a permanent, independent entity. The study and practice of Dhamma has the characteristic of absence of a permanent, independent entity. Finally the Path Realizations, their Fruits and Nibbāna, itself all have this same characteristic, it's just that we don't see it. Even a sparrow flying to and fro has the characteristic of emptiness but we don't see it. Please think this over, contemplate it, observe and ponder over it until you perceive that all things display the characteristic of emptiness, it's just that we don't see it. So who is to blame but ourselves? It's like the old Zen riddle, or koan as they call it, that 'An ancient pine tree is proclaiming the Dhamma'. That old pine tree is displaying emptiness, the emptiness that it shares with all things but people don't see it, don't hear its Dhamma teaching, its proclamation of the characteristic of emptiness. This then is the word 'empty' in its first sense as relating to all things.

The word 'empty' in its second sense refers to the characteristic of the mind that is free from all grasping and clinging. Regarding this point please understand that ordinarily, although the mind is empty of self, it doesn't realize that it is empty, because it is constantly enveloped and disturbed by the conceptual thought that feeds on sense contact. Consequently, the mind is neither aware of its own emptiness nor the emptiness in all things. But whenever the mind completely throws off that which is enveloping it, the grasping and clinging of delusion and ignorance, and detaches from it completely, then the mind through its non-clinging has the characteristic of emptiness.

The two sorts of emptiness, the emptiness of the non-clinging mind and the emptiness of all things, are related. Because all things do truly have the characteristic of being empty of a self, a permanent, independent entity to be grasped at or clung to, we are able to see the truth of emptiness. If in fact they weren't empty of self, then it would be impossible to see their emptiness. But as it is, on the contrary, although all things are empty

we see everyone of them as not-empty. The mind that is enveloped by defilements and ignorance grasps at and clings to all of them as self, even a speck of dust. Even a tiny particle of dust is conceived to be an independent entity, a 'second person' that stands apart from ourselves, the 'first person'. We label the second person, the various things that surround us, as being this and being that, and in every case see them as being permanent, independent entities.

Therefore we must know absolutely correctly the meaning of the word 'empty' which, to sum up, is to know that firstly it is the characteristic of all things and secondly it is the characteristic of the non-clinging mind. The first emptiness is an object of knowledge or realization. The second emptiness is the empty mind, the characteristic of the mind that is empty through realizing the truth of emptiness. Thus the mind seeing emptiness in all things disintegrates of itself, leaving only emptiness. It becomes emptiness itself and sees everything as emptiness, everything as I have said from a speck of dust up to Nibbāna. Material objects, people, animals, time and space, every sort of dhamma melt into emptiness through knowing the truth of this point. 'This is the meaning of the word empty.

What I've said so far should have been enough for all of you to have observed or grasped for yourself that the word 'empty' is equivalent to the remainderless extinction of 'I' and 'mine', the utter destruction of self.

The self is merely a condition that arises when there is grasping and clinging in the mind. We don't see it as empty, but see it as self, because of that grasping and clinging with ignorance and defilement. There being ignorance or unknowing in the mind grasping arises by itself, it's not that we make a deliberate effort or consciously establish a self. When the mind contains *avijjā*, it inevitably experiences all things as being

independent entities, with no need for there to be any deliberate intention.

If authentic knowing takes place, the seeing of all things as they truly are, then we will see the truth that emptiness is the remainderless extinction of self. So it can be laid down as a principle that 'empty' means the remainderless extinction of self. That being so we should give some attention to understanding the phrase 'remainderless extinction' correctly.

What is the extinction with remainder and what is the extinction without remainder? Extinction with remainder means a mere change of shape or form: although one form is extinguished there remains the germ of a new one. There is still grasping and clinging continually in the mind, first at this thing and then at that.

The truth-discerning awareness or knowledge of Dhamma which has not yet reached its peak, can only extinguish some types of grasping, sometimes. Some people may be of the opinion that dust is not an independent entity but that a sparrow is. Others may see that trees and animals are not independent entities but take people to be so. In seeing people as independent entities or as selves, some will say that the body is not-self but the mind is. This is called incomplete extinction; some aspects are extinguished but others are always left behind as self. One may reach the point of saying that the mind is not-self but that some good qualities of the mind, such as the virtues, are. Or one may believe that if these are not-self then that which is beyond time, the Nibbāna-element, is self. This sort of extinguishing always leaves a seed. Whenever we sweep out the whole lot, even the Nibbāna-element, as not-self that action is called the true remainderless extinction of ego or self.

Therefore the phrase 'the remainderless extinction of ego' means the non-arising of ego-consciousness. In terms of pract-

ice it means preventing its arising, and to practise in this manner consistently may also be called the remainderless extinction of ego. Correct or impeccable practice refers to the practice whereby ego-consciousness has no way of arising in the future, in other words, not allowing it to arise at any moment.

What has been said so far should be enough for everyone to be able to understand the phrase 'the birth of ego'. Birth here does not mean the birth from a mother's womb but birth in the vastness of the mind. So please understand that the feeling 'I am I' that arises is born in the mind, and 'birth' is not the birth of the physical body.

It must be understood that even though the body has emerged from the womb, physical birth may be considered to be completely meaningless until there is a mental birth, a birth of ego-consciousness. The body is just a lump of matter until there occurs the grasping and clinging to self. At that moment the birth of that lump of flesh is brought to completion. At the moment that self-consciousness arises in a child it is said to be born. As soon as that feeling is absent then 'it dies' and reverts to being a lump of flesh once more. As long as there is no other feeling able to stimulate the creation of a self, there is no birth; it's the same as if the child is dead. But all of a sudden if there is contact with a sense object and self-consciousness arises again, then there is a new birth, and then shortly afterwards another death. So it can be said that in a single day a child is born many times.

The way to practise in order to live with emptiness lies right here, right in the practice of preventing self-consciousness arising in this lump of flesh. This is the main point. As for the details, one must look to see quite clearly how to do the practice and at what moments or occasions to practise. These two points must be explained together. Consequently, in order to facilitate our understanding we will divide practice up into three occasions or times:

1. The 'ordinary times'.
2. The moments of sense-contact.
3. The moment of physical death.

How should we practise on the first occasion, in the 'normal times' when there is no association with sense-objects? These 'ordinary times' are the occasions when we are doing some kind of work alone and unconcerned, and may perhaps be times of performing our daily tasks or of practising some kind of formal meditation. There is no problem due to sense-contact. We may be doing some worldly task, or if it's in our spare time reading a book or even thinking about something, as long as the mind is undisturbed by sense-contact. At such times our practice must be the study and clarification of the way in which things are empty and the way in which to make the mind empty and undeluded by all things. Think about it, study it for yourself, enquire from others, and discuss it regularly. Keep doing it.

There is another kind of short cut particularly for lay-people who have never ordained or studied the scriptures and for those who cannot read at all. It has the same meaning and aim, the knowledge of the emptiness of all things, but with such people we don't use the word emptiness as they will not understand. We tell them to make a habit of contemplating what there is that is worth having and what there is that is worth being. Gaining wealth, possessions, prestige and power, what is worth gaining, what is worth having? Being a human being, being a millionaire, being a beggar, being a king, being a king's subject, being a celestial being, what is worth being, what about it is worth being?

First of all we must understand the words 'have' and 'be' correctly. These words refer directly to grasping and clinging. To fulfill the meaning of the words 'have' or 'gain' there must be a grasping at something to make it ours. For instance if we take diamonds and jewels and pile them up so that they completely fill

a room and there is no clinging to them as being ours or that we are their owners, it's the same as if there is no possession or gain. The pile of precious stones stands there without meaning. But if grasping at 'I' occurs, that 'I have got them', 'I have made them mine, then that is having or gaining. Please understand these words in this way.

I'll ask again, what is there worth having? What is there worth gaining? What is there that having been possessed won't cause its owner to suffer? Every single thing there is will burn up its owner, pierce, strangle and entangle him, envelop and oppress him should he start to 'have' or to 'be'. But should the precious stones stand piled up filling the room and he has no feeling of having or being, then there is no burning, entangling or strangling of any kind. This is called not-having and not-being. So what is there, that having possessed it or having become it we will be free from Dukkha?

Once there is the feeling of having or being, we don't have to be in the room with the stones, we can be in the forest or in another country on the other side of the world and the mind will still experience Dukkha. Try having children living in America, you'll see that if you still cling to 'I' and 'mine' they will be able to give you sleepless nights or even a nervous breakdown.

Please make it a habit to regularly contemplate what is worth having and what is worth being; what is there that once possessed or become, will not cause us Dukkha. When we discover the truth that there is absolutely nothing that is worthy of the feelings of having or being, then we become even-minded towards all things. Whatever action we perform, be it arranging, having, collecting, using or whatever, we just do what needs to be done. So don't let the mind have or become! Keep in mind the principle of doerless doing :

The doing is done but no doer is there.

The path has been walked but no walker is there.

This verse refers to the arahant, the one who has practised Dhamma, or who has walked the Noble Path to its very end and who has reached Nibbāna, but with no walker or no practiser to be found.

The principle of doerless doing must be taken up and utilized in our daily lives. Whether we're eating, sitting, laying down, standing, walking, using, seeking, whatever we're doing we must have enough truth-discerning awareness to prevent the arising of the feeling of 'I' – the feeling that 'I' am the doer, 'I' am the eater, the walker, the sitter, the sleeper or the user. We must make the mind constantly empty of ego, so that emptiness is the natural state and we abide with the awareness that there is nothing worth having or being.

Dhamma can be practised in conjunction with our daily tasks and the to and fro that they entail. There is no need to separate Dhamma from everyday life. It is a very high practice. If there is mindfulness and self-awareness, not only will our work be successful and free from error, but at the same time the Dhamma in our hearts will develop and grow greatly. Not-having and not-gaining will be the normal state of the mind.

As for 'being' it's much easier. Consider what is there that having become there is no Dukkha? This can be a formula for reflection. It is the essential point. The word 'being' just as with the words 'have' and 'gain', refers only to the being that is accompanied by upādāna, the grasping and clinging to the 'I am'. If a room is piled full of gold and we have no feeling of being its owner there is no gaining or having and no being. Although the ownership rights and social conventions recognized by laws and the world have a certain validity, in our true hearts

we shouldn't be misled into taking those relative truths to be ultimate. For instance when there is a birth it is, conventionally speaking, natural that the one who gives birth becomes a mother and the one born a child. However, if one doesn't take oneself to be a mother then one won't be a mother. Because one deludedly presumes oneself to be a mother one becomes one. Mother chickens, mother dogs, mother cows, all sorts of mothers consider themselves to be mothers and feel it natural to love their young. It's not necessary for them to create or nurture such feelings, these are instincts natural to animals.

But those with truth-discerning awareness are on a higher level. They have the knowledge of the way to destroy the grasping and clinging that arises from such ignorance.

Now some people will think : "Not let us feel ourselves to be mothers! How cruel and heartless! Won't you let us love our children?" Listen carefully; it doesn't mean that at all. It means that it's possible to be a mother and perform a mothers' duties with truth-discerning awareness. It's not **necessary** to be a mother with grasping and clinging, the cause of every kind of Dukkha. It's not necessary to suffer the unhappiness, the heart-break and the tears. That suffering is indeed the price of not knowing how to be a mother, of being a mother in a way that does not conform with Dhamma.

When one is a mother one must have the Dukkha of a mother; when one is a son or daughter one must have the Dukkha of a son or daughter; when one is a father one must have the Dukkha of a father. Try asking yourself 'Is being a mother a pleasure?' 'Is being a father a pleasure?' Those of you old enough to have had a full experience of parenthood, think over what it's like. How will you answer? Even if you don't say anything outright, probably everyone of you will shake your heads. Is being a mother a pleasure? Is being a father a pleasure?

This is something that you should study and be naturally and habitually conscious of, at the times when the mind is not occupied with sense contact.

Is it a pleasure to be a husband? Is it a pleasure to be a wife? Think it over for yourselves. Those who have fully experienced being husbands and wives will all shake their heads.

Is it a pleasure to be male? Is it a pleasure to be female? If your truth-discerning awareness is following step by step and becoming increasingly refined, you will all shake your heads. To be female is to have the Dukkha of a female. To be male is to have the Dukkha of a male.

Is it a pleasure to be a child? Is it a pleasure to be an adult? Young children will probably say 'Yes, it's fun' but we who are now adults, we who are now old, look back and ask yourselves 'Was it really a pleasure?' Children have Dukkha of children and adults have the Dukkha of adults if there is grasping and clinging.

To expand this further—is to be a human being a desirable thing? Is it worth being? Or is it worth being an animal? To be anyone of a pair of opposites or to be nothing at all, which is better? To be a man, to be a denizen of hell, are they worth being?

To take another pair : Is this person you are, worth being? Or is it worth being a **deva**¹ in heaven? These questions are a measure of truth-discerning awareness, of whether or not one sees grasping and clinging fully and truly. Those who have seen the painful consequences of grasping and clinging will shake their heads in the same way; for to be a person one must have the Dukkha of a person, if one is a deva one must have the Dukkha of a deva. If we are empty, not taking ourselves to be

1. A celestial being

anything at all, then we are neither a person nor a deva and so the Dukkha of being either of those things is absent. If one is a human being or a deva following the urging of grasping and clinging is it a pleasure? Those who have realized the truth will all shake their heads.

To be more specific, is it worth being a good person? Is it worth being a bad person? If one asks who wants to be a good person there is likely to be a forest of raised hands. Such people don't yet see that if one clings to being a good person then one must have the Dukkha of a good person in exactly the same way that a bad person will have the Dukkha appropriate to a bad person. When there is grasping and clinging at being, then there is no happiness at all, for that state of being will be weighed down by a heaviness of one sort or another. Even if some kinds of Dukkha do not show themselves openly, if there are pleasures or distractions covering them up, through being fooled by those pleasures and distractions there will be the Dukkha of having, being and gaining, of ambitiously striving to be this and that.

In truth, nature fools us into taking on Dukkha, an obvious example being the case of the Dukkha that arises from propagating the species, from giving birth. It fools us so much that people actually enthusiastically volunteer. If they were to see the truth for themselves they would probably have nothing to do with this deception of nature. Is it a pleasure to be a good person? Is it a pleasure to be a bad person? Think about it.

Coming even closer, is it worth being a fortunate person? Is it worth being an unfortunate person? The hasty and uncircumspect are likely to raise their hands immediately, saying that being fortunate is extremely pleasant, but those who have fully experienced good fortune will shake their heads. One who is fortunate must endure the Dukkha of one who takes himself to

be fortunate in exactly the same way that the one who is unfortunate must endure the Dukkha appropriate to one who is unfortunate.

Coming closer still. Is it worth being a happy person? Is it worth being an unhappy person? There will be a real forest of raised hands here, even more than before, all asking to be a happy person. On the other hand, those who have been happy, who have fully experienced being happy, will shake their heads. You may not understand this section so let me repeat, people who are happy must have the Dukkha of people with happiness. Regarding this point you must bear in mind that it is the worldly who establish the conventions as to the nature of happiness : that the one who has money and power and enjoys every sort of sense-pleasure is the happy person. But if we look closely we will see that such a person suffers Dukkha in an appropriate fashion, a 'fishbone' forms in the flesh of his pleasure. Even with the more subtle happiness that arises from samādhi and the meditative absorptions of the rishis and munis, if the feeling that 'I am happy' arises, then it too will form a 'fishbone' in the flesh of that happiness that will stick in the enjoyer's throat. Those who grasp at and cling to the happiness of rūpajhāna suffer accordingly.

Consequently, there is the injunction to renounce lust for form and lust for the formless, the first two of the higher fetters (*samyojana*) that prevent us from becoming arahants. If there is clinging to the idea that we have happiness, even if it's the happiness that arises from Dhamma, it will cause a fine kind of 'fishbone' to stay stuck in the throat, so that the true Dhamma cannot be discerned.

Grasping at Nibbāna as being **my** self or **my** happiness is impossible. One may say, if one wishes, that Nibbāna is the supreme happiness and that one grasps Nibbāna as being "I" or

"mine", that I have the happiness of Nibbāna or I have attained Nibbāna. But these are mere verbalizations, in fact it can't happen. One who still grasps and clings cannot possibly attain Nibbāna. If anyone takes himself to be the enjoyer of the happiness of Nibbāna it can only be a counterfeit Nibbāna. True Nibbāna, is not of a nature that can be grasped at in that way.

So we drive out happiness! We drive it out right from the happiness of children, the happiness of adults, of young men and women and the elderly, the happiness of the powerful and influential, right up to the happiness of being a deva, of having meditative absorptions and attainments and finally to Nibbāna. If we deludedly consider 'I am happy' then we must suffer accordingly. Those who have realized the truth see this. Those who have not are in turmoil, ambitiously and hungrily striving for wealth, power and sense pleasures, or on a higher level, greedily striving for insight, meditative absorptions and attainments, pushing so much that some end up in a mental hospital. That in itself demonstrates the dangers of grasping and clinging to happiness. Young children will not understand this point but adults should.

Now we'll give some thought to another pair of opposites. Is being born a pleasure? Is dying a pleasure? Choose one or other of the pair. Which is more enjoyable, being born or dying? If we really understand Dhamma we'll shake our heads, we'll want neither birth nor death. However, although people don't usually want to die, they do want to be born. They want birth without death and what's more, they want eternal life or if they must die they want to be reborn. This is indeed grasping and clinging. Only from the time when there is neither birth nor death, when the mind is empty, will there be an end to Dukkha.

Why not try thinking this over when you're lying down or walking, in the moments that the mind is not occupied by

sense-contact. When you're doing something or being something, why not try thinking in this way?

When you're suffering and exhausted with being a mother, why don't you ever feel that it's unpleasant? Being a husband, being a wife, being any of the things that I've mentioned, when you're disturbed and upset by that state of being, why don't you ever feel it to be utterly unpleasant? You still find it pleasant even when it brings you to tears.

We must contemplate well that we want neither birth nor non-birth, for neither is empty. If we cling to non-birth then it too is not-empty. This section, concerning birth and non-birth, the final pair, is the hardest to understand and the hardest to practise. We want neither birth nor non-birth and through not grasping at or clinging to either of them there is emptiness. Having spoken continually of having and being, of not-having and not-being, we reach birth and non-birth and almost immediately we grasp at non-birth. Thus at the final stage our practice must be to advance to the point that our knowledge of non-birth dissolves, without becoming an object of grasping and clinging. Then true emptiness will appear, that which is neither birth nor non-birth, or in other words true non-birth, the remainderless extinction. Speaking in this way may seem to be quibbling or splitting hairs but the meaning is unequivocal, there is a definite difference between those two kinds of non-birth. So don't cling to the idea that Nibbāna is non-birth and is wonderful and amazing in this way and that or that vattasamsara (the wheel of birth and death) is a plethora of fun filled births. There must be no grasping or clinging on either side for there to be emptiness and genuine non-birth. The practice at the normal times must be of this nature continually.

As for the moments when we are doing the great work of *kammatthāna*, the most technical aspect of the practice of

samādhivipassanā, whereby one examines the painful consequences of grasping and clinging, it too is a matter of being empty. A large part of **kammattāna** practice depends on following instructions, it's not something an unlearned person can do on his own, and thus there are many guidelines and explanations. You may read these for yourselves or bring to mind those you have formerly heard. All of the points that I have been making here are included in the practice at the ordinary times.

The second occasion is the moment of contact with sense-objects. When visible forms, sounds, odors, flavours and tangible objects contact the eyes, ears, nose, tongue and body we must practise letting **phassa** stop at **phassa** and let **vedanā** stop at **vedanā**, in the way that I have previously explained in many places and on many occasions.¹ Letting **phassa** stop just at **phassa** is an extremely high level of practice. On the ordinary level, **phassa** develops into **vedanā** and then we stop it just there, without allowing the further development of craving and grasping, of "I" and "mine".

Some of the articulate talkers in monastery halls and teachers in Buddhist colleges say that stopping just at **phassa** is impossible, that there is always the development of **vedanā**. That is because they cling to the written word. It's not the truth.

In fact, the Buddha taught that when seeing forms there should be just the seeing, when smelling odors just the smelling, tasting flavours just the tasting and touching tangible objects just the touching. If you can do it then there is no you, the ego is not born. It is the end of **Dukkha**, immutable emptiness.

It is sufficient to observe one's reactions at the times that we glance in the direction of some neutral form or other.

1. See p. 20

Try casting your eyes on the door or a window and you'll notice that there is merely phassa, there are no feelings of satisfaction or dissatisfaction. When visible forms, sounds, odors, flavours and tangible objects enter as contact let them stop there in the same way.

Let it be like the soldier asleep by the side of a piece of artillery. When a shell is fired he merely registers the sound without feeling anything and just goes on happily sleeping. No matter how heavy the shelling he is not startled or disturbed. There is just the sound of the piece of artillery contacting his ear and then ceasing.

Can you let phassa stop at phassa in that way when you hear the sound of a man or the sound of a woman or the sound of a loved one? If you can then you're really adept. Here animals may be more accomplished than we are because they lack all the excess mental baggage carried by humans. If we wish to reach the peak of excellence then we must train ourselves to let phassa remain as merely phassa.

But if you can't do it and concede defeat, you can still stop at vedanā. As soon as there is a feeling of comfort or discomfort, of satisfaction or dissatisfaction then extinguish it just there, without giving birth to the various kinds of desire that spring from the urges of craving and clinging. This is the practice on the occasion of contact with sense-objects.

Now in the short remaining time I would like to talk about the practice on the third occasion, the moment when the mind is extinguished and the body breaks up and dies. How can we practise so as to be empty at that time? For this matter we must depend on taking 'remainderless extinction' as our basic principle in life.

The natural death of the aged is something definite and sure. When someone reaches old age it's said that they have

little time left. What can be achieved in that short remaining time? So as to be in time, those who are old and unlearned, who don't have the time to study very much and whose brains aren't as good as they were, can hold to this very principle of remainderless extinction of the 'I', that I have been speaking of.

Make it natural to yourself to see that being a person is not pleasant, being a deva is not pleasant, being a father is not pleasant, being a mother is not pleasant, being a son, a daughter, a husband, a wife, a servant, a master, a victor, a loser, a good person, a bad person, a fortunate person or an unfortunate person – none of them is pleasant, none of them is any fun. Then the mind will hold no hope of having or being anything at all. The phrase 'absence of hope' may be used in regard to the attainment of arahantship, but it's not the resignation of the foolish and lazy, it's a different matter altogether. It is the absence of hope of one who with true wisdom sees that there is nothing in this or any world that one should wish to have or be. Truly nothing is worth having or being at any time or at any place.

So what path will be taken by the mind of a person without hope? It won't take any path at all because it sees that nothing is worth wishing for. Thus it lays the way for its own death. There being no desire to have or be anything, it dissolves into emptiness. This is the skillful means to cheat nature a little. When the time of death has truly arrived, we give rise to the feeling that nothing anywhere is worth having or being. If that feeling is present in the mind at the moment of death then one will inevitably reach Nibbāna through the act of dying itself. It's a really good deal – putting down a tiny amount of capital certain of great results.!

Let the great scholars of the land come and test out what it's like for the mind to meet death with the authentic feeling that nothing anywhere is worth having or being. Death will be a disintegration accompanied by *nirodhadhātu*.¹ The mind will be transformed into *nibbānadhātu* through physical death. If a grandma or grand-dad are unlearned and inarticulate but have this single feeling it's enough.

When the time of death arrives let this feeling be present. You should remember that close to death the mind will gradually slip away. As the body runs down nearing its end, consciousness will gradually disappear. You will forget more and more until you forget everything. You won't know what time it is, whether it's day or night; you won't be able to tell where you are or whose house you're in, you won't even be able to remember your name or even the most basic daily chants properly. But the way for you to stay as the companion of the mind until the end, is to be aware that nothing is worth having or being. Volunteer for the remainderless extinction! Let that feeling of volunteering for the remainderless extinction, that readiness to accept it, be a partner of the mind until the very end. With this **skillful** means the mind will be able to dissolve itself into the emptiness that is *Nibbāna*. This is the practice at the moment of physical death for those of little knowledge. With it an unlearned grandma or grand-dad can reach the final extinction. We call it the skilful means of turning a fall from a ladder into a measured leap.

The body must inevitably break up, it's old, it has reached its end. This is to have fallen from the ladder. As one falls one leaps on, leaps on to the remainderless extinction by establishing in the mind the feeling that nothing is worth having or being. It may be called leaping in the right direction. There is no pain of any sort. There is, on the contrary, the best possible

result, attainment of remainderless extinction. It is to be adept. It is to know how to fall from the ladder. It's not like the foolish people who, when they fall from a ladder, break their necks and all their limbs. Even those who've studied a lot and travel about, giving articulate talks in monastery halls, can still fall from the ladder and break all their bones. They can't compare with those who have been interested in the right way, even if it's only in this one matter.

Now in the event of accidental death, such as getting run-over by a car, having a building collapse on top of you, being gored in the rear by a bull or getting blown up by an atom bomb, what should you do? If you have a little intelligence you'll see that it's exactly the same. If there is even a tiny amount of awareness left, in that moment resolve on the remainderless extinction. Through having previously developed the feeling that there is nothing worth having or being, until it is completely fluent and natural to you, on reaching the moment of death, you will be able to bring it to mind for a split second before the end. For example, someone run-over by a car doesn't die immediately, there is always an interval even if it's only a fraction of a second or a single thought-moment, and for the flash of feeling resolving on remainderless extinction that is plenty of time.

Now suppose that death occurs in an instant with no feeling at all, well that itself is the remainderless extinction! As I have already explained we have already trained in the normal times to keep this feeling that nothing is worth having or being constantly in the mind, so that when the body meets death with no opportunity to think or feel anything, that awareness being already present there will be remainderless extinction. But if there is even one thought-moment or half a second, then we can think comfortably. So don't be cowardly, don't be afraid! Don't let cowardice and fear sap your strength : "please may I go

with you doctor", "take me to the hospital" and so on. If you go you'll die there just the same, it's a waste of time.

Against unnatural death, dying not wanting to die, dying unexpectedly, the sublime Dhamma can not only provide an infallible protection, but can provide Nibbāna right there at the wheels of the car, beneath the collapsing building, at the horns of the bull or in the pile of bodies charred by the atomic blast. There is no violent unnatural death, instead there is Nibbāna.

Those who have studied little, know little, right down to grandma and grand-dad who can't read, are all capable of understanding this teaching and should keep training in this correct understanding.

Now as for the death of those of perfect knowledge and truth – discerning awareness, those who have studied sufficiently and are proficient both in the theory and practice of Dhamma, for such people it doesn't have to be a matter of leaping as they fall from the ladder. They are deathless from the start, from before any illness. Through having attained a high level of Dhamma since long before, they have no death.

If a person has such abundant knowledge then when the time of death truly arrives, his preparations will be much better than those of people who have to leap as they fall from the ladder. Knowing how to establish mindfulness and self-awareness that is incorruptible he may laugh contemptuously at death. It might be called descending the ladder rung-by-rung and is the way of one with perfect knowledge.

Now I would like to talk about the way that the sick and diseased should prepare themselves for death. When one knows that death is inevitable, such as when suffering from a terminal

disease like tuberculosis, one should make the very best of it with mindfulness and self-awareness, without cowardice or fear.

I'd like to relate to you an account I once came across of the way that people in the time of the Buddha prepared for death. For those who kept the Precepts of Virtuous Conduct fasting was not at all difficult because they were used to abstaining from an evening meal on *Uposatha*¹ days. When their illness reached the point that they felt that they had no more than ten days left to live they would stop eating. Not like us. These days, if someone is close to death we go out and look for the most expensive and delicious foods, so that some people even die prematurely from the food. Their efforts to avoid food were for the purpose of having a mind completely undisturbed. When the body starts to run down it loses its ability to digest food and so anything consumed turns to poison, making the mind restless and confused.

So they prepared themselves for death by abstaining from food and taking only water or medicine. As death got closer, they would stop taking even water or medicine in order to focus their mindfulness and self-awareness, so as to die in the way of remainderless extinction.

People who cling to goodness and virtue prepare themselves for death by clinging to goodness and virtue. The wise prepare themselves to let go and meet the remainderless extinction. There is nothing that they want; injecting drugs to extend their lives would be a great irritation. This is relinquishing the body (*sankhāras*). Relinquishing the body while still alive they prepare to make the best of its disintegration by acquiescing in remainderless extinction.

As for us these days, we mill around the doctor in a tumult, sometimes until the room is packed tight, trying to get the dying

1. The full-moon and dark-moon days when laypeople would come to the monastery and keep the Eight Precepts of Virtuous Conduct

person to take medicines or eat or have injections. We try to do so many things that the sick person becomes anxious and flustered, and has no peace of mind. He doesn't know how he is going to die or whether in fact he will die at all. There is nothing but doubt and anxiety. The sick person does not experience victory over death, he does not realize emptiness or the remainderless extinction that I have been speaking of.

Unlike the people of the Buddha's time, people today usually look for the most comfortable bed, the most comfortable room, the most expensive foods and medicines, and then die with a great fuss. They want to go on living, to put off their death even if it's only for a single minute. They start having all sorts of injections and treatments and die with no mindfulness or self-awareness. It is the action of delusion.

To die in the right way we must be brave with Dhamma and die having victory over death, die realizing emptiness in the last second of life. Please remember well, there is an opportunity right up to the last moment.

These then are the ways of practice divided into three moments or occasions.

1. The 'normal' times when we're doing our normal tasks.
2. The moments of sense contact—how to deal with it so as to produce emptiness.
3. The moment of death—what to do when the five 'aggregates' khandas meet their inevitable disintegration.

These are things that should be brought up and thought about, spoken about and discussed regularly in the same way that we chat about radio and television programmes, and the general goings-on of the world. People who like boxing can get so excited talking about it that they can't get the words out

quickly enough. Why is it that we can talk about those things all day and all night and yet when it comes to something as important as this we don't discuss it at all? Why don't we ever talk about fighting with death, of having victory over it and being free of both death and birth? If we did it could become easier straight away. If we talk about and discuss these things as much as we talk about other matters, in no great time the practice will become truly easy. If we follow the correct method everything will be easy, even attaining Nibbāna or leaping as we fall from the ladder.

To sum up, we must understand correctly the meanings of the phrases 'empty', 'realizing emptiness', 'abiding with emptiness', 'being naturally empty' and 'being emptiness' itself.

Emptiness is present in all things; it is their characteristic. If the mind is empty of grasping at and clinging to all things, then it is itself emptiness, the remainderless extinction of 'I' and 'mine' and there is no more birth.

Here I will bring to an end this talk on the practice that leads to emptiness.

ธรรมสภา ได้รับจัดพิมพ์เพื่อสืบทอดการเผยแพร่พระธรรมคำสอน
ของพระศาสนาตามเจตนารมย์ของคณะเผยแพร่ชีวิตประเสริฐ ท่านที่ประสงค์
จะเผยแพร่เป็นธรรมทาน โปรดติดต่อที่...

ธรรมสภา ๓๕/๒๗๐ จรัญสนิทวงศ์ ๖๒ บางกอกน้อย

กรุงเทพมหานคร ๑๐๗๐๐

โทร. ๔๓๔๕๒๖๗, ๔๓๔๓๕๖๖ โทรสาร ๔๒๔๐๓๗๕

การให้ธรรมะชนะการให้ทั้งปวง การรับธรรมะและนำไปปฏิบัติย่อมชนะการรับทั้งปวงเช่นกัน