

Helping Yourself to Help Others

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translated by Puriso Bhikkhu

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Author's Note

Contained in this book is a transcript of a talk delivered to Police General Chavalit and Khun Tempun Yodmani, together with their friends and relatives, on an occasion of alms-giving in memory of the late Ajahn Chitra Dansuputra

The recorded cassette of the talk was passed on to Ven. Puriso, an Australian bhikkhu, abbot of Wat Kheuan in Ubon Ratchathani, by a Thai monk who resided there. After listening to the talk, he found it interesting and thought that its clear and relevant treatment of Dhamma practice would be especially helpful to Western practitioners. He therefore translated it into English, had it typewritten and then presented it to me for checking. His enthusiasm for having accomplished the task deserves appreciation and gratitude.

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Contents

Author's Note

Helping Yourself to Help Others	1
Making merit in the name of a deceased	1
By helping oneself one helps others	2
A medicine for treating the ills of life	3
The primal disease	5
Becoming aware of sense contact	8
Restraining the senses to see more clearly	10
The development of the mind	13
Qualities of <i>samādhi</i>	14
Right <i>samādhi</i>	16
The real value of <i>samādhi</i>	17
The Four Foundations of Mindfulness	18
Mindfulness and <i>samādhi</i>	19
Mindfulness and <i>vipassanā</i>	20
Keeping awareness in the present	21
Dhamma practice: passive or active?	23
In conclusion	25

Helping Yourself to Help Others

Making merit in the name of a deceased

The ceremony of making merit in the name of a deceased is one way of showing appreciation for our benefactors. Even many years after they have passed away, their children and relatives still take their goodness to heart and express their appreciation with an annual act of almsgiving, dedicating any merits arising from the occasion in their memory. This is one way of acknowledging their goodness, enabling their memory and worthiness to live on in the hearts of their children and relatives. It is also an opportunity for the sponsors to develop skillful qualities.

In the Buddhist religion it is said that when people perform meritorious actions in the name of a deceased, they should make their minds calm and clear. When the mind is so cleared and composed, that act of dedicating merit is said to be most efficacious.

Looking at it in one way, the act of merit-making seems to be done simply for the sake of the deceased, but if we look more closely we will see that really the results arise within ourselves. When we are performing an act of merit to be dedicated to another, we must first calm and clear our own minds, and then consciously dedicate the fruits of our good actions. When the mind is so established, our dedication of merit is most thorough and fruitful. So merit or goodness must first arise within our own heart before it can be dedicated to another.

By helping oneself one helps others

Therefore, in the practice of Dhamma, even if one specifically looks to the benefit of other beings, the results that are most assured are those that arise within oneself. Thus it is said that by helping oneself one helps others, and by helping others one helps oneself.

There is an analogy regarding this related by the Buddha in the story of the two acrobats. One form of acrobatics performed in the Buddha's time involved the use of a long bamboo pole, which was balanced on the head and shoulders of one acrobat, while another acrobat balanced himself on top of the pole. They would perform various tricks and balancing acts in this way. Two of these acrobats, master and apprentice, were traveling around the country performing their art.

One day the master said, "Now you keep your eye on me, and I'll keep my eye on you and so keep you from falling off."

The apprentice replied, "Oh, no, master. You should look after yourself while I look after myself. In this way we can perform our act and earn a living in safety."

The meaning of the story is: in looking after yourself you also look after others, and by looking after others you also look after yourself. In practicing the Dhamma we are cultivating virtue, which first arises in ourselves. That virtue can then extend to others, even without our knowing about it. Specifically, when practicing Dhamma we are cultivating morality (*sīla*), concentration (*samādhi*) and wisdom (*paññā*). When our moral conduct is pure we don't harm others. This is one result of Dhamma practice. Although we have developed that virtue within ourselves, its good effects extend to others

in that we no longer present any danger to them. Again, if we help others, for example by exercising forbearance (*khanti*), not harming others through anger, but exercising goodwill (*mettā*), and compassion (*karuṇā*), we are practicing Dhamma, the fruit of which also arises within ourselves. Thus it is said that looking after ourselves we look after others, and when looking after others we look after ourselves. The practice of Dhamma is co-productive in that its effects extend to all beings.

A medicine for treating the ills of life

Dhamma, when well practiced, is like a medicine for treating the ills of life, enabling us to live our lives well. The Buddha, as the proclaimer of the Dhamma, is like a skillful doctor who prescribed particular medicines for particular illnesses. If a doctor is not skillful, even though he may have good medicine, he may prescribe it wrongly. His treatment will then not be very effective. A skillful and wise doctor will be very effective in treating his patients, because he thoroughly understands the properties of the various medicines.

Sometimes we hear it said, “Buddhism has been with us for thousands of years, and yet we still see people fighting and in conflict. Evil still abounds. Buddhism seems incapable of dealing with it, it’s useless. We may as well dispense with it.” Some people see it like this.

Do you think this is true? They say that even though we’ve had this Buddhist religion for so many years, people are still corrupt, they still live in conflict. Religion seems powerless to stop these things. We can see no concrete results from religion at all. Better to do away with it.

To these people I say, “Well, the science of medicine has been with us for many thousands of years. Medicine is plentiful and there have been doctors curing illnesses throughout the ages, for thousands, even tens of thousands, of years. And yet we see disease and illness still abound. If what you say is true then we must also say that the science of medicine is redundant; we may as well throw that out, too.”

This leads us to consider that this body of ours is by nature a breeding ground for illness, and is subject to pain and aging. We have to procure medicines and exercise the body in order to maintain our strength and live as free of illness and pain as we can.

Therefore the science of medicine, and the profession of doctor, are still very valuable things. As long as there are people in the world there will be pain and disease, so there must also be treatment for them.

Similarly, in regard to religion, as long as there are people in the world there is also ‘mind’. Like the body, the mind can be weakened and damaged. Problems arise in the mind and cause discontent. The quality that disturbs the mind is what we call in Buddhism *dukkha* (suffering). As long as there are people living in this world there will be suffering, so we must also have a treatment for it. When one person is cured there are still countless others to follow.

So religion can be compared to the science of medicine, and the Buddha to a great doctor. Having cured many people in his own time, he also left us his teaching so that we who follow after him can treat our own illnesses.

In our lives we have both body and mind. As for the body, the doctors usually deal with its illnesses. It is the Dhamma,

however, that we must use for dealing with our lives as a whole, particularly the mind.

What is the disease that incessantly hounds the mind? It is the disease of defilements (*kilesa*). Whenever greed, hatred or delusion arise within the mind they cause discontent and suffering to arise. Such a mind can be called an ill or diseased mind. When diseases such as greed arise, they stifle and oppress the mind, causing it to become obsessed with some object or other. The mind is not spacious or clear. When hatred arises, it heats and agitates the mind. This is another disease that unsettles the mind, as do all other kinds of defilements.

The healthy mind should have the qualities of lightness, radiance, clarity and calm. Whenever defilements arise, these qualities disappear. Clarity becomes murkiness; calm changes to excitement and agitation; the quality of lightness gives way to oppression and conflict. These are the symptoms of the diseases of the mind, which are all caused by defilements. So we say that defilements are a disease which must be treated.

In this regard the Buddha's teaching is like a handbook of medicines. Some of the medicines are for specific illnesses. The cultivation of goodwill, for example, is for treating the disease of anger. Apart from goodwill, which acts like a refreshing, cool shower on the mind when it is oppressed and disturbed, there is also patient endurance to aid in driving annoyance and irritation from the mind, or compassion (*karuṇā*), for counteracting destructive thoughts, or wisdom (*paññā*), for brightening the mind and making it clear and light.

There are many different types of Dhamma medicine, and they must be used appropriately. One who aspires to skillfulness in using these medicines should follow the example of

the Buddha, whom we revere as the greatest ‘Dhamma Doctor,’ in that he prescribed medicines with the greatest skill. If a teacher is unable to use these medicines skillfully, his teaching may become like so much hot air. Those listening to such teachings would have to rely on their own wisdom to choose the teachings appropriate to their needs, and if they weren’t skillful they might not obtain much benefit from the teaching.

The primal disease

All of the above refers to Dhamma as a collection of specific medicines for use with specific illnesses, the diseases of the defilements. Now there is another kind of disease which is even more pervasive. Just now I spoke of the troubled and disturbed mind. Now this very mind, as well as the body, which together we call a ‘life,’ being compounded of the five *khandhas*¹, are all conditioned things (*saṅkhārā*). All conditioned things have certain characteristics. They are unstable, unenduring or suffering, and not self, they do not come under anybody’s power other than the natural process of cause and effect. All conditioned things conform to these Three Characteristics, known in Pali as the *tilakkhaṇa*². That all conditions are unstable, suffering and not self is another kind of disease, one that is inherent in all *saṅkhārā*. It is the disease of their imperfection, of their deprivation. Being imperfect they are naturally hounded by conflict, struggle and change.

¹ The five *khandhas* (aggregates or groups) are the five groups of conditions that make up human life: body, feeling, perception, volitional activities and consciousness.

² The Three Characteristics: impermanence (*anicca*), suffering or stress (*dukkha*) and not-self (*anattā*)

This imperfection also causes problems in the mind, so people suffer not only as a result of the workings of the grosser defilements, which we can clearly see arising from time to time in the mind, but also from the more subtle defilement of not knowing the true nature of life³. Suffering arises because of the very imperfection of conditions, of their being subject to the Three Characteristics. This is a more profound kind of disease, one which we must cure in order to really transcend suffering. It is not enough to simply try to cure the greed, hatred and delusion that are constantly arising in the mind: we must also clearly know the nature of life, that it is bounded by these Three Characteristics.

If we don't understand this, we will cling to the five *khandhas* as being a self or belonging to self, demanding of them not to change, but no matter how much we cling to them they won't conform to our wishes; they simply follow causal conditions. Clinging to them only causes disappointment and suffering.

Thus, on the deeper level, we could say that beneath the greed, hatred and delusion, the real cause of suffering is the imperfect nature of conditions, ignorance of which causes the defilements of greed, hatred and delusion to arise in the mind.

We must therefore study the diseases of our lives on two levels. The disease which is most apparent is the disease of the various defilements: greed, aversion, delusion, conceit, stubbornness, jealousy, stinginess and so on, which we see all around us. However, looking more deeply, we find that all disease is caused by the nature of conditions, which are bound by impermanence, stressfulness and insubstantiality.

³ This unknowing is called *avijjā* (ignorance).

Becoming aware of sense contact

We must find a way to treat these diseases by not allowing the defilements to arise. But how do we prevent the defilements from arising? First, we must look on a broader scale. Just now we looked at things in terms of ourselves, seeing the disease as something that arises in our own minds, in our own lives. We saw defilements arising in our own minds, while conditions, which are impermanent and imperfect, we saw as ourselves. But if we look on a broader scale we will see clearly that the disease (*roga*) is based on contact with the world (*loka*).

The spiritual disease and the world are connected. What is the connection? Why do greed, hatred and delusion arise within us, how do these things come about? Generally speaking, defilements arise from contact with the world. The world makes contact with us and we make contact with the world. How do we make contact with the world? We do so through our everyday experience, in sense contact, from receiving sense impressions through the eye, ear, nose, tongue, body and mind. Sensations that arise through the eye are called sights; those entering through the ear are called sounds; those entering through the nose are called smells; those entering through the tongue are called tastes; those entering through the body are called tactile sensations; those entering through the mind are thoughts and feelings. We experience our selves through these sensations. Whenever we experience no sensations, such as when we are in deep sleep or unconscious, we are not aware. When we are aware, it is through these sensations.

From where do these sensations arise? They come from the world, our environment. Our environment manifests itself to us through the eyes, ears, nose, tongue, body and mind,

which in Buddhism we call the six sense bases. Any experience that appears to us must appear to us through these avenues, as sights, sounds, smells, tastes, bodily feelings and thoughts.

Now these sensations, or experiences, appear to us and there is contact, after which follows an immediate response. All these experiences can therefore be seen as bases for greed to arise, for hatred to arise or for delusion to arise. If we have no Dhamma medicine, we will fall under the power of sensations and the corresponding reactions will take place: when a sensation that is a base for greed arises, we want to possess it; if a sensation that is a base for hatred arises, instead of seducing us into desire, it upsets us and taunts us into anger. This is how defilements arise in response to sense impressions.

In the case of the ordinary, untrained person (*puthujjana*), whenever a sense impression arises there will initially follow a feeling of pleasure or displeasure, depending on whether the sensation is agreeable or not. If it is agreeable to us there is a feeling of pleasure and there follows a reaction of liking or approval. Seeing a pleasant sight, or hearing a pleasant sound, we feel approval. If it's a sight that offends our eyes or a sound that grates our ears, one that we perceive to be unpleasant, there is a reaction of disapproval.

From these initial reactions of approval and disapproval arise mental proliferations, thoughts about sense objects which become problems in our mind and cause it to become stained and dull. The disease arises. So this disease arises within the mind, it's true, but it comes as a result of experiencing sensations, or the world as it appears to us through our senses.

Restraining the senses to see more clearly

We must know how to function correctly in this world. If we know how to function properly, the disease won't arise. To function properly in regard to the world is to function properly towards sense impressions. In this regard, the Buddha taught the initial practice of sense restraint, *indriyasamvara*: restraining the eyes, ears, nose, tongue, body and mind, so as to prevent sense impressions from overwhelming us and causing greed and hatred to arise. This entails using mindfulness (*sati*) – to know things as they are, as they arise. Whenever a sensation arises, *vedanā*, the feeling of pleasure, displeasure or indifference, is there. When a pleasant feeling arises, the unmindful person delights in it. When unpleasant feeling arises, the mind untrained in mindfulness flows down the stream of proliferations to disapproval, anger, displeasure, hatred and so on.

The mind of the average person will be in this state all the time, constantly flitting from delight to aversion, and in the *Tipiṭaka* these two words 'delight' and 'aversion' crop up frequently.

Whenever we experience a sense impression there is a resulting reaction from the mind. So I say we experience life through the awareness of sensations. Thus, the experience of sensation is a very important aspect of our everyday lives. If we don't practice correctly in relation to our experience of sense contact, defilements will arise, resulting in problems.

The first defilements to arise will be delight and aversion. Therefore it is said to cut the stream at its beginning by using mindfulness to guard the senses. In the beginning, we

recollect whenever a sensation has arisen. Whether it is to our liking or not we should not allow that sensation to overwhelm us, leading us to proliferate under the influence of delight and aversion, and from there to further harmful thoughts. This is how to practice properly in relation to sense impressions, which is also the proper relationship toward the world. When we practice like this, the diseases won't arise.

This is one aspect of the matter, the disease which arises within through sense contact. However, if we look more deeply we see that this interaction between ourselves and the world, what we call life, is all conditioned phenomena (*saṅkhārā*). The world consists of *saṅkhārā*, which all come under the domain of the Three Characteristics: they are all impermanent, stressful and not self. The whole world is therefore just the same as our individual lives, all changing and ephemeral. It is not within our power to force it to be any other way than as conditioning factors direct it (it is *anattā*).

Even though the world is *anattā*, people still attach to it. The word 'world' here refers to everything we come into contact with, not only our bodies but all our possessions, both living and non-living. They are all impermanent, stressful and not self, just as are our very lives. The wrong way to conduct oneself is to perceive sensations with clinging. Seeing sensations as ourselves or belonging to us, we expect them to obey our commands. When we cling to the world in this way, wanting everything, especially our possessions, to conform to our desires, to belong to us, then when those things change according to the natural laws of cause and effect, our minds manifest a state of turmoil and distress. Suffering arises. Thus, in the final analysis, the world causes disease to arise within us because it is subject to the Three Characteristics.

Summarizing, we can say that there are two distinct factors that cause the disease of suffering. First, *kilesa*, the unskillful interactions with the world through the influence of delight and aversion, as well as the many other kinds of defilements. The second way is by the very nature of the world itself, being impermanent, stressful and not self, which causes conflict to arise in the mind of anyone who clings to it.

However, the arising of problems, regardless of whether we look on the level of our own lives, or look outward to the world in general, must ultimately stem from one and the same source. The arising of problems in the most elementary sense occurs on a moment-to-moment basis, as the mind interacts with the various sensations and becomes, as a result, spoiled, agitated and tricked by greed, hatred and delusion.

If one has mindfulness and can cut the flow of defilements, by not allowing the mind to indulge in delight and aversion, then one can maintain the mind in a clear, calm state. The disease won't arise. However, on a deeper level, one must also understand the true nature of this world and our lives in their entirety, as impermanent, stressful and not self. One can thus relax the grip of attachment. Once the grip of attachment has been relaxed, one's mind is no longer swayed or overwhelmed by the world. No matter how things go, they can no longer rule over the mind. Not following those conditions, the mind detaches itself freely from them.

This is an important point. In the end, we must be able to free our mind, to make it liberated, clear and calm at all times.

What I've been talking about here is the practice of Dhamma on various levels. Firstly, I explained the practice of Dhamma as a medicine for specific illnesses. This includes

the various techniques for counteracting such defilements as selfishness or stinginess. When this arises, we would use one particular technique. If anger or envy arise we may use other techniques. On the deeper level, eventually we must know the true nature of conditioned things. Just by knowing the true nature of conditioned things we can thereby simultaneously cut defilements in all their forms, because we see that they are not worthy of holding onto. When we don't cling to things, they no longer spin us around, because we've seen their ultimate nature.

The development of the mind

So on the higher levels of Buddhist practice we talk about the training or cultivation of the mind (*bhāvanā*). This training also has various levels. Initially one may train the mind simply to be calm by the practice of *samādhi* (concentration). The aim of *samādhi* is to focus the mind at one sensation, or object of awareness. The everyday mind is rarely at rest, it's like a monkey, jumping from one impression to another. One moment it has one object of awareness, then in an instant it flies off somewhere else, then somewhere else again. The more it jumps around following sensations, the less it is its own master, and the more it is enslaved by those sensations and caught up in greed, hatred, and delusion.

If we are able to bring our mind to rest on one object, not jumping around after countless sensations, the mind will become manageable. So we must take one particular impression, anything will do that is wholesome and not outright harmful, such as a meditation theme. For example, one object that is quite neutral and doesn't cause the mind

to proliferate in unskillful ways is the in- and out- breathing. Another is the qualities of the Buddha, which is a very good theme for keeping the mind from wandering around.

When the mind rests with a meditation object we don't have to bother with sensations arising from the outside world. Defilements resulting from value judgments about externals do not arise.

This is the most elementary level of meditation practice: concentrating the mind on a harmless object. With the mind coming to rest on that object, we can be said to have accomplished our aim, the mind is in *samādhi*, being firmly fixed on one object. When talking of *samādhi* the word *ekaggatā* (one-pointedness) is used, meaning that the mind rests with one particular object. When it rests on that object it is calm and undistracted. This is *samādhi*.

Samādhi has just this much as its initial requirement: bringing the mind to a focus at one particular sensation. The defilements are subdued and unable to arise. If the mind goes on to more refined levels of concentration, it may enter the absorptions (*jhāna*), but no matter how refined the concentration becomes it still retains the same basic qualities — having one sensation for its object and fixing onto that.

Qualities of *samādhi*

When the mind is one-pointed, it is said to be like a magnifying glass which is used to concentrate the sun's rays. Using a magnifying glass, a concentration of energy occurs that can even ignite an object in its path. Again, the mind can be compared to water which is released from a great height,

such as a mountain. If the water has no channel it dissipates, but if a pipe is used to channel the water it flows down in a torrent, sometimes so strong as to sweep all obstacles, such as branches and trees, from its path. Yet again, the calm mind can be compared to still, limpid water, which is completely free of ripples, perfectly smooth. If one were to look in the water one would clearly see a true reflection of one's features. In the same way, the calm mind sees things without distortion.

To put it even clearer, when water is still and calm, any dust or impurities in the water tend to sink into a sediment, leaving the water above clean and clear. Anything in the water, such as fish, snails, rocks and so on, is readily visible. Similarly, in calming the mind by practicing *samādhi*, there is a further benefit to be derived, apart from making the mind unperturbed and unmolested by defilements, and that is the arising of wisdom.

Usually, with a restless mind, we don't see things clearly. It is like trying to look at an object while it is swinging back and forth. No matter how hard we look, we won't be able to see it clearly. In fact, the more closely we try to inspect the object, the more blurred it becomes. If we want to see that object more clearly, we must hold it as still as possible.

Our minds are like this. We are always having to deal with arising sensations, but usually our minds are not calm. When the mind is not calm it is as if its object was being blown about by a strong wind. More refined things, such as particular problems we may want to resolve, are even harder to see clearly if the mind has no *samādhi*.

So we calm the mind. Calming the mind is like holding that object firmly and still, so that we can examine it as closely

as we wish. *Samādhi* is a pre-requisite for wisdom. It is said, *samāhito yathābhūtaṃ pajānāti*: When the mind is firm and calm, wisdom functions clearly and we can see the truth.

However, simply having *samādhi* doesn't mean that one will automatically develop wisdom. If one doesn't know how to rightly use *samādhi*, one may simply settle for the calmed mind. Or one may think, "Oh, when I've calmed the mind maybe I'll be able to develop some psychic powers." One gets a desire for mental powers, such as divine sight, divine hearing and so on. These are all by-products of a concentrated mind. *Samādhi* which is practiced simply for its own sake is called *samatha* practice. It flies off in the direction of the refined absorption states (*jhāna*) and psychic powers. These are all fruits of mind-power.

Right *samādhi*

If you want to understand *samādhi* correctly in the Buddhist sense, you must see it as it is described in the scriptures, as the mind that is malleable, fit for work. The mind that is malleable is one that is ready for work, in that it is firm and still, as I've just explained with the comparison of holding an object still in order to see it clearly. This means we use *samādhi* to facilitate the arising of wisdom.

Wisdom is of many types and can arise in many ways. For instance, in our everyday lives there are countless things demanding our attention and consideration, but if our minds are not calm we don't see them clearly. At some later time, having calmed the mind, these things may arise once more into consciousness, so that we can review them more clearly.

This is one type of wisdom which can be derived from *samādhi*: seeing the events or experiences of our lives more clearly in retrospect. Cases where wisdom was initially not apparent become clearer.

In addition to this one can also use *samādhi* as a tool for looking at experiences as they arise in the present moment. For example, a meditator practices *samādhi* to the level of *jhāna*, then proceeds to examine the various qualities of *jhāna* – *vitakka*, *vicāra*, *pīti*, *sukha* and *ekaggatā*⁴, bringing them up for scrutiny so as to see their true nature, as impermanent, stressful and not self. This is a function of wisdom.

Wisdom can thus be used to examine an event from the past or to examine experiences in the present. In either case, the result is the same, that of seeing things as they really are.

The real value of *samādhi*

The real value of *samādhi* lies with wisdom. The difference between *samādhi* and wisdom is that *samādhi* renders the mind calm and undefiled for only a limited time. When the mind leaves that state of calm it experiences various sensations which proceed to influence the mind as before. Sensations which are the bases for greed, hatred and delusion arise once more. You see, the mind is still the same as before, except that when the mind enters *samādhi* it rests with a harmless sensation, so that defilements don't arise. As soon as the mind encounters harmful sensations once more, the defilements arise as before.

⁴ The five factors of *jhāna* are initial thought, sustained thought, rapture, happiness and one-pointedness.

Therefore the results of simply practicing *samādhi* still leave us prone to problems. Suffering still arises, the disease is still with us. *Samādhi* in itself does not give us a real, lasting result. One who transcends the influence of defilements temporarily, by using *samādhi*, is said to have experienced transcendence through suppression (*vikkhambhana vimutti*). The illustration is given of covering grass with a rock. As long as the rock is there, the grass is suppressed and cannot grow, but once the rock is removed, the grass grows as before.

How can we cure the problem once and for all, so that, even when the mind experiences various sensations, no harm or problems arise? One must delve deeper into the problem, by destroying the seed of defilement in the mind, so that the mind does not react with defilement to the various sensations.

This is called abandoning the defilements through true knowledge and vision of the way things are, that is, by using wisdom. Wisdom on this level is called *vipassanā* (insight).

Thus, when we talk of the higher levels of Buddhist practice, it is said to have two main branches. On one hand, *samādhi* in itself, which we call *samatha* (calm), and on the other hand, the use of wisdom, seeing the true nature of things, which is called *vipassanā*. If one develops *samādhi* and then uses that calm mind in the development of wisdom, one will achieve what in Buddhism we would consider to be comprehensive results.

The Four Foundations of Mindfulness

Now there is another technique which is often stressed, and that is called mindfulness (*sati*). Mindfulness is a very

important factor of Dhamma practice. We often hear of the Four Foundations of Mindfulness. Mindfulness is the crucial factor of this practice. Here the development of a calm, still mind is not emphasized. What is emphasized is the use of mindfulness to bring about the arising of wisdom. Mindfulness is a factor that can greatly assist in the development of wisdom.

Moreover, if there is no mindfulness, *samādhi* cannot arise. In the Eightfold Path, mindfulness is one of the last three factors, Right Effort, Right Mindfulness and Right Concentration, which are placed together to form the section on *samādhi*.

Mindfulness and *samādhi*

Now how does mindfulness differ from *samādhi*? The analogy is given of tying up a wild animal, freshly caught from the jungle. The animal runs about wildly. Without the rope to hold it, it would surely escape. So we must tie the animal to a stake, so that instead of escaping, the animal can only run around the vicinity of the stake. The rope is comparable to mindfulness. Mindfulness is that which pulls the mind back, or pulls a particular sensation to the mind, or pulls the mind to a particular sensation. It may also be said to hold the mind to, or force it to stay with, a particular sensation. That which holds or forces the mind, preventing it from wandering too far, is mindfulness.

Now if we restrain the mind until it calms down and stays still of its own accord, this is *samādhi*. Like the wild animal, once it is tied it can't roam about because it is held by the rope, which we compared to mindfulness. After a time the animal tires and lies down calmly. The animal lying calmly is like the mind which has *samādhi*, which is firm and still.

Thus mindfulness and *samādhi* are closely related. Mindfulness is a factor which helps to develop *samādhi*.

Now in addition to aiding in the development of *samādhi*, mindfulness is also a factor that can influence the mind to develop wisdom. All things that we can think of or reflect on are called sensations (*ārammaṇa*). If all sensations disappeared we would no longer have anything to reflect on, because there would be nothing there. In order for a sensation to stay with us there must be something to hold it down. Mindfulness is what holds the theme of contemplation to our attention, so that wisdom can consider it and develop understanding. Thus wisdom (*paññā*), too, cannot function without mindfulness. There must be mindfulness to hold things to awareness so that we can see them and reflect on them. We must have, before anything else, mindfulness.

Mindfulness and *vipassanā*

The practice of *vipassanā* meditation emphasizes the use of mindfulness. If there is no mindfulness, wisdom cannot function. Mindfulness itself has many different functions. First, mindfulness allows us to be aware of the sensations that enter our consciousness as they arise. Usually our minds are trapped by delight and aversion. When a sensation arises that produces pleasant feeling, we feel happy and we like that sensation. If another type of sensation arises, one that produces unpleasant feeling, we don't like it and give in to aversion. Whenever our mind delights or is averse, or likes or dislikes anything, it gets stuck on that sensation. The mind fixes itself onto the sensation but, being temporary, in a moment the sensation has passed, becoming a past experience. Immediately there follows a new

sensation, but the mind, being stuck on the sensation which just passed, does not follow the new sensation that is arising. That which has just passed becomes the past, so it is said that the mind which proliferates has fallen into the past.

Just as the mind falls into the past, it can also float off and begin projecting fantasies about the future. The mind which is not aware in the present moment is the mind which delights and feels averse. The mind, either delighting or feeling averse, must clutch onto some particular sensation. As soon as it clutches onto any particular sensation it falls into the past, even if only for a second.

Keeping awareness in the present

Delight and aversion arise dependent on some particular sensation. For instance, if we see something we like, the mind proliferates around that liking. If aversion or dislike takes over, the mind proliferates in a different way. In other words, the mind doesn't see things the way they are. When we say the mind doesn't see things the way they are, we mean that the mind is under the influence of delight and aversion, which make the mind either fall into the past or float off into the future. Saying that the mind falls into delight and aversion, or saying that the mind doesn't see things the way they are, is to say one and the same thing. Either way the mind does not have awareness with each sensation as it arises.

Now if we experience a sensation in the present moment, but do not attach to it with delight or aversion, then the mind will simply follow each sensation with awareness. Delight and aversion do not have a chance to arise, because of mindful-

ness, which causes the mind to stay with the present moment.

When the mind doesn't proliferate under the influence of delight and aversion, then we do not see things through the 'colored glasses' of our likes and dislikes. We see things as they are. It is said that all things in this world are simply as they are in themselves, nothing more. But the mind defiled by delight and aversion proceeds to paint things into something more than what they are. We don't see things as they are. Without the staining effect of desire and aversion, we see things as they are.

Thus mindfulness facilitates the arising of wisdom, helping our mind not to fall into the past or float into the future with delight and aversion, but seeing things as they are, which is a function of wisdom.

The practice of the foundations of mindfulness is said to help eradicate desire and aversion and to see things as they are. Now when we are more adept at seeing things as they arise, we will notice their arising, existence and cessation. When we perceive the various sensations coming and going as they do, we will be seeing the process by which they function, seeing that they are constantly arising and ceasing. They are impermanent. Seeing impermanence (*anicca*) we will also see *dukkha* (suffering) and *anattā* (selflessness), the Three Characteristics. So the practice of the foundations of mindfulness on deeper levels enables us to see the arising, changing and dissolution of all things. This is seeing the Three Characteristics of conditioned existence, which is the arising of wisdom. The mind will then no longer clutch on to or be influenced by external sensations. The mind becomes its own master and breaks free, and that freedom is the fruition of wisdom development.

As I said in the beginning of this talk, if mind knows the truth of life, the disease of ignorance will not arise. The disease of the mind is caused by ignorance, which causes the mind to proliferate.

This is the practice of Buddhism. Notice that it all relates to us. The practice I've been talking about here is based on this fathom-long body. The truth can be seen right here. Living in this world we experience the environment as sensations. If we don't practice appropriately towards those sensations we experience problems.

Dhamma practice: passive or active?

In one sense, it's almost as if we 'lie in wait' for sensations to arise, and relate to them in such a way as to not give rise to defilement. It's as if we were a passive receiver of sensations. In this sense we may feel we should sit and wait for things to happen and do our best to avoid getting involved in anything. This is one way of looking at Dhamma practice.

Another way is to use our practice to improve the world, by training to see it in a more skillful way. So the initial practice is not only to be a passive experiencer, but also learning to get up and go outside to meet the world. This means practicing toward the world in a good way.

One who practices like this practices correctly in relation to oneself and also, having seen the truth, practices in the world in such a way as to be helpful, not harmful to others. Helping others also helps us to develop good qualities in ourselves. The mind tends toward skillful reactions in its everyday contact.

In this way the practitioner sees the relationship between one's own personal practice and the practice of relating to the world. One sees that all beings are related, and so deals with them with goodwill and compassion, helping them in their need. Furthermore, we understand that all other beings are afflicted with the same illness as we are, they are bound by the Three Characteristics just as we are. Therefore it is proper that we learn to help each other as fellow travelers on the path of practice.

Dhamma practitioners should therefore not only consider the right way to relate to the various experiences they encounter in the course of their lives, but should also help others.

This type of practice was recommended by the Buddha, even up to the level of those who have experienced insight. At one time the Buddha compared the Stream Enterer (*sotāpanna*⁵) to a cow that has a calf. The cow eats grass to feed itself, and also to feed the calf which follows her around. 'Eating the grass' can be compared to one's own personal practice of Dhamma. Even though she is eating grass, the mother cow doesn't neglect her calf; she is constantly looking after it and being watchful to keep it from falling into danger. Likewise, one who practices the teaching of Buddhism practices primarily to train oneself in the correct practice, but also gives consideration to one's fellow people and all other beings, so as to help them with goodwill and compassion.

So this fits in with the principle I mentioned at the beginning of this talk: In helping oneself one helps others, in

⁵ One who has experienced a first glimpse of transcendental insight, thus entering the 'stream' to Nibbāna

helping others one helps oneself. All in all, the practice boils down to behaving in the right manner, both to oneself and to others. In this way Dhamma practice leads to progress both for oneself and for others.

In conclusion

Today I have spoken about the general principles of Buddhist practice, beginning by comparing the Buddha to a doctor, one who both administers medicine and also who operates. 'To operate' means to 'remove the dart.' In the past, one of the most important operations was performed during times of battle, when people were often shot by arrows, sometimes dipped in poison. The victims would experience great agony and even death as a result of their wounds.

The Buddha used the arrow as a simile for sorrow and all human suffering. The Buddha, as a 'surgeon,' cut out the arrowhead. We also must accept the responsibility of removing our own respective 'arrows,' by practicing the Dhamma. If we practice the Dhamma correctly we will realize the real benefit of the Buddha's 'medicine.'

The Buddha has bequeathed to us this well-expounded teaching. It remains up to us to make the most of his kindness, by taking up that teaching and practicing accordingly. In this way we can cure the disease of the five khandhas, remove the arrow, and experience peace, clarity and purity, which is the goal of Buddhism.

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