

A detailed black and white illustration of a hand holding a cluster of five leaves. The hand is positioned on the right side of the frame, with the fingers gently cupping the stems of the leaves. The leaves are detailed with visible veins and are arranged in a fan-like pattern. The background is a light, textured grey.

It's like this

NINETY REFLECTIONS TO HONOUR LUANG POR SUMEDHO IN HIS NINETYETH YEAR

It's like this

LUANG POR SUMEDHO



Preface



This collection of quotes is offered with a heart of gratitude and devotion to Luang Por Sumedho, for the many decades of his dedication to practising, realizing and sharing the Dhamma. Here he is, in his 90th year, still offering talks and Q&As, continuing to encourage people in their spiritual practice.

How many times have we perhaps heard the expression, ‘the power of the written word’? Over the years, I have met many people who have been profoundly affected by the teachings offered by Luang Por Sumedho, either through listening to talks, reading books and articles or meeting him. Many people have told me how inspiration arose as they read pages filled with what were perceived as teachings from the heart, from life experience, so down-to-earth and real.

These ninety quotes were sourced from several different books by Luang Por Sumedho, selected by a wide variety of people who are familiar with his teachings. The task of collecting the quotes was easy, but the process of choosing ninety from the much larger pool was challenging at times because they were all gems. We hope that this selection of quotes, offered 'for your reflection', will be of benefit to all who read them.

AJAHN AHIMSAKO

Meditation



I was walking on *pindapat* at Tum Saeng Pet. I was trying to be very mindful, walking barefoot, and my right leg was very sensitive; I had to be most careful of it. It was very bumpy, rocky and rooty up at Tum Saeng Pet, and I said to myself: 'You must be mindful while walking, Sumedho!' So I tried to be incredibly mindful, ever so careful – and I stubbed my toe. It was very painful and I said to myself: 'You're not being mindful, Sumedho!' While I was saying that, I stubbed my toe again and it was absolutely excruciating. So I heard myself saying, 'You're not mindful at all! You're just a hopeless case!' – and I stubbed my toe for the third time. I was about ready to faint. And there I was, thinking, 'You've got to be mindful; be mindful; try to be more mindful; I wasn't mindful.' I was completely caught up with my *ideas* about being mindful, and my poor toe was suffering along with the rest of me.

The word 'meditation' can mean all kinds of things. It's a word that includes any kind of mental practice, good or bad. But when I use this word, what I'm mainly using it for is that sense of centring, that sense of establishing, resting in the centre of the mind.

The only way one can do that is to not try and think about or analyze it;

you have to trust in just this simple act of attention, of awareness.

It's so simple and so direct that our complicated minds get confused.

The thought 'I am' is an impermanent condition.

The thought 'I am not' is an impermanent condition.

Thoughts, memories, consciousness of thinking,
the body itself, our emotions – all conditions change.

In the practice of meditation, you must be quite serious, brave and courageous.

You must really investigate, dare to look at even the most unpleasant conditions in life,
rather than try to escape, to seek tranquillity or to forget about everything.

People say to me, 'I can't do all that, I'm just an ordinary person,
a layman; when I think of doing all that,
I realize I can't do it, it's too much for me.' I say,
'If you think about it, you can't do it, that's all.
Don't think about it, just do it.' Thought only takes you to doubt.
People who think about life can't do anything.
If it's worth doing, do it.

One night we were sitting in our forest monastery in Thailand meditating when I heard an American pop song I had hated when I was a layman. It was being blasted out by one of those medicine sellers who go to Thai villages in big vans, with loudspeakers that play this kind of music in order to attract the villagers to come and buy their medicines. The wind was blowing in the right direction, and the sound of *Tell Laura I Love Her* seemed to be in the meditation hall itself. I hadn't heard American pop music for many years,

so while this sentimental song was playing I actually began to cry, and I started to recognize the tremendous emotional pull of that kind of music. If you don't really understand it, it grabs your heart and you get caught up in the excitement and emotion of it. This is the effect of music when you're not mindful. So our chanting is in a monotone because if you concentrate on it, it won't carry you away into sentimental feelings, into tears or ecstasy. Instead you feel tranquil, peaceful, serene.

In your meditation now, as you incline towards the emptiness of the mind, towards the space in the mind, your habitual grasping, fascination, revulsion, fears, doubts and worries about these conditions lessen. They're not-self, nothing to be excited about or depressed about, they are as they are. You begin to recognize that conditions are just things that come and go and that's why we can allow them to be just as they are; their nature is to go away, so we don't have to make them do so. We're free and patient and enduring enough to allow things to take their natural course. In this way we liberate ourselves from the struggle, strife and confusion of the ignorant mind – which has to spend all its time evaluating and discriminating, trying to hold onto or get rid of something.

Conduct and Monastic Life



It takes much less skill
to live with mosquitoes
than with another person.



Our path of practice is to do good, to refrain from doing evil with body and speech and to be mindful. Don't create complexities around that or seek perfection in the realm of the senses. Learn to serve and help each other. Take refuge in the Sangha by being confident of your intentions to be enlightened, to do good, to refrain from doing evil. Maybe you'll fail sometimes, but that's not your intention. And always allow others to fail. We may have ideas and opinions about each other, but give each other space to be imperfect, rather than demanding that everyone be perfect so as not to upset you.

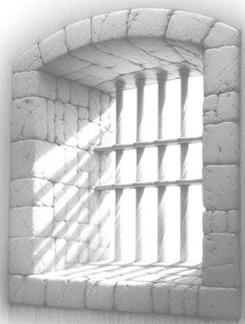
The Eight Precepts are guidelines; they are not burdensome rules that make you feel guilt-ridden if you don't live up to their highest standard.

You're not expected to be perfect all at once.

This is a way of training, a way of guiding yourself towards recognizing the conditions of your mind, towards recognizing resistance, laziness, indulgence and the resentment of being restricted.

You should want to see these things, so that you can release yourself from the burdens of repression and indulgence and find the Middle Way.

O nce you see what it is all about, you really want to be very, very careful about what you do and say. You can have no intention to live life at the expense of any other creature. One does not feel that one's life is so much more important than anyone else's. One begins to feel the freedom and the lightness in that harmony with nature rather than the heaviness of exploitation of nature for personal gain. When you open the mind to the truth, then you realize there is nothing to fear. What arises passes away, what is born dies and is not-self – so that our sense of being caught in an identity with this human body fades out. We don't see ourselves as some isolated, alienated entity lost in a mysterious and frightening universe. We don't feel overwhelmed by it, trying to find a little piece of it that we can grasp and feel safe with, because we feel at peace with it. Then we have merged with the Truth.

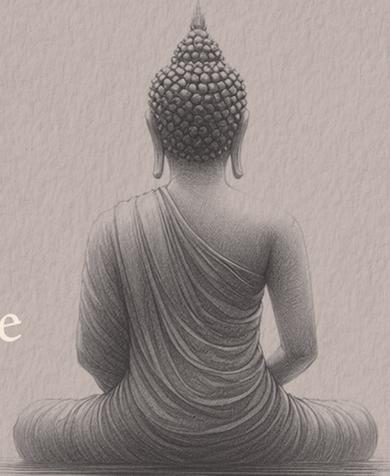


We are prone to having blind attachments. For example, say you're locked up in a foul, stinking prison cell, and the Buddha comes and says, 'Here's the key. All you have to do is take it and put it in the hole there underneath the door handle, turn it to the right, turn the handle, open the door, walk out and you're free.' But you might be so used to being locked up in prison that you don't quite understand the directions, so you say,

'Oh, the Lord has given me this key,' and you hang it on the wall and pray to it every day. That might make your stay in prison a little more happy, you might be able to endure all the hardships and the stench of your foul-smelling cell a little better – but you're still in the cell because you haven't understood that it wasn't the key in itself that was going to save you. Due to lack of intelligence and understanding, you just grasped the key blindly. That's what happens in all religion; we just grasp the key to worship it, pray to it, but we don't actually learn to use it.

Somebody asked me once,
'Do you ever take off your robes and have a holiday?'
They were surprised to find out that we don't put
on a Hawaiian shirt and pop down to the beach.
Our holiday is in the mind rather than outside;
you have to find the real holiday resort within yourself.

Silence



We learn to turn away from seeking absorption into objects of the senses. We find our peace in the emptiness of the mind, in its clarity, in its silence. We can find our rest in that silence, in that peace of mind. And we turn to that more and more, rather than to distraction through the senses. Then, as you find this place of peace, the inclination to absorb into the objects of sense diminishes considerably, one no longer feels that compulsion to absorb into the things you see, hear, smell, taste, touch, or think. One turns and inclines to Nibbāna, the peace of the mind, the Unconditioned.



The more I pay attention and am aware, the more I recognize
that in this still point there's this resounding sound of silence.
I didn't create that. I can't claim the sound of silence is some
personal creation of mine, that it belongs to Ajahn Sumedho.
It's like trying to claim the air, the space:
'All the space in the world belongs to me.'

The sound of silence is like infinite space
because it includes all other sounds, everything.
It gives a sense of expansion, unlimitedness, infinity.
Other sounds come and go, change and move accordingly,
but the sound of silence is like a continuum, a stream.

Most of the time your mind is full of things; then you have to be patient with this great activity and restlessness. Just be aware of that, watch the pain or whatever it is. Don't ask: 'Why am I restless?' If you do, then you are always trying to figure out your restlessness. The idea is to endure its presence until it goes away. Notice how things change. So you are being the silent watcher, the silent listener. You can actually hear this listening very clearly; it's the 'sound of silence'. When you understand that sound of silence in your mind, then you have a perspective on all mental states – whether trivial or important or whatever their quality might happen to be.

Just rest in this state of openness and receptivity.

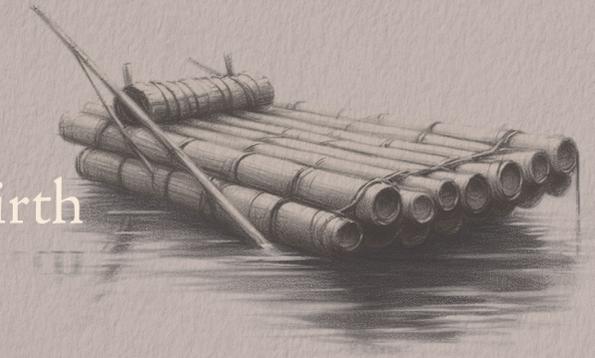
Don't attach to the idea of it.

You can attach to the idea of the sound of silence and of attaining something with it,

or keep creating some false illusions around it.

That's not it. It's not a matter of trying to make anything out of it,
but of fully opening to this present moment in a way that is unattached.

Kamma and Rebirth



We're sitting now in a room full of kammic formations which we conceive to be permanent personalities. We carry them around like a 'conceptions bag', because on the conceptual level of thoughts we regard each other as permanent personalities. How many things do you carry around with you, such as grudges against people, infatuations, fears and events in the past? We can become upset just by thinking of the name of someone who caused us suffering over something that happened twenty years ago.

'How dare they do that, treat me like that!' Some people ruin the rest of their lives by carrying grudges around. But as meditators we break through the pattern of memory. Instead of remembering people and making them real, we see that in the moment, memory and bitterness are changing conditions; we see that they are *anicca, dukkha, anattā*. They are formed in time, just like the sand grains of the Ganges River – whether they are beautiful, ugly, black or white, sand grains is all that they are.

Rebirth is nothing more than desire seeking some
object to absorb into, which will allow it to arise again.

This is the habit of the heedless mind.

I am only interested in rebirth as something which you can witness with the mind. You can talk about a previous life or the next life, but then you are just dealing with speculation. The emphasis in the teaching though is always on the here and now rather than speculating about the past or imagining the future. When you understand what the Buddha was really teaching, then rebirth in those terms is really the process of becoming – which is a mental process. You are becoming something all the time.

In heedlessness, when you are not being mindful,
but just following habit and its process of becoming something,
you mentally slip into role after role. For example becoming a father and a teacher,

and something else and then something else,
according to what you are attaching to and
absorbing into on the sensual plane.



Kamma will cease through recognition. In mindfulness you allow kammic formations to cease rather than recreating them, or annihilating them and recreating them. It's important to recollect that whatever you create, you destroy, and what you annihilate, you create – one conditions the other, just as the inhalation conditions the exhalation. One is the kammic result of the other. Death is the kammic result of birth, and all we can know about that which is born and dies is that it is a condition and not-self.

Conscious Awareness



When we are meditating, we are ‘being the knowing’. Taking refuge in Buddha means to be the knowing, to be wakeful. It doesn’t mean we believe we are Buddha – that’s delusion. But one becomes the Buddha, or the Tathāgata (‘One Gone to Thusness’) as the transcending knowing – by being awake. Then Māra comes in all its different ways; all your fears, doubts, worries, greeds, etc., come swirling around your head and inside your heart – then you say, ‘I know you, Māra.’ Just be that knowing.

We tend to develop a conception of awareness and try to *become* aware, thinking it is something we have to get, attain or try to develop; but this very intention, this very conceptualization, makes us heedless.

We keep trying to *become* mindful, rather than just being aware of the mind as it tries to become and tries to attain, following the three kinds of desire that cause us suffering.

The religious life is a life of renunciation in which we renounce, abandon and let go of things. To the worldly mind, 'renunciation' might sound as though we're getting rid of something, or condemning the sense world, rejecting it because we see it as evil or wrong. But renunciation isn't a moral judgement against anything. Rather, it is a moving away from that which complicates and makes life difficult, towards the ultimate simplicity

of pure mindfulness in the present moment. Because enlightenment is here and now; the Truth is now. There isn't anyone who can become anything. There isn't anyone who is born or who will die, there is only this eternal now. This awareness now is what we can tune into, as we let go of the appearances and the habitual tendencies, and incline towards this simple reflection on the present.

I find the more I am aware, my personal past seems
totally unimportant and of no interest whatsoever.

It doesn't mean anything, actually. It's just a few memories.
Yet taking it from the personal view, if I get caught in thinking about
myself as a real personality, then suddenly I find my past important.

If some kind of unskilful emotion or characteristic arises in consciousness, and you think “That’s unskilful” then you make more of it than it is. You don’t have to regard anything as unskilful – it is what it is. If you trust your intuitive wisdom you will know how to respond to a situation rather than just reacting to it and creating some kind of ‘bad trait’ that you have to get rid of, and feel that ‘there is something wrong with me because I have this characteristic.’ That just leads to complications. It becomes conceptual proliferation. You create a mountain out of a molehill.

What's left when there is no grasping
is consciousness knowing itself,
awareness aware of awareness.

Memory is what we have experienced, and the future is the unknown.
But who is it who knows the conditions of the moment? I can't find that 'who':
there's only the knowing, and knowing can know anything that is present now –
pleasant or unpleasant, speculations about the future or reminiscences
of the past, creations of yourself as this or that.
You create yourself or the world you live in, so you can't really blame anyone else.

When there is purity, there is nobody, no thing;
there's just 'that', 'suchness'. And let go of that.
More and more the path is just simply being here and now,
being with the way things are.
There's nowhere to go, nothing to do,
nothing to become, nothing to get rid of.

The mind has a radiant quality to it. Consciousness has a radiance; it has a light itself. When we begin to let go of always limiting ourselves through the distortions of our conditioned mental states, then we begin to understand, to see things as they really are, to know the Dhamma – enlightenment. This is not something distant, remote and impossible, unless you want to hold to those views from a personal attitude about them.

Resting in this conscious awareness is referred to as 'coming home' or 'our real home'.

It's a place to rest, a home.

The idea of a home is a place where you belong.

You are no longer a foreigner or an alien.

You begin to recognize this through a sense of relief,

of just being home at last, of not being a stranger,

a wanderer out in the wilderness.

What is most simple is to wake up. 'Buddha' means 'awake', it's as simple as that. The most profound teaching is the phrase 'wake up'. Hearing this, one then asks, 'What am I supposed to do next?' We complicate it again because we're not used to being really awake and fully present. We're used to thinking about things and analyzing, trying to get something or get rid of something, achieving and attaining. In the scriptures there are occasions where a person is enlightened just by a word or by something very simple.

Being in a pleasant state of mind is not a prerequisite for inclusive awareness. One can be in the pits of hell and misery and yet still open to the experience of being aware, and thus allow even the most upsetting states to be just what they are.

When we let go and simply abide in pure, unattached consciousness, that is also the experience of unconditioned love. Pure consciousness accepts everything. It is not a divisive function; it doesn't have preferences of any sort. It accepts everything and every condition for what it is – the bad, the good, the demons, anything. So when you begin to trust in it, the *mettā bhāvanā* practice comes alive. Rather than just spreading good thoughts and altruistic ideas, it becomes practical and very real.

When you begin to trust in the awareness, the conscious moment that is infinite, then everything belongs in it. From the perspective of this conscious being, whatever arises in this consciousness is accepted and welcomed, whether it's through the senses from the outside or from the inside – in other words, all the emotional and physical conditions that become conscious in this present moment. This sense of love, acceptance and non-judgement accepts everything you are thinking, feeling and experiencing. It allows everything to be what it is.

Taking refuge in the Buddha, in wisdom, means that we have a place of safety.

When there is wisdom, when we act wisely and live wisely, we are truly safe.

The conditions around us might change.

We can't guarantee what will happen to the material standard of living,

or that our bank will survive the decade.

The future remains unknown and mysterious.

But in the present, by taking refuge in the Buddha,

we have the presence of mind now to reflect on and learn from life as we live it.

Desire is natural to this realm, so why shouldn't we have desire? What's wrong with desire anyway? We struggle to get rid of all our desires. Trying to purify our minds and conquer desire becomes a personal challenge. But can you do it? I can't. I can suppress desires sometimes and convince myself that I don't have any, but I can't sustain it. When you contemplate the way things are, you see that this realm is like this – what is attractive and beautiful one desires to move towards and grasp; what is ugly and repulsive gives rise to the impulse to withdraw. That's just the way it is; it's not some kind of personal flaw. There is an awareness that embraces the movement of attraction and aversion. You can be aware of being attracted and aware of being repelled.

The Four Noble Truths



You are never going to find complete contentment by just being an unreflective human being. This human form is temporary, a transition from birth to death. You have to live within its limits and through the pain and experiences you meet. If we open ourselves to this then this sense of the Divine and the Wholeness and the Truth comes. We begin to have inklings of that – but in Buddhist teaching it is never put into metaphysical statements. The Noble Truths are not metaphysical truths.

Metaphysical statements aren't necessarily wrong, but because of our human state we can't really know because we are too much involved in survival and instinct, life and pain. So you start from there rather than from God and a hierarchy of statements about some universal system. The Way of Enlightenment is to penetrate existence as you are actually experiencing it. What you are really doing in meditation is going to the ultimate subject, the subject that you can never get beyond.

The First Noble Truth is 'There is suffering', and the advice,
the prescription to deal with this suffering, is to welcome it,
understand it, open to it, admit it, and begin to notice and accept it.

This gives rise to the willingness to embrace and learn
from that which we don't like and don't want:
the pain, the frustration and the irritation,
whether it's physical, mental or emotional.

Rather than making metaphysical statements
about True Nature or Ultimate Reality,
the Buddha's teaching points to the condition of grasping.
That's the only thing that keeps us from enlightenment.

When you are suffering, ask: 'Why am I suffering? Why am I miserable?' Because you are clinging to something! Find out what you are clinging to, to get to the source. It may be, 'I'm unhappy because nobody loves me.' That may be true; maybe nobody does love you, but the unhappiness comes from wanting people to love you. Even if other people do love you, you will still have suffering if you think they are

responsible for your happiness or suffering. Someone says: 'You are the greatest person in the world!' and you jump for joy. Someone says: 'You are the most horrible person I've met in my life!' and you're depressed. Let go of depression, let go of happiness. Keep the practice simple: live your life mindfully and morally, and have faith in letting go.

In the practice of the Dhamma we no longer seek to attach to friendship or to liking someone – we are no longer seeking to be only with that which we like and esteem, but instead to be able to maintain a balance under all conditions.

How do we use wisdom? By recognizing our own particular forms of pride, conceit and the attachments we have to our views and opinions, to the material world, to the tradition and the teacher, and to the friends we have. This doesn't mean thinking we shouldn't attach or that we should get rid of them all. That's not wise either, because wisdom is the ability to observe attachment, understand it and let go, rather than attaching to ideas that we shouldn't be attached to anything.

Don't expect any social situation, any society,
any organization or group to be perfect or an end in itself.

It's only a conventional form,
and like anything else it is unsatisfactory if
we're expecting to be completely satisfied by it.

Any teacher or guru to whom you attach
will inevitably disappoint you in some respect.

Realization



In life, wisdom arises within us when we understand the things we are experiencing here and now. You don't have to do anything special. You don't have to experience all kinds of extreme pain in order to transcend pain. The pain in your ordinary life is enough to urge you towards enlightenment. We can regard all these feelings of hunger or thirst, of restlessness, jealousy or fear, of lust and greed and sleepiness, as teachers. Rather than resenting them and saying, 'What did I do to deserve this?' you should say: 'Thank you very much. I'll have to learn this lesson some day; I might as well do it now, rather than put it off.'

Paññā, or wisdom, comes from intuition, not from analysis.

You can know all about Buddhism and
still not use any wisdom in your life.



When we no longer expect or demand,
then of course we don't feel the resulting despair and sorrow and grief
when we don't get what we want.
So this is the goal – 'Nibbāna', or realization of non-grasping
of any phenomena that have a beginning and an ending.
When we let go of this insidious and habitual attachment to what is born and dies,
we begin to realize the Deathless.

The thing about being human is that we have to touch the Earth, we have to accept the limitations of this human form and planetary life. And just by doing that, then the way out of suffering isn't through getting out of our human experience by living in refined conscious states, but by embracing the totality of all the human and Brahma realms through mindfulness. In this way, the Buddha pointed to a total realization rather than a temporary escape through refinement and beauty. This is what the Buddha means when he is pointing the way to Nibbāna.



N°49

In meditation we are moving towards where there is nothing to remember and nothing to forget, which doesn't mean 'nothing', but a centring, a realization of Ultimate Reality, of that which is not conditioned.

Realization is not gaining. You don't 'gain' realization. You realize something which you have all the time but never notice. Meditation is not a gaining process either. We are not here to make ourselves into Buddhas, Bodhisattvas, Arahants or anything else, or to try to condition our minds into being Buddhist. You might think you have to have a religious brainwash, throw away all your Christian habits and simply train yourself to think like a Buddhist – wear the robe, try to look like a Buddha image, use all those Pali words and call yourselves 'Buddhists'. That's just another costume, another act, another role to play.

What do we mean by ultimate truth? We can say, 'Ultimate Truth'; we can use the Pali word 'Dhamma' or the Sanskrit word 'Dharma'; we can say, 'The Absolute'; we can say 'God'. Whatever word one happens to be conditioned with is the word one prefers. 'Ultimate Truth' might sound a bit intellectual or not have the pull on the heartstrings that 'God' has, but we don't quibble about terminology any more. We don't care exactly what word we use. We don't try to find the perfect word to describe something which doesn't need any description, which cannot really be described but can only be realized. We just do the best we can with whatever language we happen to have, because the point is not to decide which terminology is the most accurate, but to go beyond the term to the actual realization of 'Ultimate Reality', 'God', 'The Absolute' or whatever.

We wonder, 'How do such ugly thoughts come into my mind? If I were really good, I would never have such evil thoughts or feelings.' But we can realize, without trying to become anything, that these conditions are just that. Whether they are noble, brave and courageous, or weak, wishy-washy, ignoble and stupid, they are still only conditions, dependent on all kinds of factors that we can't predict or control.

When I talk about realization, do you see what I mean? It's a realizing. It's not a searching for 'God', or 'Ultimate Truth' as if it were some 'thing'. Look at the word itself. You say 'God' and that makes it sound like some 'thing'. It does to me, anyway; the word 'God' sounds like something, somebody, as if it were a kind of condition. So you can only go so far on the religious path at the intellectual level, only as far as a belief. If you believe in words or ideas but never go beyond them, you're still caught in attachment to an idea about

the truth, rather than knowing the truth. That's why the Buddha did not teach any kind of doctrine or belief system. I hear Buddhists say, 'Buddhists don't believe in God, and we don't believe in the soul. If you're a real Buddhist, you don't have any of that stuff, souls and gods; soulless and godless is what we are.' But that's an annihilationist teaching. That's pure annihilationism. Disbelieving in God and a soul is just the opposite of the other, of believing; it's not a realizing of truth. It's only believing a negation rather than believing an affirmation.

Realize that everything that arises passes away and is not-self. That's a constant refrain, a realizing. Whatever your hang-ups are, let them become fully conscious, so that you begin to realize them as conditions, rather than personal problems. Let go of the identity of yourself as having problems with this or that, and realize that the problems we do have are conditions which come and go and change.

They are not 'me', not 'mine'; they are not 'what I am'. You recollect continually until you begin to break through, until as you develop in this way, the mind begins to clear because you are allowing things to cease. You're not reinforcing habits all the time; you are allowing habits that have arisen to cease, to end, and you begin to find a calm, an unshakeable peace within yourself.

The important thing is not trying to
think perfect thoughts or act like saints,
but to realize the way things are.

Knowing Things as They Are



Our practice is putting ourselves in the position of
the One Who Knows. The knower is always now;
we don't know about the past or future;
knowing now is the Buddha-knowing.
And what we can know directly at this moment
is that anything that begins must end.

The tendency of the modern mind is to think that there's some ogre lurking way down deep inside, just waiting for an unguarded moment to overwhelm you and drive you permanently insane. Some people actually live their whole lives with that kind of fear. But a monster is just a *saṅkhāra*, another grain of sand in the Ganges River. It's maybe an ugly sand grain, but that's all. If you're upset every time you see an ugly sand grain, you'll find life increasingly difficult. We have to accept the fact that some sand grains are ugly. Let them be ugly; don't be upset. If you saw me sitting beside the Ganges River looking at ugly sand grains, saying, 'I'm going to go crazy!' you'd think, 'Ajahn Sumedho *is* crazy!' Even a really ugly sand grain is just a sand grain.

Don't create fear around what you're feeling, around anger or jealousy,
the idea that you shouldn't be afraid of anything.

Have acceptance for fear: it's like this. It's not idealizing acceptance.

It's allowing conditions to be what they are. They can only be the way they are.

When you're feeling fear, fear can only be like this. It's not something you choose.

Conditions for fear arise, and this is what you're feeling. Acceptance of the fear is:

it's like this. You're allowing it to be, welcoming it, accepting it.

It is what it is. And in that relationship, you can let go of it,
which is not annihilating it, but recognizing that fear is impermanent, not-self.

Gotama the Buddha was one whose wisdom came from observing Nature, the conditions of mind and body. That's not impossible for any of us to do. We have minds and bodies; all we have to do is to watch them. It's not as if we have to have special powers to do that, or that somehow this time is a different time from that of Gotama the Buddha. Time is an illusion caused by ignorance.



We have this ability to contemplate the nature of things, the ability to say,

‘This is the way it is.’

We can notice ‘the way it is’ without adopting a personality viewpoint. ...

The mood of the mind, whether we feel bright or dull, happy or unhappy,

is something we can know, we can witness.

And the empty mind, empty of the proliferations about oneself and others, is clarity.

It’s intelligent and compassionate.

As long as you hold to the view that
'I'm not wise yet, but I hope to become wise',
you'll end up with grief, sorrow, despair and anguish.
It's that direct.
It's learning to trust in being the wisdom now,
in being awake.

Right now, no matter whether you are feeling high or low or indifferent, happy or depressed, enlightened or totally deluded, half-enlightened, half-deluded, three-quarters deluded, one-quarter enlightened, hopeful or despairing – this is the way it is. And it can't be any other way at this moment. This doesn't mean we can't try to make things better, but we do so from understanding and wisdom, rather than from an ignorant desire.

You can see old people as *devadūtas*.
Like me: I'll be sixty-seven in a few days.
Not only will I be a *devadūta* on the level of a *samaṇa*,
but an old man too.
As I get sick and senile, I'll be even more of a *devadūta*;
and when I'm dead, I'll be four all in one!

Sometimes when we're angry and hateful, we can bring it up and observe it. We don't have to act it out or try to resist it. If you want to kill me, I would prefer that you don't – but make it fully conscious so you can see it. 'I hate Venerable Sumedho and I want to kill him. I want to pull him apart, limb from limb. I want to poke his eyes out.' That's the way to make it fully conscious. You see it is only a condition in your mind and you can let it go.

Usually when we feel hate or anger we get frightened of it or we feel guilty: 'I hate Venerable Sumedho. ... Oh I shouldn't ... Oh, a good bhikkhu should love the teacher but I hate him.' It goes on; and you're never really aware of what's going on, you just vacillate between the emotion of hatred and the guilt around it. So have the courage to really hate – fully, consciously hate, but listen to it rather than act on it.

When I talk about reflection, it's not rational thinking,
it's not reason or logic that we're encouraging.
That keeps us from understanding or feeling anything,
whereas intuitive intelligence is on the heart level.
The intuitive sensitivity,
the feeling realm is experienced in the heart.

Conditions and the Unconditioned



As Buddhists, we take refuge in the Ultimate Truth, and in the Buddha, Dhamma and Sangha as conventional forms. This means that we have confidence in the Ultimate Truth, in the Uncreated and the Unconditioned – not in what we conceive, but in recognizing conditions as conditions and allowing kammic formations to cease.

Awareness is not-self, because you don't create it.

It's not personal. But it's knowing.

It's getting to recognize the reality of knowing

here and now is like this,

which is not judgemental,

not critical, not personal.

The refuge is in awakening to reality,
because the Unconditioned is reality.

This awareness, this awakesness,
is the gate to the Unconditioned.

When we awaken, that is the Unconditioned.

The conditions are whatever they are –
strong or weak, pleasant or painful, whatever.

Conditions always arise and cease now,
in the present.

The cessation is now.

The ending of the condition is now.

The end of the world is now.

The end of self is now.

The end of suffering is now.



As meditators, everything is teaching us something, if we're willing to learn to coexist with it: with the successes and failures, the living and the dead, the good memories and the disappointments. And what do we learn? That these are only conditions of our mind. They're things that we create and attach to,

and whatever we attach to is going to take us to despair and death. That's the ending of whatever begins. So we learn from that. We learn from our sorrows and grief, our disillusionment, and we can let go. We can allow life to operate following the laws of Nature and witness this, freeing ourselves from the illusion of self as being connected with the mortal condition. And so all conditions take us to the Unconditioned – even our sorrows and grief take us to emptiness, freedom and liberation, if we are humble and patient.

What's left when you let go,
when there's no attachment, no delusion,
is the Unborn, Uncreated, Unformed, Unconditioned,
which is consciousness, awareness, knowing:
'It's like this'.

Opening the Heart



Conviviality is an attitude of being at ease with life,
of openness and ease with being alive and breathing,
at ease with being present with what is arising in consciousness.

Often what passes for love in modern consciousness
is a strong attachment to another person, thing or creature.
But if you want to apply this word to that which accepts,
then you have *mettā* – love which is unattached,
which has no preferences,
which accepts and sees everything as belonging.

When we practise *mettā*, we begin to be willing to learn from termites and ants, from people who are slow, from the old, sick and dying.

We become willing to take time out to take care of somebody who is ill – and that takes patience. We become willing to take time out of our busy lives to help and be with somebody who is dying.

We become willing to try to contemplate and understand dying.

This is the direction we must take to create a really humane and good society.



I remember once going into a beautiful church in London with somebody. I said, 'Oh, what a lovely church.' He said, 'Yeah, it was probably at the expense of all those colonies the British exploited.' But I wasn't commenting on the history of the church, but experiencing the gladness of being in a beautiful place. And yet we can think that maybe that church was built out of the slave trade or the opium trade. Perhaps slave traders and drug traffickers centuries ago felt guilty, so they built a magnificent church in London. But that doesn't mean that it's not beautiful. We're not judging it on the moral plane, but reflecting on the joy, on the experience of beauty, goodness, and truth: these are what bring joy into our lives. People who can't see the beauty of the good or the true are really bitter and mean at heart; they live in an ugly realm where there's no rejoicing in beauty, goodness and truth.

M*uditā* is our ability to be joyful with the beauty and loveliness of life's experiences. It is the sense of joy and appreciation and gratitude for the beauties and the lovely things of life, the lovely things in other people. So when there's no self, then there's joy; we find joy in the goodness, the beauty of the people around us, or in society or natural conditions. Once you have insight, you find you enjoy and delight in the beauty and the goodness of things. Truth, beauty and goodness delight us: in them we find joy; that is *muditā*.

*M*ettā means a little more than just kindness. It is a penetrating kindness, a kind awareness. *Mettā* means we can coexist peacefully in a kindly way with sentient beings – both those voices and personae within us and with beings outside. It doesn't mean liking them. Some people go to that extreme. They say, 'I love my weaknesses because they're really me. I wouldn't be me if I didn't have my wonderful weaknesses.' That's silly. *Mettā* is being patient, being able to coexist with the pests of our minds, rather than trying to annihilate them.

When there is *vijjā*, knowing and seeing clearly, that gives full opportunity for the practice of kindness, compassion and the rest. But it is not me, not mine. ...

As soon as Sumedho-delusions step aside and cease, kindness, compassion, sympathetic joy and serenity can manifest.

This is why the human state is a great blessing: when the self-view is relinquished, what remains is a great blessing.

You can't make yourself feel love or devotion just because you like the idea of it. It's when you're not attached, when your heart is open, receptive and free, that you begin to experience what pure love is. Loving-kindness, compassion, sympathetic joy, equanimity – these come from an empty mind; not from a sterile position of just annihilating feeling, but from a heart that is not deluded, not blinded by ideas of self or others, or by passions of some kind or another.

M*ettā* is not analytical; it's not dwelling on why you hate somebody. It's not trying to figure out why I hate this person, but it includes the whole thing – the feeling, the person, myself – all in the same moment. So it's an embracing, a focus that includes and is non-critical. You're not trying to figure out anything, but just being open, accepting and patient with it.

Enlightenment is nothing more than growing up,
being a mature human being.
It is the perfection of human kamma:
in other words, maturing,
being responsible and balanced –
being a moral, wise human being,
who is no longer looking for ‘someone to love me.’

It's nice to be loved by others, but it's not necessary. You're not going around, saying, 'Please love me.' When there's wisdom, you can love – you don't need to be loved any more. That is the maturing of a human being, and there's no rebirth in that. Love is the natural radiance from wisdom. When there's wisdom, it's the natural way to relate to others – but when there's no wisdom, we tend to corrupt love with lust, possessiveness, jealousy and fear of rejection. All these things distort any kind of love we might be able to generate from our own mind, unless we love through wisdom rather than through desire.

Buddha-wisdom is a very humbling wisdom,
and it takes a great deal of patience to be wise like Buddha.
Buddha-wisdom isn't a particularly fascinating kind of wisdom –
it's not like being a nuclear physicist, a psychiatrist or a philosopher.
Buddha-wisdom is very humbling,
because it knows that whatever arises passes away and is not-self.
It knows that whatever condition of the body and mind arises, it is conditioned.
And it knows the Unconditioned as the Unconditioned.

Practising *mettā* towards ourselves means we stop trying to find all our weaknesses, faults and imperfections. Often when you have a bad mood or start to feel depressed, you think, 'Here I go again – I'm worthless.' When this happens, have *mettā* for the depression itself. Don't make a bad thing out of it, don't complicate it; be at peace with it. Coexist peacefully with depression, fears, doubts, anger or jealousy. Don't create anything around them with aversion.

Being and Not Being



Sometimes a lifetime's tendencies and habits towards becoming
and emphasizing yourself as an individual personality,
are so strong that you feel you should not be that way –
you should try to be nobody.

But trying to be nobody is still being somebody.
What I am suggesting is not to become nobody,
but to realize the truth of mind.

You may think, 'I'm just a nobody',
but even being a nobody is being somebody in this life.
You can be just as proud of being nobody as of being somebody,
and just as deludedly attached to being nobody.
But whatever you happen to believe,
whether that you're a nobody or a somebody,
that you have a mission, or are a nuisance and a burden to the world –
however you might view yourself,
the knowing is there to see the cessation of such a view.

The more we try to control nature,
to manipulate it according to our greed and desire,
the more we end up polluting the whole earth.

People are becoming really worried now because we can see so much pollution
from all the chemicals and pesticides we use to try to get rid
of the things in nature that we don't want.

When we try to annihilate the pests in our minds, we end up with pollution too –
we have nervous breakdowns and then the pests come back stronger than ever.



Our conceiving mind always tends to delude us, it takes us into becoming. We think, 'I'll practise meditation so that I'll become enlightened in the future. I will take the Three Refuges in order to become a Buddhist. I want to become wise. I want to get away from suffering and ignorance and become something else.' This is the conceiving mind, the desire mind, the mind that always deludes us. So rather than constantly thinking in terms of becoming something in the future, we take refuge in being Dhamma in the present.

You can see what comedy is about! We take ourselves so seriously, 'I'm such an important person, my life is so terribly important, that I must be extremely serious about it at all moments. My problems are so important, so terribly important; I have to spend a lot of time with my problems because they're so important.' One thinks of oneself somehow as very important, so then think it, deliberately think, 'I'm a Very Important Person, my problems are very important and serious.' When you're thinking that deliberately it sounds silly, because you realize you're not terribly important – none of us are. And the problems we make out of life are trivial things.

Some people can ruin their whole lives by creating endless problems,
and taking them all so seriously.





Offered for your reflection

Glossary



Ajahn	(Thai) teacher; from the Sanskrit ‘ <i>ācārya</i> ’: in the monasteries of the lineage of Ven. Ajahn Chah, this signifies a bhikkhu or <i>sīladhāra</i> (monk or nun) who has completed ten Rains Retreats (<i>vassa</i>)	devadūta	literally ‘heavenly messenger’; the four such messengers are: old age, sickness, death and a renunciant
anattā	literally ‘not-self’, i.e., impersonal, without individual essence; neither a person nor belonging to a person; one of the three characteristics of conditioned phenomena	Dhamma	the way it is, the true order of reality; often, the Buddha’s teachings
anicca	impermanent, inconstant, uncertain; one of the three characteristics of conditioned phenomena	dukkha	suffering, stress, unsatisfactoriness; one of the three characteristics of conditioned phenomena
bhāvanā	(spiritual) cultivation, that which develops calm, kindness and wisdom, as in the Eightfold Path; meditation or mental cultivation	kamma kammic	conscious intended action; action or cause which is created by habitual impulses, volitions, intentions. In popular usage, it often includes the result or effect of the action, although the proper term for this is <i>vipāka</i>
Buddha Buddho	the awakened one, the one who knows, the knowing; often used in the Thai Forest Tradition as a mantra during meditation	Luang Por	(Thai) literally, ‘revered father’, a title of respect and affection for an elder monk and teacher

Māra	evil and temptation personified as a deity ruling over the highest heaven of the sensual sphere; personification of the defilements, the totality of worldly existence and death	Sangha	the community of those who practise the Buddha's way; more specifically, those who have formally committed themselves to the lifestyle of a mendicant monk or nun
mettā	loving-kindness, goodwill	saṅkhāra	'mental formations'; the impulses, reactions and psycho-physical 'activities' that generate kamma; also the resultant habits that they create
muditā	sympathetic joy; gladness when sensing skilful and fortunate states	samaṇa	renunciant, contemplative (term for ordained monks or nuns)
Nibbāna	(equivalent to Sanskrit 'Nirvāṇa') literally 'extinguishing of a fire'; freedom from attachments, quenching, coolness	Tathāgata	term for the Buddha. 'One thus come/gone', i.e., the one who has transcendent knowledge; an epithet of the Buddha
Pali	the ancient Indian language of the Theravāda Pali Canon, akin to Sanskrit	vijjā	clear knowledge, genuine understanding, insight knowledge
pindapat	(Thai) alms-food, or the alms-round on which the food is received; from the Pali <i>piṇḍapāta</i>		



IT'S LIKE THIS

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