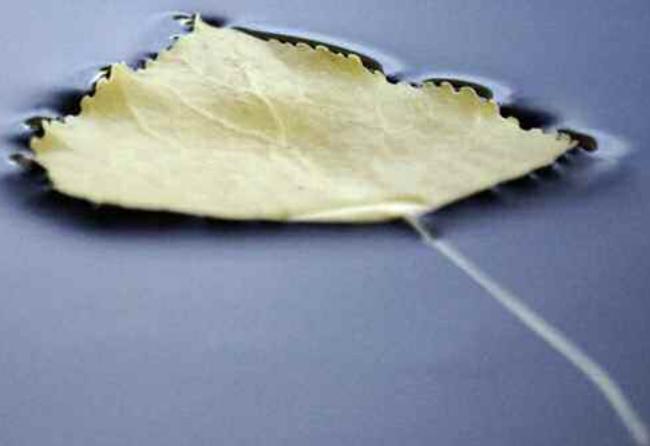


# Pāramī

WAYS TO CROSS LIFE'S FLOODS



AJAHN SUCITTO

# Pāramī

WAYS TO CROSS LIFE'S FLOODS



AJAHN SUCITTO



AMARAVATI  
PUBLICATIONS

Bhikkhu Sucitto and Amaravati Publications  
Amaravati,  
Great Gaddesden  
Hemel Hempstead HP1 3BZ  
UK



This book is offered for free distribution.  
We would like to acknowledge the support of many people  
in the preparation of this book and especially to the  
Kataññuta group of Malaysia, Singapore and Australia  
for bringing it into production.

This book is also available for free download from  
[www.forestsanghapublications.org](http://www.forestsanghapublications.org)  
2012 © Amaravati Publications

ISBN: 978-1-870205-59-7

For permission to reprint and general enquiries, contact:  
[abmpublications@amaravati.org](mailto:abmpublications@amaravati.org)

This work is licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivs  
2.0 UK: England & Wales License. To view a copy of the license, visit:  
<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/2.0/uk>  
See page 224 for more details on your rights and restrictions under this license.

Cover image 'Yellow leaf on blue water' © snoron.com  
'Leaf' text divider image photo © Nicholas Halliday  
Cover and book design by Nicholas Halliday

First edition, 10,000 copies, printed in Malaysia 2012

# Touching the Earth



CENTURIES AGO a seeker, one who searches for a way beyond birth and death, was wandering through a remote valley of one of the many tributaries of the Ganges river. He had been wandering for six years and in the course of that time had studied under teachers, developed meditation and strengthened his considerable resolve.

Most recently he had been part of a group of six ascetics whose view was that the way to liberation opened through disregarding or suppressing the senses. Eating solid food was to be done begrudgingly, if at all; the body was to be chastised and its needs given no attention. In this, as in all his previous spiritual disciplines, the seeker excelled his companions. And yet ... he knew that he had attained no superior state and gained no liberating wisdom.

At this critical point, reduced to a scrawny creature of little more than flaking skin and bone, he had left the group to intensify his practice in solitude. Finally he found a grove of trees and took up the sitting position at the root of a fig-tree, determined to sit in full awareness, mind bent on investigating whatever might arise in his consciousness. His aim was to see if there could be a way through the shifting manifestations of thoughts, sensations and emotions – to discover whether there was some absolute and untrammelled state. Yet as he tried to apply himself, he found that his body was now too weak to even sustain sitting upright. Nor was his mind steady and clear.

Strained and driven only by willpower, it could neither open nor settle into calm; instead his mind formed voices that whispered in his inner ear, some accusing, some mocking. Strange visions flittered through the shifting veils of consciousness. He was unable to repel or investigate them. A despondent inertia hovered over him like a vulture.

There were some slight sounds and a quiet voice that, at first, barely made an impression on his mind. Groggy as he was, his awareness still sensed a shift in the gloom of his near-death state. Pulling apart the eyelids which had glued shut, he made out the form of a young woman, kneeling in front of him with a

dish. 'Sujāta asks for your blessing, noble one!' she said gently as she laid the dish in front of him. 'Please partake of my offering so that my generosity can be fulfilled!' He moved his lips, but his throat could not form words. Yet, her kindness touched chords in his heart and a sense that had been ignored for years stirred. Before he could form a thought, his head had made a movement of assent and one skinny hand had lifted in response. Sujāta smiled and withdrew, and while allowing the natural instinct to move through him, the seeker found himself carefully scooping a meal of sweet milk rice from the dish, one slow mouthful at a time, until he had consumed it all.

Life flowed through his system like the sap that fed the tree under which he sat. 'Why not?' he thought. 'Let Nature look after nature. What good is there in fighting against its laws? Why not let it support me in this quest?' With his body refreshed and his mind clearing from its near-death delirium, he sat cross-legged and upright under the canopy of the tree and steadied his awareness on the experience of breathing in and out. It suddenly occurred to him that when he was a child he had done just that, quite spontaneously, and it had taken him to a place of natural calm. Eagerly, he picked up the theme.

Evening came and with it shadows, and the sounds of the many animals that move through the night. Sensing this, the seeker's mind entered its own deep shadows and all that lurks there. Fear and uncertainty arose, followed by a procession of moods — apathy, craving and negativity amongst many others swelled into a veritable army attacking his resolve. Boredom, sense desire, drowsiness and passions beset him as he sat there, hour after hour. And yet, now on guard against every inner voice as well as against forcefully suppressing them, he continued to sit firm and upright in full awareness. The night progressed while the power of these energies seemed to crystallize into one great, raging force. It was like a demon battering and tugging him. And it swept into the depths of his heart, where he could hear its seductive whispering:

'Why sit here under a tree at night alone, wasting your youth? How can anything good come of this painful and impotent sojourn? Why not trust life, learn as you go through its joys and marvels and challenges? It's late, take a rest and see what the morning brings.'

The seeker unified his mind around his resolve and looked for a clear response. Eventually, one came. 'I know you, demon; you're Mara, the deceiver, the voice of Death! You're the one who has kept me chasing delusions and running from shadows through life after life and death after death. This time, I'm not budging. You won't shift me with your doubts and promises.'

'You know nothing and you'll get nothing out of sitting here. Death will sweep you away like a twig in a flood!' said Mara. 'And even before that comes, I can

call on forces of fear, loneliness and longing that will drive you to despair and send you running for comfort. You just have one feeble body and a heart awash with confusion. How do you think that your sitting still is going to conquer me?’

‘My body is mortal, but I’m not relying on that. My heart may sense fear and craving, but I’m not taking a stand on that. I have an inheritance of many lives spent in working for purity, both of conduct and of mind. And sitting still, alone, unarmed, I also can command a tide that will check your flood! I stand on being at peace with whatever arises. Here, now, I call this very Earth to witness that I am ready, ripe with all the perfections that are needed to sweep you and your demon host out of my heart.’ With these words, the seeker focused his attention deep within his embodied awareness. In that calm centre beneath personality, thoughts and moods, he touched into a rich ground.

A response was not long in coming. His firmness grew as he recollected the huge store of virtues and resolves that he had enacted over many lives; and in his mind’s eye, the very spirit of the Earth rose up like a goddess. Wrapping her long hair into a braid, she twisted it — and wrung out of it a great fountain of water that swept through the darkness of the grove ... His heart brimmed with confidence and clarity radiated around him: Mara and his entire host had dissolved like mist at dawn.

After allowing the clarity and joy to wash their refreshing tides through him, the seeker resumed his introspection. He began recalling the results of acts based on kindness, patience, resolve and more, the deeds of many lifetimes. He reviewed the processes that determine everyone’s life, the pressure, turmoil and pain that accompanied them — and finally how they can be put to rest. By the time that dawn had arisen, a deep unshakeable peace had settled within him: he had discovered the release from the grip of Death.

In years to come, many people who heard his teachings came to acknowledge the profundity of his realization. Sensing his deep clarity and mastery of mind, they called him ‘Buddha’ — the Full-Knowing, the Enlightened, the Awake.



# Contents



<b>Preface by Kittisaro</b>	1
<b>Author's Preface and Acknowledgements</b>	5
<b>Crossing the Floods</b>	11
Quotes and Suggestions on Heedfulness	25
<b>Getting on Board for Liberation</b>	31
Quotes and Suggestions on Generosity	46
Quotes and Suggestions on Morality	50
<b>Letting Go</b>	55
Quotes and Suggestions on Renunciation	68
<b>Innate Clarity</b>	73
Quotes and Suggestions on Wisdom	88
<b>Stewarding Resources</b>	93
Quotes and Suggestions on Energy	108

<b>Bearing with Life</b>	113
Quotes and Suggestions on Patience	128
<b>The Fullness of Truth</b>	133
Quotes and Suggestions on Truthfulness	148
<b>Resolve</b>	153
Quotes and Suggestions on Resolve	167
<b>Holistic Kindness</b>	171
Quotes and Suggestions on Kindness	185
<b>Evenness of Mind</b>	191
Quotes and Suggestions on Equanimity	203
<b>Closing: Bringing It Home</b>	209
<b>Glossary</b>	213



## Preface by Kittisaro



I am delighted to write a short preface for this excellent and important book on *pāramī*, the essential qualities of heart that carry us safely through the swirling floods of existence to the unshakeable groundedness and well-being of our true nature. The publication of this work brings to joyful fruition an idea I had several years ago. Ajahn Sucitto has visited Thanissara and me in South Africa many times over the years, always taking a real interest in our Dharma work, encouraging us and regularly offering accessible teachings to help our fledgling community of practitioners negotiate the turbulent currents of a post-apartheid society.

We arrived in this country in November 1994 in response to a teaching invitation. Some of our friends warned, ‘Don’t go there. It will be a bloodbath.’ Trusting that to teach meditation was harmless, wholesome and relatively blameless, Thanissara and I brushed aside the dire predictions and made the journey. The plan was to lead a series of retreats, tour around a bit in a beautiful land undergoing an historic transition and go home. That would be that. We had no idea what we were getting into. We ended up immigrating, a decision that would drastically change our lives and transform our notion of Buddhist practice.

In the early years of our residency, we led many retreats at the main meditation centre in Ixopo, and began to develop a hermitage in the mountains called Dharmagiri. Imagining Dharmagiri as a place of long, uninterrupted silent rejuvenating retreats, we were shocked to meet the reality of frequent knocks on our door — people needing money; someone dead at the gate,

a need for a vehicle to transport the body; so many beings suffering from dreadful illness with no proper medicine; children wanting education; schools lacking basic necessities like running water and electricity; young men bleeding from a fight urgently needing a doctor. It was overwhelming. We were regularly flooded internally and externally with helplessness, exhaustion, resentment, yearning, hopelessness and despair. To survive and be relevant, we soon realized our spiritual practice had to stretch beyond meditative calm to include and embrace the surrounding field of great need and suffering.

When I first heard Ajahn Sucitto's original taped talks on the *pāramī*, I rejoiced in their clarity and incomparable applicability to living skilfully in the world. They present a path of practice that gathers in all that we think, say and do — a Way that isn't limited to meditation techniques or lofty notions of transcendence. Even with a noble, wise and charismatic leader like Nelson Mandela, with his visionary example of forgiveness and reconciliation, the people of South Africa, it seemed to us, were still traumatized by apartheid, and carried deep fundamental wounds in the underlying fabric of the culture. The natural expressions of basic human generosity, care and compassion seemed to be obstructed and damaged. Mandela's heroic example made a peaceful transition possible. He blessed us and pointed the way, but as individuals, we still needed to do the diligent work of transformation. Many people of all the diverse colours and races living here are still suffering.

The systematic teachings on the *pāramī*, the gradual building of the 'temple of awareness' that Ajahn Sucitto eloquently describes in this book, throws a precious lifeline to the isolated, overwhelmed beings that we all recognize in ourselves from time to time. If we hold it true, it will guide us back home to solid ground and a renewed sense of community.

Most of us frequently experience the feeling of being swept away. These powerful teachings enable us — in moments — to emerge from the flood into the ever-present brightness and stability of the unobstructed heart. The Ten Perfections offer a spirituality that is holistic. The Buddha's teaching envisions well-being on all levels, within and without. In today's world filled with so much inequality, injustice, suffering and conflict, these human virtues remind us that we are not isolated beings. We live in a relational field, and the realization of true peace is not just about letting go of the world, but rather living mindfully — remembering — and healing the world.

When I originally asked Ajahn Sucitto if we could put his talks into a book, I wanted South Africans to help make a gift of Dharma, hoping that the wonderful blessings of these teachings would in time shower back on this emerging rainbow nation, bringing lasting harmony, clarity and grand-heartedness to this extraordinary land.

Now this dream is coming true. May all beings from all countries find these teachings useful. May they carry us across the floods to the end of suffering.



**Kittisaro**

Dharmagiri • Drakensberg Mountains • 2011



## Author's Preface and Acknowledgements



This book originates in a series of talks I gave at Cittaviveka Monastery in the mid-1990s. More than a decade later, Kittisaro arranged to have them transcribed and edited with the intention that they be published in a readable form. Since receiving the draft, I have substantially rearranged, edited and added to the material. This is because the talks were given to the resident monastic community who already had a lot of background knowledge that I can't assume the reader has. Also my understanding has grown over time, and I wanted to back up the original material with references to the Suttas of the Pāli Canon, and also with advice on the daily practice of *pāramī*. This latter is now in the sections entitled 'Quotes and Suggestions on ...' My wish is that the mixture of colloquial and more academic sections present a balanced guide for ongoing Dhamma practice. For people who approach Dhamma through meditation, I would recommend giving consideration to the processes of 'Reflection' and 'Action'; these are traditional standards which help to bring Dhamma into the more engaged and external focus outlined by the *pāramī*.

As this is not a handbook on meditation, the guidance marked 'Meditation' is mostly about how one establishes meditation practice on the foundations of right view and right action. It may seem basic, but foundations are like that; nevertheless, good foundations make all the difference to what comes later.

The translations of the material from the Pāli Canon are heavily dependent on the good work of Bhikkhus Nyānamoli, Bodhi and Thānissaro, whose translations can be read in the

Wisdom Publications editions of the *Sutta Pitaka*, and via [www.accesstoinight.org](http://www.accesstoinight.org) respectively. I have consulted a range of translations to feel sure of the essential meaning and made adaptations in the language to suit the requirements of brevity and accessibility. The farthest I've strayed away from the original is in rendering 'morality is the ford of the Buddhas' (*Theragātha* 613) as 'morality is the way that Buddhas cross the floods.' This is because whereas to a contemporary of the Buddha the term 'ford' would bring up resonances of the Jain saints, the 'Tirthankara,' or 'those who make a ford across the flood of human misery,' this image might be obscure to a contemporary reader.

This project only could have been undertaken and reached fruition through the support and skills of many people. Kittisaro, Thanissara and friends in South Africa initiated the project; Durten Rohm made the transcriptions, and Judy Tobler and Chantel Oosthuysen did the preliminary editing. Another good friend, Dorothea Bowen in USA, then polished the draft after I had made my changes to it. In the UK, Nicholas Halliday designed and typeset the book. Finally, Dhamma-practitioners in Malaysia sponsored the production of the book for free distribution. Such is the blessing of a global community. I trust that the reader will join me in offering our gratitude and acknowledgement of their good and generous actions.



**Ajahn Sucitto**  
Cittaviveka • 2011





Quotes are from  
these collections in  
the Pāli Canon



- A Numerical Discourse/Gradual Sayings
- Dhp Dhammapada
- Iti Itivuttaka
- M Middle Length Sayings
- S Collected Discourses/Kindred Sayings
- Snp Sutta Nipāta
- Thag Theragātha (Elders' Verses)



## Crossing the Floods



A way of talking about transcendence, liberation or however you conceive of a spiritual path, is to use the metaphor of ‘crossing the floods.’ Interest in deep change gets triggered by the feeling of being swept along by events; by the sense of being overwhelmed by, and even going under, a tide of worries, duties and pressures. That’s the ‘floods.’ And crossing them is about coming through all that to find some firm ground. It takes some work, some skill, but we *can* do it. This book offers some guidelines and themes for practice that can get us fit for the task.

So: floods. Our experience is a meeting and merging of external and internal currents of events. The awareness of something out there triggers a moment of recognition as to what the thing is — a piece of music, an old friend, a familiar flavour — along with degrees of interest, pleasure or alarm that may act as further triggers to action: to draw closer, start talking, or search one’s memory for further information about that thing. This internal experience normally occupies our attention, sometimes to the point of congestion as our minds add a swelling amount of internal activity to an ongoing flow of external data. The mind has creative potential, but that isn’t always a happy experience. At times the internal activity of analysis, speculation, memory, investigation, cross-referencing, decision-making and self-evaluation can amount to a volume of overwhelming proportions. Then the experience of overload develops into one of exhaustion, or of a pressure in our lives that diminishes peace and joy and can incline the mind to either the temporary oblivion offered by drink, drugs

and entertainment, or a need for therapy to find some ways to manage the daily round. This is the loss of balance that we can rightly experience as being flooded. It isn't the world per se, nor is it that we are chronically unbalanced; it's just that the right relationship hasn't been struck.

On the other hand, we may have had an experience of aware stillness in which the concerns of the day and all those habitual inner activities stopped or abated. Perhaps it was in the presence of a natural wonder, or maybe it was in a temple, or under a night sky, where we felt for a moment lifted by awe. For a few instants or minutes perhaps our normal sense of who we are, a sense based on the movement and concerns of all that mental activity, dropped away and was replaced by a sense of greater breadth, or depth, or of feeling at one with the universe. In such an experience, the world around us changes to a place of beauty or spiritual presence. Maybe we framed the experience in the language of a particular religion, or interpreted it as a divine revelation. It could have triggered a whole range of such further activities. Or we could have surmised that there are other states of consciousness than the one we've called ordinary, and that the normal self that we experience as being in the world is not a fixed or ultimate identity. For a moment, without creating or rejecting anything, we experienced a shift both in terms of our self and the world around us.

Now if we were to find a method of experiencing such shifts and stopping on a regular basis, we could examine that sense of stopping and know that it's anything but nihilistic — it's not oblivion, but a vibrant stillness. It's as if the mind had been crinkled and folded in on itself, and now it has unfolded. An underlying restlessness and tension that we hardly noticed because it was so normal, has ceased — and with it, our normal sense of what we and the world are has changed for the better. This 'unfolding' to a wider and deeper sense is what we call 'transcendence.' We change, and our apparent world changes. In terms of the previous metaphor, it is an emergence from the floods.

## Dhamma: A Way Rather Than a Technique

The methodologies for transcendence are varied: meditation, prayer, devotion, yoga, fasting, even psychotropic drugs. In the long run, the ones that are the most useful will be the ones that can be integrated into daily life with the minimum amount of dependence on external circumstances or internal ideology. Then the method will be applicable to a wide range of people and it will not become the source of more stressful mental activity. Such is the spiritual alignment that the Buddha called ‘Dhamma,’ and which he described as: ‘Directly accessible; not bound up with special events and times; encouraging interest and open-mindedness [rather than belief]; furthering and deepening; to be realized directly in one’s experience through wisdom [rather than induced by ‘another’]’. Dhamma supports and is supported by practices such as careful reflective thinking, cultivation of kindness and compassion to oneself and others, calming the mind in meditation and gaining a transcendent understanding of the phenomena that make up and arouse our mental activities. All of these practices are to be undertaken in the light of Dhamma — that is by looking directly at the results and not subscribing to dogmatic views about any of it.

The vision of Dhamma is that if the mind is healed, strengthened and calmed; if we are no longer swept away by our ideas, doubts, plans, regrets, grudges and phobias (to name but a few) — then we can cross the floods and, to use a Buddhist metaphor, be standing on ‘the Other Shore.’ Whatever the analogy, such transcendence means that we’re neither generating stress nor caught in stressful consequences. Accordingly the most usual summary of the Buddha’s Dhamma is that it presents Four Noble Truths concerning suffering and stress — or *dukkha* (the word has a range of meanings from anguish to unsatisfactoriness). These Truths present this stress and suffering as unavoidably bound up with the human condition, yet as something that has a cause; and that the cause can be eliminated; and finally, that there is a Path of practices that will lead to the elimination of that stress.

Like any unfolding, the elimination of stress requires care. So in order to facilitate this, the Buddha's teaching encourages persistent strengthening, healing and refining of mental activity. To this end he presented themes and instructions, often in clusters (such as the 'the five spiritual faculties' or 'the seven factors of Enlightenment'). The culmination of these is in meditative Dhamma practices, ones that depend on a calm and secluded context to support close examination of the mind. If this were the only scenario for the spiritual alignment of Dhamma, it would limit the occasions in which such Dhamma could be practised, and narrow the meaning of Dhamma to a set of meditation techniques. However when we consider how the Buddha defined Dhamma, and how he framed liberation quite broadly in terms of acknowledging and building a path out of suffering and stress, then we must also use a broader focus as a more long-term foundation for Dhamma, one which will fit the contexts and energies of our active life. Accordingly, a set of instructions called '*pāramī*' or '*pāramīta*' have become paramount in their usefulness and daily-life applicability. The terms '*pāramī*' and '*pāramīta*' carry meanings such as 'furtherances' or 'perfections,' and refer to cultivating skilful intentions and actions throughout the day.

### Daily Perfections

The reason why this set was put together, some years after the Buddha's passing away, seems to have been that Buddhists speculated on why this one person arose in the world who surpassed all others in the depth and range of his wisdom. Many of his disciples developed qualities that the Buddha manifested, and also crossed over to the Other Shore, but none came close to the Buddha in terms of depth, range and versatility in presenting Dhamma. And, unlike his disciples, he realized the Path without a teacher. So people reckoned that this unique person must have inherited a huge stock of strengths and virtues in the process of many lifetimes. Stories and fables were created to describe this process whereby the Buddha-to-be ('Bodhisatta' or 'Bodhisattva') developed *pāramī* as a foundation for his future Enlightenment (or Awakening). Different schools of Buddhists selected different

qualities to be *pāramī*, but in the school that came to be called ‘Theravada’ ten were so designated. Theravada uses the Pāli language, referring to them as *pāramī*, whereas other schools use the classical Sanskrit language, hence ‘*pāramita*.’ The ten *pāramī* are:

- Generosity — *Dāna*
- Morality — *Sīla*
- Renunciation — *Nekkhamma*
- Discernment or Wisdom — *Paññā*
- Energy — *Viriya*
- Patience — *Khanti*
- Truthfulness — *Sacca*
- Resolve — *Adhitthāna*
- Kindness — *Mettā*
- Equanimity — *Upekkhā*

These *pāramī* form a set of themes that are used in the Theravada tradition to this day. They provide a template for the mind’s energies and activities that isn’t an extra to all the other things we might have to do, but encompasses our talking and working, our relationships and interactions with others, our times of private introspection, our decision-making and the forming of our life directions. We practise morality, patience and all or any of the rest while we are engaged at work, or minding the children, or stuck in a traffic jam. When it comes down to it, why not? When you’re in a jam, you can either get irritable, worry — or you can practise patience. So which is going to take you out of stress right now? You get the picture. The *pāramī* take spiritual practice into areas of our lives where we get confused, are subject to social pressure and are often strongly influenced by stress or stress-forming assumptions. Providing alternative ways to orient the mind in the stream of daily events, the ‘perfections’ can derail obstructive inner activities and leave the mind clear for. Cultivating *pāramī* means you get to steer your life out of the floods.

## The Four Floods

The term 'floods' speaks for itself: the overwhelmed, swept-along feeling that comes as we get plunged into stress and suffering. In the Buddhist texts, the word is sometimes used in the broad sense of the mind being overwhelmed by sorrow, lamentation and despair in full-blown *dukkha*, or to the existential *dukkha* of our being carried along in the flood of ageing, sickness and death. On occasion the floods refer to five key hindrances that clog the mind: sense craving, ill-will, dullness and torpor, restless worry and doubt. Meditators in particular know how any of these five can hinder the mind from realizing the clarity and peace that they are aiming for.

In their most specific use however, the floods (*ogha*) refer to four currents, also called 'outflows' (*āsavā*), that run underneath the bubbling stream of mental activity. There they remain unseen but yet direct the flow of that stream. Sounds eerie? Well if you sit still in silence for a while, with no particular preoccupation, you'll notice the mind starts wandering ... to this and that ... towards things you plan or have to do, to memories of what you've done, good or bad, or had done to you ... to ideas of things that you'd like to have. At times you may find yourself reliving a fragment of your history, or anticipating a scene that you're going to have to deal with. And along with that come judgements, opinions of what you should have done, or about the other person. All of this has a certain reality, though based on a few scanty observations. Yet this is the stream of mental activity that absorbs our attention and informs our actions — and it arises unbidden, and seems unstoppable. We have little, if any, control over it, and the stream is so usual that it's difficult to imagine how we would sense ourselves without it. In fact, the only conclusion that this inner stream presents, as it takes us into past and future, desires and problems, is the implication that this uncontrollable wandering on (*samsāra*) is what we are.

But we can study it; and that indicates that a degree of stepping out of *samsāra* is possible. And, following on from that, we can take

note of the four currents (floods) that the Buddha pointed out. This will give us a vantage point from where we can jump in or stay out of the stream of mental activity. The four floods are: the flood of sensuality, the flood of becoming, the flood of views and the flood of ignorance.

### Floods of Sensuality and Becoming

The first flood to note is the current that accompanies the senses with emotional impressions of their desirability or interest. This is the flood of sensuality (*kāmogha*), a torrent under whose trance sense objects seem to offer pleasant sights, sounds, tastes, fragrances and touches. With some experience and considered attention, we can note that none of these — once seen, heard, etc. — actually induce the kind of feeling that the current promises in any but the most fleeting way. In the gentle or pulsing waves of this flood however, the objects of the senses seem irresistible, charming and productive of real satisfaction. And yet the manifest truth of our lives is that we are not blissed-out or even satisfied for long by any sense contact. It happens all day long, and with luck it's mostly OK. Sometimes it's pleasant for a short while and sometimes it's unpleasant; but the pleasant, once established, gets to be normal ... and then boring, so desire for newer sources of pleasure kicks in. However, we can't really have any of it because it runs through consciousness like water through our fists. Sensory input, with its pleasure and displeasure, passes. That's it. That's all there is. Why make anything more of it? We would have figured this out by the age of three were it not for the hypnotic power of the sensuality flood. But in that trance we assume we have no alternatives.

Secondly, there's the flood called 'becoming' (*bhāvogha*). This is the flood that carries time and identity. When you look at experience directly, it's obvious that all we are or have is happening right now. Our memories happen now, and the results of what we've been involved with happen now. Our projected scenarios for the future happen now, and our actions, whose consequences may occur in the future, happen now. Furthermore,

our awareness of this state of affairs, feelings about and responses to all that — happens now. And yet, there's a current in the mind that creates a felt identity who was, is and will be. Rolling on its surface are worries and expectations about what I will be, nostalgia and regret about what I was. A conceit may form: 'Having been this, surely I deserve to become that'; or its negative form: 'I've never been this, so I'll never become one of those.' There's a lot of drama and suffering and stress in this flood — so much so that we fail to question 'Who is this character?' Since I have only pictures of what I was, and stories of what I might or will be, can I be clear as to who I am now? When we do question and give full attention to the present — in the focus that should surely give us the clearest, most stable impression of who we are — we find that the images break up like reflections in a stream poked with a finger. And as those images break up, all the weight, the desperate need or the embarrassing anxiety, suddenly sinks with no footing. There is a fumbling, a blur of attention, a shift of energy, and we're left groping at ripples. The spell of the flood of becoming doesn't work in the present. This is why we study it — because through investigation we come out of it.

But, as with the flood of sensuality, it's very difficult to stay out of it. The power of these floods is based on the fact that to the ordinary level of consciousness and the world, there are concrete sense objects, there is time and identity, and they are important. And so they are. However it is possible to separate sights, sounds and the rest from the trance of their ultimate desirability, in order to clearly apprehend them as they are. For this we need to attend to the sense world with wisdom and truthfulness. We need to note that it is in flux, and that the feelings and mind states that the flux evokes also change. Then the dream of sensuality doesn't arise; you can be *in*, but not *of*, the sensory world — and this helps you to handle it skilfully. So we study the sense world in order to rescue it from the flood of our trance; and in the course of so doing, we develop *pāramī* such as wisdom, truthfulness, morality and renunciation.

Much the same is true of *bhāvogha*. Our actions have effects. If you act mean and cheat, you become a mean cheat. Act compassionately and you become grand-hearted. So we do apparently ‘become’ the results of our previous actions; we do have an inheritance and a potential for the future. But when we study becoming more closely, we can notice that what has become — that is, the mind state of the present — is just that. It is a good or bad mind state, but it isn’t an identity. If it were an identity, you’d be in that state from birth to death; there’d be no possibility for change or development or decline. However, good and wise people do lose their temper sometimes, and cruel people may very well have a tender spot for their dog, or revise their ways and reform. Now we can step back from that current of who we seem to be and the world-view that it projects. And we can say, ‘No! Adherence to this generates suffering. It either drags me down, or it makes me callous or negligent.’ By reflecting on where the flood is taking us, and who we seem to be in that, we can step out of it long enough to choose an alternative direction. The capacity to do so depends again on an underlying current of *pāramī*.

In brief, becoming can’t be skipped over, but it can be reflected on, handled and directed. Rightly directed, this stream of causality can take the mind to the fruition of *pāramī* in the meditative skill of the Enlightened mind. Here the legend of the Buddha arising in the world out of the long cultivation of the ten perfections has a verifiable ring of truth. The very word ‘Buddha’ means ‘unbounded wisdom,’ and that arises from the ongoing cultivation of the inclinations, attitudes and intentions that constitute the *pāramī*. These bear their richest fruit in meditation, but are rooted in the daily life wisdom that lifts the mind out of the floods.

### Floods of Views and Ignorance

There are two other floods: of views (*ditthogha*) and of ignorance (*āvijjogha*). ‘Views’ refers to the instinct we have to hold beliefs, opinions and dogmas in order to gain a standpoint. They could be anything from ‘Buddhism is the best religion’ to ‘The liberal party

is fair and just and seeks for the welfare of the nation' to 'Women are hopeless drivers' to 'Our nation is the source of truth and harmony in a brutal world.' Or a view could be a lot more personal, 'I'm a Taurus, and that means that I'll get on well with Scorpios.' Such broad-brush generalizations form an easy basis for our decisions, loyalties and world-view. And so, throughout history, societies have adopted views such as, 'There are witches who consort with the devil and bring blight onto the crops and plague into the city.' Or they have adopted the view that Jews are a contamination and should be eradicated; or that communists are infiltrating public life in the USA and about to take over. And these views, based on a sense of the pure, the right and even of Divine Will, have justified slaughter and cruelty, hatred and loss of liberty. We can indeed be horrified by such events, often to the degree whereby the extreme nature of these views blinds us to the fact that we are all susceptible to the flood of views. 'Joseph is an idiot who should never be allowed to drive a car.' 'Start letting those kids have their own way and you'll be heading for trouble,' etc. Even 'I never subscribe to any view, political or religious because it's all hot air' — that's just another view.

There are several salient features to the flood of views. One is that it puts life into the abstract, sums people into groups, and makes a 'something' that we can stand back from. From this perspective the mind can form neat divisions: between my party and the others. The flood of views therefore isolates; and more tellingly it draws a dividing boundary across which negotiation, empathy, and at times even ethical standards, do not cross. So having decided that you're an idiot who shouldn't be allowed to drive, I'm not going to discuss with you why I think that way (though I may shout it in your face), and if I think that you are innately unskilled, I'm probably not going to offer to instruct you. And in the cases of those whom views have labelled as the 'evil', the 'condemned' or the 'insignificant', not only is there liable to be no negotiation and no checking of facts, but also actions may be administered without compunction, even though they bring death, ignominy and punishment. In sixteenth century Europe animals were deemed

as feeling no pleasure or pain, and lowering cats into bonfires to witness their antics was a source of entertainment. And so on. With the adopting of views, empathy and ethics are under threat.

Another feature of the flood of views is that it gives one a standpoint whose loftiness at times exceeds reason and the life-instinct itself. In the twentieth century, the Heaven's Gate Christian sect so fervently believed that a heavenly space ship was tailing the Hale-Bopp comet as it swung by the Earth that they committed suicide in order to get on board. Prior to that, mothers in Iran had gladly sent their sons marching across mine fields as human martyrs in that country's war against Iraq, delighted by the view that their children were thus bound for Heaven. Extreme examples again; but notice when you get that sense of standing up for your beliefs, how the energy flows, or floods, through your heart and up into your head where it shuts off alternate ways of seeing things. Wait for the next domestic argument and witness how wronged and just and firm you become. The flood of views inflates the ego and supports the identity flood of becoming.

This flood is difficult to check, because views are the benchmarks we have for our reality and our actions. We all use abstraction to define things in accordance with certain perspectives. There is a degree of usefulness in talking about Belgians, or film directors, or Carthusians, but it's in the blind adherence to those concepts as ultimate definitions of an individual that the flood arises. If it is blindly adhered to, even the view that 'all views are problems' creates problems, as that condemns any relative statement as invalid — and then what can be said about anything? No, it's the *adherence* to any view, not the view itself that is the crux of the problem. The flood of views is this intoxication and adherence, an ongoing mental action that cuts off those who believe a view from the 'rest of the trouble-makers.'

A remedy that is recommended then is to note a view as a starting place from which to investigate or enter dialogue with others. In this we acknowledge that we have a personal perspective and can't

avoid having one. This is already a breakthrough, because the fallacy that supports the flood is that any individual can have an all-encompassing view — whereas the very act of holding a view immediately places the viewer in a state of isolation from scrutiny. To acknowledge subjectivity may lead to the recognition that ‘my’ position isn’t really mine, but one that is conditioned by the information I’ve received or an experience I’ve had, and is therefore capable of being reviewed and moderated. So: ‘I think you’re a terrible driver because I saw you reverse into the gate post, and I heard that you never indicate when you’re making a turn, and Susan said that she was terrified at your speed when you drove her to town.’ If I’m practising truthfulness, then at least I’ll acknowledge that most of my information is second-hand, and that I was angry at having to fix the gatepost. And if I’m also inclining towards equanimity, I’ll also be willing to have my reasoning examined and even refuted. Then it may be that the partial truth in that view (after all, you did drive into the gatepost) would encourage us both to look into how we are all liable to do such things — and mutually review driving skills and standards. Thus we overcome the sense of division, and specific kindness gets established.

These floods of sensuality, becoming and views are carried by the most fundamental torrent, that of ignorance. Ignorance is the force that undermines our direct investigation of experience. Under its influence, if we do notice the problems that these floods arouse, we may attribute them to flaws in culture or religion or human nature, either wagging a finger of disapproval or shrugging our shoulders in resignation. We may in other words adopt pessimistic views — but that strategy doesn’t check the floods. Hence the approach that the Buddha encouraged was to see these floods as they are, as phenomena, without attributing self, others, culture or religion to them. But he didn’t advocate a passive acceptance of them. Instead he presented the template of the Four Noble Truths, which we may apply to our experience in the form of questions. That is, we can ask ourselves: ‘Is suffering and stress for myself or others bound up in this experience?’ ‘What mental

factor/s cause/s it to be so?’ ‘Is there an inner shift, an immediate psychological change, that will stop that cause?’ ‘What process will give me what it takes to bring around and sustain that shift of perspective?’ Using the Four Noble Truths is thus the way out of ignorance, the way of transcendence. But to keep using such a means, we need to keep turning the mind’s intentions that way; this is why we develop the *pāramī* — they build a temple from whose vantage point we can investigate the floods.

### Stages and Fruition of the *Pāramī*

The *pāramī* are then inclinations and potentials that we develop into clear intentions. Their development comes in three stages — the initiating, the gathering, and the completion. Initially, one brings the topic to mind. Even this much is useful; it means that *pāramī* get built-in as a frame of reference, when other values such as fun, convenience, style, worldly performance and success can be taking over the mind. The ‘gathering’ stage is when you apply the perfection in the face of opposition. Something in you doesn’t want to bother, other people don’t see the point, it’s not convenient, etc., etc. The third stage, of completion, is when you know your fullness in that perfection will take you through any obstacle — you can give up your life for it. You realize: ‘Why not? Life is going to end anyway — why not establish the mind in a position of strength while there is time?’

So when we establish our minds on one of these *pāramī*, we can put aside inclinations as to who’s right and who deserves what, and we can focus on the intention of our own minds. As we get clear in that respect, we then have to meet the resistance that results from going against the current of the flood. This is the gathering stage, in which there is often an emotional and energetic turbulence in the mind in which doubt and imbalance come to the fore. Here’s where one has to use resolve, patience, wisdom, kindness, or the examples of wise friends in order to get steady. This is the stage in which perfections get established to supplant impatience, intolerance and other defilements that cramp our potential. As we look for that balance within the shifts

of our mind and world, we keep checking out the current in accord with the Buddha's own line of enquiry: 'Does this behaviour cause me and/or others long-term harm, suffering, indignity or stress? Does it lead to my welfare, the welfare of others and peace?'

As a result of that work, our inclinations and intentions get established on the good and the whole and we are able to review the fractured, the stained or the afflicted. You could say that on touching into truth, your mind is able to return to healing. This is how the 'Bodhisattva' arises — it's a mind that is in touch with truth but not fully absorbed in it, gone beyond your previous standpoint, capacity or view, and opened to a place of wisdom and compassion. Instead of referring your actions to some self-image of 'what I deserve' and 'should I really?' and 'this is what I always do and all that I'm capable of,' there's a shift to a response that refers to a wider parameter than that of the habitual self. The great intention arises: for my welfare, for the welfare of others, and leading to peace. Then that twisted loop in the circuitry of intelligence, the loop of self-view, gets untangled. The mind unfolds a deep crease; and in that unfolding, nothing is lost except a propensity to unnecessary suffering. It's not the case that 'I'm perfect,' but that a perfect balance has been struck. This is the third stage of the *pāramī*, the completion. It's a change of life.

## Quotes and Suggestions on Heedfulness

*Heedfulness is the path to the Deathless; heedlessness is the path to Death. The heedful do not die; the heedless are already dead. (Dhp. 21)*



*Regarding internal [i.e. mental] factors, I don't see any single factor as useful as wise attention ... Bhikkhus, a bhikkhu who attends wisely lets go of what's unwholesome and develops the wholesome. (Iti. 16)*



Before we consider the various perfections, there is one factor which can be said to be the ground of them all and the mother of all Buddhas. This is heedfulness (*appamadda*), the act of paying unbiased attention. In his first declaration to his original five disciples-to-be, the Buddha proclaimed it is through paying attention, 'listening' deeply, that the doors of the Deathless are thrown open; the highlight is the same in the Buddha's last utterance — 'All compoundings are insubstantial, fare on with heedfulness.'

What heedfulness amounts to is the opening of the mind in full attention; and this dropping of habitual, careless or compulsive tendencies is the preparation for seeding *pāramī*. That is, when your mind is opened out of its preoccupation, you have a chance to reflect on what it's doing and bring up a relevant intention such as 'patience,' 'kindness,' and so on.

Heedfulness is supported by restraint (*samvara*), a non-judgemental pausing and gathering in of mental energy. Restraint can be used to create a few seconds' pause in which you pay unbiased attention to what's happening for you. If you build in pauses of ten seconds or so ten to twenty times a day, this doesn't entail carving out a lot spare time. But this small exercise will help to keep you on track, make adjustments and avoid running yourself down.

From an Enlightened viewpoint, with heedfulness we take the opportunity to touch into the ‘deathless element’ behind the mind’s activities, whereas without it we both cripple our spiritual potential in the here and now, and align our attitudes and intentions to what can only end in death.

### Action

Try to build in five, ten or twenty seconds when you finish your morning ablutions. You may find a similar pause before or after you eat breakfast or lunch. You could wait ten seconds when you get in the car before setting off. If you’re going by public transport, great, there will be several minutes of good pause time. They may not seem significant — the habit is to not take a pause, or to spend ... or, even worse, in feeling frustrated, impatient or obsessed with something or another. However, pauses offer a chance to change gear, to review an emotion and to let the driven energies loosen. So it’s good to build them in — or to use them wisely when they occur.

### Reflection

To make good use of the pause, deliberately seed a question — and rather than fill in any answer, attend to the feel and the movement of the question like it’s a ball moving in slow motion through your mind. This is the skill of ‘wise attention’ (*yoniso manasikāra*). Notice what the question touches, where it lands and what its effects are. This will offer you a reflection, an opportunity for deep consideration. Such a process values your thinking mind and puts it to good use.

The questions that will work in this practice are homing questions. They don’t tell you what you should do or how someone (or you) should be. The first is: ‘Where am I?’ This will send the ball through the bodily sense. For that duration, it disrupts the flow of time and the ongoing story of the day. And that gives you some perspective on what the mind is carrying — eagerness, depression or any of it. This may be all you can do in five to ten seconds. But

you know the stream of what you're in. If you keep that question poised, ready for the next pause, then when you're stopped in traffic, or waiting at a check-out, you can more fully sweep your attention around your body, feeling the soles of the feet, the palms of the hands, the face and the temples. Pause and rest there. It will provide you with calm and perspective.

The perspective that this pause offers may incline you to pause a little longer to review your mental/emotional territory. If so, the second question is: 'How am I?' or 'What feelings come up with reference to what's going on?' This will give you an overview on what emotions are leading, or about to lead, your actions and speech. With this question you're not trying to change that state, but naturally it does take the compulsion out of it. You give yourself the choice: to follow that mood, or to address it.

This question may show you some mind-state that is important, for good or bad. If so, maybe you can address it then and there, or maybe you have to 'park' it — make a note and keep aware of any reactions that arise from that state. Say you're feeling quite excited about buying something, or meeting someone. In the pause, you might note the intensity of that and suggest, 'Go carefully, this might not be what you're expecting.' In this way you put a check on the power of the flood and stay balanced in the present. The overriding theme of wise attention is one of checking out your experience in line with the Four Noble Truths: 'Is my mind creating stress or investigating and alleviating it?'

In this respect, addressing the mind-state includes noticing how your body feels — in terms of nervous energy, or in terms of what parts of your body feel charged up or impacted by the feeling. You may feel energized, but mostly up in your face and head, or you may feel sunk in your belly or chest, or buzzing with very little bodily reference at all. To more fully address the mind-state, widen your awareness to include as much of your body as you can. And breathe slowly, quietly and deeply. This is where wise attention leads into meditation — however, even when you only have a few

seconds' pause, you can deliberately seed a reflection that supports *pāramī*. (We'll look into these in the following sections). Training one's reflective capacity is a matter of learning to think deliberately in such a way that one is also attending to the 'feel' of the idea and any effects it has on one's heart and mind.

## Meditation

Sit in a way that keeps you alert but not stressed. Get a sense of feeling your body from the inside out, and look into how best to sit to feel the whole body in a clear way. Let your posture adapt to that.

Get in touch with two sets of sensations: one, the pressure of the body on its seat; the other, the sense of being upright and balanced. How do you know you're sitting? How tall and how wide does your body feel?

Pay attention to the texture and tone of your body through feeling the sensations in your hands, around your eyes, forehead and mouth. Through a balance of alertness and relaxation bring these, and any other areas of your body, into a state of open ease that isn't tense but is awake.

Stay with that for a few minutes. After some time, you'll probably feel the rhythmic sensations that tell you you're breathing in and out.

Notice also thoughts and mental impressions as a flow, rather than getting involved with their topics. Then, without losing the fine-tuned awareness of your body, try to note when a thought ends. Also look into how and when one begins — you might deliberately think a simple word in order to experiment with this. If the thought seems too intense and driven to be clear about its process, check what's happening in your body, regain balance, and follow a few out-breaths to calm the energy.

When you can watch a thought, you may find that thought dissolves rather than ends, and crystallizes rather than begins. Even more important is that you get a feel for the mind prior to thought, and how by pausing and steadying there, the process of thought calms and subsides.

Let your awareness take all this in.

If you get excited, expectant or agitated, wrap your awareness around that mental/emotional sense. Avoid censoring your thoughts; instead, spread your attention over your body, letting the mind play in the background. Widen your attention so that you don't get engrossed in the speech that your mind is coming out with. Keep referring back to the fine-tuned awareness of the body as described before.

Add some wise attention. Where is there stress — in the body, in the mind, or in your expectations, wishes and resistances? Is it possible to let go of any of that? Give yourself five to ten minutes to explore this.



## Getting on Board for Liberation:

### *Dāna, Sīla and Nekkhamma Pāramī*



Although the Buddha's first full teaching was about the Four Noble Truths, that sermon was given to people who had already gone forth as renunciants and made commitments to a spiritual path for many years. He didn't always teach in this way. In general, the Buddha taught people in accordance with their own way of life and understanding, and often began by pointing to three powerful and transcending inclinations of mind: generosity (*dāna*); virtue, morality or ethical sensitivity (*sīla*); and renunciation, the ability to let go of the pull towards a sense object (*nekkhamma*). It was when a person had contacted these inclinations in himself or herself and felt confident in their validity that the Buddha would then explain the meaning of the Four Noble Truths — his analysis of why we experience stress, inner pain or dissatisfaction (*dukkha*) and how we can be free of it. The establishment of generosity, morality and renunciation through wise reflection is then to be understood as a necessary foundation for the teachings on full liberation.

### Preparing the Mind for Liberation

It's said of the Buddha that he could 'train those who wished to be trained.' Even a Buddha can't teach someone who isn't interested, willing and capable. In other words, if the mind isn't ready, it can't take in the Buddha's teachings (Dhamma). What makes it ready isn't a matter of belief, but the capacity to access and feel the validity of generosity, virtue and renunciation. Now most of us

may not have these inclinations heading the to-do list of our thinking minds all the time, but when they're pointed to — when someone asks, 'Is generosity a good thing?' — we'd probably say that it is. Morality, the sense of 'act towards others as you would wish them to act towards you,' is also something that we'd probably approve of, although we might disagree over details.

The inclination of renunciation, of simplification, begins to make sense when we consider why, despite the validity of generosity and morality, people don't always share, but instead tend to fight, steal and abuse each other. A powerful cause of all that is the pull of the senses towards having more for oneself, which leads to miserliness and manipulation, jealousy and aggression, selfishness and greed. Hence the value of renunciation. However, this inclination towards simplifying one's wishes to make them fit one's needs often depends on some careful thought and introspection.

In all cases, even apart from the good that these perfections bring forth, their cultivation requires reflection and discernment. These are wisdom faculties. And when we use those faculties to put aside superficial or short-term gains and develop deep and long-term results, we're getting on track for liberation.

The inclination towards a life based on depth rather than on the surface activity of events is a fundamental cause for the development of *pāramī*, potentials that we can firm up into guiding intentions. Potentials such as generosity, virtue and renunciation are deeply supportive faculties. They make us clear about our own values and intelligence, and as we develop these, they become a kind of temple, a sanctuary within which we can stand, look around and formulate a path for practice. And the Buddha once described the Way of that practice as being 'for my welfare, for the welfare of others and leading to Nibbāna (peace)' (M.19). Whatever we do, whatever views or aims we hold, if we examine them under the light of these criteria, our actions will generate *pāramī* and spread them into blessings for others.

Outside of this temple of practice, we don't see where we get caught; or we see it but think we have no choice but to be caught up in our moods and impulses. Such an assumption deprives us of dignity and self-respect. So, when we don't acknowledge our own inner temple, and visit it often, we lose faith in ourselves, and weaken our potential for complete liberation from suffering and stress.

### Wise Attention

Sometimes this inner visit is helped by a situation such as a sacred place so that the mental/emotional activity calms and brightens and we feel settled. In such places, as the mind clears we can feel a call from its depths, something like an urge for the true and the good. We might sense this experience to be transcendental or transpersonal – something that takes us to a place in ourselves that feels more meaningful. Then realizations tend to occur in the holistic sense of 'for my welfare, for the welfare of others and leading to peace.' Values of sharing and harmlessness and simplicity are not foreign to our hearts, but bringing them forth depends on the mind's being placed in an environment that allows its boundary of concern to widen.

This is because the mind takes on the characteristics and concerns of what it's associated with, or where we place it. All the time you are placing your attention within a certain frame of reference: if you are going out for the evening, your attention will be established on the intention to look smart or well-dressed, and with that intention you'll be aware of clothes and grooming and social mannerisms; whereas if you were gardening, you'd be looking out for weeds and grubs and wouldn't feel concerned if your clothes weren't of matching colours or your hair was untidy. And if you're meditating you'll be attending to the elements of peace or anxiety or clarity in the mind, and what you're wearing is irrelevant. Your purpose or intention establishes a boundary of attention; and that affects what you experience. Conversely, what you attend to affects the nature of your intentions. When you enter a sacred place or a temple for instance, your attention is

given to that particular space, and then receives whatever is within that space. Elements within such spaces trigger uplifting, reflective or sobering impressions so that the mind brings forth its transcendent potential. Then you're more likely to think and act in terms of that potential — which doesn't arise because of the symbols, music or vistas, but because of the values that the mind brings forth when it is calmed and opened by them. There's a profound difference between the indoctrination effect of brainwashing and the summoning of your own potential that deepening the mind can bring about!

Most often the boundaries of attention are located in everyday life, and they cause us to take in confusing or deluded messages. In the TV adventure serial, violence is exciting and heroic; then on the news it's illegal and a source of concern. In the commercials, consuming and getting more is fun and the true way to happiness; on the ecology programme, the chief source of global warming and pollution is unbridled consumerism and squandering of resources. It's all very confusing. But the television set and the computer are the most popular temples these days: when your mind is inside them, it's confusing — but nothing is asked of you, and you carry no responsibility. Your attention is suspended from your own concerns — which feels like a relief — but the mind is in a passive position that doesn't call up anything from its depths. Attention is in a trance.

With Dhamma practice, however, one thing we are doing is referring more directly to real human beings. In a Buddhist monastery for example, we gather together as the fourfold assembly of the Buddha's disciples: the monks and nuns who have gone forth into a life of renunciation, as well as the men and women who are living in the public sphere. When such people come together, then there is a sense of empathy and sharing, even and especially if the gathering is impersonal — with little conversation and silence. Such occasions can touch into our depths and bring transpersonal inclinations to light. For example, we are encouraged to recognize what unifies us. We look through the circumstances of daily life to something more timeless, and we recognize what we have in common.

One such common factor is the sense of aspiration, the wish to do or be better, to find peace or meaning or happiness. Then, because we see this in other people, or we attune to this unifying factor, we step out of the mistrust, the comparisons, the criticisms, the fears and the jealousies. And that helps us individually to see ourselves in a new light. So the presence of others in a transpersonal mode of attention helps each of us to see ourselves more fully. This is one reason to cultivate *pāramī*: inclinations such as patience and truthfulness towards ourselves and others take us out of the vortex of isolation, self-consciousness and the suffering of all that. With just this view we can realize simple truths such as everyone suffers, wants to be happy and makes mistakes — and that what really helps is being in touch with and acting in accord with shared principles.

### Right View Through Generosity

One thing that the first three perfections indicate is that to undo the stress our minds create takes a move to a more selfless, less egocentric mode. With generosity and morality we take other people's welfare into our awareness; we incline towards empathy, kindness and compassion. And yet this doesn't cut off our own welfare: to live with a kind and conscientious heart is good, and means we make good friends. So this is for our welfare and others' welfare; it's not self-centred or self-denying; and it leads to the allaying of abuse, greed and mistrust — a net lessening of suffering and its causes.

The first perfection, generosity, is very accessible. Most of us have received gifts, so we know how uplifting it is to receive other people's kindness. It touches us. Then when we reciprocate, we feel good in giving something to someone — and for that particular moment, a benevolent connection is established. It's a simple and fundamental approach to relationship. As a Buddhist, one of the primary things one does when visiting one's teacher, for example, is to make an offering. It can be just a candle, incense or flowers — but one does this as a gesture of connectedness, of being in touch in a benevolent way. We probably already have a

feeling for this way of relating but only do it occasionally, on birthdays or at Christmas. However the Buddha's encouragement is to develop it on a daily basis. It lifts the mind out of its isolation and establishes goodwill.

With generosity, what one gives is not that significant, rather it is the act of giving that's of value. This action opens the heart in a benevolent way, and affects another person accordingly. It's a movement into the reality of a shared world. Furthermore, when one cultivates *dāna*, it's important not to think that only material things are the beginning and end of it all. Instead, giving a friendly gesture or a helping hand, offering service, or giving attention are offerings that may in some situations be more important than giving material things.

One of the long-term benefits is that through generosity, we begin to establish a happier sense around relationship. Relationship is a basic thing: we have mothers, fathers, children, friends. We are born into relationship experiences, but often our relationships get tarnished by fears, blame and dislikes, and we imagine we'd feel more comfortable on our own. Of course the Buddha himself encouraged solitude, but that was in an Indian society where everyone is so tightly connected through village, clan, family and caste that someone could lose the sense of being an individual. However in the West, it's exactly the opposite. Your sense of what you belong to ends at the edge of your skin, which is one reason why people in the 'developed' countries get to feel so alienated and anxious. We've developed self-view: 'You're on your own, compete and keep it for yourself.' But we've lost a lot of the sense of being part of something meaningful and sacred.

Consequently, what the Buddha called right view — which is the foundation of the path out of suffering and stress — gives value to relationship. It encompasses acknowledgement of and gratitude to mother and father and other supportive people, as well as the sense that there are wise beings from whom we can learn. And accordingly we learn to relate to ourselves in a wise and kindly

way, to acknowledge the good we've been born into, the good we've done and the mistakes that we need to learn from. Right view reminds us that we are not just an isolated point that is only relevant for the moment. We are in a field of present awareness that absorbs and carries the consequences of what we've done in our life or had happen to us. In some way, we have absorbed and are still connected to all events, all actions and all circumstances in our life. Therefore, all of that has to be purified.

However, it's not the case that you have to go through every event and judge who was right and who to forgive. Instead, you sense the overall results that stay with you: regret, doubt, worry, aversion and so on. You investigate, open to, and heal those results. This is one of the processes of mind cultivation or meditation — a cleansing and healing of the results of the past through just sustaining awareness of a pain in a wide, kindly and unhurried way. With such a focus, we're not even trying to fix or understand the past; we try to be with just how it seems now with that single, kind intention. Then even when one is on one's own, one is abiding in this particular field of awareness that is uplifting and aimed at purity of intention. This is a transpersonal awareness in which the mind leaves its shadows and burdens behind. All the perfections lead to that.

In this kind of awareness your relationship experience is clear. You have no numbness or defensiveness in your heart, and you aren't trying to find a separate place in the universe where you can hide out and not have to be anybody. With transpersonal awareness, even when you are on your own, you can still be in that shared temple of *pāramī*. You are not separated from the good actions you have done and you are not essentially separated from mother, father or from the sense of being welcome and at home in the world. Whilst you're never really 'left in peace and quiet' as long as you have unresolved mind states and attitudes, you're never mixed up with and overwhelmed by them if you have this transpersonal wholeness.

## Connection Through Generosity

To develop *dāna* is a vital intention that goes against the ‘get it for yourself’ attitude, or the ‘she’s got more than me, it’s not fair’ complaint of the competitive materialist world. This model, encouraged through Western capitalism, has never been the only way that societies operate. In fact, I was reading a while ago about a social model that is used on some islands in the Indonesian archipelago, where the aim is to gain as much debt as possible. What happens is this: you get in your canoe with your pig, and you paddle over to another island where you give somebody your pig, and they give you a coconut. They are then indebted to you because your pig was worth more than their coconut. Now they have a bond with you because they are indebted to you. Then they take their pig and swap it for somebody else’s pineapple, so that that person is now indebted to them. In this way, they gradually create a whole network of feeling connected, of belonging and owing something to everybody else. This movement of energy enacted between people, and often between a person and the land, is what constitutes a firm sense of ‘being in’ the world, rather than trying to find a place of one’s own in the world (which always leads to stress).

In the island’s system, a really important person is one with such incalculable debts that there is no way they can ever pay them off. They are indebted to a whole village or a whole island, and it is impossible to pay it all off. Such a person is considered to have made so many connections that they are a success. Now in a normal capitalist society, many people, and indeed most countries, are also in debt, but there is fear and shame around that. This is because there is no sense of direct interaction and hence belonging. Money is a source of having power over others, rather than a token of belonging. The creditor, often a remote institution, could reclaim and take away your house, which would never happen in the tribal model that I just described. When there is the sense of connection, it supports ethical sensitivity. I wouldn’t want to deprive you of shelter; it would be bad for you, it would be a disgrace for me, and it would ruin our friendship. Who wants to live like that?

This sense of developing connectedness through value leads to an openness of heart. Then things don't have to be fair and equal because we support and share with each other. This is something I've noticed with alms-rounds. I, as an alms mendicant, am not equal in material terms to others. Why should they give me anything when I haven't worked and therefore 'earned it?' And who do I think I am anyway to be expecting others to feed me? This is the kind of thinking that can go on in my Western mind. When you are wandering for alms in England, many people don't know what Buddhism is; they know you are probably some sort of religious person, but that's about it. Yet some feel instinctively drawn towards making an offering when you have a shaven head, a modest and peaceful manner and a bowl, and even thank you for being around so they can do that. It seems to indicate an intuitive feeling for the beauty of making a free-will offering with no manipulation, no scheming, no 'I get something back out of this' attitude. This blows the 'equal,' 'fair,' 'deserve it' judgemental mind. The simple truth of the matter is that people feel moved, and inspired when they have a chance to be generous, and they get to like the feel of it.

It's said that the highest kind of *dāna* is when a worthy person gives to a worthy person. Of course, it depends what you mean by 'worthy.' The poor and the downtrodden, the homeless and those in dire need are worthy of our compassion. Also giving to wise people is to be cultivated, because you support those who can support many others (so it's a good investment), and because you establish a connection with that kind of person. Then the wise person becomes part of your temple of awareness, and a support for your consciousness. This may mean that you give \$1,000 to a shelter for the homeless, but if you visit a temple, ashram or monastery, you may offer your services instead. One may need more financial generosity, but the other may benefit more from generous actions.

Generosity of service is more the norm in the renunciate life, where one has few material resources to share. Instead one shares the Dhamma, a gift that is called the greatest gift, because this teaching encourages all of us to be generous, moral and wise. Also

monks and nuns will serve their teachers in many mundane and practical ways, even as the teacher shares his or her wise attention with them. Fundamentally, service keeps people connected to right view and to each other; it's not about 'getting a job done.'

As a meditation, the cultivation of generosity is about bringing people to mind and sharing the goodness of one's life with them. It means developing a sharing intent, and from there learning to see one's life as part of a whole system rather than as an individual fragment thrown together with others in a haphazard way. The 'whole system' view definitely helps in getting some perspective on one's own character, and it allows the heart to feel full and settled with others. With right view we're on a boat that can cross the floods of insecurity and loneliness.

### Morality: Respect and the 'We' Sense

This boat is kept on course by *sīla*, morality or virtue. Morality, like *dāna*, is based upon a sense of empathy; except with morality it's not a question of making an offering, a one-off occasion, but of making non-abuse a way of life. So it's a more sustained kind of practice. The fundamental principle behind morality is: I don't do to you what I wouldn't want you to do to me. I don't steal things and I don't lie to you, because I know I wouldn't want those things to happen to me. And I don't sexually abuse or violate others, and so forth. I have that sense of respect for other beings. So that's for my welfare, for the welfare of others and leads to peace.

In Buddhism, there are the Five Precepts (*pañcasīla*): personal commitments to refrain from intentional killing, stealing, sexual abuse, harmful speech and use of intoxicants. These may sound really basic and boring, hardly a sublime vision of the transcendent. They're not that decorative or grand. But the transcendent point is not what they look like — but what they call forth, what it takes to keep them, and the effects that they have on your life. Speaking truth and avoiding gossip lifts the

mind out of many scummy habits, and causes you to associate with trustworthy people. Avoiding alcohol keeps your mind bright and opens up more time in your life: you're not violating your mind.

It's this understanding of the value of long-term effects over superficial appeal that makes these precepts special and valuable. If most people kept even most of the five precepts most of the time, there would be an end to so much misery in the world. They are to be practised with a sense of truly valuing one's own mind, one's own body and the context of the people one lives with. With these precepts, we extend that sense of respect and regard towards all creatures, so that we impart value to this realm that we share with others.

*Sila* also involves wisdom. Its ethical sensitivity asks us to consider more carefully what is harmful, and to exercise discrimination. We can then notice the energies and impulses that we leave outside the boundaries that we set — things we might acknowledge about our nature but don't build our life upon. Particularly as one looks into the mind more fully, and meets the floods, all kinds of inclinations that are un-virtuous and 'sub-personal' come to light: murderous instincts, jealousy and spite. Some pretty dark stuff can be thrashing around in there. If one doesn't have confidence and faith in one's temple of awareness, one can get very confused and depressed about it all. This is where the idea of establishing good-heartedness and generosity as a foundation pays off, so that the mind's foundation can be built on intentions like these that one has carried into action. Then one can acknowledge the negative forces and energies that move into the mind; and, through not encouraging or building on them, one can withdraw emotional energy from those channels.

This withdrawal isn't a denial, but a lessening of the drama. It is happening but you are simply not taking an interest in it. You're not obsessed with it. Just that withdrawal of emotional excitement and highlighting calms the energies of the mind and makes them subject to being shifted into more useful channels. This is only a start — we have to meet and transmute those energies in

meditation — but inclining towards the bright, and withdrawing from the dark, is the very necessary start.

That approach begins to develop the quality of wise discernment. We can note short-term, passionate impulses and consider long-term effects. We can ask ourselves which is more beneficial — the glee of getting revenge by verbal abuse or gossip, or the sense of being a master of our heart and living with truth? And in the long-term what is the result of revenge? Counter-attack, feuds, conflicts that can go on for generations. Is it better to steal an advantage over someone else, or to live with a mind that is free from manipulativeness and mistrust? One small drink may seem OK, but when does it lead to another, and what is the result of a loss of clarity? Careless speech is the first result, and also collusion in the use of mind-blurring stuff as a form of entertainment. Clearly, noting the accidents, sexual abuse and crimes that are drink- and drug-related, we would do well to know it's best to leave this stuff alone.

### **Renunciation: Taking a Look at Craving**

This takes us to the third perfection — *nekkhamma* — which is generally translated as 'renunciation.' This practice is a matter of wise discernment rather than of asceticism or of being puritanical. To put it simply, renunciation means discerning what one actually needs at any given time within the range of wants and desirables, and following on from that. You could call it simplification. It's an important practice to cultivate because the mind can conceive of many desirables, and all that conceiving and pondering stirs it up into a mass of agitation. In this way we can lose our balance, fall overboard and dive into the flood of sensuality. And of course, the great powers of the consumer industry are very aware of how susceptible the mind is to impressions of comfort, excitement, attractiveness, being popular and all the rest of the things that buying an ice cream, a gadget or an item of clothing promises you. So to go through a shopping arcade bearing in mind what you really need is a very relevant practice of renunciation!

And when you pass through one of these malls — it seems that every airport now forces all passengers to pass through an arcade of luxury goods and alcohol — you can feel how sticky and demanding, and how superficial all this stuff really is. You get to know that, and how manageable your needs are. The Buddha summarized them as food, clothing, shelter and medicine. With this understanding there is a return to your own dignity and value as a human being. You don't need to be, in fact you can never be, lifted up by an excess of material things.

In monastic life, some aspects of this are very easy. We don't really have a lot of choice, in that our discipline requires that we give up money and ownership of food and lodgings, and that we use simple standard robes for clothing. We choose to take on that renunciation and live more simply, because then we have less to look after, less to get envious about, fewer options to choose from. You can't style your hair when you don't have any. You can't decide what you're going to eat today if you're living on what people offer. And to compensate for what might sound like miserable deprivation, you get the joy of living free from material concerns, and the warmth of receiving the generous free-will offerings of people who want to give you support. This is pretty amazing.

One big challenge is putting aside sexual activity. I've met people who could scarcely believe this was possible for a week, let alone the decades that I've been practising celibacy. No sexual activity — not opposite sex, not same sex, not with yourself — monastic rules draw a very clear line. And because human sexuality is a complex issue of emotional and relational energies as well as the more sensual, one has to develop the warm-heartedness and the inner pleasure of meditation in order to back up the abstinence — otherwise I think one would indeed go very weird.

Renunciation, particularly in the area of sexuality, also demonstrates how enormously attractive and appetising forbidden things become. For people who are sexually active, sexual activity gets to be no big thing. I even lost interest in it when I was a

layman — along with all the game-play and competition that could go on around it: the jealousies, the infidelities, the separations and the heartbreaks. But after giving it up, my mind could review the whole topic in a very rosy and distorted light — I had to keep reminding myself of why I'd given it up, as well as the fact that the huge number of people who were sexually active didn't seem to be blissed out most of the time. And the distorted lens through which craving viewed sexuality showed me what a fool it makes of the mind. Do I really need to see people through the lens of craving?

In fact our craving is about something we don't have. We can't crave something we already have, so the very fact of not having sets up a target for unresolved passion. Therefore it isn't the object that sets craving up, but the sense of 'not having.' There's nothing wrong with sight and sound, taste, smell and touch; it's the fantasy world that craving makes of them that creates the danger. This is the flood of sensuality that will drag you under. Knowing the flood for what it is takes the whole thing apart. You understand that stilling craving is not, for example, just about removing sense objects, but a matter of investigating the mind and resolving passion. Sexuality and food are not really the source of craving. The source is the 'not having.' If you can't have tea, it will be 'not having' tea that will become the source of your craving. If you can't have bananas, then 'not having' bananas will be the source of your craving.

If giving something up encourages craving, why do it? Well, apart from enjoying simplicity, a big reason to renounce is in order to understand and thereby undo craving. What we are primarily giving up is this sense of absence — the feeling of 'I need, I want, I am incomplete without.' That's what we're giving up. How does this absence become such a solid and pressing presence? The point is that when you look into craving, you realize that the hole is not a hole; it's a vortex of tangled, over-stimulated energy. It's unresolved passion forming a block in your energy and awareness. And it's sustained through craving, through spinning passion out in the thousand and one projections of the mind. This energy needs to be, and can be, redirected. That's why it's necessary not just to restrain and repress, but to look into craving and what it's

based upon. The whole tangled, seemingly solid and techni-coloured block is based on the ephemeral fantasy of fulfilment. In other words, on ignorance, on not acknowledging for example that if last week's shopping spree didn't fulfil you for more than a few finger snaps, more of the same isn't going to do so either.

So craving is based on ignorance: we imagine that fulfilment comes through passion (people will keep trying this approach until they drop), and even when it dawns on us that this isn't working, we don't see that there is any other way to find fulfilment, so it seems that even a few brief hits is better than nothing at all. That's why to really develop renunciation we need to go into the mind and heart; we need to meditate. That's where the fulfilling happiness of unentangled energies can be found; there's a quiet warmth available that can suffuse the body and uplift the heart. Yes, when we can turn the mind away from its dreams and back to its source, we can remove the block and feel more full and vital than ever before. Once you do this, you understand the fuller significance of renunciation.

The *pāramī* of renunciation gives you the focus to see craving for what it is, and if developed, the wisdom to not participate in the attempt to fill its bottomless hole. Renunciation also encourages you to develop other sources of fulfilment. But the most valuable thing that viewing craving from the vantage point of renunciation offers is the realization that just this abandoning of craving is what the Buddha meant by Enlightenment. It's just absence that we're giving up. This is the essence of the Four Noble Truths, and this is what is meant by Nibbāna — the complete ending of sorrow, lack, confusion and despair. And to sense that is worth giving up a lot!

But to cross the flood to that Other Shore, we need to build a boat, start to handle it and get to know the currents we have to cross. These three *pāramī* start the process and give us a foretaste of the peace, wisdom and compassion that the journey will bring us. So build carefully and make a temple of your boat. Make it solid and spacious, then warm-hearted and reliable companions will get on board with you. And that very vehicle becomes an expression of the goal of Nibbāna.

## Quotes and Suggestions on Generosity

*A noble disciple whose mind is straight gains the inspiration of the meaning, the inspiration of the Dhamma, and the gladness connected with the Dhamma.*

*When he/she is gladdened, rapture arises; for one uplifted by rapture the body becomes calm; one calm in body feels happy; in one who is happy the mind becomes concentrated.*

*This is called a noble disciple who dwells evenly amidst an uneven generation, who dwells unafflicted amidst an afflicted generation, who has entered upon the stream of the Dhamma and develops recollection of generosity. (A. 6.10)*



*No one can enter and abide in [various levels of] meditative absorption, nor can one realize stream-entry ... once-return ... non-return ... arahantship [i.e. the four stages of Enlightenment] without abandoning five mind-sets. Which five? Stinginess with regard to one's dwelling-place, one's Dhamma-friends, one's material gains, and one's status; and ingratitude. (A. 5.265-271)*



*If people only knew, as I do, the results of giving and sharing, they wouldn't eat without having given, nor would their minds get stained with selfishness. Even if it were their last bite ... they wouldn't eat it without having shared it, if there were someone who could receive their gift. (Iti. 1.26)*



In addition to checking compulsive drives and rash impulses, pausing offers a chance to adjust the direction of the mind by adding fresh input. This in essence is the process of developing *pāramī* — rather like steering a boat, you check the drift into choppy water and tweak the rudder a few degrees. The degree may

not seem much compared with the tide, but over time it effects a change of course in your inner and outer life.

In the process of the mind taking on the *pāramī*, there are three major developments: that of **empathy** or ‘fellow-feeling,’ of **inner strength** and of **clarity**. Naturally any *pāramī* requires the clarity of seeing what is needed, and the strength to align the mind to its theme. So wisdom and truthfulness in the first case, and resolve and energy in the second are always present to a degree in any perfection. Then of course, one needs patience to sustain a resolve, kindness to fortify the heart, and equanimity concerning the degree of progress, or of difficulty that one is experiencing. So the cultivation is not of first this *pāramī* and then that *pāramī*, but rather of many of them coming together to support the chosen leader.

However, we start with the two that head the list and which work on opening the heart and developing empathy. It’s a suitable start to very human development.

## Reflection

This introductory theme is about activating the empathy gene — the one that’s associated with bonding, and with care and concern for others. We may assume that our genetic code is selfish — and in a way it is: friendship, sharing and respect for others produces the optimal environment for our own welfare. Pause to reflect on what it would feel like if you could trust everyone. Or if when you were low on resources it would be a common and natural thing for others to share what they had with you. Before you dismiss these as fantasies, give yourself time to get a good taste of what those reflections *feel* like. Remember: you don’t have to leap into action, or reaction (‘I’m a totally selfish person!’), but just tune in to the feel of that. Maybe it will give your rudder a tweak in a happy and affirmative way.

How does giving feel? Whether you enjoy feeding the ducks, or buying a gift for a friend or relative, notice what happens to your mood state when you bring the idea of generosity to mind.

How does it feel to receive? Consider that every day air, light and generally a liveable degree of heat are given to us, without which we could not survive. Consider the time and care it took for others to help us get born.

Consider one example today of being given to: it could be a few helpful words that somebody didn't have to say; support in what one was working with; an offer of a cup of tea that someone made ... anything. Reflect that this didn't have to happen, and that it was directed towards you with no pressure on your part.

Ask yourself — how can I be part of a realm of giving?

### **Action**

The further development of generosity is firstly in terms of the gift of fearlessness, or solace; and secondly the gift of Dhamma, or liberating truth. The gift of freeing others from anxiety first means taking any action one can to protect or support the health and safety of others. This could be blood or organ donation, or giving one's time to look after the sick or helpless, or providing for a charity in one's will.

The gift of Dhamma provides resources for others to progress towards liberation. This could be supporting a Dhamma-centre or monastery with material requisites or service, or sponsoring free-distribution literature, or offering one's time to guide others or direct others to where guidance can be found.

In other everyday ways, generosity can be developed through speech, pointing out another's good deeds, or giving one's time to be a good listener.

### **Meditation**

Determine five minutes during which you will apparently do nothing. Treat this as a gift, an offering of free time during which you will not have to achieve anything or fix anything.

Sit comfortably in a way that is conducive to wakefulness. Bring up the idea of having all the time in the world just to be here feeling relaxed. Relax the muscles in your face and shoulders. Then let your arms come away from the sides of your body a little with the intention of giving your chest all the room it needs to let a breath come in and slowly expand it. Let that breath open your chest and throat; give it time to reach completion, time to pause and time to breathe out.

Whenever you get the twitchy thought or impulse to do something now, or remember something, recall your 'five minute' determination and think, 'Yes, in a few minutes time, it could be good to attend to that.' Feel the 'do it now!' impulse in your body and relax where you feel it. See this as a gift to yourself — one that will make you a more composed and calm person — and therefore a gift to those you associate with.

## Quotes and Suggestions on Morality

*Whoever truly cares for themselves  
should never follow ways of wrong;  
it's difficult to be at ease  
if you've done a harmful deed. (S. 3.4)*



*In this existence one should above all train oneself in terms of morality;  
morality, when cultivated, brings you success.*

*A moral person gains many friends on account of their ability to master  
their impulses; but an immoral person, one who is guided by evil, gets  
alienated from their friends.*

*Morality is the beginning, the support and primary cause of all good  
qualities; therefore make your morality pure.*

*Morality is also the control, the gathering in and delight of the mind. It is  
the way whereby Buddhas have crossed the flood; therefore make your  
morality pure. (Thag. 608, 610, 612-613)*



Morality in Buddhism can be seen in two ways: as **intention**, and as **convention**. Intention refers to the impulse that arises in the mind in the present, in which the ethical tone — whether of ill-will, kindness, deceit or truthfulness — is the basis for the *kamma* (actions) that we lay down and of which we reap the results. Convention refers to any socially or personally established rules, principles or laws that restrain or encourage certain actions. Conventions, such as speaking in polite language or refraining from theft, do not by themselves eliminate unwholesome impulses/intentions; it is quite possible for example, to speak politely with a mind of malice. If conventions don't get referred to intentions they become social or personal functions that merely serve to establish our place in the social domain. In this context they are liable to become sources of views, of righteousness,

conceit and prejudice. For example, I may attach to the conventions of my religion, ideology, ethnicity or nationality and therefore look down upon, condemn and even wage war on those outside my group. This is a major obstacle called ‘attachment to customs and systems’ (*silavattaparamāsa*). However, conventions (such as the Five Precepts) do create behavioural boundaries that can cause us to check our actions, apply wise attention, witness our intention and abandon it. Keeping in touch with present-moment intention is therefore crucial. With that as a basis, we then use conventions wisely in order to develop skilful behaviour (for example teaching children about sharing and right speech).

Morality is a matter of refraining from abusing oneself or others through body, speech or mind. Therefore it’s useful to bring it into play when one is thinking negative thoughts about oneself or others, mentally degrading them, or through speech encouraging others to do so.

Morality carries with it the strength of restraint, the empathy of concern for how one’s actions affect oneself and others, and the clarity of discerning the difference between short-term happy feelings and long-term well-being. Drinking alcohol and taking drugs may provide short-term ease or exhilaration, but can have ruinous effects on oneself and others.

To avoid moralizing and righteousness, one should practise morality as if one is wisely supervising someone one loves and respects. If you are called upon to check someone else’s behaviour, do so in the same way. This is the spirit of *kalyānamitta*, spiritual friendship.

## Reflection

Notice a fly buzzing against the window, a spider on the wall or running across the floor. Feel how that affects you. Pause and ask if it wants to die, or if its death is necessary for you to live well. Notice what it feels like to experience a violent impulse — towards people being noisy, towards fellow drivers on the road, towards

people you fear. What does that do to your mind? What does it feel like to let the impulse pass?

Reflect similarly on the other precepts (see below) — how would it feel to be cheated, abused or deceived by another? And conversely, how would it feel to be supported and respected by others?

Consider your actions from the standpoint of a wise and warm-hearted friend (this is not an inquisition). Which actions would you recommend giving more attention to?

### **Action**

Check your speech habits and the habits of those with whom you associate. This can be done through remaining silent instead of participating in slander or gossip, or through directly questioning others on the veracity or usefulness of their comments. In cases of verbal conflict, offer time to patiently negotiate through the difference of opinion.

Give up supporting the exploitation of animals through butchery or sport. If you choose to eat meat for health or other reasons, consider finding a local source where the animals are raised and treated humanely. Do some research and avoid purchasing forms of ocean life that are in danger of being over-fished.

Refuse to accept favours, bribes or special privileges for one's work.

When asked, carefully and with consideration, encourage others to follow moral standards.

Affirming the Five Ethical Precepts is something that people find useful. It's a verbal affirmation of five topics for restraint:

- the impulse to damage sentient life,
- the impulse to take what isn't given,
- the impulse to use sexuality in abusive ways,
- the impulse towards harmful speech and
- the impulse towards intoxicants

These can be affirmed in a formal way at Theravada Buddhist monasteries on Full and New Moon nights, or at home with spiritual companions.

### **Meditation**

Notice the arising of any negative thoughts towards others. Notice what it feels like, how it affects your heart and body. Consider putting these aside as a way of protecting yourself from harm.

Look into the causes of ill-will; if you feel hurt or neglected, spend time just feeling the feeling and referring it to the sensations and feelings of full and relaxed breathing in and out. Breathe through your emotions. Do likewise with craving and ambition. When you are more settled, consider how ill-will poisons the mind and to what degree material gains and ambition can give you happiness.



## Letting go: *Nekkhamma Pāramī*



The previous chapter introduced the renunciation *pāramī* as one of the first three perfections. I'll add some more on renunciation, because what it entails can be misunderstood, and its value underestimated. Far from being the route to starvation, renunciation is the path to realizing fulfilment.

### Examining Needs and Wants

If the first three perfections establish a vehicle in which to cross over the floods, renunciation also takes us further: it pushes the boat away from the ground that the floods break over. It takes the mind to a more stable place, where it can gain access to great ease and clarity. So like every other *pāramī*, renunciation supports (and depends on) wisdom. Wise renunciation goes against the current of gain — that very powerful assumption that happiness comes through having or storing up something, even a spiritual something. This assumption, which promises a way out of dissatisfaction, actually supports the nagging insecurity of assuming that we are fundamentally lacking, inadequate or needing to be propped up. As long as this assumption holds the mind, we can never realize the independent balance that is Dhamma. This is why, if you really want freedom from the suffering that the mind creates, you have to be prepared to challenge the assumption of gain and loss. Otherwise, you'll be chasing its mirages and projections forever, and losing touch with the way to freedom.

Just looking around reveals how this sense of inadequacy is played upon by the forces of material consumerism that are exhausting the planet. They support the notion that the senses will provide us with fulfilment — but do you know anyone who has fulfilled human potential, or is at peace, through feeding on sights, sounds, tastes and the rest? Of course, it's not so easy to give up that dependency. Feeding on the senses remains a natural inclination for us until we have realized something more fulfilling and less prone to loss, jealousy or addiction. That's why true renunciation, rather than repression, can only develop dependent on finding fulfilment through cultivating the mind. This isn't to deny that material support in terms of adequate food, clothing, shelter and medicine is essential for human life; but to recognize that 'adequate' may mean forty pairs of shoes to one person or a yearly pay of millions of dollars to another. Even then, the sense of 'adequate,' 'enough,' 'satisfied' keeps slipping away from the outreach of the clenching hand into 'another one,' 'a little more.' The reason for this lies in the clenching reflex itself: when we grasp, we tighten up, lose perspective and limit the mind's potential. In that state, we lose balance — so we reach out for more, and then tip over.

On the other hand, cultivating our spiritual potential gradually eliminates the sense of lack and thereby grants contentment and inner strength at no cost to oneself or other creatures. To at least attune to the spirit of this cultivation checks the tide of ignorance: we stop ignoring the evidence of the *dukkha* of the clenching hand. Once we have learnt the clarity, resolve and skills from handling the pull of the senses, renunciation can go further — we can let go of attachments to status, to our opinions, and even to who and how we assume we are.

In this psychological domain, renunciation is in two stages: letting go (*cago*) and complete relinquishment (*vossagga*). Letting go is the giving up of trying to be something, the giving up of holding onto some psychological ground as one's own; this refers to the attachment to becoming and views. Complete relinquishment is the abandonment of the sense of self, of being any finite coherent

thing, subtle or gross, in terms of mind states or of awareness itself. This is the abandonment of ignorance. So the development of this perfection runs in tandem with the development of wisdom. When the mind is firm, composed and clear, it can stand free of habitual supports.

Renunciation in its most obvious sense entails introspective enquiry: to look into one's wants and wisely translate appetite into relevant needs. This wise discernment is a vital requirement in the world of the total, round-the-clock, internet market. So keep asking yourself, 'Do I really need this?' When you enquire into needs rather than wants, you'll find that needs are simple. To me clarity, balance and the ability to bring forth the good seem to be needs — along with the more relative needs (time to meditate, adequate teachings and material support) that make this possible. Needs tend to simplify and take you through the jungle of fantasy to a place of value. When I attend to wants on the other hand, it's not long before the next little want comes along on top of the first ... and then the next ... and then the sense of being inadequate and deprived. But maybe instead of having another snack, the itch to get out of feeling bored or empty would be met by an act of generosity or kindness to another. And maybe the hankering for entertainment would be addressed by steadying and brightening the mind's energies through meditation.

Therefore it's important to keep reviewing what is necessary, using reflections such as: 'What I get in terms of my mind states is the result of how I act.' To support cultivating the mind, there's a relative need for food, shelter, clothes, medicines and so on, and relative needs change as situations change. For example, there might be the need for a university degree or a car to get to work. And just because they're relative doesn't mean that they're not important — for a while. To judge current needs takes an ongoing cultivation of wisdom. Therefore, when one looks into the impressions and aims that come up in life, it's good to recollect: 'This seems to be how things are right now, and this seems to be the direction to go in. What is necessary, and how much do I want to commit to that?' Then there is an opportunity to bring wisdom

into one's life in a down-to-earth way. This process of enquiring into relative needs, rather than denying that there are any, is one of the hallmarks of the Buddha's approach to renunciation. It's a gentle and reflective practice, not an ascetic ideal. This is an important point, because taking an absolutist stand against the sensory world places the mind in the current of the three non-sensory floods.

### Steady in the Face of the Floods

These floods — of becoming, of views and of ignorance — become more apparent as we cultivate introspective meditation. Becoming (*bhava*) is the appetite to assemble status, personality role and accomplishments for the enhancement that they offer us. So this could even mean being the most accomplished ascetic in the district! When the mind takes a stand on becoming, the trend is to get swept into wanting to be something that we sense we aren't and yet could or should be. Most of us are trying to believe that we are, or are going to become, better than we believe we are now — although what we think we are is just a point of view. We can get depressed believing that we're not good enough, without really questioning: how good do you have to be to be at peace with yourself? Isn't every talent, act of service, or development a plus on top of that? Being at peace with the way you are right now does require an ethical sense, and clarity with regard to the mind, its energies and moods. So being at peace doesn't mean there's no room for development, but that the interest in development can come from the wholesome wish for truth and self-acceptance rather than from an ungratifiable need to be something.

Becoming also operates in a counter-current as the urge to be nothing (*vibhava*), to be apart from what we assume we are. So when we think we haven't become anything great, we can feel like failures. Because of this urge to push away what we think we are, people seek oblivion through drink and drugs. People even kill themselves — every financial crash evokes a wave of suicides from businessmen, not because they have been made destitute, but through the depression of not wanting to see themselves as

failures. So this flood of becoming is a source of loss of self-respect, contentment and wisdom. When in this flood, we're running from a false assumption and towards a mirage.

The flood of becoming supports and is supported by sensuality, views and ignorance. People can feel they've become something special when they've increased their ability to possess a lot of fancy expensive stuff. And the drive of becoming is one reason why people feel they need to be something special: the unique, the charismatic, the weird, whatever. In terms of becoming, just being one in seven billion is a waste of time — hence we get neurotic about our individuality. Actually we already are unique, we already have become what we seem to be; the game is being played and we can contemplate the sense of identity as it flows and changes. That's miraculous enough.

But when this flood makes us numb to our potential, one of the illusory certainties it offers is to become a believer, someone who forms an identity out of their religious views, beliefs or political inclinations. This lens of identity is called 'self-view.' Under its influence, people adopt -isms and get fundamentalist about them — 'this is true, this is right, all those who don't share my views are deluded, damned', etc. Fundamentalism gives people a strong sense of belonging to the tribe of the just and the true; it comes from an inability to handle the fluidity of being open. But we can get across this too, if we can meet and be steady in life's uncertainty. We may feel the energy going up into our heads and a shield forming over our hearts to hold ourselves firm; we may harden to defend ourselves from those of different views. But if we get hot and frame people in a distorted light, in the bluster and smoke of all that, we don't notice the fire. So the thing to notice is not the view, or the other person, but the shift of energy that gets our hearts pumping and our thoughts whirring into battle stations. That's the fire of ignorance. The practice of cooling the fire involves coming into the body and steadying the heart through the breathing. Putting out that fire entails questioning: is holding onto this producing suffering in myself and others? From what urge, flood or unconscious reflex does it stem? Can that be

let go of? And how? This is the enquiry into the Four Noble Truths, the heart of the Buddha's teaching.

### Meeting the Floods

To come out of the deadlock of the floods begins with the ability to recognize rather than repress them: to witness what they do to us. Notice for example the pull of the senses or the lure of success in terms of the tensions and the boost that they can give us, as well as the lurch that comes with loss and failure. Then there's the 'I'm not like this, I should be like that' of nagging doubt and conceit. To acknowledge these as they are, rather than follow them or pretend they're not happening, is the beginning of renunciation. We start by letting go of the blindness around self-view. We can be open about how we shut down and hang on and the results of that.

As we enter the turbulence of meeting the floods, often in the direct contemplation of mind, we meet who we seem to be at any given time and check out what that identity is based on. Is there ease or worry, contentment or guilt? Then it can be addressed. So renunciation is a doorway to meditation, not a denial or repression. Repressing the sensual instinct just by verbally condemning it doesn't go very far. Even when you want to be pure and non-attached, irrational emotions can suddenly trip you up. Instead, rather than focusing on the objects that desire brings up, we can develop the skill of directly looking into and through the energy of desire. We can access the energy that is carrying the thoughts and images. We can notice that energy in the mind's restlessness, blockage or passion. And through cultivating the mind, we can steer that energy along channels of goodwill or embodied calm that give it a longer-lasting well-being than the quick fix of sensuality.

Notice in a straightforward way how the energy of the floods tosses the heart around. Then, rather than react to this, judge it or even to try to fix it, a mind that is attuned to renunciation knows the 'no-option' attitude: 'This is the way it is right now.' That clear

acknowledgment and emotional acceptance also help to shift the focus to a deeper place beneath the floods. So just as these floods manifest in terms of thoughts, emotions and energies, the way of reversing them is threefold: intellectual, emotional and energetic. Having an intellectual understanding of the illusory nature of attachment and the benefits of letting go is a good start, but you need to have the emotional acceptance of their presence. That truthfulness collects and focuses the mind and makes it capable of turning the energy of the floods around. You don't cross over through good ideas alone.

Instead, the energy of the floods has to be met. That is, as you steady the heart to directly meet the waves of experience, you feel their energy. This first contact manifests as a disturbance, a ripple in the stream of conscious moments. Something feels touched, struck, and it shivers. Then comes the second contact, which we interpret as 'I'm being affected/touched' and 'That affected/touched me.' This secondary impression, the one the heart makes, is what we make out of contact. It's where our psychologies of being offended or needed or appreciated kick in. And good or bad, we really buy into that; that's where 'I' as an active subject arises. It feels like you're being moved or even thrown around in a series of familiar responses, although the basis of all that is just a habitual impression stirring the heart. Yet out of that will arise all the voices of doubt, and the stories of what I am.

This is why this stage of meeting the flood with *pāramī* is so dynamic and transformative. In the figurative description of the Buddha's Enlightenment, it's said that he was beset by the host of a great demon called Mara; and this is a good way of depicting and getting some perspective on all those nagging voices that come up when you practise any of the perfections. You've probably heard these: the ones that whisper, 'Why bother?' or, 'Why shouldn't I have what she has? It's my right!' and, 'I can never do this, I'm too weak-willed.' This is where the Buddha overcame Mara — by knowing all that as just an activity, and it can be given

up. You have the possibility not to act like the self that it creates as stuck in the flood. Isn't that an opportunity? You can stop making anything out of the ripples and the waves of contact. Thus the agitation and stirring abates, until even when the ears and eyes and the rest of it are receiving impressions, the heart remains steady.

### Accepting the Flow of Experience

So you keep your wisdom sense open for the voice and the feel of hankering for things, the forces that get bound up in views and trying to prove how good you are. It's a revelation that has its embarrassing aspects: we once had a monk at the monastery who was very grim about Dhamma practice, and took delight in seeing the down side of life. One of his favourite words was 'putrid': he could talk about the body being putrid, the food being putrid and life in general as being rather putrid. When we were having a tea break at the end of a day of work on building the monastery, he would say, 'Look at how the craving for sweet things arises.' He'd make you feel guilty about drinking a cup of tea. But then one day, he was going to the kitchen and passed the place where all the slops go. An 'After Eight' mint chocolate had fallen off the table into the slops bucket. It caught his eye, and before he knew what had happened, his hand was in the bucket and he was fishing it out and eating it. He'd lost the control that the view had given him. His renunciation hadn't penetrated to the more instinctual level.

Being willing to acknowledge and meet the floods takes great heart. Ajahn Chah said that being a monk is knowing about letting go, but being unable to do so for ninety percent of the time. Just seeing that certainly crunches the ego. However with truthfulness there's a necessary development. You start to come more from the heart, the sense that works in terms of relating to experience rather than fixing and organizing and making yourself into what you think you should be. So as we witness the limitations of knowing Dhamma through our ideas, we grow in the emotional strength and capacity to relate to the floods. We come to a more

measured and patient approach, and we don't get hung up on being or not being something. Then we can be with the grasping in a clear but non-judgemental way. For purity you have to transcend rather than repress the flood; you have to know the pull of pleasure, feel it and relax it. You have to get to sense how attraction works, and how to release that energy by referring to the awareness of it. This is a heart inclination rather than a technique, and awareness is brought to the fore through patience and kindness. So you give up the ideas of who you are and how things should be, and instead breathe patience and kindness into the grasping and the agitation.

I remember one time sitting quietly on the lawn in back of the monastery, and the thought arose in me to do some meditation. However, once I'd decided that I should be calm and undistracted, I noticed the sound of the pigeons flapping their wings. 'Flap-flap-flap, flap-flap-flap!' So I thought, 'I can't sit here!' Then some people walked past. 'I can't sit here. People are walking around.' Then there was the sound of their voices. 'Noises, noises! I can't sit here!' So I practised with 'just sitting.' Not meditating, but just sitting here and being with what was happening. There were waves of agitation coming up around sights and sounds, and then the ideas started up. I thought, 'I've got to go somewhere else at five o'clock; I've got an appointment. It's a quarter to five! Mustn't be late' — even though the appointment was only a three-minute walk away. Then the emotional reactions kicked in: I didn't like this agitation, so I found myself getting irritable with my stupid mind. However through all this, I kept coming back to just sitting here, and 'it's all right.' Letting the sights, sounds and agitation roll through and deepening into 'it's all right.' It may sound unimpressive, but it cut off some suffering.

So it is: one can create pressure out of 'trying to meditate' to the point where you lose composure and awareness, and become unable to simply open up and accept the flow of experience. You get snared by the meditation demon.

This probably happens for most people — thoughts coming up in the mind, holding tight to those thoughts and then getting that itchy feeling that says you've got to do something! When this kind of thing comes up, it's like Mara's tickling you under the nose with a feather to see if he can get you going. If the feather doesn't work, he starts coming with a little stick and a poke: 'I've got something to do, can't just sit here!' Have you ever sat on retreat and found out how many urgent things there are to do, that you simply have to get done ... and then as soon as you leave the meditation hall you think, 'It's not that important, really. I don't really need to do that.' But then you feel embarrassed at leaving the hall and think, 'I'm pretty stupid. What will the others think of me?' So you decide you'd better leave the retreat altogether. As long as you hold onto some idea of what you should be, ignorance has you on the run. Therefore when you sit and meditate and you feel that geyser bubbling up in the mind, don't even think, 'Oh, I'm too agitated now. I can't meditate.' Instead, go beneath the topic and be with its energy. Feel it in your body, and as you do so, breathe through it without aversion, but with a kindly and gentle attitude. There's all the time in the world to be with the mess of the mind. This is practice; this is letting go, isn't it?

So when energy feels like it's trying to throw you out, just open your awareness, widen and soften. This may ask you to bring forth all your *pāramī*; it may ask you to be more complete and real than your daily life activities do. Sometimes it feels like being on an edge where you can only find footing for a moment. But a moment at a time is all you need, and in reality it's all you have. So you abandon the time-bound historical personality and let the wave pass through you. It's like standing in the sea and allowing waves to arise, splash over you, and then subside. If you keep moving back from the wave, it follows you. It follows you up the beach and it catches you anyway, but it catches you running away from it. If you stand still and let the wave roll over you, you stand your ground against *dukkha*. You see that it is just of the nature to arise and cease. You know that you're not that wave, and you're not someone who has, or shouldn't experience, waves. You're not

hooked up to sounds, sights, views, or to their absence or to being somebody who experiences this. If you make a person out of this process you're caught in the flood. This is the ultimate purpose of renunciation: to give up these attachments, this sense of an unconscious need to be something and of not being enough right now. We give up and relinquish attachment to all of that, so that instead of getting lost and drained, we fill up with the rich heart of awareness. With the shift of letting go, you have another place to stand.

### Enlightenment Comes Through Relinquishment

Enlightenment involves derailing and deconstructing the sense of lack. It is getting rid of that piece of psychology that in every moment says, 'There's something else that I should be having right now. There's something else that I should be right now. There's somewhere else that I could go right now. There's somebody else who's got it better than me right now. I'm not complete right now. I need to be something right now.' Enlightenment comes when we are free of that and not gratifying it with, 'Oh, now I can do this. Now I can do that. Now I've got one of those. I'm getting there. I'm nearly getting there. Now I can watch my breath. Now I can sit in *samādhi* ... I've got there.' Following these, the hunger doesn't go away. It can take on more interesting shapes, get more technical, but it doesn't go away through filling oneself. It resolves through renunciation. We have to let go of that black hole of 'not enough.'

This is because although it feels like a hole, a lack, it's actually a block. It's the accumulated pressure of the floods. What is needed then isn't filling it, but releasing it. On the psychological level this means working against the *bhava-vibhava* currents. What feels wrong at this time? What shouldn't be here right now? Whatever it is, *accept* it. The more you don't want it, the bigger it gets. How do you want things to be right now? *Relinquish it*. The more you want it, the farther you push it away. Daily life practice is to keep working against that *bhava-vibhava*, especially the *vibhava* that keeps saying, 'I'm fed up with this. I've had enough of this. I don't want to be in this situation. I can't stand this another minute!'

Accept it; sidestep the topic and welcome the energy as it arises. I find this very helpful when the mind panics. Then as I look into that I see that it all nestles down inside that sense of lack, of being deprived of my space, my time, or my peace of mind. The cry for peace of mind can get pretty aggressive when it comes out of the place of hanging on!

However, the detail of the practice is that letting go is dependent on cultivating strengths and clarity. Release requires relative fulfilment. In terms of Dhamma, this fulfilment is the flowering of the seven factors of Enlightenment: mindfulness, introspective investigation, energy, rapture, ease, concentration, and equanimity. This may sound like a tall order, but these are the factors that start to form as you meet rather than react to, or get swept away by, your personal world. So when you want to know yourself, rather than affirm, deny, please or annihilate yourself, that interest supports mindfulness and introspective investigation. You bring a steady witnessing to your mental content, you bear it in mind and enquire into it: 'Is this useful; does it lead to my welfare or that of another? How stable and reliable is this thought or emotion?' This supports the *pāramī*: you see how certain intentions, such as generosity and ethical clarity are beneficial, and so on. The *pāramī* then support the Enlightenment Factors, because they give you worthy intentions to keep energising, just as you withdraw from unskillful ones. And this brings clarity and happiness to the mind.

In meditation, when you focus on this happiness it becomes rapture — an uplifted, suffusive energy — and ease, a contented feeling. Focusing on these brings around concentration, and that supports equanimity — an evenness of energy with a spacious feel. These Enlightenment factors are transpersonal in that the habitual identity, delineated by skeins of thought, mood swings and reactions, is in abeyance. But the leading edge and generator of these factors is through the correct handling of the personal world with its choices, responsibilities and random input. The transpersonal is correctly entered through handling one's personal life in the light of the perfections.

It's important to note and practise that, because one can enter transpersonal levels of the mind without the proper preparation — say through drugs, or through incorrect use of yogic practice, or even through meditation. When people put too much attention onto subtle energies, or are too eager to get out of their personalities, a vital connection is broken. Then deluded, seemingly Enlightened states can occur, which are difficult to get out of. Or someone can lose their sense of who they are and can have a breakdown. This is why the Path requires integration of all levels, and *pāramī* play a big part in that. The renunciation aspect of this vehicle is there to train us: whatever manifests on any level is not to be clung to, not as my self or any cosmic self. When that lesson is learnt right down to the ends of one's psychological nervous system, then the transpersonal can open to the Beyond.

## Quotes and Suggestions on Renunciation

*Let go of the drive for pleasure. See how it's peaceful to put aside worldliness: then there's nothing you have to hold onto and nothing you have to push away. (Snp. 1098)*



*... the pleasure and joy that come through the five strands of sense-pleasure ... are grubby, coarse and cheap ... when, uninvolved with sense-pleasure and unskilful states, a bhikkhu enters and dwells in meditative absorption ... this is the bliss of renunciation, the bliss of non-involvement, of peace and of Enlightenment. (M. 66.19-20)*



*They don't grieve over the past,  
Nor do they yearn for the future;  
They live only in the present:  
That's why their face is serene.*

*It's from yearning for the future,  
And from grieving over the past;  
This is how fools become withered:  
Like a fresh reed that's been hacked down. (S. 1.10)*



Renunciation brings clarity with regards to needs and desires. It has a strengthening effect as it offers us the chance to stand free of consumer pressure and status pressure. It is also a tonic for the heart and a requirement for meditation, because it returns our attention to a here and now which is easeful because it's not about having things or being someone special. This present is arising without our making it do so. Letting ideas and moods arise and pass in the present, in the spirit of kindly acceptance, leads to insight and a peaceful abiding.

## Reflection

Imagine you had to carry with you, on your back, what you really needed. What would you take? Of all that's left, what would you make a second trip for? If that were all you had, how would that feel?

Consider that there are things that you have now — gadgets and conveniences — that were not available ten or twenty years ago. You and others managed without them then. Similarly, there will be items for sale in a few years' time that seem irresistible — yet now without them, life is manageable. Where's the pressure?

Whenever you get the sense of 'not enough,' ask 'When has it been "enough"?' And when will it be?'

'All that is mine, beloved and pleasing, will become otherwise, will become separated from me.' True or false? Consider that in our dying there is nothing that we can take with us — except our own mind-set. What do you want to hold onto? What will it be like when that is gone? Can you work with lessening your attachment to it, or them, now?

## Action

Notice something you've had on a mantle for years or a book in the bookshelf that you read years ago. Take it away into another room or put it in a drawer. What's missing? How does that feel?

Next time you go to the shops, decide what you want and just buy that. If anything else attracts your attention, step outside the store and wait for a few minutes before deciding whether to go back in and buy it. How does that feel?

Stop work when, or before, your energy runs out. Consider the sense of 'not finished yet.' When is it ever finished? Train yourself to work within these guidelines; be prepared to leave projects unfinished today, and rather than try to complete them, spend a

few minutes tidying up and making it easier to start again the next day or work period.

Consider that whatever your occupation, one day you will be unable to continue in it. What will happen then? Is it impossible that anyone else could take your place, or that what you're doing couldn't be done by some other system?

## **Meditation**

Stand with your legs coming straight down from your hips. Soften around the knees so that your legs aren't locked, and the weight of your body is being evenly distributed over the soles of your feet. Let your arms hang slightly away from the sides of your body and relax your shoulders and face. Stand for five minutes or so, acknowledging but relaxing the urge to do something, know something or feel anything special. Accept being how you are right now.

If you have more time, you can take this into sitting. One way of cultivating concentration and meditative absorption is just to keep reviewing what you're doing psychologically that you don't need to do — worrying, planning, hankering for results — and to stop doing it. In tandem with that, in terms of what you are doing that is skilful — sitting upright, contemplating in- and out-breathing — 'do' that thoroughly (it gets to be more a matter of returning and settling than any other activity) and enjoy it.





## Innate Clarity:

### *Paññā Pāramī*



The fourth of the vehicles that cross the flood of the world is wisdom — *paññā*. This is the discriminative faculty that operates through discernment or clarity, rather than a learned store of knowledge. It's a faculty that we all already have. To quote the Buddhist scriptures: '*wisdom and consciousness ... are conjoined*' (M. 43.5). In other words wherever there is consciousness there is wisdom, because wisdom is the faculty that makes distinctions — between pain and pleasure, safe and threatening, black and white. For the lower forms of animal life, this faculty is programmed solely around sense contact. For example, an amoeba can differentiate between pain and pleasure, but it doesn't have issues around self-worth. Those creatures that have more evolved forms of discernment are acknowledged to be 'higher' forms of life. Sparrows learn about milk in bottles and peck the silver foil off the top to get a drink. Mammals can learn how to manage their environment and their social order; they know when things are safe, and when it's time to relax and enjoy life. In fact, dolphins seem to do better than humans on that score. But for humans the possible development of wisdom is to be clear about the mind. Wherever there is consciousness there is wisdom, but for humans the job is for '*wisdom to be developed, and consciousness is to be fully understood*' (M. 43.6).

Yes, the human mind is a mixed blessing. We can witness our instincts and responses and discern what is good/appropriate/skilful from its opposite; but we can also get so lost in the theories

and viewpoints that we've adopted in order to measure our responses, that we get confused and stressed. We can get so thrown around by what we think we should be, and what we fear we might be, and the ways we wish other people would be, that we lose the balance of clarity. So with a human mind it's imperative to develop the wisdom faculty in the right way. This entails balancing the need for ideas, aims and procedures with the understanding of how all this mental stuff affects us. Without balance we get top-heavy and so contrived that getting through a day is a major undertaking. So it's essential to develop the wisdom that oversees or transcends mind consciousness with its values and dogmatic biases, its compassion and depression, its love and its lust. This transcending wisdom, or deep clarity, is the perfection that accompanies every other *pāramī* and is brought to full development, use and effect by them. Without it, life can be a real mess.

### Three Aspects of Wisdom

The development of wisdom is on three fronts. The first is the learning aspect: that is, the function of picking up and assimilating some ideas. This is what is called *pariyatti*, conceptual wisdom or theory, which we might obtain from a book, or from listening to a talk. The second is the wisdom of practice, of directly applying theory in one's life and practising towards clearing away the causes of stress, confusion and suffering. This is called *paṭipatti*. Thirdly, there is the wisdom of realization, or *pañvedha*, which is a confident, clear and peaceful knowing that stands outside of opinions, reactions and biases. It is the kind of knowing that just 'knows' that something is so or not so. It is that purity of knowing that provides release from confusion and stress.

These three aspects of wisdom are symbolized by the Buddhist figurines that carry a book, sword and lotus. The book is the wisdom of theory — *pariyatti*; the sword is wisdom with regards to application, of putting theory into practice — *paṭipatti*; and the lotus is the wisdom of realization — *pañvedha*. The book symbolizes the knowledge, which requires skill to pick up,

assimilate and bear in mind. The sword symbolizes the energetic cutting off of delusion and entanglements. It requires the wisdom to know what to cut through, so that you don't cut off your intelligence by hacking in the wrong direction. Applied practice isn't about eliminating thoughts and feelings; it's not butchery of the heart. It's a clearing away of confusion that allows the lotus of realization to come to light and blossom.

In a way, these three are sequential, although not quite as straightforward as first A, then B, then C. The way that they generally come into play is that you get some advice, make a considered effort and get some degree of realization. There's enough clear seeing to give you confidence in the theory, so you make more of the mind accessible through further application, and then you can subsequently broaden or deepen the realization. The process loops around, but it begins with mapping out a basis for an enquiry into cause and effect. We investigate: what is for our long-term benefit rather than short-term gain? What is for our welfare, the welfare of others and leads to peace? What kind of immediate happiness actually causes us unhappiness in the long run – and what are the causes or triggers for those trajectories? We don't always apply our wisdom to our impulses, such as overspending, incompatible relationships or substance abuse, because as ideas and impulses they all feel good at the time! Just to know that you have a reliable resource and can map out where you're going is already a kind of release – from being clueless.

So a lotus begins to bud with the first glimpse of clarity at a theoretical level. Then we can look into what the mind's cooking up and get clear as to what's stoking the fire. Maybe we're trying to possess or control a situation that can't be held, or make a son, daughter or partner be something that they're not. Or we're resisting an uncomfortable feeling, getting defensive and pretending it isn't there (while denying that we're being defensive). When you realize that you're trying to push a river uphill, or stop it flowing downhill, and that it's a waste of energy, that's a further budding of the lotus. Then, having the idea that

you can release yourself from stress, you stop wasting your time and energy in unnecessary holding or pushing or resisting. That's another release, one which encourages your wisdom sword to cut off the tangles, biases, desires and worries that bind you into unnecessary effort. The energy that is caught up with confused misunderstanding and wrong activities — whether psychological, physical or emotional — then gets released. It is subsumed into the energy of the mind, and there is a feeling of wholeness, peace and freedom. In fact every time we have some kind of realization, energy is untangled and settles, making the mind feel bright. And to know that it's well worth going through the struggle and enquiry to get there is the wisdom that keeps you going through the next challenge.

Wisdom is an innate faculty, and it's not just theoretical. It's more like the discernment of a raccoon whose wise paws can distinguish between a rock and a clam in a stream. In a similar way, our minds have an awareness that is able to receive and evaluate the states they go through. This mental awareness (*citta*) already has enough wisdom to recognize and resonate with qualities like kindness, generosity, truthfulness and integrity. We know what goodness feels like when it occurs; it is something that strikes us. Then if we reflect and consider the message that our clarity, rather than our confusion, gives us, we steer towards that goodness, both because it makes us feel good and because it brings balance into our world. The path out of confusion and stress therefore begins with accessing this reflective awareness and bringing it to the fore.

Reflective awareness has to be developed through deliberate encouragement and practice, such as through exercises of meditation, because the default is to let assumptions, beliefs, passions and worries lead the mind — because they speak the loudest. So an important piece of theory is to remember to take the time and create the occasions to bring our wisdom forth. This is how *pariyatti* or theory, leads on to *paṭipatti* — practice.

And practice leads on to realization. For example, one can remember to attune to kindness, honesty and generosity, practise

evaluating that experience and realize, ‘That was good for myself and others and takes me to a good place: I’d like to do more of that.’ That piece then goes into one’s personal book of wisdom. Accordingly, as clarity about the feel of one’s activities grows, acting with more conscience and concern towards other people and creatures is a natural result. So when wisdom comes to the fore, other virtues get boosted.

Wisdom is not just a matter of refined intellect — psychopaths and dictators can be very cunning — but of our ability to evaluate mind states as they are directly felt in the present. And the rule of thumb is: ‘If it doesn’t support other *pāramī*, it isn’t real wisdom; it’s just an opinion.’ True wisdom senses balance and wholeness, discerns cause and effect, and realizes the fruit, the blossoming of clarity and happiness. This is the wisdom of right view. It’s for my long-term welfare, for the welfare of others and leads out of stress.

### Wisdom Develops a Path Out of Suffering

Practice-wisdom grows especially well through meditation. Meditation in the Buddhist sense means the cultivation of calm and insight (*samatha-vipassanā*), and the development of mindfulness (*sati*) and concentration (*samādhi*) to bring those about. Mindfulness is the faculty that bears a feeling, idea, process or sensation in mind. Sustained, it counteracts scattered attention and impulsiveness. Concentration is the deepening into the steadiness that mindfulness brings, a deepening that becomes pleasurable. These two support calm. And when the mind is calm we can look into it and bring wisdom to bear on the roots of mental action. This penetrative inward looking, or insight, is needed because it’s often the case that we don’t really know or aren’t clear about the causes, motivations and effects of what we’re doing. The basis of action gets buried beneath the sheer quantity of action our minds get involved with.

Wisdom in meditation comes through handling and evaluating our experience in terms of how it affects our mental awareness. Insight looks at whether sights, sounds, thoughts or attitudes feel

rough, tight or bright; whether they bring around a contracted and stressful state of being or an open and released state. As you pick up the marks of the unskilful or the skilful from the state of your mind, and as you see how they arise, insight develops. Your wisdom takes on an embodied, heart- and gut-knowing, which is clear and gets to the point — such as: ‘It feels like the problem isn’t that people want a lot from me, it’s more that I’m a compulsive do-er. I demand too much of myself.’ For this felt knowing you have to calm the mind and enquire with reflective awareness, rather than think about yourself. Then you can see: ‘This is suffering; the cause is a craving to be some state or another; there can be a letting go of that craving; this is how to bring it about.’ You get a personal read-out on the Four Noble Truths — suffering, origin, ceasing and Path.

The methods for letting go of the cause of suffering provide an ongoing Path, the Fourth Truth. We focus on this process in formal meditation exercises, and also in daily life. It’s about knowing the good and living it out, knowing the bad and steering away from it — and being aware of the results. Then, through acquiring the results of goodness, one begins to feel clear and in tune with goodness. One can see when there’s something dissonant. Maybe we see a grudge, or a demand we make on ourselves — or how we identify with a role or a function, and adopt an inner verdict of being a success or a failure. However, when mental awareness clearly discerns: ‘All this is something that passes through awareness. These are states that I can step back from,’ we see the stress and the possibility for release. Then with that release, we feel the quiet happiness of clarity and confidence; and with that the pressure abates.

If you let this process unfold, you’ll find that you do good things, not because of some identity with being good, but just because it feels good in a reliable and holistic way. ‘This is good for others and good for me.’ You feel confident about doing good; you aren’t embarrassed by it. You don’t feel your acts of goodness are inadequate, useless or pointless, or that somebody else can do better. It doesn’t matter whether anyone else can do better or if

anyone else notices or cares. What is of immediate and discernable relevance is whether your own mind is in a skilful or unskilful state. So wisdom as a perfection gives us our own ground. It is the discernment to feel what is right and what is wrong, in a truly intrinsic way rather than through a competitive 'I'm better than you are, this is the only way' bias. And the result is that aware intelligence, rather than self-image, governs the heart.

### Wisdom Needs Meditation

Wisdom builds on the basis of renunciation. Renunciation is a part of meditation: we deliberately put aside going out through the sense doors. This is restraint: it's the first thing we do. We come to the point where we feel we want to check the outreach through the senses, because our wisdom tells us that reaching out is throwing us off balance. So putting aside the outreach, we turn inwards and stabilize the attention by pausing, and then establishing mindfulness on a suitable meditation topic. This is a beginning.

Although renunciation seems to mean putting aside sensory activity, this is really only a rough guide since the sense world is something that we are born into and have to engage with. More accurately, wise renunciation means working with sensory impact, so that we don't react by running out through the senses, or contracting into a tight defence. We need to maintain balance. Discernment can get pushed to one side by the blind energy of impulses, or by the equally blind denial or suppression of sensory input. So the practice is to know how to use restraint wisely. It's a matter of pausing, backing off a little from sense contact, and with that broader perspective reflecting on what feels skilful or unskilful. Then we can pick up engagement from a clear, ethical and compassionate place. Without the balance that restraint offers, the wisdom faculty doesn't have a still and firm state to refer to; it has no point from which to give a reading.

So mindfulness, bearing a point or theme in mind, is a key asset in the development of wisdom. It gives us access to the 'feel' of

knowing, a feeling of quiet assurance and balance. In meditation this wisdom of recognition is called 'full awareness' (*sampajañña*). This faculty recognizes what's happening in the mind at any moment. At first what full awareness tells you is that your attention stays still for about one second before it twitches to the next item. Yet full awareness also recognizes: 'Mindfulness can be established for this moment.' It encourages: 'Just do this for a moment; just try to start looking at your experience.' It doesn't carry the pressure of 'you have always got to keep this going.' Mindfulness might fall away from its point or theme, but then full awareness says, 'Stop. Just for this moment pick it up again.' Direct applied wisdom can only operate in this moment. As soon as you stray from this moment, you're no longer in the domain of the wisdom that blossoms into realization.

Mindfulness of breathing is a very good way of staying with the moment because you only have to deal with one thing at a time: one inhalation, one exhalation, half an inhalation, or the pause between an in- and out-breath. Therefore you are applying yourself to very small increments of experience. With this method, the wisdom you already have has a seedbed to grow on. You can't plant the seed of wisdom in the on-flowing slips and slides of mental currents, but you can carve out a little niche in the steady ground of breathing and pop a seed in there. It's rather like planting grass in shifting sand dunes: you see where, through careful effort, you can eventually anchor the drift.

This moment-at-a-time reference also gives us the opportunity to get out of the time frames that the flood of becoming (*bhava*) foists upon us. These include the voice that says, 'Got to get still; when is the clear light coming?' With penetrative wisdom, nurtured through mindfulness and full awareness, these thoughts can be transformed into, 'Impatience here ... Well, let's just take a moment and be with one exhalation.' Then there's the tenacious urge to run away from it all (*vibhava*) which says, 'I never want to be bothered with this again. I want to get all my problems over with. I've been sitting for ages; everything should be over by now, shouldn't it?' But with wisdom we put aside both the urge to

accumulate and gobble up experience, and the urge to get rid of experience. Instead we practise wisdom: through checking the mind and restraining those reflexes moment to moment. Then there's some realization, you get to know the mind and look beneath the mirage of its activity. Restrain the worry, impatience and conceit; tether your mental energy to the body. Already you are starting to take away some of the fuel for neediness and craving. And, you get a sense for the wise knowing that supervises this practice.

This knowing awareness gets lost when we cling to states of mind, because these are in motion. We get pulled off balance by emotionally-powered thoughts that demand that we follow them, fix them, get rid of them or worry about them. So we have to learn to undo this habit of reaching for, adopting or clinging. Getting a feel for how pushy or unkind we can be to ourselves in this respect points to the need for the renunciation of self-image, for letting go of the effort to be what our driven minds demand of us. You can never satisfy a driven mind. So a wise person is someone who can give up the ranting of the self to find a more natural tune; they can see how the clamouring and the clutching, the fearing and the grasping, are unnecessary and not worth hosting.

All clinging, to sense data or to psychological drives, is bound up with ignorance, a deep un-knowing in which awareness is pulled this way and that. This loss of balanced awareness fosters various kinds of thirst (*taṇhā*): for sense contact (*kāma-taṇhā*), for being something (*bhava-taṇhā*), or for not being anything at all (*vibhava-taṇhā*). Getting needy around sights, sounds and sensations isn't good news, because not everything we see, hear, taste, smell or touch is pleasant; and all of it is changeable. So this thirst tunes us in to a pretty unfulfilling channel. Much the same can be said for *bhava-taṇhā* — the thirst for a state of mind, or a position in society. It aims to make us feel solid and secure, but how many 'successful' people are really calm and assured in themselves? *Vibhava-taṇhā* is the drive to get away from something that triggers embarrassment, anxiety or loss of self-image. With this we look

to escape from the chaos of feeling, so we try to seal ourselves off from the awkward instincts of our reflexes: a sure way to develop neurosis and denial. Unchecked, these drives cause us to contract into habits that end up defining us: my attachment to winning an argument, my need for approval which makes me compliant but secretly resentful of others, my habitual self-disparagement which attempts to purge me of what I think are my sins and weaknesses. And the sum total of all that gets to be a secret identity, a self-view that our normal self doesn't know how to let go of. Hence *dukkha* — imbalance, denial, agitation.

These drives are made particularly tenacious because everything in the world tends to feed them. The world in general is geared to 'the carrot and stick' way of operating. Fame, praise, gain, status, power and excitement condition the personality, and this contaminates a very important aspect of our functioning and communication. Personality is the psychological interface between the realm of feeling and mind states and the realm of function and behaviour. It's a pretty important manager. However, it gets seduced by notions of prestige and fulfilment. So the manager takes a bribe and instead of serving as a facilitator, gets told that it is the real self, that it needs to look good and feel good, and that the way to do that is to ignore inner balance. Then this self-view takes over to the point of extreme delusion; people get hung up on how they look, how suave or cool or powerful they are — all of which is superficial and subject to change.

Moreover, the personality ignores the fact of death, ignores the fact that it is just a construction, and ignores the wisdom that would align it to these truths. We can therefore be rendered incapable of coming to terms with the mortality, fragility or the limitations of the human condition. We can't manage the push and pull of feelings. So people blow up and fight at football matches, or jump off a cliff when they lose their job, or go mad with revenge when they feel insulted. Either that or these reflexes are ignored, or shamed and criminalized. With self-view, wisdom isn't developed and our personality isn't able to manage what life brings up in a balanced and peaceful way.

## Meeting the Waves

Psychological thirst can be wisely addressed through meditation practice. When we come to meditation we turn off the glare of sense contact and sit still to establish a calm and introspective environment. Because of this basic calm (*samatha*), the drive that comes with sense contact is checked — we're not getting engrossed with sights, touches and all of that. Nor are we getting ahead, being a star or getting ego-affirmation. On the other hand, the urge to get away is checked by drawing attention into feeling the presence of the body, here and now. So these drives are muted by calm and stillness, and this makes it possible to witness and evaluate them, and refer them to the basic sanity of our inner balance. This subsequent process of evaluation sets up the path of insight (*vipassanā*).

As we meditate insightfully, we notice the underlying characteristic of whatever grabs hold of our attention. A lot of the time it feels restless or trapped. Whether it's a worried thought or an eager plan, it's accompanied by a restless urging, an inability to be still or comfortable with oneself. There's always holding on, pushing, beckoning or tickling somewhere. It's a restless existence. But to get through that means meeting these waves with *pāramī*. In this respect, insight-enquiry focuses on the underlying *quality* of the wave, rather than the *topic* that is churning the mind. Insight wisdom puts aside the tribunals over the past, and the prognosis for the future; it doesn't buy into speculation and option fever; and it has no demand or knowledge of how things are supposed to be. Instead, it furthers learning skills to relate to these undercurrents. It doesn't try to smash the waves down or straighten the sea; it doesn't build walls or retreat; it just stands on the true ground of awareness and lets the waves pass through a moment at a time. This strengthens access to a ground where the untrained mind can find only an unsure footing. So a wise person delights in meeting the waves, because this is how the true strength and beauty of the mind come forth.

I'll refer to walking meditation to illustrate this, in which the moment-by-moment process is very evident. You have the reality of physically taking one step at a time and that is a very good thing to gear down to — just one step at a time. Feel the subtle shift of pressures and effort in moving the body, and learn to walk without tension. Make the path somewhere between twenty and thirty steps (not too short or too long) and deliberately stop at the end of each walking set. However, be sure not to stop only physically but also psychologically — to rest the rolling on of the mind and just be present. Within this practice you keep coming back to the reference point of being present with the body and with the dying down of the resonances and echoes of what has been occurring for you during those twenty or so paces. You stop and attend carefully to standing. That shift from moving to standing is quite a significant and useful one since in a standing meditation one is continually brought back to the fullness of the body with no aim, and there's a sense of open presence. Then, deliberately intend to walk, picking it up with a sense of willingness and going through with it.

In any meditative process, one aim is to clean out unwholesome states. It's rather like washing a shirt. You put it in the water and swish it around; you don't just let it sit there in a bucket. You're supposed to apply some energy and rub it so the dirt comes out — but you don't tear the cloth either. So with walking meditation, the walking is firm, clearly distinct, but one step at a time; it's a gentle but persistent exertion. It includes the moments of rest. When you take it like that, there is time for stopping and reviewing, and that involves and calms the thinking mind.

In this way you get to calm the sea of the mind, and that makes meeting the waves easier. Connecting your mind to walking helps you to see, and feel, where you start panicking or getting indignant about a particular memory, person or activity. Then you can focus on that topic with the attitude, 'Well OK, let's look at that. What is that animosity, jealousy or craving? What's it founded on?' You look into it. You can find yourself walking up and down the meditation path thinking, 'I'm going to tell him, I'm really going to sort him out!' But by steadying the energy of that

impulse with the walking, you come out of its grasp. You can't calmly and gently get angry with someone: if we hold the mind against the walking (or the breathing) it can't sustain a heated, tense state.

The walking practice provides a continuum of effort and energy, along with the continuum of a background calm and steadiness. You learn to let thinking come and go, without putting energy into it, and without fighting with yourself. Through that, you can begin to calm the thinking mind. Because of that *samatha*, you can apply reflective wisdom towards looking into your mind or heart. You have a calm background against which you can see where the bubbling is. Then you can see where the hindrances and attachments are and find a way to release them. You begin to see the rhythms and the spaces between thoughts, where they can be stopped and dispelled. And you see, 'Ah, this is the point of letting go'; or 'This is where I'm hanging on.' Then there's a flash of realization into the Four Noble Truths. This is how calm and insight work together.

### **Realization: The Flowering of Wisdom**

What we see with insight is that all our aversion, our greed or our worry cluster around perceptions or impressions that we have. They're not innate, and they're not self. For instance, when you dislike a person, the person in your mind is actually an accumulation of various impressions that irritate you. The perceptions that do otherwise are screened out. You don't remember the person's suffering, virtue or nobility; you remember their tardiness, greediness, or lack of cooperation. In this way you build up an identikit picture of a person based on a few perceptions. But if you step out of that through calming the mind, you can investigate and acknowledge the things you weren't noticing. Then it's clear that: 'This isn't a person, this is an impression of them I have created out of aversion.' And as you look into that, you learn what your own mind can't tolerate; and as long as that remains the case, you are allowing that picture to have power over you.

You enquire, 'How has my mind gathered together this particular image?' Then you begin to understand that such perceptions are selective impressions based on pain and on not being in touch with, or not being able to handle, the wave of pain. So it gets stuck within us and can't pass. We're sensitive and don't like irritating things; but if we're not wise enough to acknowledge and let go, if we ignorantly shield ourselves from that irritation, these irritants get embedded into anxiety and aversion. You only get past them by looking into them, into how they're caused, and letting them pass through you.

A story may be useful here. It concerns the man who, as an enormous act of generosity, gave the sangha at Cittaviveka a stretch of woodland. He did so also because he wanted the woodland to be regenerated and managed carefully, and he had ideas about how that would happen. However on examination, no one else felt his ideas were practical. But because he was very much an ideas person, he was so disappointed that he couldn't come to the monastery for eighteen years. Instead, he spent eighteen years sitting at home, worrying. So during that time, all the people with whom he had been in contact about the woodland became figures of aversion for him — both the monks in the monastery and the Trust directors. He finally managed to break through this stalemate, and he actually came to the monastery to check things out. Somebody took him for a walk in the real woods — not the imagined, 'ideas' woods — and he saw how beautiful it was. He said, 'I've been worrying about how wrong it all was for eighteen years — and it's all so perfect.' It wasn't the way he wanted it, but he got to see that things didn't have to go in accordance with his ideas. And he gave a big, joyful smile. You could see a huge mass of anxiety and sourness, falling off like a terrible scab from the wound inflicted by clinging to ideas. And underneath that he was fresh and joyful. That's what realization is all about.

The ignorant mind sinks its teeth into something and gets hooked. Then it builds up a perception that we don't want to have challenged. When we have people we dislike, it becomes difficult

to get together and have face-to-face contact. We cling to our impressions and think, 'I'm not going to talk to them. They don't understand anyway.' We get infatuated with our viewpoint because it makes us feel solid, even if it makes us feel miserable. That's how sick *tanhā* is. But to unlock the aversion, we don't have to be right or wrong. All we need is simply to be with the other person or irritating thing and acknowledge that they have other features than our mind-set has presented. Even more to the point, we can undertake this process with regards to ourselves! We can start to liberate ourselves from our perceptions and notions by wisely knowing that the patterns and behaviours of the mind are selective, incomplete and not to be clung to. It's not that they have no truth in them, but most usefully, they show us where we hang on blindly to 'my view, my way.' This self-view is definitely a habit to kick. Life inevitably brings things I don't particularly want. I do manifest as other than ideal. But I can work with that. I don't have to knot up into a contracted heap of hatred over things that aren't the way I want them to be.

With this approach, the sword of wisdom's cut can be light and clean, a mass of suffering falls away, and you experience a suffusion of relief. It is then that you experience *paṭivedha* — the realization, the flowering of wisdom — even if just for a few moments. You realize that rather than holding on in order to have, or to be right or wrong or whatever, your mind can unfold into deep clarity. This is beautiful.

So with wisdom we don't have to contract out of experience; we sustain awareness of it, and blossom through and out of it naturally, just as the lotus grows out of the mud. And we can enjoy that. For us do-ers, acknowledging the ability to enjoy, to be open and to receive realization takes wisdom too. So take the time to savour and enjoy the realization; then it will feed back into the assurance that there is an innate wisdom. This is a change of lineage: rather than belonging to a body, to a family, a job, *kamma* or a mind-set, we belong to wisdom. Wisdom is inherent in being human.

## Quotes and Suggestions on Wisdom

*What kind of discernment does a learner have? An example is that of a bhikkhu who discerns clearly: 'This here is suffering and stress ... this is where it comes from ... this is where it ceases ... this is the path of practice that leads to its ceasing.'* (A. 3.73)



*Bhikkhus, there are eight causes and necessary conditions that lead to gaining the discernment that one didn't have ... and to increasing, enriching, developing and ripening of the discernment that one already has ...*

*[1] living as a disciple of the Buddha or with a worthy exemplar who brings up a strong sense of conscience and concern, warm-heartedness and respect ...*

*[2] while living in such a way, one approaches that teacher on suitable occasions and asks: 'What does this statement mean?' And the teacher reveals what was hidden, makes clear what was obscure, and dispels one's doubts ...*

*[3] having heard the Dhamma, one accomplishes seclusion in body and seclusion in mind ...*

*[4] one is moral and lives guided and restrained by the training rules ...*

*[5] one has heard a lot of teachings, and retained what one has heard ... then discussed, kept in mind, examined and thoroughly penetrated them to straighten one's views ...*

*[6] one keeps one's energy aroused in order to let go of unskilful mental states and to pick up skilful mental states. One stays steady and firm in terms of effort ...*

*[7] in the midst of the sangha one doesn't just chit-chat about this and that. One either talks on Dhamma oneself or encourages another to do so; and one is comfortable with a noble silence ...*

[8] *one stays focused on how the five aggregates are arising and passing; that is — ‘This is form, its coming into awareness and its disappearing. This is feeling ... perception ... programmed activity ... consciousness, its coming into awareness and its disappearing ...’ (A. 8.2)*



Wisdom in Buddhism is primarily a relational experience rather than a storehouse or corpus of knowledge. One is wise *about* cause and effect, and hence one is alert to what’s happening and how one is being affected. Because of this, the term ‘discernment’ may in many cases be a more useful one. In other words, wisdom is primarily something you *do* so that an opening to transcendent clarity may occur. As the last quote shows, its specific seeding is often effected by access to a teacher, and its subsequent growth fed and guided by being activated and worked out in real life situations. The highest development of the wisdom faculty is clarity with regard to the Four Noble Truths and to the selfless and changeable nature of what we take our reality to be.

## Reflection

Notice and give consideration to the fact that when you acknowledge and focus on your thoughts and emotions, the mind enters the experience of being aware of them rather than being them. Enhance that awareness by giving it emphasis, putting it to the fore and disengaging from the activities of the mind and heart in order to know them more fully. Notice that you can do this (for a few moments anyway) without denying, censoring or proliferating about your mental behaviour. Notice that a blend of clear attention and emotional spaciousness supports this kind of awareness; and that the results of it are that one is calmer and wiser with regard to the mind. Once this detachment or non-involvement is established, then one can work on applying goodwill to moods and thoughts that are affected by ill-will, and renunciation to moods and thoughts that are affected by craving.

## Action

Employ clear awareness (rather than an acquired judgement) to track the feel, the energy and the resultant after-effects of skilful and unskilful impulses in the mind. Can you also pause a little and notice the quality of mind that accompanies small customary reactions — such as making a hot drink, reaching out for a snack, or flipping on a music track? Is it blurred, furtive or clear? If you like to add joking remarks to your speech when you talk to people, is it to make things more palatable and tonally welcoming? Or is it just a nervous reflex? Check out a few of your habits.

Notice the end of an experience — such as a conversation, or a task; or the end of reading a book, or even the moment when having walked, you sat down. Add a five second (or more) pause before you move on to the next thing. In those few moments send the enquiry inwards: ‘What has passed? What was the effect of that? How does that affect what I do now?’

When you read spiritual literature, do so slowly. Be prepared to stop after a paragraph or two and let the effects and meanings of that reading sink in. When is it wise to stop and attend to your own mind?

When talking or listening to others, widen your span of attention to include awareness of your body; notice any effects. Try to periodically be aware of your breathing and use that to calm or ground your emotions. Alternatively, widen your attention to include awareness of background sounds.

## Meditation

Notice your attitude when you begin meditation. Pause for a few minutes and allow the current flow of mind to manifest, putting aside any immediate reactions. Can you get the general drift of all these waves? And if they’re worry currents or frustration

currents or ambition currents, what counteractive attitude should you bear in mind as you meditate? What in fact is a suitable meditation topic? This may shift from day to day, but you might find it helpful to begin your meditation period by reflecting on the following four themes: goodwill; mortality; the good that you have done or that has been done to you; and the example of the Buddha or your immediate spiritual teacher. These will help to bring your mind into a balance of head and heart. As that effect is felt, select a meditation topic that your mind is now willing to be guided by.

Notice the flow of thoughts and mental impressions. Try to note the point at which a thought ends. Notice also when it is at its fullest intensity; then attune to the changing process of your train of thoughts, stepping back from engagement with the topics. Attuning to the changing nature of phenomena is a direct path to release.



## Stewarding Resources:

### *Viriya Pāramī*



Let's consider energy or *virīya*. Energy is fundamental for all of us and to anything we do. When our energy is bright and steady we feel good and act effectively; when it's low or scattered we feel bad and mess up. So energy is relevant both as the resource of vitality and as the way that we apply that resource.

#### Why bother?

We all probably recognize that any development is going to depend on the consistent energy with which we apply ourselves. So applied energy is one of the qualities that the Buddha regularly encouraged when he structured his teachings: it occurs as one of the seven factors of Enlightenment (*bojjhanga*), as one of the five support faculties (*indriya*), as well as one of the four bases of any success (*iddhipāda*). For Awakening or Enlightenment, energy is not just a matter of intense effort, it is the wisely applied resource that resists the push of psychological habits (*sankhāra*). Some of these habits build up into programs — such as perfectionism, dependence on others, obsessive self-criticism and addictions — that cripple our actions and well-being, and use up our resources. In theory, being aware of these should lift us out of their grasp. But in practice, it often doesn't because there is a block that stops awareness penetrating them.

These programs of habit are like the HIV virus: they infiltrate our immune system by posing as real and necessary aspects of our

identity. We even defend them: to the workaholic, their efforts are necessary to keep things going; to the alcoholic, liquor becomes a way of finding a fit in the world. These programs offer the security of an identity through a set of habits that kick in by default. So, when the wave of insecurity or loneliness or passion hits awareness, it doesn't face the risk and the discomfort of challenging the self-view and the world view that these programs present for us. Instead, awareness jumps on board the reflex habit with denial, distraction, blame, etc. Surfing on these seems a better option than standing in the tide ... 'and anyway I'm aware of it.'

The point is that awareness has to widen beyond waves and programs. Its default is to be conditioned by the current span of attention and what appears within that, and by intention, the directive of the heart. When a program wells up, it floods attention, and our intentions tend to follow the push of the flood. So energy is needed to resist that flood and direct awareness to firm ground. Rather than brute force, energy is mostly about sustaining wise endeavour. Its chief function is to keep awareness awake at the places where we drift into automatic. Then its gift — of steady vitality — can replace the 'drive and crash' programs of habit.

However, the topic of energy can bring up an uneasy feeling: when I'm already tired, and stressed, do I have the capacity or the interest to exert myself further? Well, that worry itself is another wave that has to be met and enquired into.

A wise response to that worry would be to say that the priority is to learn how to conserve energy and not dissipate it. Also, energy needs to be regulated: many of our problems are connected with either not having enough energy, so that we feel flat, or having too much of it, so that we're overcharged and bursting at the seams. The irregularities are because the mind's natural inclination is to orbit and check out what's happening in its external and internal domain — so its attention gets caught by

attraction, aversion or confusion. These forces can capture energy and overwhelm the mind. So the degree of exertion should be determined in accordance with what we're meeting. When we're tired out, energy is most usefully applied to kindness, and letting go of the need to sort out business. Then we come out of the grip of confused priorities. And in all cases, mindfulness — acknowledging the present state of the mind — is essential.

This brings us to a second response to the worry about whether we can find the energy for Awakening: one of the best ways to use energy is to apply it to investigating the nature of doubt, and stress in general. What is the best way, the most pressing topic to expend energy on? So we use our energy to enquire into ourselves with investigation and perseverance in order that we can put aside the causes that trigger harmful programs.

In summary, the first response connects to wise restraint and calm; the second to enquiry and insight. That's how energy, applied to calm and insight, can free the mind from stress and suffering.

### Setting Wise Boundaries

Regulating and directing energy has to do with establishing boundaries. We must consider what is unskilful, what leads to harmful results and should be left aside. And we must consider what is skilful, what channels our energy towards that which is supportive and nourishing. The most obvious area that we should consider is our ethical standards — otherwise we're going to have to deal with the psychological and social mess, the furtiveness, and the guilt that comes from not making our ethical boundaries clear. Following on from that we can consider what we will attend to and act upon, what our priorities are, and what our area of concern is in any particular situation. We can bear in mind the reflection: 'Is this for my welfare, the welfare of others, and does it lead out of stress and towards peace?' Instead of setting up a boundary between self and other, this reflection aims for a boundary between intentions and action. Then we can check before we cross that boundary.

Boundaries around actions are necessary, and it's up to you to establish them. You can't just be passive; some things have to be deliberately left outside: 'No, this is doing me no good.' Or, 'That's not my concern right now; I don't need to do that.' There is a definite 'no' to that boundary. Make it firm, give it some energy, and it will look after you. You can't make much of a boundary out of, 'Well I suppose I ought to give that up, one day ...' or, 'Maybe ...' What does the energy of that feel like? On the other hand there also has to be a 'yes.' For example: 'I'm going to be fully with this. I've made a commitment; I'm going to see this through.' Then establish that with care and give it some energy. And even if you fail from time to time, still come back to those boundaries. Look into how they caved in or where they were too tight, and learn a few things.

Learning to establish a 'no' boundary means practising some restraint. It means following up on the understanding that the mind works better if you don't load it with unnecessary things to look at, buy, have or worry about. If we don't establish that boundary, the mind can get swamped by useless input. So the Buddha advised us to work out what causes unskilful mind states to grow and what causes good mind states to grow, and to establish our boundaries accordingly. It can take determination: addictions like cigarettes, alcohol, or even work often take a lot of careful and repeated 'no's,' as well as the back-up of alternative ways to channel energy. The most important of these alternative ways will be actions of generosity, kindness and calming meditation, to bring healing to the heart that's been abused by these pursuits.

We even need to establish a boundary around our intellectual activity, because intellectual activity can become a vast dimension that floods the mind with restless energy. There are all kinds of things that we can think about, from Aztec pottery to the geography of Venus — there's probably a book or an article on each of these somewhere, written with great enthusiasm by its author. And maybe such information is useful to someone, somewhere. But you have to decide whether it's relevant for yourself or just a distraction from more important issues in your

life. The Buddha himself commented that the knowledge he was imparting was like a handful of leaves in comparison to the leaves that were in the forest. But for liberation from suffering that handful was enough. The rest you can use when and as you like — but you can get lost in a forest and buried under a pile of leaves.

The key point is that wherever your attention gets established then that's where your energy goes. And that energy and focus becomes your world. Whether it's meditation, music or computer science, your heart adopts the concerns, values and energy that go along with that. So is it worth giving yourself to? A lot of people are led astray and sucked dry by worldly values, and then spat out, like husks. They may have spent forty years working hard for a company, and then they are given the sack; so they feel lost and depressed, even suicidal, because they didn't put their attention where it would have served them best. This is tragic, because it isn't that people don't do good things, but they don't put their attention on really knowing themselves and finding inner fulfilment. Instead, it's as if they belong to somebody else.

To summarize, energy has a fourfold application: first, to put aside what you feel is unhelpful, and secondly to keep guarding the mind against such unskilful influences; then thirdly to establish what you sense is good, and lastly to support and encourage those skilful influences. And it requires wise discernment, advice from experienced people and trial and error to know what's appropriate in a given situation.

### **Getting to Know Your True Interests**

Wisdom is an asset for healing and applying energy, because it helps you to know for yourself where your mind gets caught or spins out. In this respect, wisdom operates by means of mindfulness, the function that bears in mind a particular topic, impulse, mood or sensation so that it can be given full attention. With mindfulness we can zoom in on what's affecting or driving us. Then we can get a more tuned in understanding of ourselves

than through the opinions of other people, or even through our own fault-finding attitudes.

This is because the aims and programs that you end up adopting aren't necessarily related to your disposition. In society in general, judgement is made based on current ideas of success, rather than on whether you are fully following your aspiration. For instance, maybe at school you didn't get a thrill out of geometry because it wasn't a passionate concern of yours and so you weren't good at it. So you flunked geometry and consequently you felt you were a failure. Something that you weren't interested in and weren't very good at becomes a problem, and that undercuts your confidence. Along with experiencing the feeling of failing in something, you then start to get the sense that perhaps you aren't intelligent or you're lazy. Because of that you feel more doubtful about your ability to do anything. Then you do all kinds of things to compensate for that, often wildly overreaching yourself, so that you get stressed.

Does your energy come from interest and aspiration, from willingness of heart? Or is it caught up with trying to climb the wrong mountain?

To illustrate this, I'll give you the story of a weightlifter I met at a meditation session. He was a chunky fellow who could rip telephone books apart with his hands. I asked him how he had gotten interested in meditation, and it turned out that he'd had a problem that eventually drew him to looking into his mind. The problem was that he'd get frightened when walking down the street if he hadn't done any weightlifting that day. He'd feel he wasn't in top form, and didn't feel strong enough to be out in public. It turns out that the very urge to build up a muscular body, and all the energy he'd committed to that end, had come from a sense of inadequacy and fear. And his bodily development hadn't cured that. In fact, all the muscles in the world would never have cured him, because muscles weren't the problem. Thankfully by the time I met him, he'd started applying mindfulness to the experience of anxiety, witnessing how it affected him and calming the energy in his body.

The issue here is one of intentions and perceptions. A committed intention and sense of purpose is necessary whether you want to be a ballerina or a computer programmer. And you have to be prepared to do some work and go through some discomfort in order to arrive at the good result. Much the same can be said for a meditator. But in terms of prioritizing how we apply effort, it's vital to get clear as to the perceptions (that is impressions) of the result that we're aiming for. These may be shadowy or unquestioned assumptions that predict a future well-being, approval, companionship or security. 'People will be impressed by me. I will be free from blame. My life will be interesting.' The first may be true for a few minutes, the second impossible and as for the third — anything you work at goes through phases of tedium. Check it out.

To do this before we invest a lot of energy in a vision or a project means bringing mindfulness to bear on the idea or impression that arouses our interest, and on the intentions and actions with which we follow up that interest. We can never arrive at the imagined perception, but we always experience the results of our intentions. So the important thing is to examine, clarify and stay in touch with our intentions — not our imagined goals. When I became a monk, it was along with two others: a man who wanted to live a wandering life free from obligation and tedium, and a man who wanted a life where he could live in harmony with others and be shown proper respect. They had their good reasons. For my part, I wasn't that convinced by monastic life, but felt it could offer me the resources to enquire into my mind. I'm still a monk after thirty-five years; the other two disrobed within a year.

### Looking Beneath Thought

In the process of staying in touch with intentions, the thinking mind isn't a great help. In fact it can often get in the way, by adding a running commentary on your moods, along with critiques and ideas of how to fix a problem. However, a lot of the time the thinking mind, with its obsessive energy, isn't the problem. No, what's really driving us is underneath thought, in the domain of

emotional impressions (mental perceptions) and the feelings and self-images they bring up. So you have to pick up the dominant emotional theme of the thoughts — it could be excitement, worry or doubt — and listen to it carefully, attending to what comes up. In this respect mindfulness is backed up by full awareness, which is the sensitivity that assesses the mood or impression, the nature and energy of the response, and the result of the action.

Then stay with the emotional theme, widening and calming your attention so that the energy of application meets the energy of the emotion. Where they meet, where we're not struggling to master our feelings or drifting off to something more interesting, things click. Your awareness comes out of the program by being bigger than it. Probably something very obvious will strike you, something so obvious that you wonder why you missed it. And yet if someone had pointed it out, their advice wouldn't have worked. You needed to look into the disturbance in the heart until what arose was the clear knowing: 'All that disturbance is just thoughts and moods. You're fine. Don't blindly adopt what other people say.'

We tend to judge ourselves based on assumptions or on how others relate to us. Often this is because our boundaries around what we do and don't want to pursue haven't been developed with mindfulness. We've more or less gone along with assumptions rather than checking things out and consciously deciding yes or no. Those assumptions and the consequences of our actions then govern the mind and form who we are. If we don't have clarity over these impressions a lot of our actions end up being like the weightlifter's. So investigate. If it's taking you to suffering and stress, you'd better get to the bottom of it. If it has a true basis, then see what you need to develop or put aside. Otherwise, stop putting the wrong medicine on the wrong spot, and practise saying 'yes' to what is really for you.

Maybe we've lost touch with that. Maybe our boundaries have been broken by sexual, physical or verbal abuse. We tell ourselves we weren't strong enough, and so a sense of personal value has been damaged. The result of this is often that we keep looking to others to tell us that we're OK. And, even when they do, if the

boundary is damaged we still don't know it deeply for ourselves. With that loss of deep knowing, the programs rule. Maybe it's cosmetic surgery or implants; maybe it's athletic performances; maybe it's being number one at business school; maybe it's even getting Enlightened. The thing is that this kind of pursuit will absorb all the energy you can give it and still demand more. It's a hungry ghost. It's a complete phantom, because your sense of your own worth, of who you are, has been established on the basis of an incoherent supposition. The strange thing is that you may even recognize that it's not true. However, self-programs arise at a deeper level than the rational. What's needed is mindfulness-based insight into what makes us tick.

### The 'Yes' Boundary

When you want to determine what to apply energy to, establish the 'yes' boundary around that which you truly want to pursue with aspiration, and maintain it with investigation and recollection. Putting appropriate energy into what you know is worthy will give rise to joy. And the most far-reaching results come when we back up our aspirations and actions with mindful investigation, so that we clean out any pride or egotism in an undertaking. Offering service in a selfless way gives rise to confidence in oneself, because one's intention and energy just come down to the love of the good, not the pursuit of prestige or success. It is related to the intimate aspiration of one's own heart. Once we know this, we don't lose it; we have it as a refuge.

The initial element in this process is faith, *saddhā*. *Saddhā* isn't belief, but the intuitive sense that there is meaning; there are aims and energies that are worth more than just getting by. So where does your sense of value and vitality arise? What comes alive for you when you ask yourself that question? Looking after and doing the best for your children? Serving the community? Investigating and developing Dhamma? It's up to you. This faith is brought forth by willingness (*chanda*). When you give of yourself freely and not because of what somebody else wants, says or does, there is beauty in the mind. Aspiration, the healthy willingness to do, is called

'beautiful in the beginning.' At that moment, you are not thinking, 'What will I get out of it? What do other people think? Will I succeed? Am I capable of it?' If you wait until you think you're ready, the chances are you'll be waiting forever. We have to make a leap of faith based on intentions, rather than perceptions of self and other. Then just do it. Give a 'yes' to the faith and a 'no' to the wavering speculation. The more you doubt, the less steady your focus becomes; the less focused, the more agitated; the more agitated, the more you doubt. You have to break out of the doubt program with an act of faith, a 'yes' to good intentions. Sure you'll make mistakes, but if you stay within the boundaries of ethics and mindfulness, that's how you learn.

With faith, the energy is an opening of the heart, whereas belief closes the mind by locking it onto an idea or theory. Belief employs energy to defend or attack, and not to enquire. Faith, on the other hand, always benefits from enquiry. When you place faith in someone or something, it means that you will give them clear attention and take seriously what they say. But the Buddha emphasizes that such a faith has to be backed by investigating the truth, and working with it in yourself. This is 'beautiful in the middle.' Then it matures into 'beautiful in the end': confidence and realization.

If we want to cultivate our potential to its fullest, it needs to be in a process that covers both how we feel and aspire, as well as how we aim and act. Then we can check out where the wrong assumptions or careless impulses lie. We are able to guard ourselves against ignorance and suffering and not increase them. And we can gradually wipe them out. We are able to dismantle the foundations of blame, mistrust, regret, anxiety and aversion, until these programs break down into smaller instances or locations, such as disappointment or boredom, or into deep-seated habits that we have to work through by insightful investigation.

Therefore, there is a path to be cultivated. The more you can value and live the path of clear thought, speech and action, the more you escape from worldly value judgements. You get to know how to investigate your thinking, not in terms of how smart you are,

but in terms of whether your thinking recognizes and shuns cruelty, and whether it recognizes compassion and kindness. You can give some time to such recollection at the end of the day. Perfections don't head the list in terms of worldly values; they won't necessarily get you a promotion, but they will give you inner peace of mind. And the more you value and energize those qualities, the more peace the *pāramī* will bring. Their energy comes from aspiration, and application to what brings the best results. Our concern is: do we act, speak and think in ways that we can look back on with confidence and clear conscience? Do we act with generosity or not? Do we care for other people? We can energize these qualities by putting attention into them, bringing them to mind in recollection and dwelling on them. Again: what we attend to, we energize; what is energized, governs our world.

### Directing Energy to the Knowing

Aspiration is a good energy with which to begin meditation. One of the traditional ways of getting in touch with this is called *pūja*, the act of honouring. It's generally associated with offering tokens such as lights, incense and flowers to a sacred image, something that evokes the sense of the good, the true and the beautiful. You establish a shrine, image or devotional object, make such offerings to it, and chant or otherwise bring forth your heart in faith. Such devotional practices can be a source of fulfilling energy. Looking from the outside, people may think, 'What on earth is going on here? Do you really think that is going to do something for you?' This is because people don't recognize that the image is there to represent something deep in your aspirations. You're not worshipping a statue or a god. The image is not for belief or ornamental purposes but to catalyse a sense of offering, faith, trust, confidence and giving of yourself.

An image can't perform any good or bad actions. But you aren't asking it to be an actor; you're only using it as a prop for bringing forth your own energy. So *pūjā* is done with the most genuine sense of trust, love and appreciation for what the image represents — for example the pure, the compassionate, the joyful, the wise. You can also develop the spirit of honouring towards people whom

you respect. The Buddha himself commented that to honour that which is worthy of honour is a great blessing, because of the focus and energy that it evokes. It brings your mind into bright openness and gratitude: the perfect setup for meditation. When you honour the honourable, you take on its aims, values and energy.

The energy of doing things — the energy of arousing and gladdening oneself on the one hand, and disciplining, restraining and investigating on the other — is also aimed towards an end result. Effort is a very useful function of energy; however, effort can never be a goal. The goal is not to keep making more and more effort; the goal is to arrive at emotional stability and fullness of heart. And with that comes a plenitude that doesn't change because it's not supported by actions or mind states. The Buddha called it 'Nibbāna,' 'Unconditioned' or 'Deathless.'

To get to the end of the energy of doing, you can apply mindfulness to the process of how you are aware. What is the basis of knowing anything? And how much of knowing is additional interpretations and assumptions? Can there be a release from those?

For example, I recently had a cold. The symptoms were a feeling that my head was under pressure, with strong sensations around the brain and the eyes. The throat felt rough. The instinctive leaning of the mind is towards getting over this, and curing it: 'How can I fix it? When is it going to go away? How can I get somewhere where the pain isn't happening? Why does it have to be here?' Then one time this thought came into my mind: 'Why do you bring the pain here? Why not leave it there? Why not say that there's the pain, and it's there?' Then the knowing of the discomfort and of the mental responses is right here, and the object of the knowing, the unpleasant sensation, is over there.

With mindfulness, by being fully present with and aware of unpleasantness, we can start to get a sense of it being over there and leaving it there. Then we have an area within which to abide

peacefully, neither blocking nor making a big thing of a feeling. Whereas if we always attach to feeling as here, as mine and what I am, then there comes the emotional battle, the fluster, the attempts to block it, the indignation and so forth. Then, one's energy is all used up in an activity that is pointless. But if the attachment is dropped, one's energy stays in a sense of calm and knowing; and one can enhance that and give it energy by focusing on it.

Physical things are a lot easier to work with than mental things, so one learns to practise with the physical discomforts first. Afterwards, it is easier to distinguish and not get caught in the mind stuff, like feeling one isn't doing very well or can't do this meditation. It becomes easier to step back from the thoughts, and find balance by being aware of them. And over time, with faith, mindfulness and energy, you can do the same with your mental programs. Even if you're following a meditation technique in a workaholic, dutiful way, give attention to how you know this as stressful. That awareness is the key. As you touch into and say 'yes' to that awareness, it will bring you into balance with no further effort. The more you attend to this knowing, the more energy goes towards it; the energy goes away from the mental pattern, physical sensation, mental feeling or emotion, and into a steady awareness of them. This awareness, by standing clear in the presence of pain or doubt or self-image, releases the emotional intensity and proliferation they carry. The struggle and the agitation ceases and the process of being sucked dry by phantoms reverses. You start to fill up with peace.

Sometimes practice is about just holding a place, a point in your body — or a point in your mind — with no aim to fix it, but just to hold it carefully with dispassion. You simply let attention and energy come into that place, so the body is held in awareness-energy, and the mind settles into it. This can flush out the afflictions, the numbness and the hurt places. There is a healing faculty to energy that occurs when you stop 'doing it' and instead allow the energy to accumulate and enrich you.

This is the province of *samādhī* — concentration, or unification — which is a state of stable energy, wherein the body, heart and intellectual energies merge and are at rest. It has the energy of an enjoyment that isn't based on the senses or the intellect, and it allows a resting in awareness.

### Energy as a Factor of Awakening

None of us has too much or too little energy; all that we suffer from is imbalance and ignorance about it. So if you are physically not very strong, you make your boundary fit that condition. Staying within that limitation, saying 'yes' to fewer physical activities and 'no' to many more, you will find that your energy will accumulate within the boundary. Similarly, if you are not feeling emotionally robust, form a boundary for your aspirations that enables you to stay focused and mindful with ample energy. Find a way of establishing your boundaries, and then have confidence within them.

However we train in Dhamma, it's destructive to think, 'I'm not as good as' or 'I'm better than,' because if you do that, your mind doesn't stay on its own ground but starts to pick and compare, to fault-find and to slight yourself or others. Instead, realize the potential to end suffering! If your lifestyle can fit a set of aspirations, then say 'yes' to them and the boundary they represent, and give them all your energy! You can change those aspirations if that seems appropriate. But the most important thing is to understand that a boundary is there to assist your Awakening, rather than to give you status or to make you feel inadequate. So if you say, 'I'm only this' or 'I'm one of these,' then you are misusing the boundary, and energy is lost.

In conclusion, we can see there is an energy associated with establishing, with doing and with being. This energy leads towards attachment to a self-image and the burden that image represents. However, we can arouse and nurture a different energy — one that is associated with being beyond any image. If we open up into the silence of the mind, where we are not monks or nuns, men or

women, then there is a beautiful stable energy that supports letting go of burdens. This is why energy is one of the primary factors of Awakening.

## Quotes and Suggestions on Energy

*What is most supportive for the final realization of truth is making effort.*

*Without making an effort, one doesn't realize a final truth ...*

*— But what quality best supports making effort?*

*Introspective enquiry is most supportive for making effort ...*

*— But what quality best supports introspective enquiry?*

*Determined application is most supportive for introspective enquiry. If one doesn't apply one's mind with determination, one doesn't enquire introspectively ... (M. 95.22-24)*



*What's the energy that's too slack? Energy accompanied by laziness ...*

*What's the energy that's too tense? Energy accompanied by restlessness ...*

*... Constricted internally? Energy accompanied by sloth and torpor ...*

*Distracted externally? Energy repeatedly distracted by the five strands of sensual pleasure. (S. 51.20)*



The cultivation of energy is about on the one hand protecting and gathering resources and on the other applying and sustaining that energy on worthwhile pursuits. The assessment of what is worthwhile and the fine-tuning of how to gather and sustain energy are the way that wisdom contributes to energy. As for the development of empathy — one of the key motivations for applying energy is that it is for the welfare of others as well as oneself. Aspiration, the motivation to bring forth one's energy for the good, is a primary means of gladdening the heart. Combined with the previous perfections, energy establishes the basis for mindfulness, the act of sustaining wise attention on one theme. This shifts the process of wise reflection into that of sustained meditation.

## Reflection

Consider that energy is the fuel for any kind of effort; even thinking uses up energy. It is also a resource that progressively dwindles with age. Consider frequently then: is this action, or speech or way of thinking worth contributing my energy towards? The last thing at night, consider that one's time of dying approaches and can occur at any time; in the light of this, review what one's energy is committed to. Does that aim gladden and calm the heart? If so, dwell in that reflection for a while. If not — note that and look again tomorrow at where and how you are going through life.

Give yourself a few minutes of checking in on aspirations. Aspirations are not plans or schemes, they are value statements and resonances of what one would wish to bring about. Such as: 'May there be peace in my community'; 'may my relatives or friends find their way through difficulties'; 'may all beings be free from oppression and poverty.' Their immediate effect is to draw one's focus of concern from the details of one's local daily life to more visionary perspectives. This gladdens the heart and is a source of firming up one's energy.

Consider also what you'd like to have finished with, and how to take a rest, using renunciation and restraint, in order to recoup.

## Action

Take on something worthwhile that asks for your energy, something that makes you stretch and perhaps put aside other activities. Making personal sacrifices is something that refines and strengthens the mind.

Use energy in terms of backing up other *pāramī* — such as kindness or generosity. Instead of adding more things to do or get done, deepen the quality of what you put into your actions. In this way, energy used skilfully resources and regenerates the heart.

## Meditation

Practise sustaining an upright posture in meditation. (You can benefit from physical exercise to strengthen the lower back, stretch the hamstrings and tissues around the hips).

On each out-breath gather and commit your attention to following that breath until it has completed. In the pause and the in-breath relax and let yourself be filled with breath-energy. Then on the next out-breath, direct and hold the mind on the sensations of the breath anywhere you can feel them in your body.

If you feel drowsy, keep your eyes open and keep your focus on maintaining an upright posture. Also, and in the case of getting bored, brighten energy through enquiring into either the specific nature of the sensations in the body that accompany low energy, or into the mind-state. Whose is that?

If your energy seems too strong to be comfortably contained in stillness, try widening your focus and sweeping attention down your body and out through the soles of your feet (standing may be a more helpful form for this). As an alternative, meditate on the movements of the body as you walk to and fro along a chosen path.

If your energy feels steady, spread it through the entire body. When this is accompanied by kindness, the result is very refreshing.





## Bearing with Life:

### *Khanti Pāramī*



Earlier I mentioned the three stages of developing *pāramī*: the initiating stage, when you build your boat of right intention; the gathering stage of meeting the flood, when you hit the white water of negativity, seductive reasoning, wild impulses and doubt; and then the completion stage in which your boat comes through, bigger, deeper and having jettisoned some unnecessary cargo. This process is very clear with the next perfection, that of *khanti* — patience, forbearance or acceptance. This one really moves through the white water. The Buddha famously declared *khanti* to be the supreme purification practice. He was playing on the Vedic term *tapas*, which signifies the taking on of an austere or ascetic practice such as fasting or mortifying the body in order to cleanse the mind of passions and attachments. But the Buddha pointed not to physical asceticism — which he frequently spoke against — but of the restraint of holding the heart still in the presence of its suffering until it lets go of the ways in which it creates that suffering. That is, the mind/heart (*citta*) habitually creates suffering and stress through reacting to, holding onto or getting caught up with what life throws at us. All the perfections contribute to the lessening or dismantling of that *dukkha*, but the specific quality of patience is to carry the heart through the turbulence of existence so that it no longer shakes, sinks or lashes out.

One of the traditional chanted recitations in Buddhism refers to the Buddha's own confrontation with the demon host of Mara:

‘The Buddha overcame Mara through practising *khanti*.’ He overcame the forces of delusion, anger, fear, aversion and greed through practising patience, not through blaming anyone, ignoring those forces or running away from them. So when you’re stuck in a traffic jam, anxious for resolution to a crisis or beset with a migraine, it’s good to remember that the Buddha was here too and found a way through. In an age where one is encouraged not to wait but to go faster, not to accept but to be more demanding, this *pāramī* may be the one you use most frequently to cross the floods.

### Acceptance Without Expectation

Patience deals with checking emotional reactions, but it’s not a denial of emotional intelligence. Patience has the gut-knowledge that recognizes that a problem or a pain is not something to run away from, get flustered by or be self-pitying about. It has the wisdom to know that we have to prioritize the steps through which we can resolve suffering. It’s true that it may be possible to find an alternative route to the destination; it may well be that more negotiations are needed to resolve the problem; it may be that there’s a medicine that will ease the pain. But the first thing to do is to not react – to not rage, despair or mentally proliferate. Our first effort is to draw a line around the suffering, take a step back and know ‘that’s that.’ Then there’s the effort to recollect that we can be free of the suffering; that we can let go; we don’t have to take suffering in and adopt it as final, real and solid. After that initial recollection we have the encouragement to investigate, and then to draw out the hook that snags our hearts on the rough stuff of life.

All this takes patience. Patience holds us present with the suffering in a spacious way, encouraging the mind to open. And an open mind both feels more peaceful in itself, and more readily sees into the cause of its suffering.

Patience is not a numbing resignation to the difficulties of life; it doesn’t mean that suffering is all right. It doesn’t mean shrugging

things off and not looking to improve our behaviour. Nor does it mean putting up with something until it goes away. The practice of patience means bearing with *dukkha* without the expectation that it will go away. In its perfection, patience means giving up any kind of deadline, so the mind is serene and equanimous. But if the patience isn't pure yet (and it takes time to develop patience!), the mind still feels pushy or defensive. Impure patience is the attitude: 'Just hold on and eventually things will get better; I'll get my own way in the end if I'm patient enough.' This approach can temporarily block or blunt the edge of suffering, but it doesn't deal with the resistance or the desire that is suffering's root.

Pure patience is the kind of acceptance that acknowledges the presence of something without adding anything to it or covering it up. It is supported by the insight that when one's mind stops fidgeting, whining and blaming, then suffering can be understood. It is this suffering that stirs up hatred and greed and despair, and it is through practising the Dhamma, or Way, of liberation that its energy and emotional current can be stopped. Reactivity isn't the truth of the mind; it's a conditioned reflex, and it's not self. Because of that, suffering can be undone, and when it is, the mind is free.

Therefore, all conditioned reflexes have to be understood as unreliable and dependent on causes and conditions. They're not to be adopted as real and solid. Yet they do happen! Although we can intellectually understand that holding on, expecting things to be satisfying or feeling cheated are immature responses, in order to undo these attitudes we must first be patient with them. Rather than adopt more miserable reactions — 'Why isn't it working? Why did you let me down? I shouldn't complain. Why is it like this?' — the practice is to bear with the waves of turbulence. The world, including our own bodies and emotions, is unsatisfying and a bit of a mess. But the practice does urge us to cross over it all. And this requires us to grow stronger and broader rather than hide or run away. Then the process of bearing with the suffering is not a punishment but a voyage of growth.

I remember my mother telling me of a woman she used to visit. This woman was over ninety years old, had been very poor when she was young and lived in an agricultural district in Cambridgeshire. There are many stories of agricultural workers going out into the cold Cambridgeshire fields, picking vegetables in November, in the cold mud. This kind of work ruined her feet and she developed terrible rheumatism. Even as a young person she was quite hampered by it because she didn't have enough money to buy shoes. This must have been around 1910 or perhaps even earlier. My mother didn't meet this old lady until she was already ninety, when she was crippled and had intense pain. All the bones of her body were painful and her feet were ruined. And yet this woman was a tremendously and totally sweet, loving light. This was a great inspiration to my mother because the old woman had eventually learnt to be patient with this pain. And as the patience purified her of the mental suffering, she also became radiant.

### The World and Its Winds

We all have to be with some kind of physical burden, or limitation, although for most of us it is not that bad. We may just need to wriggle, scratch, switch on some gadget or take a few pills. But the suffering that can be relinquished arises dependent on causes and conditions: on attitudes and assumptions that things should go our way, that life should be comfortable, that bodies shouldn't experience pain and that society should be fair and peaceful. We look for conditioned phenomena to be satisfying, conclusive, reasonable, productive and so on. But taken as a whole over a period of time, they aren't. So we cause ourselves and others suffering when we expect them to be so.

Now of course, we can organize and create supportive conditions such as health and education and laws, but those conditions have to be constructed and maintained; they're not a given norm. It's also noticeable that even as human beings improve the conditions and circumstances of their environment, suffering doesn't abate: anxiety and depression are now the number one disease of the developed world. Here we find the widespread pain of being driven

to attain material goals that are never fulfilled or fulfilling, and the anxiety of competitive pressure and loneliness. Some of the chief sources of this emotional pain are called the ‘worldly winds’: the gusts of praise and blame, gain and loss, fame and ignominy, happiness and unhappiness. These impressions trigger demand, anxiety and despond wherein we never feel good enough where and how we are. And like winds, they can blow through the heart at gale force and throw us completely off balance.

Take for example enjoying fame versus being ignored. When you are famous and the centre of attention, you feel magically empowered: ‘Here I am. It’s wonderful. Everybody has been waiting for me.’ Then there’s the opposite, being ignored: ‘Who? Do you want something?’ You are just a number in the crowd, and you think, ‘Nobody cares; I don’t count.’ People will struggle and strive to be famous — to eat the most beans in a contest, to dive over Niagara Falls in a barrel, and other such life-threatening feats — the *Guinness Book of Records* is full of them. And at the other extreme, we can get lonely and depressed if we don’t get positive attention; when we’re ignored, our lives become miserable — most of the blues is about that. But if you clamour after fame or get stuck in an impression of having been overlooked, you go nuts.

Take another pair: how powerful the experience of praise and blame can be! We can hunger for compliments or a little crumb of approval now and then, ‘Well, you’re not so bad.’ Then you can feel jealous if somebody else is getting huge amounts of it, and you are standing by the door, hardly noticed.

As for blame, how we wriggle and contort to try to avoid it! We aspire to being liked, and we work at it, but still somebody doesn’t like us. Or maybe we blame ourselves. So we try to do what’s right and fair, yet somebody misunderstands or is offended, and we get blamed. We are careful to be polite: ‘I must remember she’s a little sensitive about that. I mustn’t forget this, in case I get blamed. I want to make sure that I understand everyone’s perspectives and that everyone agrees on this point.’ Doing this can make you so nervous that you slip up ... then the blame hits you, ‘You’re an

insensitive, callous pig. How could you say that?' Then you're writhing on the point of the arrow of suffering.

The Buddha made a very helpful summary of blame: *'They blame one who remains silent, they blame one who speaks much, they blame one who speaks in moderation. There is no one in this world who is not blamed'* (Dhp. 227). That applied to him, too, for the Buddha was blamed many times. So when we know it's inevitable we can just focus on doing our best, all the time keeping our wisdom-ear cocked for the mind's yearning for approval and its dread of disapproval. Once the mind starts to even anticipate being blamed, a flurry enters into it. And when the blaming begins ... our mind may try to come up with a rational explanation for whatever it was we're being blamed for. Or maybe we try apologising. Or we retort, 'You're just as bad.' We flounder in these ways, rather than simply feeling where the blame is digging in and then drawing a line around it: 'This is painful mental feeling.' It's a trigger, so we need to be extremely patient with that feeling. Patience can't just be idealised; it has to be learned by feeling a painful feeling and no longer reacting. It's a humbling lesson: to feel the pain, be patient with it and learn something about letting it pass through.

With fame and praise, the sting is manipulativeness, intoxication and self-inflation. People do deals or compromise their integrity in order to be winners: athletes cheat at games, or people try to fix their bodies with obsessive dieting or cosmetic surgery. All this suffering and loss of dignity for the glow of attention! And how long is a fame or praise addict satisfied before wanting another hit? If you crave that rush of positive attention, get it, feed and rely on it — you inflate and crash. On the other hand if you hang on to blame, become a victim and make a self out of it — you bury your heart in despair. And if you try to avoid these, you'll be running forever.

So can you focus simply on the impression in the heart and not shrug it off, not fight back, not go under? An impression is an impression. Don't rely on it, don't adopt it, don't try to avoid it. Instead, understand it for what it is. Then you can see the truth

about someone blaming you. Have you made a mistake? Is there something you can learn from this? And you can see the truth about someone praising you. How much good will fame do for you? Doesn't it deprive you of privacy? And that surge that you feel from gain ... doesn't it make you vulnerable to loss? These winds are there to teach you patience. Even your neediness and despair aren't reliable, so be patient; focus on how patience feels and value it. Then you can acknowledge specific mistakes you've made without taking on the sense of being a failure. And you can experience others' gratitude or praise with a sense of gladness that they have received something of benefit. You don't have to own it.

### Learning the True Response

For an achievement that will provide long-lasting nourishment, we have to develop a response to unsatisfactoriness, *dukkha*. The Buddha's encouragement was that *dukkha* must be understood. The unsatisfactory, inconclusive, never-quite-fitting, things-going-wrong, unstable quality has to be understood in order to realize the place where it ceases. And in order to understand, we have to 'stand under' that unsatisfactoriness. We don't pole-vault over it to the nice bit on the other shore. Instead, we stand under it as it cascades over us. When there is a complete standing-under, we feel the quality of that flood. You look to where things touch you, where things are felt. You look at physical pain and what that does to you. You see how first of all you wriggle a bit to find a way to soften it; then you begin to get a little annoyed by it; then you get very annoyed by it. Or you remember some harsh words that have been placed at your door. You think, 'It's not fair this is happening to me; not fair that it's going on for so long.' Then you think, 'Oh, give up.' But still it hasn't gone. It didn't go because you haven't really given up; you were waiting for it to end, so you've only given up ninety percent. Eventually, it pushes you into a corner, and the only thing you can do is accept its presence and work on your reactions.

I learnt this pretty early on in my monastic life. I was living in a monastery that had a section in it for intensive meditation

practice, while the rest of the community was involved with the sort of things that a lot of Asian monasteries take on: servicing the lay community, performing ceremonies, offering classes to children, maintaining the property. The meditation area was kept apart; but of course from time to time when there was a big occasion, the sound of the public address system could be heard clearly. This was all reasonable enough, but the mind isn't always about being reasonable. So I'd get irritated by these disturbances. My concentration was so fragile that I couldn't maintain my meditation topic in the presence of noise. Even the croaking of the local frogs would bother me.

Well it so happened that at one time, the monastery had a very big celebration: an ordination hall was being opened, and for this occasion, ninety-nine men were undertaking temporary ordination over a period of eleven days. As the rule is that three is the maximum number that can be ordained together at any one time, this meant thirty-three ordination ceremonies, all of which required the presence of the entire resident male community. Actually, because of some judicial procedure, each of us only had to go to half that number. Nevertheless, while allowing for meal breaks and so on, this meant that for several days there were ceremonies round the clock, day and night. I'd be in my hut until there was a knock on the door, then off to an ordination, get back for an hour or two, then off again.

The environment was steeped in sound: the sound of the loudspeaker celebrating donations by naming each individual donor and how much they'd given; the sound of chanting; Dhamma talks; announcements; and the sound from any of the four film shows that were playing in the monastery grounds. There was no way that I could block it out. But wonderfully enough the sound was more continual and implacable than the complaining and the resistance of my mind. Eventually after a few days of turmoil, the mind gave up and just bathed in the sound; and with that, the sound stopped stirring my heart. It was amazing to feel a sense of silence and space in the midst of so much noise. And I think my mind learned something important, because sound

has never been a problem since. I now know that the wise response to disturbance is to make it the object of meditation.

In that full allowing of conditions to be what they are, we stabilize our hearts and find peace. It's like putting a boat into water. We make an ark of truth: 'Conditions are like this,' and in that truth, we don't adopt the conditions as our own. This is important: you can't drain the sea, but you don't have to drown.

Why we feel overwhelmed, as if we're drowning, is because the heart is 'leaky.' When it isn't secure, perceptions and feelings flood in and cause it to sink. But even then it's just mind-stuff — no sights, sounds, physical pains or harsh words, just the impressions of those. It is these impressions that mount up to a sense of overwhelm and alienation. And the heart can recycle them for years, even when their apparent external source has long disappeared.

These perceptions, moods and reactions arise dependent on the mind's expectations, fragility or aims. We have to learn deeply that the approval of others, the success in our career, and the presence of what we love are not to be taken as given, not to be adopted as mine. This adopting of conditions is what knocks holes in our boat. But when these conditions can be held in the truth of their nature, the mind lets go and senses a freedom that doesn't depend on supports. Gain, loss, praise, blame — you don't have to go under. You can wear out the reflex of hanging on to the world. But for this you have to be very patient.

### **Building Patience Around One Point**

At the core of our suffering is the crucial point where we don't want emotional pain. Our resistance can throw us into a fit of doubt, lack of confidence and the feeling that we are useless. In that loss of balance, the mind thrashes around and creates either a self who is the victim or a self who is to blame. But when we get right to the point, we can see that what's actually there is the wriggling in order to deflect the pain in our hearts. We blame

others, we blame ourselves, the world, fate, or past *kamma* or some such concept — we search for scapegoats to carry the pain. All this is the mind resisting or wriggling away from painful feeling. And in this process, the mind loses the strength and clarity that would enable it to bear with and even let go of the feeling.

On the other hand, if we draw attention gently but steadily back to the source of our suffering, we find a place where we can work and assemble our skills around this pain, rather than trying to find a way round it. If we go directly to the feeling itself, we can sense that the feeling has no intention; it has no aim to hurt us, it's just doing what feeling does. Feeling feels. It's not self; it has no aim, no agent, and belongs to no one. Why not let it go its own way, and keep the heart free from tangling with it? If we do that, even if the physical feeling remains, the mind can be serene. It doesn't mean that we don't act for our own or other people's welfare, but we do so from a cool and wise place. In this way, we use that which is painful, embarrassing or tedious as a tool to purify and strengthen the mind.

The ten *pāramī* fit together and support each other at this point. For example, to be patient one has to apply energy — it's not a passive response. The mind has to be clear and awake; patience requires a courageous and full-hearted willingness to experience one's mind and its reflexes. At the same time, if you're patient, you conserve and consolidate energy by not squandering it on useless reactions and turmoil.

Resolve (*adhithāna*) is another vital perfection that connects to patience; it strengthens the support structure. We need to be held by making commitments, in terms of our activities or in terms of responsibilities to the people we live with. But as you may have noticed, when you commit yourself to anything, sooner or later, the wish will arise to change direction and get out of that commitment. Things start out being attractive, interesting or inspiring, but then, eventually, the feeling will move the other way. But if you really commit, you bear through the tides of feeling to

get to a deeper source of wisdom. With that you begin to cross over your world.

When we cultivate patience within the floods, it encourages us to see that the unskilful or grasping energies, the desires that the mind adopts, can be borne with and released. And because we can let go of those pushes, we know that they aren't the mind in and of itself; we know that there is an awareness that can come through the heat and pressure. But this realization depends on the patient fortitude to keep holding the mind steady time and time again so that it doesn't waver or adopt craving or aversion, fear or despair as a true thing. Which, even after a degree of realization, it will do. Even then, when you think you're clear, your mind gets caught in some petty jealousy or hankering that you should have outgrown years ago. More patience! The reality of Dhamma practice is that, as much as we would like to be pure and free, we have to learn to develop patience with our attachments and passions, and our views and opinions about them. Then out of the crucible of these *pāramī*, deep compassion flows, and the mind broadens and opens so that its wisdom can penetrate.

### Recognizing Patience Teachers

Living with other people, in families, relationships and communities, can be an occasion for developing patience. This is certainly the case in monastic communities: you've left your own space; sometimes you're in a foreign country, with a language that you're not familiar with; you might be living with people whose personalities aren't necessarily those that you would have chosen to live with; and you're following a discipline and a routine that operates independent of and sometimes in contradiction to your wishes and moods. There are routines to follow which require patience: the meal time is generally an hour or so, of which forty minutes are spent waiting for people to arrive, for the meal to be formally offered, for blessings to be chanted, and so on. All this is great for letting go, but for quite a while it is radically destabilizing, and moods based on frustration come up. Then

when the pressure's on and other people aren't the way you want them to be, the mind gets irritable. 'What on earth do I live in a community for? Surely it would be better to be in the forest, where it's peaceful. Then I could experience rapture and joy, all the lovely things they talk about in the scriptures.'

Instead, in community life, you get into a wrangle with a monk over the way the chanting should be done or the way the work should be organized. Or it's some opinion about the teachings, or the teacher. Or you start thinking, 'Why does he have to talk so loud? Why does he have to crack silly jokes? Why do these lay people want their babies blessed? Why don't people live harmoniously? Why are people always finding fault with this, that and the other? Why are people always getting psyched up about work projects? Why does everyone have to bother me? This has got to stop. It's getting in the way of my seclusion and bliss.'

If you are a senior monk or nun, then maybe you have people who are new to the training, and you have to go through the same things repeatedly: make sure you clean your cup after tea; don't talk too loudly when the person in the next room is meditating; please don't run up the telephone bills ... and so on. Next year, it's the same thing, because it's another lot of new people. You say the same things over and over again, until you start feeling like some sort of robot or automaton. The same stuff: people are always doing the same stuff, and all the same stuff keeps happening. Then you come up with different ways of saying things just to put another angle on it. 'Isn't it fun not to run up phone bills?' Or, 'There's a lot of joy in cleaning your cup after you've finished your tea.' After a while you run out of juice and get snappy: 'Oh, for God's sake, behave!' Then people come back with, 'Why are you so mean and irritable? You're supposed to be compassionate and happy.'

During the yearly summer retreat period in the monastery, which we call the Rains Retreat, it's customary for the samanans (monastics) to take on resolutions. These might be something like refraining from taking sugar, or giving up reading books; or it

might be taking on something like a particular course of study or longer periods of private meditation. What you choose depends on what you think you need, or where you feel short in terms of *pāramī*. One year, I decided to not allow my mind to complain about anyone or anything. I was at Amaravati then, which was busy and there was a large community of people of many nationalities, with different languages and from different cultures. So in the general confusion and dysfunction of it all, my longing for simplicity and stability was sorely challenged, and I could get quite irritable. I kept most of it to myself, but still my mind was discontented. Hence the resolution.

So with this resolution, I had to develop patience: patience with having to explain things repeatedly; patience with what my mind could do noticing my porridge go cold as Ajahn Sumedho gave daily instructions at breakfast time; patience with these inner struggles. ‘You can’t complain!’ said the voice of resolution in my mind. So instead I had to watch the irritation. Just putting up with it didn’t really take me across. I could put up with things and become a patronizing old grump who puts up with things. But instead, as the practice of patience deepened, it took me to that point in the mind where I could feel the chafing, the tension, the disappointment — and the wanting to get away from it. At that point, where there was no excuse and no alternative, there was also no condemnation. After all, no one likes suffering. And we’re all in this together — wanting peace and harmony, but disappointing and irritating each other nonetheless. ‘It shouldn’t be this way, there shouldn’t be any suffering.’ But then isn’t understanding and letting go of suffering what it’s all about. What else are we here for?

And from there, my mind began to open into love and compassion for all of us. It shouldn’t be like this, but it is — and we have to support each other. I could realize, ‘There’s nothing wrong with them. They’re my patience teachers; they’re helping me to cross over the flood by getting me to jettison my demands, impatience and narrow-mindedness.’

## Releasing the Mind with Patience

All the perfections merge in the highest wisdom, the steady insight into suffering. But it is patience, if cultivated thoroughly and insightfully, that penetrates our will to do, or intention (*cetana*). Intention is the mental activation that seeks, wavers and tightens. It is also the source of *kamma*, because *kamma* is based on the intention behind the mind's thinking, responses, habitual strategies and general jumping around. Intention directs one's attention and interest in a particular way, so corresponding concerns and aims come to mind, and sometimes speech or bodily action follows. And this is what our 'world' is made of. Say you are very involved with your business, or a relationship. Then your concerns might become, 'Well, it looks like things are going wrong.' Or, 'Things are going right. We had a good year — what next?' The sphere of one's concern is one's world, within which there is gaining and losing. And all of that depends on the activity of mind.

A mind whose intentions are affected by the floods gets turbulent. And it creates a self who is stuck in them. I am measured in accordance with the world that my mind has constructed. Whether it is the refined world of meditation or the world of business, the floods flow and the worldly winds blow.

However, there is a place where the floods stop and the wind doesn't blow. It is in the ending of intention. The world stops, or rather doesn't get created, when that process of seeking, wavering and tightening stops. Transcendence, or crossing over, finally means that the movement of mind, which tries to circumvent, forget, defeat, stop, divert, allay or placate — stops. In that stopping, the very conditions that appear to confront us evaporate. And through knowing that, one is unafraid of conditions; one does not hanker after them and one is not intimidated by them.

Patience is a big part of that. With patience, instead of trying to wriggle out of suffering, one learns to be still and to release the mind from its wilfulness and possessiveness. Then, when the perfections have done their work and the flood of one's world has receded, intention — even the good intention of *pāramī* — can relax. There is true peace of mind.

And you can even feel respect for the ungrateful and the exasperating. They help you to wear out your addiction to self-view, to having your own way. And they help you to lose your fascination or irritation with the personalities of other people, and all that which is just *kamma* and no real self at all. Then you say 'Thank you' to pointless situations and people who irritate you. This is the perfection of patience: it can make one's life a vehicle for blessing.

## Quotes and Suggestions on Patience

*What outflows are to be abandoned by enduring? For instance, a bhikkhu, wisely reflecting, bears up. He bears cold, heat, hunger and thirst; he bears the touch of flies, mosquitoes, wind, sun, and creeping things; he bears being spoken to in unpleasant, unwelcome ways and he bears bodily feelings that are unpleasant ... and life-threatening. Whereas outflows, aggravation and fever might arise if he didn't endure. These are called the outflows that should be abandoned by enduring. (M. 2.18)*



*... there are these five aspects of speech by which others may address you: timely or untimely, true or false, affectionate or harsh, beneficial or unbeneficial, with a mind of goodwill or with malice. Others may address you in a timely way or an untimely way. They may address you with what is true or what is false. They may address you in an affectionate way or a harsh way. They may address you in a beneficial way or an unbeneficial way. They may address you with a mind of goodwill or with malice. In any event, you should train yourselves: 'Our minds will be unaffected and we will say no evil words. We will remain sympathetic to that person's welfare, with a mind of goodwill, and without malice. We will keep pervading him with an awareness imbued with goodwill and, beginning with him, we will keep pervading the all-encompassing world with an awareness imbued with goodwill that's like a catskin bag — abundant, expansive, immeasurable, free from hostility, free from ill-will.' That's how you should train yourselves. (M. 21.19)*



Patience may at first strike you as a teeth-gritting 'hang on until it's over' quality. But this would not be perfect patience, because in such a case, the mind is still longing for the end of the experience — aversion hasn't been relinquished. Perfect patience has the soft and heartfelt strength of having 'all the time in the world' to rest in an experience. It relaxes the edge of time. The transformative power of patience is such that, as the mind relaxes its defensiveness and bristling, the annoying delay becomes an

occasion for spaciousness, and the other person's irritating behaviour is something you can meet, with empathy, as *their* unfortunate problem. Naturally it also includes the wisdom to know what one just has to bear with, and when there is the occasion to act in a clear and responsible way. Patience is not meant to transform you into a doormat, but to act as a firebreak on immediate impulses that will not bring around your welfare. And as our conditioning is often one of getting things done as quickly as possible, it's skilful to check that attitude with wisdom.

### Reflection

When you feel that you have to wait, or that time is passing slowly, feel what's happening in your body. Do the same when you're in a hurry and have not a moment to lose. Watch five seconds pass on a clock, noticing the different states of nervous energy and how the time 'feels.' The feeling of time is a measure of what's happening in the nervous system — which is why when one's system is speeding, there is never enough time, and a list of more things to do easily comes to mind. Reflect: 'The work can never be finished.' What would it take to just be poised and attentive to the present for ten or twenty seconds?

### Action

Whatever you're doing, do that with complete care and attention. With whatever you're feeling, make yourself its generous host. Come into your body, extending your awareness down your legs to the soles of your feet. To support this embodiment try keeping your hands engaged — say lightly holding the steering wheel of the car, or gently folded together. Direct your awareness to the tactile impression of light, sensitive touch. As an extra, you might find it useful to hold and gently squeeze a ball or stone in your pocket.

### Meditation

Patience is essential for meditation, both as a quality that moderates one's eagerness to get results, and as a specific remedy

to imbalance of energy. Regarding the first problem: the correct attitude to establish is to start each meditation period as if it's the first, and to keep bringing one's energy and other resources to bear on the present moment. Results will come from that foundation. Reflect on goals at another time; the first assessment to make is in terms of whether one is able to bring that 'one moment at a time' attitude into practice.

Imbalance of energy is when one has either too little ('hypo') or too much ('hyper'). These will become a basis for sloth and torpor or apathy in the first instance, or restlessness and agitation in the second. Both of these states are disagreeable, which is why one needs patience to bear with them.

With both, it's good to strengthen one's focus on the body, first on the overall sense of the posture and then on the breathing. Check that the posture is upright and alert and then attend to the muscles and joints of the upper body to both soften and arouse attention. Then steady your breathing and lengthen the pauses between the out-breath and the in-breath. This may also feel unpleasant at first, but that's part of the second stage of the *pāramī*. Bear with the unwilling feeling of dullness or the wriggly sense of restlessness and maintain slow, full breathing. Keep dropping any topics of mind — such as how many things I have to do — and feel the wriggly energy, *without trying to change it, and without aversion*. Indeed one may have many things to do, but patience will help you to do them better. Sometimes we are tired, and sometimes over-stimulated. Work on meeting and breathing through the body's energy to bring around non-involvement and balance. When clear awareness is established, then it's time for you to do as you see fit.





## The Fullness of Truth: *Sacca Pāramī*



This *pāramī* highlights the capacity to be truthful, a quality that can be understood in two ways. Most obviously there's truthfulness in terms of intention and behaviour — the determination to refrain from telling lies or reporting rumours and gossip. This is *sacca*, truthfulness, an aspect of morality. But truthfulness also refers to perception, to the ability to see or know things in an undistorted way.

To free the mind from distortion, tunnel vision or blind spots takes more than a moral sense. For this we need to check out the nature of our thoughts, attitudes and biases through introspection and meditation. Through such practices, we begin to get a feel for the pressure that our preferences and expectations create; and also, how to get free of that. It's often a matter of distinguishing our assumptions and wishes from the way things actually are. It's through the clear awareness that we develop in meditation that these pressures lift, and as the mind comes out of bias and stress, that awareness senses and eventually rests in its own purity.

Consequently, when awareness is experienced as a bright inner balance and clarity, this is truthfulness in the sense of 'being filled with truth.' The rarity of 'being filled with truth' is evident in that it is one of the special attributes of a Buddha. He generally referred to himself in terms of this truth-filled awareness, as 'Tathāgata,'

which means ‘Gone Thus’ or — to extend the meaning — ‘One who has Gone into How It Is.’ This term encompasses both understanding and behaviour.

*... whatever in the entire world ... is seen, heard, sensed, cognized, attained, searched into, pondered over by the mind — all that is fully comprehended by a Tathāgata. That is why he is called ‘Tathāgata.’*

*... whatever a Tathāgata speaks, utters and proclaims from the day of his self-Awakening up to the day of his remainderless Nibbāna — all that is just so and not otherwise. Therefore he is called ‘Tathāgata.’ (A. 4.23)*

### **Cultivating Truthfulness**

If you look at the *pāramī* as a sequence of development, you get the sense of what it takes to experience truthfulness in terms of both behaviour and perception.

The first two perfections, generosity and morality, arouse the heart and create a sense of empathy with other beings. We are willing to share with other beings and are concerned for their welfare. We don’t want to harm or hurt others. Through these *pāramī* we get in touch with our own affective mind/heart, with what wounds and numbs it, as well as what makes it feel right, true and steady. Clearing and steadying our intentions through generosity and morality is an essential beginning and ongoing support for truthfulness.

Renunciation takes that process further by differentiating the knowingness, or awareness, of the mind from the impulses and feelings that it experiences around sense objects. This is the ability to step back in order to gain perspective on how the mind is being affected, and to be clearer as to what sights, sounds and the rest of it we want to pick up — and with what intention. This doesn’t mean not having things and only rejecting things. It means knowing that the most important thing is to be guided by clear awareness. So a skilful letting go will also fill the mind with clarity, steadiness and understanding. As we develop that skill, it grows

to include an even more vital detachment towards psychological persuasions and inclinations — such as what views we hold, or the attitudes we have about ourselves. Trying to bolster or bury our personality creates pressure and stress, which distorts knowing it as it really is. Pressure distorts truth. But with the balance of truthfulness, we're aware of feelings, thoughts and attitudes. We're not dominated by them, but we're not dismissing them either. We get them in perspective and act with less compulsiveness.

Next is wisdom, the ability to discern. This *pāramī* discriminates in terms of what is skilful and unskilful, and sets up mindfulness as a monitor. With mindfulness we notice the pushes and drives that distract the mind from what it is supposed to be bearing in mind. And when this is coupled with wisdom, we begin to recognize any stress (or unsatisfactoriness) in our moods and mental behaviour. So check it out: spend a regular five minutes every day sitting still and getting a feel for the emotions and energies. That's not a waste of time; even a business meeting will work better if people sit quietly for five minutes at the beginning. So mindfulness-based discernment establishes a reference point from which we can witness our psychological actions — our caring impulses as well as our reactions and anxious defences. We get to know what causes them and their results. This understanding helps us to know how our mind operates and is affected, and where it needs guidance.

Balanced energy arises once we have begun to establish this inner guidance. Energy supports and empowers wisdom. Instead of being hesitant, or reckless, instead of hanging back in confusion or blindly surging forward, one begins to see more truthfully, 'This is true, this is right, this is to be done. This is false, invalid and to be put aside.' One applies oneself to what is good, true and useful. So applied energy is the vital food for ongoing cultivation. However, as the mind gets freer from the topics and behaviours that use up its energy, we recognize that free awareness itself has an energetic component. Awareness contracts when it's stressed, spins and scatters when it's confused, and calms and steadies when it

receives care and wholesome input. It has a sense of vigour and vitality that is not about doing, but about being collected, whole and balanced. So through cultivating truth we taste the pleasant truth of awareness when it is at rest.

Next is patience, the ability to bear with something. This is most significant when we have to bear with disagreeable impingement, failures, abuse, blame and sickness. This forbearance, backed up by the preceding perfections, gives us the strength to hold and sustain our aware presence, rather than be blown around by blame, doubt, pain, worry, fear, passions, convictions and beliefs.

When we can find a stable abiding place in awareness, we can witness moods, feelings and impulses changing. That is their truth; and that is the truth of all conditions. If I'm in touch with this truth, I experience doubt or irritation as superficial. They may happen, but they don't have to be adopted, rejected, blamed or reacted to. They're not me, not mine, not self. They arise and pass in awareness, and are what they are. Accordingly, our actions can be based on the awareness of the thought, mood or impulse: we're not in their grip. We can act upon them or let them pass, with a clear understanding of consequences. So through being filled with the truth of awareness, one acts in terms of truthful behaviour. This full truthfulness, its brightness and peace, is what is meant by terms like 'realization,' 'seeing things as they are,' and 'Awakening.' Enlightenment is a matter of getting real.

### **Clear Awareness is Deep Honesty**

Truthfulness as behaviour, and truthfulness as understanding and realization, are related. So are dishonesty and confusion. We find ourselves being dishonest, or exaggerating, or being economical with the truth because it's more convenient that way, or we want a result that will favour us. Then again, we're not always aware of how our words and deeds affect others. This is ignorance — not being directly in touch with truth. So we adopt assumptions, in line with our preceding assumptions. It's easier that way. Even if

the assumptions are not based on truth, it seems as if they will fend off results that we fear. We can use well-tried strategies to defend ourselves against the monsters that we assume dog our steps. Better that than face them! But what if the monsters aren't there? Haven't you found that being straightforward and truthful gives you a quiet strength; and, that most people will respect and sympathize with your honesty? The real monster is the one that gets us to tell a lie or offer partial truth because we fear the emotional backlash that may come when we say how it is. As long as we don't use truth, we let ignorance make us insecure and fearful.

We might say, 'This is very interesting, but I have a lot to do right now,' rather than make the more truthful statement, 'I'm not interested in this at all.' Why do we do this? One way of looking at it is that I don't want to hurt somebody's feelings — which is sensitive. However, such an attitude implies that I already know what will hurt their feelings, and that's not entirely true. Perhaps it would be more truthful to say, 'I don't want my feelings to be hurt. If I hurt their feelings, they are liable to blow their top, and then I'll be hurt.'

Connected to avoiding pain is the tendency to be less than truthful because we're ashamed to reveal how our mind is behaving. Maybe when we want something, we say, 'I really need it.' We say 'need' rather than 'want,' because it is a more respectable term. Or when things don't go our way, we might think, 'It's not fair.' We put the desire or the pain into the impersonal, referring to and even blaming 'it.' Our hankering or resistance hides under such abstractions as 'my turn,' 'my rights' and 'my needs,' when it may be more honest to say, 'I want it, whether it's fair or not.' But we don't say that because it makes us look bad — so we deflect the direct truth onto some abstract principle. Or, we project the heart of the matter onto someone else: 'You did this, it's your fault,' rather than, 'I am upset, I am angry.' When we say, 'You do this to me,' there may be some truth in that, but it isn't truth based on our direct experience. A more direct truth is to say, 'I am feeling

this, and because of that I'm lashing out.' That's closer to a realization of what's happening, though still not completely true.

This is because in the fulfilment of truth there is the realization that the agent of events, of virtue and vice, is intention (or impulse) not self. And intentions arise from assumptions and perceptions as to what is or will be agreeable or disagreeable. Yet we can examine our perceptions, assumptions and impulses. Most have a degree of truth in them (pursuing what attracts the mind can be enjoyable in the short-term) — but they all benefit from being questioned. Because we can be aware of and investigate the feel of attraction, repulsion, defensiveness and the rest, they're not fundamental states. They're not self; they are as they are, and there's no one behind them to defend or approve of. There's no one to claim, or be toppled from, the moral high ground.

To take an instance: like many celibate monks, I've had to meet and struggle with sexual desire. Part of me has recognized that sexual energy draws the attention outwards in ways that use up a lot of juice and don't come up with much in the way of long-term benefit. So I have agreed to not act upon that energy, and the trust that I have with other people is based on holding to my word and not looking out for sexual advantage with women. All fair enough: but one part of my system hasn't made that agreement, and is wired to the biological program of sexuality.

So there's a struggle, particularly when women wear clothes that are fashionable and are designed to accentuate the attractiveness of the female form. Thus, one notices a ripple in awareness, sometimes amounting to a wave, in the presence of women. And behind that wave comes another wave of confusion or guilt, because the script in the head says that one is 'not supposed to experience sexual desire.' Sure enough, if it's lingered upon, that first ripple turns into an emotional turbulence which persists for hours. But on the other hand, adding guilt and aversion isn't a peaceful response either.

I remember one time a friend of mine who was a wildlife warden showed me a letter that he was writing on the headed notepaper of his trust. Up in the top right corner was the letterhead, which consisted of a drawing of a roe deer, a female seen from behind with her head turned to the left. With the foreshortening and perspective, the most immediately striking detail of the picture was the rump of the deer, which had a central white blaze. Somehow my eye snagged on that rump for a microsecond as I glanced over the carefully drawn picture. My friend, noticing this, commented how men and women's reactions to the letterhead differed. The women found the image charming, whereas men reported feeling slightly embarrassed.

I found that very revealing. It dawned on me that my consciousness was just doing exactly what it was hard-wired to do: to respond to sexual signals. But that's all it was — I certainly had no interest in having a sexual liaison with a deer, however charming she was. So that ripple of perception did not have to imply or link to any behaviour or even inclination. I could just be accurate about what was going on and know it for the program that it was. The truthfulness of seeing a ripple exactly — knowing where it was and what it was, with a clear conditioned arising — also allowed it to fall back into awareness without a trace. When we can do this, what remains is a bright watchfulness. In relationship with other beings, it tends to resonate with warmth and happiness.

So the real issue is not one of being affected, but of the proliferating tendencies and assumptions of lust (or fear, irritation, guilt, etc.) that jump onto that affect. That is, there are latent tendencies in how the programmed mind forms our experience. These tendencies conjure up a blur of pleasure or apprehension or irritation. In that blur the mind believes that lasting pleasure, satisfaction, annihilation or damnation are just one step away. That's the assumption called ignorance — it's worth checking it out.

Many of our assumptions and impulses are biologically or socially conditioned; we don't decide to have them. And yet, that voice in the brain or that surge in the heart is so familiar and habitual that it may seem like the real me. But what is it that witnesses it? Which is the 'real me,' the thought or the watchfulness? Maybe neither. Isn't it the case that you remember a song because it just pops into your head when you're in a certain mood? And that a thought arises out of an intention to work something out? And that sometimes you forget things you knew? No thought or mind state is there all the time, so how can any of them be a permanent aspect or possession? And if none of these can be possessed or under one's control, what kind of possessor or controller lives in our mind? In truth, there's not some self in charge of all this; nor do we seem to be able to be apart from this changing show. It all arises dependent on causes and conditions.

### **The Inheritance of Kamma**

What keeps it all going? Is there something beyond this passing show — and what would that be like? These are the kinds of questions that arouse people in the search for spiritual truth. And at the heart of such a quest is the need to acknowledge and put aside false assumptions: assumptions that are generated by the floods of sensuality, becoming, views and ignorance. It means paying attention in an appropriate, enquiring and in-depth way. This is the intention based on truthfulness — not to have some experience, or become something, but to come out of false assumptions.

A basic assumption is that things have a fixed or predictable nature. Even though rationally we know that isn't true, our emotional reflexes get confused and upset by changes in the weather or our health, by delays in transport and by changes in other people. The reflex assumption is that sense objects provide a true and lasting feeling — that the impression of a taste, sound or sight as either pleasant or unpleasant is true. And that sets up 'must have' or 'can't stand it.' But when we contemplate the

experience from a wider and more long-term perspective, we notice that the feeling depends as much on our state of mind as on the sense object itself. When we're hungry just about any food tastes great, but as we get satiated that feeling fades, and the focus shifts to something else. In other words, intention, the bent or inclination of the mind, has changed how we experience the food. And at other times, I might barely notice how it tasted because I was talking to a friend. In that case the change has occurred through a shift of attention. Or maybe we feel that the unpleasant taste of the food ruined the whole evening. In this instance the issue is one of contact; that is, the impression 'unpleasant' has coated the mind, so the unpleasantness is transferred — everything we experience during the evening is perceived through the filter of that contact impression.

Such transference is very common. For instance, person A is in a bad mood because of being stuck in a traffic jam and late for an appointment. Feeling irritable, he or she finds human contact irritating. So he/she speaks dismissively to person B, who then feels that person A doesn't like them, or that they've done something wrong, and so person B feels confused. That's how suffering gets transferred. Or you feel that someone else is great fun because everything's going well — the weather, the food, the music — it's a magical evening. So maybe you think you'll do the same thing tomorrow. However, it doesn't quite happen that way, because circumstances have changed. There's a different mood or a different energy in both parties. In truth, the same factors don't ever come together again. So you feel disappointed. Maybe you think that he let you down, or that there's something wrong with you. The truth of the matter is: contact impressions are dependent on changeable factors, and therefore they are unreliable. We ask too much of the sense world by assuming it to be otherwise. Wouldn't it be wiser and more honest to relate to sense data as they actually are?

So it is with the impression of identity. If I believe he or she always is, or always should be, a certain way, I fix a sensitive, changing, affective mind into a stereotyped object called a person. 'He's an

idiot. She's always loving. He's self-centred. She's supposed to look after me.' Through such views we project irritation, adoration or neediness and make others into the heroes and villains of our lives. Now these projections may have some truth in them, but that truth is probably much more specific. For example, 'He's an idiot' might mean something like, 'I notice that his way of chairing the meeting yesterday didn't bring the results I'd wish for.' The falsehood is that a piece of behaviour has been made into a three-dimensional person and cast in stone. That's what 'becoming' does: it stretches an event into an entity. If I believe in this creation, it will affect the way I relate to that person, and the way I talk about them; which means I help and participate in the creation of these caricatures, demons and angels. And to do that limits my responsiveness and our freedom.

This mental activity is *kamma*: as your mind acts, assumes and projects, so you create an inheritance. We end up stuck in a world of 'them and me' with its fixed opinions, disappointment and confusion. *Kamma* means action; it's based on intention, attention and contact. It has results, and this is what's running your life. In this respect, the first step towards abiding in truth is to be clear about good and bad *kamma*: to recognize and refrain from the bad, and to pick up the good. So it's better to know that one feels irritation, admiration, or jealousy and look into that, rather than keep making our emotional responses into 'other people' who then control your life.

When we look at things in terms of truth, we can acknowledge contact impressions in terms of pleasant and unpleasant feelings: perhaps as familiar, poignant or uncomfortable perceptions and impressions. We can witness skilful, unskilful, compassionate or confused psychological intentions and states of mind, and we can sense whether attention is weak, bright or obsessive. Contact, intention and attention, and all of this kammic stuff are changeable. There are no fixed things, entities or people. But there is an inheritance and potential furtherance of habits and biases. As we see that our world is dependent on contact, intention and attention, we start to take steps to generate bright impressions,

based on kindness, compassion and wise understanding. And as we develop those intentions, and all the intentions that the *pāramī* represent, our attention gets clear and well focused.

### Relationship: A Vital Learning Ground

If we stand on truth, there is no abiding self or other; only pain or attachment to be released; only ignorance to be cleared away. However ignorance is, by definition, something that we're not clear about: we can't see our blind spots. So we have to explore our reactions and assumptions as they play out in terms of behaviour. This is where other people can be a great help. When we acknowledge the dependent nature of you, me, them and it, the realm of relationship becomes a vital learning ground.

Once again, intention is important: to aspire to truth, and to do so with kindness and respect. Generally speaking, our behaviour is angled towards getting positive results. With other people, our intention is for approval, friendship, or at least non-conflict; and we may well be anxious about making mistakes. But if someone else's behaviour doesn't give rise to those positive impressions, you may feel that he/she doesn't approve of you; so you try harder to get the positive impression, or you defend yourself, or you acquire a sense of inadequacy. So you either walk away retaining that negative impression or try to appear good to the other person, whilst still feeling anxious and uncertain. Intentions get mixed up. The relationship gets infused with the need to become, and the suffering of that. Through the process of transference, this suffering is blamed on the other person, from whom at the same time one is trying to win praise or attention.

Experiencing anxiety and resentment whilst trying to win approval is a confusing process! The confusion is heightened by lack of in-depth attention: not admitting that this is going on, and probably not checking out whether one's initial assumption is correct. That will again affect your intentions: you might decide it's better to live alone, or shut your heart down. But this has negative effects: you've created more confused *kamma*, you

haven't entered truth, and so you haven't released the source of your suffering.

This kind of thing is normal; only Awakened beings have no transference. Acknowledging this, we know that if we aren't Awakened, we're going to project the needs and fears of our un-Awakened state onto others. And therefore we also acknowledge that for communication, let alone Awakening, we need to establish some *pāramī* and keep them in working order. Is a mind of patience and goodwill established? Are we using wisdom? Are we giving up wanting things to be the way we personally prefer? Are we speaking in terms of verifiable fact, or in terms of assumption?

We need to establish a safe space for communication. For example, we could say to someone with whom we are having difficulty, 'All you have to do is listen. I'll just talk about how a particular behaviour pattern affects my behaviour pattern, and then we can see what comes out of that. So this is not about you or me. This is really just a way in which we can both look at our own behaviour patterns and learn a few things.'

We can also try to be specific. For instance, instead of saying, 'Why are you such a tyrant?' we can say, 'When you told me to get off the phone yesterday that really affected me.' We can say, 'This is what happens for me,' and not 'you did this because you are always like that.' Then we are not left with this 'always' thing and a fixed 'you' or 'me,' but just a particular incident and piece of behaviour. We are being truthful in that we are specific and accurate, even though this means revealing the truth of our conditioned responses. But one result of that is the development of real trust between people, while in ourselves we become less judgemental and more understanding of our conditioning. Another result is that awareness strengthens in terms of presence rather than in terms of activity.

### Truthfulness is Its Own Refuge

One of the benefits of tuning in to the linked truths of non-self and *kamma*, is that we're less attached to our behaviour and self-

image. It's a lot easier to accept that we get things wrong at times when we recognize that our actions are conditioned rather than a definition of who we are. But that doesn't mean we don't give action its due importance. These truths also point out that every action has an effect, and that actions affect other minds as well as our own. So we actually want to know when our actions are causing problems, because it helps us understand and work with the kammic habits that we all have.

These truths lead to a sense of openness and enquiry into where our actions come from and what their effects are. That interest in truth makes us more imperturbable: we don't have an investment in being perfect. Truth also provides a stable reference point — such as the admission that you may make mistakes, but it isn't your intention to cause harm. Of course if it was your intention to hurt someone with a verbal stab, you have to take responsibility for that, and look into why you wanted to do that. And maybe reflecting on all that, you realize for yourself that your harmful intentions cause you the pain of furtiveness, guilt and loss of self-respect. We begin to see conditionality, cause and effect and how things are taken and felt. We begin to understand a little more about the human condition, and compassion grows.

So through the wish to be filled with truth, we are much more careful and interested in what kind of causes we are laying down. We recognize that whatever we do has an effect; what we do individually affects others. We can't escape it. We can't say, 'I don't want it to affect you' — because it does. What we experience is a shared flow that affects and ricochets all around us. When we really know this, we can't be irresponsible; there's enough suffering already in pain, sickness, loss and misfortune to be careless about creating any more for ourselves and others.

Even without action or intention, we affect others. A classic example of this led to the formulation of a rule in the monks' code of conduct. The story is that one of the Enlightened monks (an *arahant*) who was on a journey stopped in a guesthouse for the night. The woman who owned the guesthouse was attracted to him and attempted a seduction, but he didn't respond. So she

apologized. When the Buddha heard of this, he didn't blame the woman, but he did admonish the *arahant*. 'You shouldn't have put yourself in that situation, not because you were doing anything wrong, but because people are vulnerable. This woman acted in the wrong way, in a way that makes her feel regret and remorse. As an *arahant*, you have to be sensitive to people who still get caught up with passions. You have to be aware of how you might affect them.' So the rule was made that a monk should not lie down under the same roof as a woman. However rare it might be that a mishap would occur, the rule does express a truth about the conditioned realm. We need to know and be responsible for how we affect others.

### The Ground of Truth

In daily life, when there's the upheaval of opinions and rumours and blame, we benefit from having some solid ground. The development of truth grounds us in three ways. First of all, one can be truthful about one's morality, so that one can say, 'I haven't killed, I haven't stolen, and I haven't deliberately told an untruth.' This means that any kind of pain and confusion is not because of these actions. Then we have a place to stand. For example, 'I may have been foolish, I may not have had much mindfulness, but I haven't been evil.' Or if one has acted badly: 'Passion overwhelmed me and I did act unskillfully. Now I acknowledge that and wish to make amends.' Of course, doesn't everyone lose it sometimes? Can't we accept that, and have confidence that others will accept that? Therefore, when one has that place of truth, there's less defensiveness and conflict. The power of truth is that it gives you firm ground and an ability to stand, acknowledge an error and investigate the suffering, confusion or pain.

The second way in which truthfulness provides stable ground is with regard to the quality of awareness. This has to do with clearing the mind of greed, anger and other hindrances by means of meditation. Important aspects of this training are mindfulness and concentration. Mindfulness gives us the ability to keep a frame of reference, so that you can measure the behaviour of the mind. For example, 'There is greed in my mind; it arose with the

sight of that.' Truthful recognition can initiate a review of what triggered the greed, how lasting the pleasure of the desired object will be, and how uncomfortable the experience of greed is. With this honest investigation, you might shift your attention, return to the breathing or develop the intention of letting go. This process clears the mind of hindrances, such as restlessness, confusion, doubt or greed. Then the mind's awareness can shift to the steadiness of meditative concentration.

Third, truthfulness provides firm ground for the development of transcendent wisdom. When the mind is aware of its awareness, it is suspended from the floods and can witness them, with their causes and effects, in terms of the Four Noble Truths. We begin to see things truthfully, rather than thinking, 'She's like this. They are always like that. I should be like this.' This is proliferation — the mechanism that turns the wave of an agreeable or disagreeable impression into a solid thing out there. And that is the origin of the suffering of negativity, craving, loss, covetousness and imbalance. But when the mind is clear and steady enough to witness all that — truthfully — as a process, it can also let go. There is the realization that, 'This is stress, pressure, and suffering; this is the origin of it; this is what it's like when it stops; and this is the way to bring that stopping about.' When one repeatedly undertakes that process with honesty and candour, the proliferating tendencies get cleared.

The hallmark of truth is that one feels clear, open and settled in actuality. There are no grumbles, sighs of resignation, or triumphs; the mind is rested in awareness. Only truthfulness will return the mind to the home of awareness from which it arises. Then we feel clear and balanced. Assumptions, strategies, reasonable defences, arguments and accusations of blame may make us feel righteous, justified or on top, but they won't take us to the peace of Nibbāna. This is why we follow the movement towards truth. Through shifting from ignorance to truthfulness, we can open up to stable, transcendent awareness.

## Quotes and Suggestions on Truthfulness

*Someone who lies, who breaks the principle [of truthfulness] and has no regard for consequences — they're open to doing any kind of wrong. (Dhp. 176)*



*[The qualities of a first-rate practitioner] Whatever cunning ploys or guile or slipperiness or underhandedness he has, he brings them right out to the Teacher or to his experienced spiritual companions in the holy life, so that [they] can try to straighten them out for him. (A. 8.13)*



*... through resolutely working at it, one realizes ultimate truth with the body and discerns it by penetrative wisdom. (M. 70.23)*



Speaking with veracity has a cleansing and strengthening effect on the mind. It also supports empathy, because you respect your own and the other's clarity. Without other people's input, how else are we going to penetrate our delusion and sneaky habits? Although we are anxious about saying things that we feel may bring others discomfort, the benefits of straight-speaking are great for all concerned. Admittedly, one has to know the time and place and develop the skills of right speech — which is clear and empathic speech aimed at the long-term welfare of yourself, the other person, and your relationship with them.

Phrases in the Suttas such as 'touches the Deathless' or 'realizes ultimate truth in the body' point out that there is a somatic reference to true knowing. Nowadays we sometimes speak of 'gut knowledge'; similarly, deep insightful knowing should go into the very core of our nervous system and be felt as a shift, a release or a dawning. It's more than an arrangement of ideas. This

understanding has practical applications to daily life, as is suggested below.

## Reflection

Consider your daily actions and attitudes. Is there anything in there that you couldn't reveal to a friend or someone you respect?

Think of how things, you, and others seem to be without directly using verbs 'is,' 'are' or 'am.' For example instead of 'I am depressed,' try 'I'm experiencing depression now.' Instead of, 'You are wonderful / lazy,' etc. try, 'I see you as /consider you to be wonderful / lazy.' This will open up the possibilities for change and non-attachment.

Acknowledge how your mind is when you say or think 'always,' 'never,' 'everyone,' 'nobody.' Look into how that feels, what it sets up as a basis for action / passivity and for how you see yourself and others. Acknowledge any stereotyping such as 'Women are ...' 'You never know with gay people ...' 'Typical Mexican!' etc., etc. Investigate the truthfulness of the assumptions, experiences or isolated points of data the mind bases these stereotypes upon.

In that pause of heedfulness, investigate whether you really have an opinion about something, or have something to say, or not. If you do, then how and when do you bring that across to others? Get the full sense that this is a thought happening in your mind, not necessarily an absolute truth, but something that may be worth hearing and sharing.

If you have a memory, acknowledge it as just that rather than as an unerring record.

## Action

Practise finding the right time and place to say things that people may find disagreeable. Then refer to what you know as, 'It seems to me that ...' 'I've noticed that ...' and also add any significant

subjective details such as, ‘I became really annoyed when I heard ...’ Avoid defining another’s intentions. (How do you know?) If what you have to say may be uncomfortable, then express that along with your concerns — such as, ‘This isn’t easy for me to say, but out of respect for your integrity, I thought you would want to know that ...’

Keep in touch with what’s happening in your body as you speak. Notice the blurring effect of excitement, anxiety or anger and how in that chaotic state it’s easy to lose touch with truth. Being aware of your hands, perhaps by touching the thumb-tips lightly against the forefingers, may help to moor your energy into something steady that’s not rigid.

Notice the times when in a conversation, or in thinking or remembering something, you get fidgety, or shrug, turn away, or enact a deflective movement. Try instead to soften that reflex, come into your body and relax. This will help you to allow an uncomfortable truth to enter and pass. This truth isn’t necessarily a truth about the words that are being spoken, but the truth of how you are feeling. If you stay aware with that, and steady your mind in the awareness of the feeling, you’ll be able to speak your own truth.

## Meditation

Base your meditation on a balanced and grounded body posture, whether you’re sitting, walking, standing or reclining. When you cultivate mindfulness of breathing, do so by being aware of the ‘whole body,’ that is the body as you sense it — your nervous system. This will attune you to the flushes and flows of energy that accompany feeling — bodily or mental. If you sit with your hands either lightly cupped together so that the thumb-tips are touching each other, or with the palms face down, one on each thigh, you’ll stay in touch with this affective ‘feeling body’ in a sensitive way. This will give you a way of sensing the steady quiet balance of an unbiased awareness; times when your mind is under

pressure, fidgeting or dreamy will then become more obvious. This state of awareness is an optimal basis for wise attention, enquiry into truth and clear responses to life.



## Resolve: *Adhitthāna Pāramī*



The eighth of the ten *pāramī* is resolve — *adhitthāna*. The prefix ‘*adhi-*’ means further, higher or fuller, and ‘*-thāna*’ is a foundation, a standing place. Thus the origin of the word suggests the most complete establishment, and it has come to mean resolve or determination. When it’s conjoined with other perfections, *adhitthāna* serves to underline and strengthen them. So one determines to be generous; to refrain from doing harm; to let go of what needs to be relinquished; to discern and investigate; and to bring energy, patience and truthfulness to one’s practice.

This *pāramī* is then a foundation: intentions are pretty weak if one has no resolve to carry them out. You have to make the resolve to practise if you are to follow any path at all. But that resolve requires the wisdom to sense that a course of action is worth following through, and to moderate and supervise one’s resolve. So as with all the other perfections, wisdom is involved: the wisdom that is in touch with cause and effect, and can get a handle on what and what not to follow. It’s good to review: is what I’m involved with for my welfare and for the welfare of others, and if not, why do it? Any such enquiry which is sustained for ten minutes, or a day or a year, goes against the passivity, indifference or blind willpower that consigns us to the floods.

### The Need for Commitment

Resolve isn’t a small matter: if you’re looking for the best results or the deepest changes, you have to do that with the

understanding that this will most likely mean working at it and overcoming some resistance. And it will require the faith that you can at least try. Otherwise you aren't going to grow.

Naturally, you can develop stronger degrees and a further extent of resolve in accordance with a wise assessment of what is needed or useful for you. For example, when you begin to meditate, you might start with ten minutes and check out how that was. If you get interested you go on to fifteen minutes, or half an hour or more. When you read a book, you don't start off thinking that you will read all day and all night, but rather you pick up a book and then look into it for ten minutes; then if it's worthwhile, you continue. So wise resolve supports strengthening according to feedback, interest and capacity. It's not blind doggedness.

It does, however, mean that you put aside the alternatives and stay with your central aim. The end result is a stronger and more skilful mind, but it means getting over the first hurdle: the idea that lasting personal development can occur quickly with little effort. Frequently we find ourselves presented with many options, so it's more likely that we'll get exactly what we want. It sounds good, but the multi-option scenario can lead to option paralysis: you don't give due time and effort to change in yourself, and you get the ongoing sneaky feeling that if you'd only done that, or bought *that* one, it would have been better. So resolve comes late on the list of perfections, because to make a wise resolution requires a mind that has sampled, practised and received the benefits of generosity, virtue and the rest. Then you know what a useful commitment, and its results, feel like.

Without this ongoing reflection you may find yourself with commitments that you never clearly looked into and resolved upon. Sometimes relationships can be like that. Or it may be that you have the commitment to go to a job every day, but you don't feel that interested in it. To you it is just a way of making some money and getting by. And yet in this society there can be very high expectations of commitment to your job: you're expected to believe in it. You must subscribe to the notion that selling insurance is what you want to do for your life, or that inspecting

machinery is your role on the planet. Otherwise you're not perceived as motivated, and you don't get a job. However, if commitment is to something that does not catalyse personal development, or if commitment is expected with regards to aims and concerns that we don't find worthy, we can't find the willingness of heart (*chanda*) to make the effort. Instead we want to break out of the drudgery or the insane pressures; we want to kick back and be free.

Therefore, when we first come to Buddhist practice, we may feel it's about freedom from commitment: that liberation is about openness, spontaneity and being with the moment. The idea of being boundless and free is attractive, and we can assume this comes around through not having any commitments or aims. People may think, 'Don't tie me down, I'm a Buddhist. I want to be completely open. I want to feel free to follow my intuitions.' We sometimes get people coming to the monastery and remonstrating with us, saying that our Buddhism isn't really up to much because we have these petty rules and restrictions, rather than being free, boundless and cosmic. We're stuck in our narrow little Theravada ways, such as: 'Please don't point your feet at a Buddha-image; it's disrespectful.' It sounds like school again. This is why our times are sometimes called the Dhamma-ending age, because it's hard to get some of these teachings across in a society that has turned the precious qualities of motivation, respect and resolve towards material ends and towards beliefs that don't go that far. Then it's quite understandable to feel: 'I've had enough of being controlled and driven. Freedom is the opposite from obeying rules and making effort.' Until you wake up one day with a hangover and the realization that: 'This way of life is going nowhere. I'd better shape up and get my act together.'

This was the case for me. When I was still at school, you always had to wear a uniform, a school tie and a school cap. And if you were walking down the street and saw a teacher, you always had to take your cap off to the teacher. Most of us would try to find any way possible to rebel and wriggle out of it, like wearing your tie crooked, or not doing your jacket up, or wearing your cap

backwards. There seemed to be no wisdom or benefit in keeping this rule. So by the time I got away from school, it seemed to me that all rules that didn't make sense to me were superfluous, and I wanted to break out of their confines. I didn't want to be contained by something that seemed meaningless.

Many people at that time were looking for freedom through living spontaneously, taking drugs and travelling around. Freedom was definitely not associated with adhering to the Five Precepts. But even then I was still very interested in what I felt spirituality to be — and that certainly wasn't adherence to meaningless rules. I'd read spiritual classics like the *Tao Te Ching*, the *Bhagavad Gita*, and so on. I remember reading several books while I was living on a beach in Morocco — where I'd never even heard of, let alone kept, a precept! I was reading about the Tao: 'The way that can be named is not the True Way.' That sounded great. And then there was Krishnamurti, who seemed to say that any kind of rule or convention is not really where it's at. I thought, 'That's it, freedom from tyranny!'

But I'd still be left with the question: 'But what am I supposed to do?' In the book it might say something like: 'Be here now, and let go of the idea that you need to be something.' I thought, 'OK, I'm here — so now what do I do?' The advice was good in a way, but it didn't provide a path, and I didn't have enough *pāramī* to be able to dwell on a plane of serene, intuitive abiding. I was still swamped with urges, drives, greed, fear and delusion. I didn't have the clarity of intent and insight to be able to use these realized statements. They just stayed in my head, and I couldn't live them out.

### Developing Resolve

So with only an unformed sense of inner direction, yet at least realizing there had to be one, I started travelling and ended up in Thailand. By chance I stumbled across a meditation class and ended up staying in a monastery as a guest to develop that practice. In the monastery some things were very clear. They said,

‘This is what you do. You sit there and you watch your breath. And while you are here, no drink, no sex, no drugs, no music; and, you can’t eat after noon. Keep noting the breath, and when your mind wanders, bring it back to the breath.’ Naturally the resistances arose. I’d think, ‘I don’t know whether I can handle all this. I don’t know whether I can make it. This is tough, all this restraint.’ But I could feel restlessness, doubt and confusion and recognize that if I followed those, then I’d be back going round in circles the way I’d been for much of the past decade. Also I could recognize that for a moment at a time, I could follow those instructions. And with that, I was inching out of the flood which I’d been floundering in. My mind would still say, ‘I can’t do this,’ but, a moment at a time, I was doing it! No one asked me to do this for the rest of my life. Just to do it for one day; and if I decided to leave, that was OK. So I’d think, ‘I’ll do it for a little while.’ Then the next day, ‘I wonder if I’ll get through another day of this? Well, that’s the morning gone, then the afternoon, that’s another day gone. Two days, pretty good! Then I’ve managed a week, that’s good! Fifteen minutes sitting meditation, fifteen minutes walking — nearly there. Nibbāna will surely be here soon.’

It is simply a case of taking the practice a little bit at a time, with a ‘why not’ attitude rather than a compulsive one. The approach was: ‘Look, you can do this. You can stay for as long as you wish, and just build it up.’ That approach was kindly and gave a tangible path to gradually haul out of the floods, a moment at a time, as best one could — and then to value the fact that one had done this much. That alone was an education in terms of handling motivation skilfully and laying down a steady, patient foundation. Those causes naturally had their effects: at first the mind was pretty chaotic and threw up all kinds of resistance, desires and restlessness. But it made me even more aware that this confused and obsessive stuff was what I really didn’t want to be immersed in. I could commit to trying to get out of all that.

At first, meditation wasn’t rapturous: there was just the resolve to hold to the meditation topic and the simple form of the life within this torrent of moods and feelings, and to let those torrents pass.

I mostly had to put effort into not despairing, getting forceful or becoming angry with myself. But gradually my outlook shifted from 'getting Enlightened' to one of being aware of the mind a moment at a time and being content with that. Surprisingly enough, with this attitude, the intensities abated, and I began to recognize that there was some awareness that didn't seem to be in the floods. It had been here yesterday and for as long as I had been around. 'Be here now' started to make sense! Something was always here, and what my Dhamma-resolve had done was to resist the pulls long enough to get a feel for this 'something.' I couldn't really figure it out, but it seemed like a norm of awareness that wasn't a thought, feeling or emotion. And I felt: 'That's more like it; that's more what I want to be with.'

However, making that kind of resolve certainly highlighted the emotional chaos, insatiable desires and insecurity of the mind. All the excuses and plausible rationales would come up — the host of Mara, right on cue. Convincing voices would whisper, 'You can do this much easier in a more comfortable place, rather than sweating through the days alone in a bare hut in this strange country with these weird rules.' 'If you keep on this track you'll miss out on the new developments in spiritual practice.' But in a way, that strengthened my resolve — it made me ask myself deeply: 'Do I want to encourage all this restlessness? Do I want to have a mind that can't settle and needs continual propping up?' After years of following my impulses, I felt over-saturated. I wanted to go inwards, and I recognized that I could benefit from the restraint that being in a monastery could provide. After a while I thought, 'I could try this for three months. Three months should be enough. Three whole months! I ought to have the big breakthrough by then!' Of course, by the end of three months, I could see that there was a lot more stuff that I didn't want to adopt. Yet, as these mind states lost their intensity, I felt a little more spacious, grounded and free. Moment by moment, I began to realize, 'It's alright in this abiding place of witnessing and watching.'

So that resolve led to considering a way to live from that stillness that I'd touched into ... and that led to making a commitment to

living as a Buddhist monk, a bhikkhu — for a few years anyway. That's the way an initial resolve feeds back and forms a path.

### Small Enlightenments

The Buddhist emphasis on knowing through one's direct experience has always felt very sane to me. The Buddha's Dhamma is shown not through, 'This is Truth, this is Ultimate Reality and the Secret Law of the Cosmos,' but as, 'This is what you do to get through the mess.' And it offers an opportunity, a way to explore the mind and step back from the *samsāra* of its turmoil through the simple expedient of picking up a reasonable intention — like focusing on breathing — and witnessing how the mind skids and wobbles around that intention with its transient likes and dislikes.

In the early months of my practice the mind bounced backwards and forwards, ricocheting between feelings and fantasies, grudges and self-judgement like a ball in a pinball machine. However, even acknowledging that this was happening deepened my understanding. I'd always associated freedom with the ability to move around. Instead, it now felt like freedom was in the still watchfulness. It seemed to be here, but I couldn't locate it; it had no motive and no opinions; it was free of all that. But it seemed dependent on making a resolve.

For this reason I got very keen on making resolutions: firstly to sit for an hour, then longer, then meditate all night. Of course, every day the mind wanders; one loses or gets caught in obsessions, which could mean that every day you fail. But I found that if the mind could move through a wave of turmoil, it entered a place of peace, and that was worth aiming for. More subtly, even when it didn't reach that place, stillness could still arrive — with the sense, 'Well, that's my limit; I tried, and that's the way it is right now.' Or there could be a recognition that I had to be more patient or kinder in the resolutions that I set for myself. It was a change of view: success *and* failure, when carried out with good intention, both led to wisdom, peace and kindness. In my book, that's a little Enlightenment.

Resolve, when it's aligned to other perfections, also helps us look at daily scenarios and mundane tasks in a more Enlightened way. For example, cleaning the floor doesn't seem interesting, but taking on a task for the welfare of the situation as a whole helps to widen attention. And it activates giving, energy and patience. In general, Enlightenment begins as a shift of focus to a more 'non-self' view, and to long-term results rather than short-term moods. To take another instance: in the monastery, when we refrain from eating in the evenings, we can reflect on this restraint as being for limiting our own appetite and also out of global concern. If one simply thinks, 'I can't have anything to eat tonight,' then it becomes a problem. You think, 'I'm going to eat, anyway. I'm going to go over the wall and get a bag of doughnuts.' Yet when one considers the number of people who are starving or hungry, who don't have enough to eat, one feels, 'People are giving me enough food for a day, so yes, I can go without an evening meal,' because one's heart is touched. The focus shifts as you consider, through resolve and wise reflection, the amount of food that is wasted by people eating more than they need; or all the animals that are needlessly slaughtered; or the land that is being ravaged. Then making a determination to limit that instinct feels appropriate. Whether one is a *samana* or not, the resolve of renunciation serves to check the instinct in the mind that says, 'I want this. It's my right to have it, and I want it now.' After all, in a shared world, where is that attitude going to take us?

There are also resolves to pick up and encourage a course of action. In my case, when I came to the West, I saw that the bhikkhu training in terms of renunciation, honesty, harmlessness and modesty was a good thing to have going in this confused world. It felt good to look at living in a way that would be for the welfare of others, rather than always thinking, 'Why wear robes? Why do we have to chant? What's wrong with hair?' Picking at the details was too narrow a focus. It felt better to look at life more broadly, at how one could be part of a scenario that offered calm, attention and a quiet grace for whoever could benefit from them. Resolutions then align themselves to how one can intend for the welfare of other beings: this renunciate life is of value; it brings

forth tenderness, strength and trust. And to be part of that is both an honour and a way to shift out of personal obsessiveness. It's a small Enlightenment, a lightening of the burden of self-importance, not some personal statement about how great and wise I am.

### Applying Wisdom to Resolve

Mendicant life, in which one has little say over what material resources will come one's way, automatically provides opportunities for meeting difficulties with resolution. For example, when I first came to England, I only had light-weight tropical robes and a pair of open-toed sandals. Soon it was wintertime, and it began snowing. Lay people gave boots to some of the monks, but not to me. I determined just to bear with the difficulties and not to ask for anything. I resolved to make it a principle not to seek out requisites, because I noticed how the mind whinged and complained, and I wanted to stand firm against that petty voice. So it was good to bring up and look at that feeling of wanting, when I saw other people had good stuff. 'He has boots. Why don't I have boots? It should be fair. How can they give him boots and not me?' But then I just decided it wasn't my concern; giving was their business; mine was to receive what was offered and give up jealousy and complaining. So I made it a practice to be content with what was offered, with the resolve: 'If it's not offered then it is not needed.'

Arguably, to walk three miles on alms round through the snow, one did 'need' boots. But I didn't have any, and so ... I could use the opportunity to be here with that, witness what came up and let it all pass — and it wouldn't kill me. Then the resolve would take me through the vortex of feelings to that emptying out of desire where there was stillness and peace. That felt really good and worthwhile. It was actually more useful than having the boots — because to find the way to the still point was what I was dedicated to, not to warm dry feet. Moreover, learning contentment made life easier and richer. After that, any room, any place to live, and

any food was OK. I realized that the body and mind are adaptable, and that we can adapt. And that gave richness to ordinary life.

It encourages one to look for opportunities for resolution. One can get over-zealous. I have determined some extreme practices in my life as a bhikkhu, but the most useful ones came through wise reflection on where my attachments lay. In monastic life, there is a three-month period every year for more intense practice, and taking on a resolution is a customary part of that. Three months of keeping a resolution is a good effort because what sounds like an inspiring resolution on day one gets to be a tedious burden by day sixty. Therefore you have to bear with it, and this strengthens the power of witnessing the changes of mood and inclination.

During my first Rains Retreat in England, I considered that I was very fond of ideas and I always wanted to have bright and interesting things in my mind. So I determined a few things to work against that trend. Firstly I resolved not to read anything, because I was aware of how much time I'd spend casually reading stuff just to fill the holes in the day and keep the mind stimulated. When I put that habit aside, the hours began to yawn open. This was even more the case, as for this three-month period, I was refraining from conversation. On top of these, the other resolution was the 'sitter's practice,' wherein one resolves not to lie down at any time during the three months. So there were many hours where there was nothing whatsoever to feed the mind, and no oblivion to sink into to get away from its poverty.

Also, because refraining from lying down lessens the amount of sleep you can get — which makes the mind dull and dreamy — a lot of the time I just had to sit and be with inconsequential ramblings of thought and weird daydreams and give up the attachment to bright mind states. I had to learn to hold and work with, and not shy away from, the inconclusive, dribbling, dreary mind. This meant staying with it and attending to it as if it were worthy of attention. This practice was very good for developing compassion.

Compassion is a wonderful idea when you read about it in a book. But meeting one's personal dreary, muttering mind with an unflinching and tender heart is more demanding than experiencing compassion for the starving people of the world. When one thinks of the starving millions, that readily inspires compassion. But when you take away the worthy cause, you see that the nature of the mind is to need something to engage with. Then you feel what it's like if there's nothing interesting or worthwhile to do. The mind gets moody, bored and lifeless. And you have to learn to simply hold it, as you would a baby — holding it, rocking it, bearing with it, listening to it. This is great for strengthening and broadening the heart, building up tolerance, and letting go of conceit.

Of course one can also develop resolve with the wrong motivation — such as trying to prove oneself, or just to get through the tedium of a monastic day. At times I'd get resolution-fever: fasting, cold showers, bathing in the snow. I guess I just had to burn off some energy. But over time I could sense disappointment and the way my mind could create suffering over how flaky and half-hearted other people seemed to be. The mind had the inspiring idea of how people should be, and how there should be strict discipline and rigorous effort with no one slacking or being difficult. And I could see how hurt the mind felt by the way it actually was. I thought, 'Wouldn't it be nice if everybody was pure, harmonious, and putting forth maximum effort?' And then I thought, 'No, it wouldn't, because then I'd complain about myself. I'd find something that I was doing wrong.' But as my view broadened through being with others in their struggles, I could sense that to develop the resolve to be with the raggedness, chaos and disorderliness of *samsāra* without conceit or irritation was in itself conducive to Nibbāna. To open to the woundedness and wackiness of my own *kamma* as well as that of other people — and to experience compassion rather than judgement — that was the opportunity to further the practice.

Resolve has to be developed wisely. It first strengthens the individual will and integrity, but then if you sustain that in

relationship to others, resolve opens the mind into a broad field of wisdom and compassion. It penetrates the isolation of the watchful meditator and reveals what the watchfulness can cover: the rawness that says, 'I want to be unmoved and not have to get involved.' The watcher can be affected by the wish to not be here, which can provide a basis for self-view and bias. So although stillness is useful, it too is not to be clung to. Unless stillness furthers letting go, it doesn't lead to final freedom — the freedom from the biases and standpoints of self-view.

### Opening to Compassion

This understanding can really broaden our perspectives. We all want to be happy, and yet normally we get disappointed. This is because we imagine happiness to be a colourful emotion of gratification, but this is not as deeply meaningful and steady as compassion. Compassion is something we can all share, at any time, no matter whether we are up or down, or whether everybody else is up or down. We can all share in it. The happiness that derives from pleasure isn't something we are designed for as human beings. We can experience little bits of it, maybe, but it's sporadic. The uplifted attitude of compassion is more our measure. Compassion is the only way to hold the world.

It's not that compassion is always about doing something. Rather, it's the intention to replace the contraction and agitation we experience around pain with openness. Sometimes there are things we can do, sometimes there aren't. But when we're identified with action and responsibility, there's a stress in the heart, and the sense of having to make things work. When we get it right in a holistic way — with regard to self and others, and towards Nibbāna — we can avoid the pitfall of getting stuck in trying to be good and dutiful.

In my own case, identifying with covering a lot of duties around the monastery makes me get functional, busy and intense. And that isn't what people want from a Buddhist monk. I'd sit in meditation and just think about the work I was doing, planning the work I had to do, figuring out this and that. I wondered how to

freshen up, and so I decided to resolve occupying this busy mind with something meaningless, but devotional. Just to give myself, with no result and no one noticing. We have a memorial stupa in the monastery, and so every morning I'd get up at about 3:30 a.m. and go to the stupa to circumambulate it and bow to each of its four shrines. I decided to do that every day during one Rains Retreat, no matter what. So as soon as I woke up, before I could even think about it, I'd get up, get dressed and go. This may sound like a good idea in July, but in Britain in late October ...

Rain and cold and dark. Inner muttering and lethargy. But whatever was in the mind at the time, I would put that mind state on one of the shrines on the stupa, and bow to it. I'd think: 'Very good, I honour you.' Then the mind would say, 'What's the point in doing this?' and I'd reply, 'I bow to you, I honour you.' On another day, the mind would say, 'This is pointless,' and I'd focus on that mind state and bow to it. I developed a sense of opening to and supporting the mind, rather than trying to pull it into shape or make it have lovely thoughts. After a while, the mind would say, 'I understand what you're doing. I've got the point now, so now you can relax.' And I'd think, 'I bow to that mind state. I honour, love and respect you.' Then the mind would say, 'But it's raining this morning.' So I'd bow to that. The mind would say, 'What are you trying to prove anyway? Who do you think you are?' And I'd respond by bowing to and honouring that thought.

Crazy? A little — but it got me to see through the compulsive and insatiable nature of needing to be doing important things. That habit was getting me stuck on goodness, on putting myself in a repair shop to try to make *samsāra* work. And with this I wasn't attuning to the invaluable lightness and joy that makes it possible to both live in and see through the world at the same time. This is where, when duty stales us, wise devotion can further us. Devotion is not a matter of superstition or blind ritual. Directly experienced, it has a light, uplifting energy. The heart-activity of praising the good has an energy that lifts the mind. This energy can move us beyond the horizon of the functioning, managing mind with its self-importance, its need to be busy and its demand for results.

With devotion we can work without making a solid thing or person out of whatever great or small deeds we undertake. In such self-emptying, the mind inclines towards the Nibbāna that is the basis for the serene compassion of the Buddha.

Over time, my resolve energy has simplified and calmed to one of sustaining the attitude, 'May this action or thought be for my welfare, the welfare of others and lead to peace.' Compared with the more extreme practices, such a resolve doesn't make the headlines. But it acts as a life commitment and a basis for external action, enquiry and insight. This resolve doesn't make a self out of intention or results; it just holds experience carefully and lets it pass through and dissolve. This is beautiful, and selfless: the self doesn't do it, *pāramī* does. In this way, when resolve widens through compassion and wisdom into self-surrender, we can liberate all the beings that arise in consciousness. Whether they arise from an internal or external source, we work to free them from aversion, indulgence, indifference and identification.

May our resolve open us to the great heart that crosses the floods!

## Quotes and Suggestions on Resolve

*A person has four grounds for resolve ... the resolve on wisdom, on truth, on relinquishment and on calm. (M. 140.11)*



*We shall be happy, indeed, friendly among those who are hostile ... free from craving amongst those who are bound by it ... free from greed amongst those who are obsessed with it. (Dhp. 197-199)*



The issue of personal strength is very much to the fore when we consider resolve. However, it's also a practice of wise discernment — what resolutions are pertinent and useful to you? And of course that brings in our empathic sense. Any resolve needs to be referred to the effect it has on our minds, and the intention and motivation that brings it forth. Wise resolve isn't aimed at proving oneself to oneself or others, or at becoming the best. It is a skill that can make wise reflection effective by putting it into action and sustaining it. In this respect, it is a servant of all the *pāramī*.

### Reflection

To link wise reflection to resolve we might enquire: 'With a mind that seeks my welfare, how do I shape and sustain a direction in life? How do I let myself down; where are my weak spots? On the other hand, what is a good quality or skill to develop? Which of these obstacles or skills would I point out to someone I wish well who has a similar disposition, or is in a similar situation?'

Bringing together your recommendations to yourself and to your friend may give you a balanced view of some central topics for resolve.

Are there any of these that your circumstances, your job, your

commitments or your age will make it difficult to keep? Which of these, on the other hand, will you find support for in your lifestyle or situation?

The results of these questions will give you the optimal themes around which resolve is most likely to stick and bear fruit.

## Action

How to make a resolution:

Think it over slowly and carefully, noticing the feelings and the mental reactions. Every time the mind responds half-heartedly with thoughts such as, 'Well, I'll give it a try ...' or quails with doubt: pause, and bring back the thought of the resolution again, slowly and deliberately passing it through the mind. Do this until the mind's response is quiet and has a strengthened feel to it.

You might like to complete the resolution by a physical movement, such as folding your arms or standing up, with a few moments of silence again. Finally, mentioning your resolution to a trusted friend may add some strength.

How to keep a resolution:

Repeat the last process. If at any time your resolve slips, note that and reflect on how that feels without going into a self-analysis. You might feel confused, humbled or angry, but feel those feelings and let them pass. Then consider the points on selecting a suitable resolution, and see what would plug up the hole in the resolve.

## Meditation

Using resolve skilfully in meditation is a matter of bearing the theme and the aim of the meditation in mind. So mindfully one bears in mind the resolve on wisdom, truth, relinquishment and calm: whatever the meditation topic is, it should fit within that template. Full awareness (*sampajañña*) assesses whether one's mind is getting duller or clearer, whether one's mind is letting go of hindrances and obsessions or not, and so on. Bearing this frame

of reference in mind then helps one to choose whether a particular meditation topic is suitable or not: if it's bringing greater clarity and is supportive of letting go, then even a very simple theme such as mindfulness of the body when sitting still is a valuable resource. Sometimes you may feel that *mettā* meditation is more to the point, sometimes walking and so on.

The subsidiary resolve, which fits within this larger frame of reference, is to stay with the topic that you've found to be suitable. This will help you to see and slip out of the pull of restlessness, desire or laziness. Just staying with your theme and making no comment on the mind's chatter will provide a steady ground of awareness that with time your mind will centre on. As the mind gets calmer, then the resolve is to enjoy that calm so that that happiness deepens the mind's settledness. Then look for anywhere that stillness is being experienced and give that attention.

These succeeding resolves bring the mind to a unity that is easeful. Having settled mental behaviour, you can then deepen into the awareness of that. At this juncture, the resolve for relinquishment can work on dropping both the sense of time, and of holding or being this awareness.



## Holistic Kindness:

### *Mettā Pāramī*



Who isn't touched by acts of kindness? Who isn't moved by the intention to 'pervade the all-encompassing world — to others as to myself — with a mind imbued with a kindness that is abundant, exalted, without boundaries, free from hatred and ill-will'? Or by the phrase, 'Even as a mother protects with her life her child, her only child — so with a boundless heart should one cherish all living beings'? The ideal of goodwill (*mettā*) expressed in these phrases from the Buddhist tradition is one that is shared by all spiritual paths. Kindness is immediately and obviously a big part of what spirituality, and true humanity, is all about.

We can all experience goodwill towards some being at some time. However, we can all lose touch with that bright way of relating — especially to ourselves. So it's valuable to bring to mind that each of us has at some time been on the receiving end of freely given goodwill. It's one of the recollections, or 'five-minute meditations,' that is useful to undertake throughout the day. I have done this myself for years, recollecting specific acts of kindness that occurred in this very day, and dwelling on the emotional resonance of that. So far I have never found a day when someone didn't offer a kind word, ask if I needed something, or even talked about our conflict in a gentle and non-hurtful way. With all of this I acknowledge: 'They didn't have to do that.'

So when you're feeling bitter, anxious or lonely — remember this: at some time you have been seen with a loving and sympathetic

eye. Stay with that impression, breathe it in and out and extend it. Also recall: no matter how mean you may think you are, you experience goodwill towards something. We all do — they say that even Hitler loved his dog. However, it's clearly the case that for most beings this channel of goodwill gets blocked from time to time by a flood of ill-will. Therefore we need a means to carry the heart across the floods that submerge our fellow-feeling. And when we make the resolution of kindness, not just towards kittens on a nice day but even towards cockroaches on a bad day, when we include dictators and brutal maniacs, as well as all aspects of ourselves — then we're making *mettā* into a perfection, a vast and transfiguring way of life. The result, the fulfilment of the *pāramī*, is a mind that is grounded in wisdom and compassion, and which easily opens to the peace of Nibbāna.

### The Mind of Self and Other

Let's get to the crunch point. A heart brimming with love is indeed an attractive ideal, but what's more important is breadth of application rather than intensity of affection. As an analogy, the Buddha remarked that if bandits caught you and sawed your limbs off, and if at any time during that process your mind moved into aversion — then you wouldn't have been practising *mettā* thoroughly. So if you include all beings all of the time, you'll recognize that to not allow the mind to move into hatred and ill-will is a pass-mark you could aim for. (And that, indeed, is a very high standard).

*Mettā* is an extension of the affective and responsive mind or heart. How crucial its alignment is! On the one hand, the mind can get trapped by fear, greed, hatred and delusion, and on the other hand it can extend in generosity and other perfections.

The main issue for the mind is how it relates to what happens. Relationship is fundamental, because we are actually never a stand-alone being, but always a 'being with' or a 'being in,' or even a 'being with the sense of being without.' Consciousness is just this awareness of 'being with' in the various fields of seeing, hearing,

tasting, smelling, touching and thinking. And in that process of being with, consciousness automatically establishes the sense of a subject and an object: a seer who sees a visible object, a hearer who hears an audible object, etc. Out of that duality, the sense of self and other arises. That's the program of consciousness. Notice that self and other are relative positions that depend on each other. You can't have an experience of self without an other (animate or inanimate) that is in contrast to it. However for each mind, the emphasis is on the self; the 'me, mine' bit is the crucial aspect in a world of changing others. Even in your own mind, there appears the self (the subject) as a watcher and the other (the object) as thoughts and emotions. Or the self is how you conceive yourself as being, and other is what you should be, might be, or were.

This is self-view, and it's the norm for unawakened beings. Self-view rests on the assumption that these dependently-arisen polarities are actually separate and autonomous. It infers a self, despite the inability of that self to own or control the body or mind that it adopts as its own; despite its genetic and psychological inheritance from others; and despite its inability to rest unsupported by sights, sounds, affection and purposeful activity — all of which are outside its dominion. Self-view is blind to interdependency. Consequently, its flooding ignorance sweeps us into a sense of separation and alienation, whilst all the time asserting that this is our empire.

The sense of dissatisfaction that occurs in the territory of alienation is not attributed to the disconnection between self and other. Instead, ignorance tells us that there's something wrong with either the other, or the self that eventually becomes an other — that is, my mind that I have to deal with. So we pick away at either or both of these apparent culprits. It's often the case then that the boundary mark between self and other becomes one of ill-will, although we may not even recognize it. We might say: 'I should be like this,' 'I'm the one who has to do this,' 'I need to help others to be more the way they should be.' In all of these, the

relationship is one marked with a sense of the inadequacy of either self or other. The flood of becoming makes such assumptions reasonable: of course I have to become better! And, of course you and the world could improve! But does frustration and blind reaction make that happen? Following that instinct, do you ever notice that the good times still don't arrive? Now it's not that everything is exactly right, but when the assumption of needing to become something else precedes, and is the basic configuration of, our attitudes — where's the appreciation, where's the joy? In a world of flawed humans, where's the foundation for goodwill? Where's the resource and the *pāramī* that can make the world a better place?

### Accepting Otherness

In the practice of kindness, we look into the mind as it is happening, a moment at a time, with the intention to gentle it out of the hold of aversion, depression and anxiety. To support this, the teaching is that, although the sense of self-other happens by default, we *can* have some say over its emotional and energetic flavouring. Our current intention doesn't need to be tense, inadequate and critical; it can be uplifted and uncramped. The sense of self-other can catalyse and give occasion for an intention to offer support. This intention is essential for a happy life, because if we don't use the relational experience in a kind and generous way, then defensiveness, anxiety, fault-finding and grudges are going to haunt our lives and impair the lives of others.

*Mettā* is non-aversion, but it's also non-fascination and non-projection. It releases others from being the objects of our projections, lust and idealism. It allows others to not be the way I want them to be for me. True love for another means that you don't appropriate someone or project your unfulfilled wishes or needs onto them. Instead, *mettā* means recognizing otherness, and feeling that it's OK. We don't have to make people the same as ourselves or judge ourselves, based on what we think about other people. We don't have to feel we have to win them over, or feel that they should satisfy our emotional hunger. And when *mettā* is

fully developed it can allow us to be with the irritating and the unfair and the messy, so that such perceptions no longer even take hold.

It's the same for ourselves: when we hold ourselves with the mind of goodwill, we don't have to feel intimidated and compelled to prove ourselves. We have all been small, weak and stupid. We have all been totally irresponsible infants, awkward adolescents, made a mess of things, lied, cheated and maybe even killed. Yet we changed. These were all visitors and forces that occupied the mind. Now there's no denying the responsibility for allowing one's mind to be so occupied, but our current responsibility is one of cultivating virtue, discernment and kindness, not of obsessing and sustaining the burden of guilt and denial. And one of the major healing tools for this process is *mettā*. With this we take on *samsāra* with non-aversion and non-projection. We can accept the presence of the petty-mindedness, the guilt and anxiety as visitors conditioned into the mind, and work with them. Then there is nothing to hide from or dread anymore. This is a more useful approach than going through another round of anguish, self-hatred and defensiveness. By stilling these reactions, *mettā* enables us to penetrate to, and remove, the root cause of ill-will — often towards ourselves — underneath the complexes.

### Start with Empathy

Although we may not be performing acts of hatred and violence, the more habitual bottom line of ill-will is an inability to sense empathy and goodwill. This lack of empathy flavours consciousness and is the source of many problems. Sometimes we are blinded by the instinctual drive that assumes that selfish greed and ambition is the way to happiness; sometimes we are pushed by the ego-drive of becoming that wants us to be better, more attractive or more successful than another; sometimes we feel ill-will over a difference of opinion and viewpoint. The thing to acknowledge is that this is just the mind acting in accordance with the basic conditioning of self-view. It's not a permanent truth, not who you are, but the current expression of the ongoing series of

affects and responses — now reflective, now eager, now caring, now restless.

If you can regard this mind as it really is, you become compassionate. People's minds are conditioned and formed around circumstances. You realize that people may not know much about kindness simply because they haven't received much of it. Hurtful, abusive things may have been done or said to them; appreciation and warmth may have been in short supply. Consequently, such minds can have sour flavourings which attach to their sense of self and others, and which engender aversive or mistrustful responses. The default then is a distorted relational sense in which pleasure and personal security come from besting others, even through making fun of or scapegoating them. A boundary has been created which blocks empathy. And it doesn't even feel bad at first: getting more than another, putting others down or taking revenge has the same sweet burst to it as a drug. That's why it takes over.

But it doesn't have to. A few years ago, a friend of mine — let's call him Steve — drove his delivery van into a petrol station to fill the tank. The man who was operating the pumps — a young man like Steve — leaned into the car and noticed the photograph of Ajahn Chah pasted to the dashboard. He came up with some jeering questions as to who this bald guy in robes was, and why did my friend have such a weirdo pasted up to look at. Steve was taken aback at being mocked, but held his ground. He explained to the young tough that before reading Ajahn Chah's teachings and meeting his disciples, he'd felt depressed at how meaningless life seemed. He hadn't known what to do with his life, felt lonely and was just wasting his time; sometimes he even felt like ending it all. But before he could get much further, the other interrupted with 'You mean you feel like that too!'

So it is. Someone dares to tell the truth about suffering, and the note of empathy is struck. Suddenly the conflict, the 'you're so different from me,' falls away. No one has changed anything except

the self-other line up, but in that moment of empathy there is a mutual deepening. The way out of ill-will is not through judging who's right, but through finding common ground. Kindness, or non-aversion, begins with empathy, the sense that we're all in this same samsāric ocean together, struggling in the floods.

### Softening Comparative Judgements

All beings seek their own welfare. Suffering and the pressure to get free of it are the concern of us all, so surely we could get together to support each other. And yet we often focus on the ways that set us apart. This focus brings even more suffering, in terms of comparative judgements that bring competition and conflict. On the other hand, when there is empathy — even at the times when we experience bereavement, pain and fear — the suffering diminishes. There is nothing so conducive to trust, strength and uplift as a struggle shared. Consider the stories of explorers who, against extremity, struggle through to safety together; shared conflict brings about fellow-feeling with its tremendous mutual strengthening. When the boundary of concern widens to include others — even those with whom we're in conflict — in an important respect, the suffering ceases. This, the Buddha pointed out, is the suffering we can bring to cessation. In doing that, we're not just released from pain, we are broadened and deepened out of alienation, into wisdom and compassion.

So there is great practical wisdom in understanding how the mind creates boundaries of concern and interest, and how we can work with these. Of course there are boundaries; there are other beings on earth. But what counts is how those boundaries are maintained, opened and closed. When we consider otherness — the way beings are different from us — we can feel either insecurity, 'How does she compare with me?' or contempt, 'You're not as good as me'; or fear and intimidation, 'You're better or stronger than me.' Or, we can feel adoration/attraction — 'I want to be bonded to you.' These immediate assumptions are called 'conceit': that is, we conceive of people as worse, better or the same as us. The effect is that the mind's responsiveness gets stuck. It doesn't see the rich or

successful with compassion for *their* suffering. It doesn't value the beauty, humour or resilience of those 'worse than me.' And it doesn't respect the differences of those who are 'the same as me.' Caught in the conceit of self-view, the heart doesn't extend its boundaries of appreciation and concern; we take each other for granted as 'my wife,' 'my boss,' 'my teacher'; and that fixing of them freezes our sensitivity. In that state, the heart easily tips over into complaining about the other not being the way they 'should be' (or rather the way I want them to be), and so the heart becomes a breeding ground for ill-will.

Reflect on this: if you take someone to be the same as you, you feel confused and frustrated when their opinion is different from yours. And sooner or later it is, isn't it? So there's conflict not only when you think others are different from yourself, but also when you think they are the same. Trying to make people be clones of yourself makes you intolerant. Or, you pressurize people into having the same view. But a 'we' that hasn't arisen through recognizing and accommodating differences is a conformist tyranny, not a harmonious abiding. The only way out is *mettā* — the widening of a boundary of fellow-feeling to include all. Even, of course, those with whom one is ill at ease.

To give an illustration: as a Buddhist monastery is an open system, one gets many visitors, and not all of them are that balanced. A few years ago, a man I'll call Dennis used to frequent the monastery for some sort of companionship, but always grew loud and aggressive to others in the dorm. He did what he felt was useful work, which was actually counter-productive, and in general made a nuisance of himself until he'd leave, showering everyone with verbal abuse — until the next time. So when he turned up one day in the meeting hall there were a few silent groans; as he started waving his arms around and demanding attention, most people left. One of the monks stood firm and informed Dennis that his behaviour was inappropriate for a monastery — which got Dennis even more riled. I looked at this man with his demands, and my mind's lens seemed to widen. 'Poor guy,' I thought, 'he must annoy so many people. Yet he obviously

comes to the monastery for company.' So I found myself coming right up to him and, calling his name gently, taking him by the arm and walking around the hall with him, talking with him as I did so. I had no expectations; it was just a response, but the effect surprised me. His wildness diminished, and his bodily tension eased. As I commented that he wasn't a bad person, but that his behaviour frightened people, he came to a standstill. I put my arm around his shoulder, and he quietly slid down the wall to sit on the floor. In a few moments he had curled up and was sleeping like a baby. I laid a blanket over him. After a short nap, he woke up calm and coherent, stayed for tea and then went home. He'd got what he'd been coming for after all these years.

### Cultivating a Boundless Mind

So here's the question: who is more important, who gets first servings of kindness — me or you? Well, if your mind is crabby and depressed, you're not in the best condition for ladling out the love. But on the other hand if you keep it for yourself, and you fuss over every twinge in your own mind, then that feels like narcissism.

It's a trick question, because the practice is holistic: to others as to oneself. The way it works is that you see where development can occur and widen it from there. You keep expanding and deepening the sphere of kindness in all directions. This is because there are near misses. For example, there's an altruism that seems like kindness, and may carry some of its features, but is mixed with the need to feel that one is being loving and useful to others. We impose a requirement on others that they benefit from our love. This is missionary kindness. It doesn't always allow people to be the way they are; we want to convert the nasty into the loving and make the sick get well. Now *mettā* may indeed have such effects, but as a Dhamma practice it's focused on intent rather than arrival at a specific state. So we don't practise kindness in order to make others into our idea of what a nice person is. Instead, the practice is to cultivate a conscious field of kindness in which — as aspects of ourselves and others arise in our awareness — they will not be met with fear or negativity. Then we trust the removal of ill-will and self-view to have its effect.

Of course we can't just bring kindness to others without having felt it in ourselves, which means that our limitations, fears, doubts and pains are an essential part of our fieldwork. So it's useful to check whether we have *mettā* for ourselves, and when we lose it. Do we beat ourselves up and feel guilty when we make a mistake, are late, or don't live up to others' expectations? Do we feel shadow impressions hovering around us over things we have or haven't done? Does our conceiving mind create an image of how great somebody else is and therefore how inferior we are? The learning point is that as long as we pick up on, and attach to, particular features as self or other, good or bad, we never arrive at holistic goodwill. With self-view, sooner or later someone's going to be inferior and someone superior.

Instead, we have to connect goodwill to the experience of self and other as it happens; that is, how I feel about you in the moment. Then we bring the intention of goodwill to the uncertainty, or fear or irritation as we experience it. And we're also prepared to be affected: we stay open to what's happening for self and other, without having an answer as to who's right and who's wrong.

One of the nuns in the monastery was born and married in Cambodia. At the time of the Cambodian holocaust, her husband put her and the children on a plane, promising to follow them when he'd concluded some business. She never saw him again. She got busy with life in the U.S.A, not only raising three children, but also studying for and gaining a Masters' degree. She had to, in order to keep her mind away from dwelling on the past. But all the time she could feel hatred for the Khmer Rouge (who had killed her husband) seething inside her. Eventually her intention to help the people of Cambodia rebuild their country brought her into confrontation with that ill-will. How could she bring around reconciliation, when she still hadn't reconciled herself? Through a series of encounters, she learned about meditation, and started to clean her mind of its hatred. However the real test came when she had to go to Cambodia to meet and work with members of the Khmer Rouge, one of whose leaders was still advocating that the children should be taught to fight to cleanse their country of

foreign influence. Looking straight in the eye of the leader of the faction that had destroyed her husband and a quarter of the population of her country, she asked him to pause, and then she asked forgiveness for the hatred that she had felt for him and his faction. She followed that with offering her forgiveness for the pain that they had caused. Some of the assembly wept, some embraced each other. A few remained aloof, but for many the process moved on.

So in working with others as with oneself, we have to go deeply into the mind. In the direct contemplation of what is arising — at the dividing line between what we're comfortable with and what we're not — simply note the flavour of consciousness. Is it contracted, defensive, anxious, demanding? Listen to the tones and the energies behind the topics that the mind brings up; tune in to the waves of irritation, fear, guilt, and so on; and extend empathy and non-aversion. It's about not fighting, blocking or running. Holding our centre, we thus can soften the edginess of the mind. We can open to include the experience of ourselves and others in our awareness. This is the cultivation of the boundless mind; over time, it widens to include it all.

### Building Capacity

The ability to generate *mettā* depends on both willingness and capacity. These may be in short supply. Those who have experienced sustained abuse can find it very difficult to experience kindness for themselves or for others; those who have not had the secure presence of goodwill can be subject to the insecurity that leads to attachment to views and becoming. Our capacity can also be limited by how we're being affected in the present. Although conditions are always changing, when the mind is affected by visitors such as fear, worry, guilt and passion, it easily becomes fixed in that state. If the visitor is anger, then the mind becomes bristling and volcanic. If the visitor is remorse or guilt, the mind becomes an eddy that chases itself and sinks down. So we need to develop strengths and skills to stop being overwhelmed by these fixating forces.

Hence there's a requirement to develop *pāramī*. Generosity and morality are foundations for fellow-feeling. And with renunciation, we practise letting go of the sense of covetousness and selfishness, the 'me, me, me' attitude. That, too, is a basis for kindness. With renunciation, we start to let go of the need to be successful or the need for status, and look into the props we use to support our self-image and emotional well-being, which include material things, stimulation, busyness, status and praise. When we start to let go of some of those props, then we notice the blank patches in the mind, where there's a raw need to be stimulated, and we notice the consequent restlessness. These blank patches indicate where we must begin filling our emotional body with well-being.

The first three perfections — generosity, morality and renunciation — make well-being possible because when one is generous and virtuous, there is self-respect. Because of that good *kamma*, we have emotional brightness in which the mind can extend itself to other beings in empathic rather than grasping ways. Hence we get fuller and richer in ourselves and can let go of a few more props. As the fear and the need disappear, discernment gets clearer, and we can see where we need to work. This means we begin to recognize where fearful, self-defensive boundaries occur in our lives. Beyond these boundaries we collapse or get incoherent, and in maintaining them we contract or get volcanic. But with the *pāramī*, we see what affects us at the edge of our sense of self, and then we find the energy to work into that sensitive place.

Extending the mind into sensitive places takes us into the turbulence that the boundary has been created to contain. Often there are emotions and energies that have been pushed aside or repressed, and they lie dormant in the field of consciousness, for as long as we keep busy or can control what's going on. But outside of that — when things go wrong, or somebody or something pushes our buttons, or when we meditate — old senses of being intruded on or pushed around or rejected can get activated. Then

what arises are generally forms of fear, grief or rage. Somebody has invaded our space; we have been denied or pushed out of warmth. There are of course personal versions of these stories, but those are the basic messages of the turbulence out of which need and depression, anxiety and resentment boil up. And with these, the first intention is of patience, then truthfulness, plus the resolve of kindness. Hold the centre, soften, widen, include it all. Sustaining these intentions — no matter what — leads to the settling and crossing over.

Patience is essential because sometimes it can take a long time staying at the edges before things shift. Truthfulness is required to acknowledge: ‘This turbulence, this sense of intimidation is not him, her, them or me. It’s actually that affect and response.’ So it is: often in our lives we find ourselves going through the same emotional scenarios and the same wounded, ‘dumped on’ experiences — just with different characters doing the dumping or irritating. First you assume, ‘It’s him or her.’ Then you might think ‘It’s me, it’s my weakness.’ But is this really true? You can spend ages attributing causes anywhere you choose along the self-other boundary, but that doesn’t release the pain. Instead you need the resolve to stay with it, to get to the truth behind the self-view. As you let go of all the discriminations and positions, your mind widens to include it all. This is where the latent tendency that is holding the self-other boundary gets released.

### Great Heart

As a Dhamma practice, we sustain and deepen the intent of kindness, irrespective of the various identities and shadow forms that arise in awareness. That’s enough. We establish clear awareness and sustain kindness in the moment where impressions occur and where responses arise. It’s not about conjuring up any great feelings of emotional warmth, but a process of staying in touch, of not blaming oneself or others, and of not going into the past to rehash old issues. The ‘staying at’ that point of the hurt, ill-will and pain then begins to carry the awareness across to compassion (*karunā*) and transpersonal wisdom.

*Karunā* is the kindly eye on the helplessness of our suffering. When we experience this without blame or defence or struggle, compassion arises. And it arises irrespective of the identity or value of the wounded being. Compassion sweeps over judgements of others or ourselves. It knows how terrible it is for anything — even a mass murderer, tyrant, or poisonous snake — to be trapped in pain. When entering into this sphere of compassion, it is not a matter of doing anything, blaming or feeling sad about it, or wishing it were different. Instead, it is about entering that place where one touches the pain directly. Then, through staying in the hurt where the mind can't do anything, has no remedies, ideas or philosophies, it comes out of the position of 'me.' The small, localized state of mind opens out of the default self-and-other sense into the Great Heart.

The non-doing of such a heart has powerful effects. Instead of trying to conjure it up (and feeling frustrated if 'it doesn't work,' or 'I'm not good enough'), we let the healing happen by itself. Then there is a sense of grace, of receiving compassion that is greater and more boundless than any of one's personal attributes or efforts. Truly this is called a divine (or sublime) abiding (*brahmavihāra*). And through contemplating the selfless nature of this abiding, the mind lets go — not only of ill-will, but also of the push of becoming and self-view. This is the shore of the Beyond.

## Quotes and Suggestions on Kindness

*This is how you should train yourselves: ‘The liberation of mind through kindness will be cultivated, developed, followed, used for guidance, taken as a basis, grounded, steadied, consolidated, and thoroughly practised ...’ (S. 20.5)*



*Just as a strong conch blower can easily notify the four directions without any difficulty, in the same way, when the liberation of mind through kindness is thus developed, thus followed, the results of limited [unskillful] actions don’t remain and linger on there. (S. 42.8)*



*There’s the case when a bhikkhu cultivates the Enlightenment-factor of mindfulness accompanied by kindness and similarly the Enlightenment-factors of investigation-of-states, energy, rapture, tranquillity, concentration, equanimity, accompanied by kindness which is based on detachment, dispassion, ceasing and leading to complete relinquishment.*

*If he wishes to abide in the perception of the repulsive with regard to what is not repulsive, he abides thus perceiving the repulsive. If he wishes to abide in the perception of the unrepulsive with regard to what is repulsive, he abides thus perceiving the unrepulsive. If he wishes to abide in the perception of the repulsive both with regard to what is repulsive and what is not repulsive, or if he wishes to abide in the perception of the unrepulsive in both ..., he abides thus. If he wishes, avoiding both the repulsive and unrepulsive, to abide equanimous, mindful and clearly aware, he abides thus, equanimous, mindful and clearly aware, or, attaining the heart’s release called ‘beautiful,’ he abides there. I declare that the heart’s release by kindness culminates in the ‘beautiful.’ (S. 46.54)*



Kindness as a Dhamma practice is the skill of extending goodwill, so that one's heart isn't taken over by ill-will. Sounds easy? Well, these quotes point to the thoroughness and the excellence of such a cultivation. Thoroughly undertaken, it liberates the mind from the cramp and gloom of ill-will, despond and cynicism. In the second quote, the Buddha recommends using *mettā* to free the mind from the regret and remorse that is the result of unskillful actions. Herein one is encouraged to spread *mettā* to oneself (or who one was at that time) and to all those who were affected and involved in the unskillful action.

In the last of these teachings, the Buddha makes it clear that one should sustain such a mind state even in the presence of what one finds repulsive. So much so that one should test the mind by seeing the unattractive aspects of what one customarily perceives as attractive (giving consideration to the viscera and waste products of the human body for example) — and yet not be moved by aversion. The other permutations indicate the thoroughness of the training. Therefore, more than being a social grace, such goodwill requires the strength and clarity of the Enlightenment factors to keep the mind from swerving down the habitual track of what it likes and dislikes. And the maturation of such a practice is that the mind abides in the inner radiance called 'the sphere of the beautiful.'

## Reflection

Give consideration to any acts of goodwill that have been shown to you this day. Do likewise to any such actions that have occurred in the past. Then reflect in a similar way to any such actions — encompassing generosity, loyalty, advice, care, service or forgiveness, that you know have occurred between other people. Dwell on such reflections long enough to establish the emotion and attitude of kindness.

## Action

Minimize critical speech about others to a few words that are offered sparingly, merely as an opinion if it seems necessary to warn another of that person's tendencies. Refer to others' apparent weaknesses as degrees of illness or affliction that they have to bear, as in, 'He sometimes gets caught by the tendency to dominate others.'

Notice situations in which you get irritated by other people — maybe they work at a different speed than you do, or with less proficiency. It might also be the case that you get irritable in noisy or crowded situations. Try to use such scenarios as places of *mettā* practice. Staying mindful and grounded in awareness of your body, particularly the soles of the feet, the chest and the palms of the hands, widen your awareness to include aspects of the situation you're in. Acknowledge any tightness in those parts of your body and any mental resistance. Find the limit you can extend to — that is, the amount of irritating phenomena that you can be aware of in a non-defensive and non-reactive way. Stay there, without letting your thoughts, speech or actions distract you from maintaining that abiding place. Meanwhile, extend a warm heart first to yourself and then to all those around you.

Notice aspects of yourself that make you self-critical. Practise in a way that's similar to the previous example, extending an awareness that can be present with those aspects without agitation or constriction.

Notice any boundaries that your mind erects to place yourself or others in categories such as 'friend,' 'enemy,' 'no-account,' 'important person,' 'idiot,' 'genius,' etc. Without discounting the perceptions, move the labels around from person to person and maintain a willingness to accept each one as they are.

## Meditation

Begin with several minutes of the above reflection, extending the awareness into how your body feels with the experience of goodwill. Settle into that. Pick up the sense of wishing your body well. Move that warm sense around the body, including places that feel unwell or neutral as well as vigorous. As much of our self-consciousness hovers around the face, it's especially useful to imagine this part of your body being seen by the eyes of goodwill.

Draw your attention out to the surface of your body, to how you sense the skin. Be aware of it like a sheet or a blanket enclosing your person, until you sense a good connection and a vitality gathering there. This is your field of goodwill. Let it fill with the benevolent sense that was described above. This may take a while. When you're ready, imagine that someone you are fond of or respect is going to move into that extended space. Notice if the energy changes, and stay connected to your bodily presence. Maintain the sense of an unstricted field that contains your body, and gradually allow the other person into that without reaching out or feeling self-conscious. When you reach a limit, rest there. Then imagine them moving away while maintaining the same state of mind and energy.

Subsequently, practise this with people you feel neutral about, and those with whom you have difficulties. However, don't let them get any closer or for any longer than your field of goodwill can support!





## Evenness of Mind:

### *Upekkhā Pāramī*



As we arrive at the last of the *pāramī*, we're looking for the highest, the best, the tops. So it could seem like a disappointment to find that as far as perfections go, as far as actions and intentions go, the top is equanimity, evenness of mind — where the mind refrains from delight and sorrow, ups and downs. This may not sound all-transcending, but as a practice it's deep, attentive and full. And if you consider it in the light of what the mind normally does, and how it's motivated to get to the pleasant and the exciting, and to get away from pain, blame and loss — then you'll probably acknowledge that to establish equanimity takes some doing.

But is it any good? What good does being equanimous do? Well, previously we were looking at kindness and compassion, and these are the first two of the four *brahmavihāra*, or divine abodes, which are those lofty, abundant and uncramped states in which one includes others as oneself. The third is appreciative joy, the intention to appreciate the good fortune and happiness of others. But the most profound of the *brahmavihāra* is equanimity. In this context, it's an even-minded acceptance of oneself and others. With equanimity I can tune into where you're at, up or down, and that doesn't change my empathy with you. Further, it comes with the understanding that whatever you're going through right now will change, and I trust your capacity to pass through this phase. In that sense it's an immense offering of respect, and also of perspective on wherever we find ourselves in the present. With equanimity we can allow ourselves and others to grow past all

views and perspectives — to the point where we might wisely realize that everything that manifests as ourselves or others is a passing show. And if we don't mess with it, doubt, take sides, blame or get stuck in ourselves, we have access to an openness that can't be put into an opinion. That's quite a realization, and quite an asset. With equanimity, there is no panic, defence, claiming, rejecting, blaming, worrying, doubting or treasuring; it's a state which allows all that to empty out. So it's the tops. It's something one could justifiably get a little excited about.

### **Inclusion, not Indifference**

Outside of contemplative circles equanimity is not highly rated; in fact, it's not really understood at all. True enough, the Pāli word *upekkhā* can mean 'neutral' in terms of feeling; it can give the impression that one is indifferent and doesn't care — a nonchalant, laissez-faire attitude. But this is stupid equanimity: there's nothing furthering in it. Nonchalance carries delusion that does not fully acknowledge the feeling or the consequence of mind states. It's an escape in which one gets vague and fuzzy; it's a defence, a not wanting to feel — which is understandable when you consider how many terrible things you can witness through the media every day. So instead of fellow-feeling and empathy, people pass comment, philosophize or talk about suffering as if it's a statistic. Sure enough, being aware and tuned in, and still remaining equanimous isn't easy.

Normally when there's unpleasant contact we block it, look the other way, take a pill, or otherwise filter it out so that it doesn't throw us into some unmanageable state. Until, that is, we get something that knocks us down, like getting really sick. With sickness, you find your mind can be reasonable and stoical at first. But if the illness hangs on for week after week, shows no sign of abating, or gets worse, it takes us to the end of being cool and balanced about it all — we can get moody and desperate. Even without a physical illness, if the mind gets anxious or stressed to the point where we can't sleep, then crazy moods or suicidal instincts start coming up. And when you think of people who are

dying, losing control of their bodies or becoming senile (which is likely to happen to many of us), it's a disturbing prospect. When loved ones are losing what we know of their minds, losing the ability to form sentences or getting panicky and angry, when you witness human beings falling apart — it isn't so easy to be philosophical about it all. But it's through these and like contexts, through feeling the feelings and letting them move through you, that you get a chance to develop and know the value of equanimity.

This *pāramī* is actually useful all the time because, even when we are living in a controlled environment where we can be clean and adequately fed and sheltered, things don't stay comfortable or interesting for long. This isn't just because situations always change so radically, but also because of the changeable nature of feelings and perceptions — through which 'interesting' or 'comfortable' becomes 'tedious.' In a situation that is fairly agreeable, we take things for granted, get bored, feel that we're wasting our time, and so on. Just staying with things as they are, in a relatively neutral context, is a major Dhamma practice. I've seen it myself in monasteries where requisites are provided for free and you're living with people who keep precepts and are committed to Awakening — but 'so-and-so's chanting is unbearable ... and the Dhamma talk is so boring ... and I've got a great idea for a building project — if only those others would agree with me ...' and so on.

The mind always finds something to get irritated about or fascinated by; it always finds something to need, worry about and sorrow over. This is because the mind receives input in terms of perceptions and feelings that register experience as pleasant or unpleasant — which is natural enough. But then an undeveloped mind adds mental activities and programs of craving, aversion and self-interest on top of that. These are the latent proliferating tendencies (*anusaya*) that are embedded in the mind's awareness and that take form as the mind rises into its activities. With these, our heart-capacity and vision shrink. We lose touch with the good

fortune we have and of how much worse it could be; we forget and lose empathy for the misfortune of others; and we edit out all the ugly, smelly, rough and tedious aspects of our lives.

So our comfort zone is only a percentage of what is actually going on. The other stuff is on the other side of the border where, as soon as we touch into it, there's a twitchy reflex, because the mind just can't be with that fear, pain or inadequacy. And this weakness gets ignored. Instead we tend towards a mind-set that imagines the best, wants the best, and wants to be a winner. That's the message of the society. And anything that can't fit those criteria is second-rate, and to be excluded. Society in general tends to exclude the poor, the illiterate and the incapable. So we reject them; then we fear them; so we reject them some more. And that same kind of exclusive mind-set also turns on ourselves. No one is ever good enough, and no one can be good enough when regarded from the perspective of that critical mind-set. Seen through that lens, we can never be good enough, strong enough, bright enough, calm enough — and it's our fault. So we reject ourselves, remove the support of warm-heartedness, and still demand that we come out on top.

### **Even-Minded Empathy**

The only way out is through a different approach: one of developing equanimity as self-acceptance. Cultivating this is one of the ongoing themes of Dhamma practice. For example in meditation: when painful memories or ugly mind states come up, we pause, set aside how things should be, and let go of trying to analyse or fix the mind. In checking those reactions (without judging them) an even-minded empathy spreads over the mind. No need to struggle: 'I can be with this.'

I like to define this process as having three stages: pay attention; meet what arises; and include it all. That is, feel the thoughts, feelings and emotions as they are; widen the focus to feel how they're affecting the body; and let empathic attention rest over the whole of it. Don't get busy, and don't just wait for things to

end — that isn't a full inclusion. Instead, soften those attitudes and include it all. And let that process continue for whatever arises next. There will be a release — which might not be what you were expecting. However, through following that process, you begin to trust the effect of equanimous awareness. And that's the real turning point. Because when you have the tools, you get eager to include your whole life as Dhamma practice. You want to see where you get itchy and defensive, and you're on the look out for the tell-tale signs of fluster and contraction — because if you pay attention, widen, soften and include it all, the movement to Awakening continues.

As a perfection then, equanimity is an intention or 'mental muscle' rather than a feeling. It's the big heart that can steadily hold feelings and perceptions in full awareness without getting rocked by them. And it strengthens into a mind state when it is supported by other *pāramī*. Equanimity allows a feeling to enter, be fully felt and pass. This is what makes it supremely useful: we don't dismiss the world, but get a heart that's big enough to embrace it. And with that there also comes the realization that the world — forms, feelings, perceptions, mental activities and even consciousness — is a passing thing that doesn't own us. So there's no need to run, and nothing to shut off. Equanimity then is the crucial firebreak that accompanies all the *pāramī* at that stage when resistance wells up. You know: the mind gets itchy about being patient, or mutters, 'Why should I?' about being generous, or whispers, 'They don't deserve it' when cultivating *mettā*. With equanimity towards those floods, you don't get caught and swept away by them. Instead this *pāramī* becomes your ground.

### The Three Knowledges

As an introduction to the reflections on the *pāramī*, I brought up the story of the Buddha-to-be sitting under the bodhi tree and meeting, then repelling, the host of Mara through calling the Earth to witness the vast store of perfections he had accumulated over past lives. Another description illustrates the part equanimity

played in that. In this account (M. 36), the Buddha describes having three successive realizations: that of his previous lives; that of the nature of good, evil, and their consequences; and that of the ending of the biases and floods that cause suffering.

So first of all, with his mind ‘concentrated and attained to imperturbability,’ his focus widened to include a panorama of his many lives. Now just imagine doing this to the one life that you can remember — or cast your mind over a project or a relationship — and contemplate the twists and turns of its drama: now exciting, now struggling, now a waste of time, now persevering, making choices, feeling bad with a stroke of misfortune, and then feeling good with a lucky break ... and so on. Can you do that without reacting, flinching or getting nostalgic? Can you stop the tribunals, get past being a victim or a star? If you can keep going and witness all these with equanimity, can you say this life is good or bad? Or wasn’t and isn’t it just what it was, or is — and isn’t it a learning experience? That’s the first stage of wise equanimity. With that absence of final judgement the mind remains open, and the learning deepens.

In the case of the Buddha-to-be, the second realization was through a further widening and deepening: extending beyond the reflection on himself, he contemplated all beings going through the ups and downs of their lives as he had done, and reaping the results of their actions. This was the realization of *kamma* — that any action, even mental, has consequences. This is the law of cause and effect. It’s impersonal, and doesn’t apportion blame. The law says that acts, thoughts and speech lift you up to a bright state or drag you down to a dark state dependent on the ethical quality of the intention that initiates them. Intention chooses heaven, hell or somewhere in between — one moment at a time. And if you get past the reactions and the explanations, you get in touch with the mind’s intention. Then you can investigate and set the right course.

So the intention of equanimity creates an unbiased strength which gives you the chance to see more clearly. And to offer this strength

to yourself or others is a precious gift. One time a friend of mine was cheating on his medical prescription and acquiring addictive drugs under false pretences. His wife knew of this and naturally was deeply concerned. But instead of criticising him, she just bided her time, and at the right moment coolly and caringly pointed out to him that what he was doing was going to bring him into deep trouble, in terms of a loss of self-respect, psychological well-being, and in terms of the law. But she made clear that the choice of action was up to him. Her unhurried tone and absence of drama and blame penetrated deeply, so with this encouragement to carefully consider cause and effect, he promptly changed his ways.

Equanimity then isn't about being passive and not assessing actions. Instead, applied equanimity makes us feel less guilty, defensive and reactive. A natural sense of conscience can arise to guide us to what, in our heart of hearts, we know is right and makes sense. A heavy-handed approach merely closes the mind in defence, or sets off a counter reaction. On the other hand a passive approach, in which everything's fine and we suppress wise counsel and feedback, leaves us prey to our impulses and blind habits. The Buddha's middle way takes in the knowledge of cause and effect while making intention, rather than self, the owner of action. So the Buddha's teaching offers us calm and clear guidelines that respect our innate moral sense, rather than righteous rants that render us as infants with irredeemable corruptions.

However, it takes an unflinching and steady attention of ongoing equanimity to bear witness to all of our actions. So it's a matter of unconditional self-acceptance: this is what you've been, and what you've done for good or for bad. No censoring, no justifications — just stay tuned in. Then the mind can operate outside of the tribunals and parades of self-view. It deepens to see that what each of us experiences as 'myself' is actually the current of cause and effect, for good or bad. It is *kamma*, not blind destiny or a flawed self, that carries the mind along and creates a 'personal' history. The Buddha-to-be didn't rest with that realization, but penetrated

deeper. Giving up sorrow or elation about what he had now understood, his mind deepened to review the assumptions that support *kamma*: the seeking for happiness through gaining and getting rid of; the questing for security through acquiring a philosophical or religious view; the grip that holds the mind as an unchanging self; and the denial of not owning up to the day after day unsatisfactoriness of doing all this. As we have seen, these are the floods of sensuality, views, becoming and ignorance. As he penetrated past these biases, through seeing them for what they are, his mind released from all suffering and stress. This was the third realization.

Calling a fully-released person anything is a potentially confusing business, so he referred to himself as ‘Tathāgata’ (Gone Thus), although we generally use the easier word ‘Buddha’ (Awake; Fully-Knowing) as a designation. Not that he personally needed a title to take a stand on. He was pretty cool about all that. For example, in the *Brahmajāla Sutta (D.1)* he advised the monks on how to respond when they hear others either disparaging the Buddha, or praising him. His comment was that whether the monks felt angry and displeased in the case of disparagement, or elated in the case of praise — ‘*That would only be a hindrance for you.*’ The correct response was simply to refer to the disparagement or the praise as either incorrect or well-grounded. There’s no need to defend or affirm a person; such an effort encourages views, identification and conflict. But it’s not as if there’s no assessment, and that it’s all the same; there definitely is assessment and a response. But the response comes from a mind that is equanimous around identity and allows discernment to speak clearly of actions and behaviour, not personality. Things are seen as ‘thus,’ ‘just so’; the ‘Gone Thus’ sees even truth as ‘thus’ without attachment.

So equanimity is a deep humility that allows the mind to step out of adopting any identity, any view, any judgement. With evenness of mind the intentions of wisdom and relinquishment make the choice to abandon the cause of suffering, and kindness and compassion encourage others to do the same.

## Developing Evenness in Meditation

As with many of these perfections, putting equanimity into practice begins at home. All the *pāramī* acquire their full power only when they are grounded in the intimate attention of meditation. Simply speaking, meditation practice develops equanimity in two ways. The first is by steadying the energy of mind. This comes around through calm, mental unification whereby the process of focusing the mind on one theme unifies, smoothes and strengthens its energy. When the mind puts aside external sense contact, and the agitation and fascination that accompany it, the mind's energy settles and unifies with the energy of the body. Such a mind can then enjoy its own vitality and extend its awareness more widely without losing centre. This is *samādhi*; and as it deepens, the mind's composure and ease refines and steadies, leaving clarity and equanimity. This is called developing 'mind' — referring to the energy that trembles or tightens, rises up or radiates, dependent on perceptions and feelings.

So in meditation we get to know the energetic aspect of mind, and through developing and purifying it we can rest in that element rather than in all the comings and goings. Then one's mind remains equanimous: it isn't pulled out, pushed in or shaken about by events. And accordingly, the mind settles on this elemental ground; in the midst of the world, it still feels whole, healthy and well.

The second way in which meditation practice develops equanimity is through the intelligent and insightful capacity of the mind. This is an aspect of wisdom (*paññā*) called *ñāna*: a penetrative knowing that can know, 'This is a thought, this is a feeling, this is a mood. This is liking, this is disliking. This is remembering, this is losing it.' Such discernment can be trained to be equanimous and unbiased; whilst being touched by thoughts, sensations and mind states, it can be trained not to flinch, fudge, congratulate or blame.

The more we have the capacity to receive and reflect on experience, the more we see it as caused (and therefore subject to

dissolution), changeable, and not belonging to anyone. This insightful focus (*vipassanā*) sees experience in terms of the three gates to the Deathless: desirelessness, signlessness and selflessness. In a way, they all come down to the same thing, a corrected view of how we normally mark or perceive things. Without this corrected view, we unconsciously label things in terms of their desirability, that is their agreeable or disagreeable character. And so we try to get the agreeable and get away from the disagreeable. But in meditation you discover that you can't get or get away from what arises. The more you want to have peace and stillness, the more agitated and uptight you get. The more you try to get rid of the stupid and ugly mind-moments, the more persistently they assail you. After a while you discover that the only real option is to pay close attention and adopt on-looking equanimity. Then the hot stuff starts to boil off, and as the peaceful intention of equanimity spreads over the mind, a natural inner stillness can be realized.

### Deepening into the Signless Mind

Insight furthers this process by penetrating the perceptual process that labels or 'signs' everything. Perception is the activity of recognizing an object as something that is known. It is the manager of the tiny mental memos that label things: 'This is dreadful, this is humorous, this is a threat, this is fantastic,' and so on. But when we recognize that what we experience is impermanent and changing, then we see that all memory labels are not true in a final and lasting way. In other words, the signing of things as being always this way or that way changes with our moods, our perspectives and the context in which we experience them. So things are desirable dependent on our desire, not innately in themselves. For example, lively music is great when you're dancing, but terrible when you're trying to get to sleep. To focus on the impermanent, moment-at-a-time nature of the experience may not get you to sleep straight away, but its equanimity will quell the restlessness and irritation. Insight shifts the signs — to the realization of signlessness.

Sometimes perception, the sign-maker, gets quite frantic: say, in a situation where there's conflict and the sign-maker wants to designate right and wrong. Then the need to be something gives rise to a need to take a stand and hold a position. This in turn causes us to form strong views; we favour and condemn people as good guys or bad guys. (And of course, we also do this to ourselves). In terms of events in the world, there is always somebody you can lampoon or vilify: the tyrant of the moment or the corrupt minister of the year. And then there are the ones you can cheer, the white knights. Then the next year, it turns around, and the white knights have been found to be flawed by self-interest so they become the villains.

This is the story of politics isn't it? How the Western powers can seem to be liberating other countries from their tyrannical regimes — and are then revealed as being motivated by economic self-interest. And, how our allies are discovered as indulging in the same kind of corruption as our enemies. We focus on the sign of the good and ignore the other signs, or we do the same with the sign of the bad. But when discernment is equanimous we recognize that perception is affected by self-interest: 'My people, my religion as against those others.' Insight reveals the bias of self.

I was given a lesson in signlessness and selflessness whilst attending a sky burial in Tibet. In a sky burial, a corpse is laid out on the ground and slashed open to attract the vultures — who then descend in a flock to devour the flesh. The bones are then smashed to powder and scattered. It's grim enough when described in words ... but in real life, when one sees two or three freshly dead bodies tossed off a cart, there's a perceptual shock — because the mind 'signs' the bodies as 'people asleep.' Then when the butchers start slashing them as if they were cutting up a side of beef ... and when within a few minutes a flock of eager birds completely covers the bodies in a heaving mass ... and then within a few minutes they are gone leaving only a scattered heap of bones ... the signs of 'person,' (someone's father or mother), 'human body,' 'meat' and 'bones' flash through the mind with emotional intensity and disappear. All that's left is a sober and empty clarity.

Then you look at your own body and those of people around you: old, young, male, female, fat, thin. And you say, ‘Who is this?’ In itself a body is neither something nor nothing. But it certainly isn’t ‘me’ or ‘mine.’ And when we recognize that an object is not what we label it as, the labelling stops; there is signlessness and nonidentification with that object.

This also has a profound effect on the mental agent of making signs, that scurrying inner secretary who’s always handing us the name, the opinion — the sign. Busy isn’t it? But when all signs are seen as relative, and when compulsive self-interest is laid aside, then the secretary can take a break. With the sign-maker on holiday, we can get a taste of deep peace. This is called ‘not-making-it-that’ (*atammayatā*), the realization of the source of the mind. There is no identification, even with the knowing which is the last hideout of self-view. There is no inner need to know and describe anything — and yet there is clear awareness. This is the ceasing of ‘name’ that is synonymous with full Awakening.

Equanimity, framed by other perfections and applied to the mind’s reflexes in meditation, keeps releasing the preferences that form our world. When the mind completely lets go, this is *atammayatā* — the deepest layer of awareness where there is no labelling and no intention. The mind’s energy is untroubled, and its discernment is clear but not making any signs. Deliverance of mind (*ceto-vimutti*) and deliverance of wisdom (*paññā-vimutti*) have combined. There’s no trembling to respond to or ward off, and there are no ideas to hold on to. A more fundamental property, the ‘Nibbāna-element,’ is realized.

## Quotes and Suggestions on Equanimity

*There are three grounds for mindfulness that a noble one cultivates, cultivating which he is a teacher fit to instruct a group ...*

*There is the case where the Teacher ... teaches the Dhamma to his disciples: 'This is for your welfare, this is for your happiness.' His disciples do not listen or lend ear or apply their minds to realization ... In this case the Tathāgata is not satisfied and feels no satisfaction, yet he remains unmoved, mindful, and fully aware. This is the first ground for mindfulness that a noble one cultivates, by which he is fit to instruct a group.*

*Furthermore, there is the case where the Teacher ... teaches the Dhamma to his disciples: 'This is for your welfare, this is for your happiness.' Some of his disciples do not listen or lend ear or apply their minds to realization ... But some of his disciples do listen, lend ear, and apply their minds to realization ... In this case the Tathāgata is not satisfied ... ; at the same time he is not dissatisfied. Free from both satisfaction and dissatisfaction, he remains equanimous, mindful, and fully aware. This is the second ground for mindfulness that a noble one cultivates, by which he is fit to instruct a group ...*

*Furthermore, there is the case where the Teacher teaches the Dhamma to his disciples: 'This is for your welfare, this is for your happiness.' His disciples listen, lend ear, and apply their minds to realization. In this case the Tathāgata is satisfied and feels satisfied, yet he remains unmoved, mindful, and fully aware. This is the third ground for mindfulness that a noble one cultivates, by which he is fit to instruct a group ... (M. 137.22-24)*



*The eye, ear, nose, tongue and body can bring desirable, agreeable, endearing and attractive items to the mind. Any equanimity that arises with regards to these is called 'worldly equanimity.'*

*Unworldly equanimity occurs when, having put aside pleasure and pain, as well as mental gladness and sorrow, a monk enters upon and abides in the fourth meditative absorption, which has neither pain-nor-pleasure and has purity of mindfulness due to equanimity.*

*And what is the still greater unworldly equanimity? When a monk who has no outflows sees his mind freed of greed, hatred and delusion, and still experiences equanimity. (S. 36.31)*



*There is equanimity that refers to diversity and is based on that; and there is equanimity that refers to unity and is based on that.*

*... equanimity with regard to forms, sounds ... smells ... tastes ... tactile sensations and ideas: this is equanimity that refers to diversity and is based on that.*

*... equanimity dependent on the dimension of the infinitude of space, equanimity dependent on the dimension of the infinitude of consciousness ... dependent on the dimension of nothingness ... dependent on the dimension of neither perception nor non-perception: this is equanimity that refers to unity and is based on that.*

*By depending and relying on equanimity that refers to unity, let go of and transcend equanimity that refers to diversity ...*

*By depending and relying on not-making [atammayatā], let go of and transcend the equanimity that refers to unity. (M. 137.17-20)*



The standards for equanimity can seem high, involving states of mental absorption that many of us rarely, if ever, reach. However, it all rests on understanding and loosening the mind's responses and projections around pleasant or unpleasant feeling. This may occur in ordinary situations, as outlined in the first quote, where one has to deal with the disappointment or elation that comes with the frustration or fulfilment of one's purpose. In such

scenarios, it's good to reflect that many factors other than one's skill or intention have a part to play in the outcome. Even a star athlete can be laid low by disease, or frustrated by poor weather. How much is any failure or success one's own? Holding on to them just creates unnecessary stress and agitation.

Of the two bases of feeling (physical and psychological) the one we are most unquestioningly moved by is the mental/emotional/psychological. Pleasant or unpleasant feeling is the factor that will trigger the mental reactions of 'feeling inadequate,' 'unbearable dilemma,' 'irresistible urge,' 'bored stiff,' etc. (The Pāli word for feeling, *vedanā*, refers to feeling as the experience of pleasure, displeasure or neutrality, that if followed brings up emotional energies (*sankhāra*) — which in English, we call 'my feelings'). Considering that only a third of feeling will be agreeable, and even as such is prone to evoking longing for more, it's wise to get some perspective on the diverse bases on which a feeling may be resting before following it. That is, there are agreeable feelings that are based on skilful mind-sets and views (such as on generosity, compassion, truthfulness and calm). And whereas some unpleasant feelings are to be endured (such as in illness), and others are a warning of danger, there are sour feelings based on craving or grudges that should be relinquished — through careful cultivation.

Taking this understanding and applying it in meditation will bring around the spacious serenity that is sublime equanimity, rather than indifference or boredom. This is equanimity based on a unified state of mind. The culmination of the practice — 'not-making' — is a complete non-identification with even a peaceful mind; it is synonymous with the relinquishment of intention, and the realization of Nibbāna.

## Reflection

Imagine an unpleasant scenario — being late for work; losing your job; getting sick, etc. Hold the space carefully and let the emotions, the mental images and agitation move through. (At first, it may be best not to pick any examples that are close to becoming real). Notice the state of mind where the agitation stops. Here you are.

Now do the same with a very positive scenario — receiving a reward; meeting the perfect partner; etc. In the same way as before, let the emotions and the mental images and excitement move through; and notice the mind-state when it stops. Here you are. Get familiar with the mental territory that feels like, ‘Well, after all that, here I am.’

Then apply that to another person’s position: can you offer them the steady trust that this too will pass?

### Action

Equanimity in terms of action can be developed by applying attention and effort evenly to all the stages of an action from preparation to completion and tidying up. In this way, the mind isn’t just geared to getting things done, or the achievement moment. This is particularly valuable when one doesn’t achieve one’s aims! If the mind is applied evenly, we can then pause, tidy up, reflect and try another approach. It’s also useful to reflect on the result of ‘getting results’: how long does the satisfaction last? If our concern is on how evenly we apply the mind, and the serenity of that, then win, lose or draw, equanimity is the result we can abide in.

### Meditation

The cultivation of equanimity in meditation hinges around two principles: firstly, that the mind can step back from what it’s experiencing; and secondly, that increasing degrees of calm provide a deeper source of satisfaction than that of aroused sense-pleasure. The first shift uses the principle of wisdom, the second enters the base of feeling with the question: ‘What is going to make me feel satisfied?’ These exercises of wisdom and empathy require persistence to keep them going, but the result is a deepening sense of equanimity and peace.

In meditation practice you steady feeling by attending to a calming object, such as breathing. And with wisdom you review the process of feeling to learn how to not get caught in it. So we

begin with fully 'knowing' the meditation object — through letting the breath fully extend and be sensed throughout the entire body. Then we tune into the skilful pleasure that arises through being uncramped and calm. As this sense becomes the dominant theme, then you assess the pleasure that comes from calm as being more sustainable and satisfying than the coarser and vacillating pull of sense-pleasure. This brings around an understanding of the benefit of stillness, and a firm basis in skilful internal pleasure to counteract the pull of the senses. Then, as you contemplate that steady calm through the wisdom faculty, the mind steps back from feeling. The increasing calm then blends with the detachment of the knowing awareness into an equanimity that is based not on indifference but on a unity of purpose, object and attention. By staying with that, the mind unravels its fascination with feeling and mind-states in general.



## Closing: Bringing It Home



When we think of the Buddha's realizations, the effect can be either inspiring or self-defeating. We can think, 'I don't experience that; I can't get that concentrated, I don't have the time or the resolve.' However, one great advantage that we have over the Buddha is that we can attend to the teachings and keep cultivating the Way that he carefully presented. With wise reflection we can gain an intellectual understanding of the Dhamma, and by taking the opportunities that life presents, we can put the Dhamma into practice and witness the results.

In the particular set of reflections in this book, the constant refrain is to get in touch with the undercurrents and biases that flood the mind, and to use *pāramī* to cross over them. The *pāramī* are teachings which one can use in daily life, but which will also deepen meditation. Through the practice of the perfections, we can review any experience we have — whether it moves us or holds us steady — with this question: 'Is that which is trembling, or urging, really my self? Is that which feels solid, wants to hold on, really who I am?' With wise and deep reflection we'll probably acknowledge, 'I'm not always like this. It depends on ... pleasant contact / being threatened / feeling healthy / the comments of others ... etc., etc.' So keeping this in mind, and on-looking with mindful equanimity, we can realize, 'Oh, this is just conceit, this is just identification, this is just doubt, this is just stress.' However momentary this realization may be, we can experience a ground that is not manifest as a state or a feeling. It's a ground that isn't a state of mind, but an inner peace that mental states cannot influence.

However, when we try to hold it, claim it or figure it out, the floods of views, becoming and ignorance take over. Recognizing this makes us personally more modest and respectful of the Way. Whoever and however we seem to be, it is through wisdom, affected by mindfulness, strengthened by collectedness, and held straight by equanimity, that a Path evolves. So every time an old habit arises, or when a program of ‘what I really am and what I should be’ gets going again, we have to pay attention, meet what arises, and include it in our practice.

This ‘inner work’ can also be our contribution to the welfare of the world. Out of that clarity and openness, resolve and compassion will arise and guide our lives. One reaction to the ignorance, greed and destruction is to despair about it all — but that shuts down awareness and curtails a wiser response. We could also go into a blaming or punishing position; or into feeling inadequate; or we could speculate that it’s all part of some divine plan. Instead, the personal responsibility is to attune to *pāramī*, and bring them forth in the way that we live our lives.

So what the Buddha’s Way presents is a culture — not a technique or ideology or metaphysical statement about ourselves, the world or the meaning of it all. Essentially, it’s a Way that has to be lived — with many helpful guidelines, to be sure — but lived in the uncertainty and uniqueness of each person’s life. It is by bringing ourselves fully and compassionately into the lens of our own awareness that we find the Way, and the *pāramī* give us exercises to do just that.

Then, even in a world swayed by greed, hatred and delusion, we can see the good in ourselves and others, attune to it and cause it to develop. In this there’s no room for complacency, despair or regret. This Path is already a deliverance through virtue, discernment, patience and equanimity. We can’t predict the details of what it will take us through. But each insight into the breadth and clarity of the Path shows us that there’s nothing else worth doing, and every means to stay on it.





# Glossary



- adhithhāna***: resolve, resolution
- appamadda***: heedfulness, vigilance
- anusaya***: latent tendencies, proclivities
- arahant***: Enlightened being
- āsavā***: outflow, taints, corruptions
- atammayatā***: ‘not made of that’ — the state when the describing and comparing faculty of mind comes to rest
- āvijjogha***: the flood of ignorance
- 
- bhava***: becoming, being
- bhava-taṇhā***: the craving to be something
- bhāvogha***: the flood of becoming
- Bodhisatta or Bodhisattva***: a person, or a mind, that is resolved on Awakening and Awakening others
- bojjhanga***: factor of Enlightenment (or Awakening)
- brahmavihāra***: sublime state — one of the four empathic states (kindness, compassion, appreciative joy and equanimity)
- Buddha***: one Awakened without a teacher, who teaches others
- 
- cago***: giving, giving up
- cetana***: intention, volition
- ceto-vimutti***: liberation of mind — that is, the quelling of mental activity or reactive trembling
- chanda***: motivation, willingness of heart
- citta***: mind, heart, awareness

**dāna:** generosity, giving

**Dhamma:** Order of Cosmos, Way of Truth, Teaching of the Buddha

**ditthogha:** the flood of views

**iddhipada:** path to success

**indriya:** faculty

**kalyānamitta:** spiritual friendship

**kāma-taṇhā:** sense-craving

**kamma:** action, the activation of intention

**kāmogha:** the flood of sensuality

**karunā:** compassion

**khanti:** patience, forbearance

**mettā:** kindness, goodwill, benevolence

**ogha:** flood

**ñāna:** gnosis or full realization

**nekkhamma:** renunciation

**Nibbāna:** ‘blown out,’ the extinguishing of the ‘fires’ of greed,  
hatred and delusion

**pañcasīla:** five moral ‘precepts’ or training guidelines for those  
making a commitment to Buddhist practice

**paññā:** discernment, wisdom, the faculty of assessing distinctions

**paññā-vimutti:** liberation through discerning conditioned reality  
to be just that

**pariyatti:** learning, theoretical grasp of Dhamma

**paṭipatti:** practice, putting the teachings to the test of personal  
experience

**paṭivedha:** realization, the wisdom of seeing through, or  
penetrating, greed, hatred and delusion

**pūja:** honouring, any action that offers respect or homage

**sacca:** truth, truthfulness, reality, veracity

**saddhā:** faith, confidence

**samādhi:** unification of mind, 'concentration'

**samatha:** calm, a major theme in meditation

**samana:** recluse, contemplative, a cultivator of direct inner knowing as distinct from a Brahmin (a priest who cultivates ritual and access to the Divine)

**sampajañña:** full awareness, the function of attuning to the nature, relevance and character of what is being borne in mind.

**samsāra:** 'wandering on,' the habitual programs of psychological activity

**samvara:** restraint

**sankhāra:** 'activity' (in a psychological sense), program that activates the body-mind in prescribed ways

**sati:** mindfulness, the ability to bear something in mind

**sīla:** ethics, morality, virtue

**taṇhā:** thirst, craving

**Tathāgata:** Thus Gone One, or Thus Come One, the Buddha's normal way of referring to himself

**upekkhā:** equanimity

**vedanā:** feeling, bodily or mental, pleasant, unpleasant or neutral

**vibhava:** getting rid of, getting away from, denial, self-abnegation

**vibhava-taṇhā:** the craving to get rid of aspects of experience

**vipassanā:** insight, a major theme in meditation

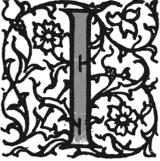
**virīya:** persistence, energy

**vossagga:** relinquishment of any position of self

**yoniso manasikāra:** wise attention, deep attention



# Hearing the Sky



IF ANYONE had passed through that grove of trees where the seeker had won his freedom, they would have been granted the rare sight of an Awakened One. Sometimes he was standing under a tree, at other times calmly walking up and down, and sometimes he sat still with spine erect, motionless for hours, even days, at a time. Weeks passed, but, to the Buddha, time and place made no impression. There was only the blossoming of awareness: now steadily absorbed in blissful stillness, now carefully analyzing the modes and relationships of mental factors such as attention, impression and feeling. With an awareness like a skilled surgeon's probe, he spent days gently teasing apart the tissues of mind, taking note of how attachment, identification and stress came to be — and how that process could be eased out.

At times, his awareness radiated out, tuning in to subtle energies and spiritual forces; at other times, it swooped back to the Earth and the mass of confused humanity that struggled across it. Through the span of his mind's eye, innumerable human beings streamed in a flood, faring on from birth to death. Whether their lives were long or brief, they had to spend it dodging hunger, sickness and pain as best they could; in the course of trying to hold on to their gains or to acquire more, many inflicted terrible wounds on others. Most died in anguish and confusion. Tuning into that, the Buddha's mind shivered with compassion. How embroiled people were in all this! And so fascinated by the sensory play! Like fish in a summer pond jumping at dragonflies as it steadily dries up, people's hearts seemed fixated on fleeting snatches of gratification, blind to their impending doom. 'But this is how it is,' he thought. 'Is there anything that I can do?'

His mind broadened as it traversed the entire Cosmos of sentient beings, all caught in birth and death. Regarding this, his awareness, vast and lofty as the sky, picked up the tone of compassion, sensed it and steadily merged into it — and in the bright attention of that awareness, a spirit formed. This was no mere sprite or demi-god, but the overseeing God of the conscious Universe. Some named him 'Brahma Sahampati' — 'the Boundless Father of All' — a Supreme

Being that the devout revered as the mediator of the order of the Cosmos. Of all the brahma deities, Sahampati was the One who balanced its turning wheel with his inscrutable will. He seemed to be its master — and yet he was bound to its turning through the countless ages; he too was not free from the ongoing train of birth and death. And, with his vision, he was painfully aware of how many beings were caught in its spin, innumerable as the planets that circled the wheel of the galaxies. All, it seemed — except for this one emaciated wanderer in a grove in the Ganges Valley. So, as the Buddha's awareness crystallized around the knowledge of the pangs, torments and the seemingly impenetrable ignorance of humanity, this great spirit found him, took note, and stirred within his heart.

The memory arose of how his own liberation had been supported by Sujāta, the young woman whose offering of milk-rice had turned his path from one of self-mortifying asceticism to a Way of natural simplicity. Then he remembered the image that had arisen of the time when he was a child sitting peacefully in a state of purity under a tree while his father performed a ceremony for the success of the crops nearby. The recollection of that had triggered his realization of the Middle Way, natural, enriching and peaceful. The sense of deep gratitude turned his thoughts to how his father, mother and so many other humans had made his life possible; how their goodness, generosity and commitments to his welfare had touched him in many ways. Humans were certainly confused, as confused as he had been — but many of them too had perfections, some surely could be taught ... if there were a means to teach that Way.

But there arose in him the recognition that he had no teachings, no rituals to present, no philosophical system to expound. He had nothing to say. So his awareness gently released from compassion to on-looking equanimity. But as it opened out like the boundless sky, it met the great overseeing spirit calling him to turn towards the Earth, the universal Mother. Brahma Sahampati, knowing the potential that the Buddha was carrying, descended from on high to kneel on the earth at his feet. As if calling her to witness, the Father of All, palms pressed together and raised in prayer, resonated great compassion through the open awareness of the Buddha. 'Blessed One, there are beings with but a little dust in their eyes. Out of empathy, please present Truth to them!'

As the universal prayer resounded in the Buddha's mind and met his personal memories and reflections, his awareness explored the field of human *kamma*. It was an impenetrable maze to the unenlightened, but to a Buddha, the law of intention, of where wholesome or unwholesome inclinations lead, was as evident as if it were inscribed on a scroll that he could study with ease. As he reflected thus, he realized that, true enough, in this world there were many who had the basis of perfections — people who refrained from taking life; people

whose words were straight, well-expressed and timely; people who respected truth and honoured the sanctity of awareness; people who devoted themselves to integrity ... All they needed to do was to distil those qualities and turn their minds inwards ... If they put aside every other duty, belief or perspective than that of living their good intentions, of valuing, upholding and studying them — their lives would be a blessing. And furthermore, they might thereby realize where even those intentions come to rest.

Still uncertain as to how and what to teach, the Buddha instead chose those who were likeliest to be receptive to him. His five fellow-seekers came to mind; he had moved away from them for the consummation of his quest — yet there was a strong thread of fellowship there. He decided to follow that lead, trusting that a teaching would arise spontaneously at their meeting. So, letting his empathy and resolve guide him, the Buddha set off in the direction of Varanasi. A great Wheel of purpose and focus had begun to turn. Once he had proclaimed it, that Dhamma would keep rolling for millennia, even to lands far removed from the Buddha's home. Some said that the very sky resounded with joy.



## Further Connections



For Internet connections to articles, books and places within Theravada Buddhism, I'd recommend:

**[www.accesstoinsight.org](http://www.accesstoinsight.org)**

**[www.buddhanet.net](http://www.buddhanet.net)**

**[www.forestsangha.org](http://www.forestsangha.org)**

(the umbrella website that includes many of Ajahn Chah's monasteries)

**[www.cittaviveka.org](http://www.cittaviveka.org)**

(the website of the monastery where I live, which also has teachings you can download)

**[www.forestsanghapublications.org](http://www.forestsanghapublications.org)**

(a place where this book as well as many more sangha publications can be found)

# Pāramī



The original inspiration for the title of this book, '*Pāramī - Ways to Cross Life's Floods*', came from a watercolour by artist George Sharp.



## Note on the Author



Born in London in 1949, Ajahn Sucitto entered monastic life in Thailand in 1975. He subsequently took bhikkhu ordination there in 1976, but returned to Britain in 1978 to train under Ven. Ajahn Sumedho in the lineage of the Thai forest master, Ven. Ajahn Chah.

In 1979, Ajahn Sucitto was part of the group that established Cittaviveka, Chithurst Forest Monastery, in West Sussex. He has lived there for the greater part of his monastic life, but travels on teaching engagements throughout the world.



This work is licenced under the  
Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivs 2.0  
UK: England & Wales Licence. To view a copy of this licence, visit:  
<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/2.0/uk/>

Summary:

You are free:

- to copy, distribute, display and perform the work

Under the following condition:

- Attribution: You must give the original author credit.
- Non-Commercial: You may not use this work for commercial purposes.
- No Derivative Works: You may not alter, transform, or build upon this work.

With the understanding that:

- Waiver: Any of the above conditions can be waived if you get permission from the copyright holder.
- Public Domain: Where the work or any of its elements is in the public domain under applicable law, that status is in no way affected by the license.
- Other Rights: In no way are any of the following rights affected by the license:
  - Your fair dealing or fair use rights, or other applicable copyright exceptions and limitations;
  - The author's moral rights;
  - Rights other persons may have either in the work itself or in how the work is used, such as publicity or privacy rights.
- Notice: For any reuse or distribution, you must make clear to others the licence terms of this work.

Bhikkhu Sucitto asserts his moral rights to be identified as the author of this book.

Bhikkhu Sucitto requests that you attribute ownership of the work to Amaravati Publications on copying, distribution, display or performance of the work.